
Communication before Social Media

Before the advent of the telephone, before the mailbox, the internet and social media apps, communities in the African continent had mediums with which they interacted with each other intra and inter-community wise. The different communities had been able to evolve communication beyond the family unit, beyond the kindred unit, beyond the community as a whole. People had been able to make contact across long distances and as a result information had been spread across kingdoms divided by big rivers, thick forests or great deserts.

In a world obsessed with the social media phenomenon, it would seem as if communicating across great distances began today. Yes it is true that communication today is now instantaneous, transactions are now done in real time across great distances and people are learning about other cultures and people without leaving the comfort of their couch but this does not mean that communication across borders is a new concept.

The traditional media did not just mean word of mouth, interaction between two individuals, no, there were places for communication, tools of communication as well as times of such communication. The old world was a place of rules and every action or activity had its time and place. Nothing was done out of random need. People fixed a period where communities could align and exchange ideas and information.

MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Market Square:

One of the most popular centers of information in the old African world was the market square. The market was a place for buying and selling but it was also a place for gossip, rumor and the exchange of information. Traders came not just with their goods but they also came with news from other communities that they had been to. They came with news about fashion, war, sickness; cures for sicknesses, deaths, etc. in this way, a community that had a big market could keep up with the affairs of the world outside their communities.

Many a war was fought over trade routes because despite the wealth that came through those routes, who ever controlled those routes, controlled the flow of information and in the ancient world; information was gold as it is today. Unlike, the present day proliferation of useless information as well as the overdose of information, information back then was priceless and carefully gathered. As a result, communities had among the traders, spies who carried secrets from other communities to their mother community. This information gave a community edge

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over another during negotiations or during war. This is not so much unlike the embassies of foreign nations that sit on the soil of other nations. On paper, they are there to link two sovereign nations together but in reality they are there to spy on their host country, thereby functioning as the first defense against aggression from a potential enemy nation.

Town Square:

The town square was in most cases the center of the community and at any given time, any member of the community could be found there. Activities like dances, community meetings were held in such places. Before the coming of night clubs and bars, the town square was where singles met and wooed each other. It was the place where beautiful maidens showcased their beauty and young men flexed their muscles in feats of strength. It was a great place for people to connect, not too different from dating apps that abound the place.

Town Crier:

The town crier was another popular medium of communication. The town crier was a traditional institution that served as the official government news monger of the community. He carried news from the government to the masses. He was basically the commissioner of information. He gave announcements for meetings as well as informed the community as to decisions reached by the governing body of the community. He was never harmed as his duty was considered a sacred one. You could hear him ring his gong deep in the night as he carried information from one part of the community to the other.

Orator:

Another medium of communication that was similar to the towncrier was the orator. In the Nigerian sense, the orator was not just a man who knew how to make great speeches and manipulate words, he was also a traditional institution whose function went beyond making people laugh at parties. True, he functioned as the master of ceremonies at many a party, whether wedding, funeral or child naming but he was more than that.

The orator carried the history of his people within him. He knew the nitty gritty of his people's language; the subtle nuances of meaning as well as the implication of proverbs. He knew the songs and most importantly, he knew the genealogy of his people. A proper orator could narrate the genealogy of a family from the beginning. Not so much unlike the troubadour of Europe or the griots of eastern Africa, the orator was a man who became something more when in his official capacity. His advice and admonitions were taken seriously because he knows the history of his people and understand how the land worked. Through him, uninformed members of the community could get information as to their heritage. He kept the history of the people alive in

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the stories, proverbs and songs he performed during any function.

Chief Priests/Priestesses:

The chief priest or priestess of a god or goddess was also a medium of communication in ancient Africa. Unlike the other mediums, who were focused on exchanging information across physical time and space, these men and women functioned as a link between the supernatural and the physical. They had the ears of the gods and functioned as the mouth piece of the gods themselves. They were feared and respected no matter how young they maybe, no matter their gender or social status. Kings bowed to their wishes and great men and women listened when they spoke.

They also carried the history of their community within them and often functioned as adjudicators in cases where no foolproof solution can be discovered. They knew every family history as they have in some cases been called at the birth or the death of a member of any given family.

Due to the respect they had, they are able to guide the community spiritually by sharing information from the gods as well as from the vast knowledge of the land they had, which was usually handed down from generation to generation among the priests and priestesses.

The drum/the fire signal:

are also mediums of communication across great distances but they were usually used as an emergency measure, no so much unlike the fire alarm, the police siren, the bomb siren, etc. they were used in cases of war, natural disasters, epidemics, etc. it served as a means of sending quick signals calling for help or telling a community of impending dangers.

These mediums might not stand high when compared with the present means of communication that abound the world today but they served a purpose and they never became an addiction to the community. Rather, they maintained their function to this day and their value can never be overemphasized at the times when traditional values are fading and the new freedom is turning the world in zombies who do not know that their neighbors have not picked up their paper for a week or opened the door for their poodle.

IN CONCLUSION

There are other means of communication that existed before the advent of the present day technologies and some of them are still in existence in some part of the world to this day. If you have an idea of any old medium of communication; either a place, a tool or office, do share with

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