Fading Fortune of Colour Communication in Igboland of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the fading fortune of colour communication in Igbo land focusing on three dominant colours:*Nzu* (white chalk), *Uhie* (red powder) and *Odo* (yellow powder). The work was anchored on Cultural imperialism theory. The survey research method was adopted. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed at the state capitals of the five major states that make up the core states of Igboland. Findings show that majority of the respondents no longer make use of *Nzu, Uhie* and *Odo* for colour communicative purposes in the area; this has grave consequences for the Igbo culture. The study recommends public enlightenment programmes for cultural revival among people of the Igbo extraction and sensitization of the indigenous people. The traditional agents of socializations – the family, age grades, schools, churches, the governments at the various levels have got specific roles to play respectively in the cultural recovery crusade.

Key Words: Colour Communication, Fading, Igboland, cultural revival

Introduction

Before the advent of modern media of communication, colours were largely used for dissemination of important information in typical African societies. These traditional ways of communication were very effective and believable to the people because they are indigenous and not alien like the modern mass media system. However, as modernization continued to take root in the society, the use of colours for communication continued to wane among the indigenous people of Igboland of Nigeria. According to Okpala (2016), Igbo people are endowed with the use of colours to communicate. These colours portray and promote the cultures of the people. Prominent among the colours in Igboland are *Nzu* (white chalk), *Uhie* (red powder) and *Odo* (yellow powder). These colours havehuge traditional significance in the area, and they communicate significant messages even more eloquently than the verbal words. People make use of them to share certain symbolic traditional meanings. According to Wilson (2006) symbols could be object, person or event whose meaning or code of abstraction is generally shared among people in the community.

When such vital indigenous communication instrument fastly fades, it should ordinarily call for concern among communication scholars. And ought to have attracted scholarly literature. But a search for such scholarly academic discussions on the matter showed paucity of studies in the area; the few available ones are scanty, unscholarly and largely undocumented. A search at filling this knowledge gap and academic lacuna prompted this study.

Objective of the study

1. To find out whether people of Igboland still make use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo*for colour communication.
2. Ascertain why communication with indigenous colours seem to be on the decline in Igboland.
3. Suggest possible measures at reviving the colour communication among the people of Igboland.

Research questions

1. Do the people of Igboland still make use of *nzu*, *uhie* and *odo* for colour communication?
2. What factors are responsible for the decline in the use of indigenous colours for communication in in Igboland?
3. What possible measures could be taken to revive the fading fortunes of colour communication in Igboland?

Colour Communication

Colour according to the Oxford Advanced Learners'Dictionary, is a spectral composition of visible light, perceived or named as a class. Colour is a complex subject with many strands and it has the power to subliminally convey values and stories. There are different types of colours. Prominent among them are white, red, yellow, blue, black, green, and blue, among others. They communicate differently. Colour communication is the use of colour symbols to transmit information. According to Ndimele (1999), different colours communicate different messages. Some of them and their dominant messages include: **Yellow (**warmth, excitement, happiness); **Blue (**depth, peace, supernatural); **Green (**peace, stillness, nature); **White (**harmony, silence, cleanliness, purity, peace, innocence, holiness); **Black** (grief, darkness, death, unknown); **Red** (glowing, confidence, aliveness, danger, love, blood); **Orange (**radiance, health, seriousness); etc.

In a traditional Igbo society, *Nzu* (white chalk), *Uhie* (red powder) and *Odo* (yellow powder)communicate beyond literal meanings to traditional purposes. *Nzu* is got from clay, while *Uhie*and*Odo*are products of cam wood tree usually prepared by grinding the substance into powdered form mostly by mothers in the villages. They serve ritual purposes, initiations, marriages, ornaments, etc.

Cultural Significance Nzu(white chalk)

*Nzu*was used in olden days for prayers for welcoming visitors in Igboland. This act is known as 'igo ofor ndu'. It symbolizes peace, purity and clean heart. *Nzu*in a traditional Igbo society is believed to have mystic ritual powers and functions as facilitators of communication between men and their gods. A diviner paints the region of his eyes with 'nzu'which signifies his ability to see beyond the visible.'Nzu' is given as sacrificial offerings. Many shrines are piled high with cones of *nzu* as sacrificial offerings too. Nzu and kola nuts are most frequently used together for the success of social or ritual undertaking. Nzu is also an essential object for purification in Igboland.

Nzu also has social significance in Igboland. In many social gathering where kola nut is shared, the formalities often include the passing of a lumpor fine grainsof*nzu* used to mark the ground and/or certain parts of the body as a means of indicating one's serious participation. Again, pregnant and breast feeding women use it as ornaments and as a sign of spiritual and moral purity. It is rubbed on a pregnant woman's abdomen and later on the newborn baby to celebrate the arrival.

Economically, people engage in 'nzu' business. Nzu is produced into lumps and sold in the market.

Nzu, lumps of white clay; source: (omg.modernghana.com)

Similarly, the *uhie,* the red powder is got from cam wood tree. The tree grows tall and blows out into a gigantic tree with spread out branches. Its leaves are relatively small. Its body has white, ash and black. The wood of the mature one is very hard, and the wood is red as blood. The tree is found in thick forest and along river banks. It is prominent in Northern Izzi of Abakaliki of Ebonyi state, NigeriaIkebe (2018).

In a traditional Igbo society, when a young lady gets married and goes to her husband's house and become pregnant, she adorns herself with *uhie* to communicate her new condition. *Uhie* is used as perfume when a woman delivers a baby to stop minimize odours associated with new delivery. It is used by those undergoing adult physical and ritual circumcision. Echiegu (2016), observes that adult men and woman, who have undergone physical circumcision and those undergoing ritual circumcision, rub '*uhie*' during the healing period. Economically, some persons trade on 'uhie' as a business.

In the vein, *odo,* the yellow powder, got from yellow cam tree also has huge communication significance in Igboland. For instance, in Abakaliki area, Echiegu (2016) explains that when a youngman, with neither wife nor a child dies, his corps is dressed with an unadulterated 'odo' in preparation for burial. Again, just like *nzu* and *uhie, odo* has economic significance too. Some women do business in 'odo'. They make cream out of it. It sold like hot cake during hot weather because it cools the body when robbed. Socially, it is of significance to those undergoing adult physical and ritual circumcision. Echiegu (2016), observes that adult men and woman, who have undergone physical circumcision and those undergoing ritual circumcision, also rub it during the healing period, especially on the legs. It serves as decorative cosmetics. Young girls and pregnant women wear it as makeup.

Theoretical frame work

This study was anchored on Cultural imperialism theory. The cultural imperialism theory is the practice of promoting a more powerful culture over a least known or desirable culture. It is usually the case that the former belongs to a large, economically or militarily powerful nation and the latter belongs to a smaller, less powerful one.

The theory of cultural imperialism was developed in the 1970s by Herb Schiller to explain the media situation as existed at that time. The nature of media at that time promoted a one way, top down transmission system from dominant countries to dominated countries that theoretically gave rise to a passive audience and a powerful media.

The cultural imperialism theory states that Western nations dominate the media around the world which in return has a powerful effect on the Third World cultures by imposing them western views and

therefore destroying their native cultures. Therefore, Third World countries watchmedia contents that portray the western world's way of life, belief, and thinking; this gradually permeates their life, belief and thinking too.

The theory says that humans do not have the free will to choose how they feel, act, think and live. They react to what they see on television because there is nothing else to compare it to besides their own lives. This theory explains that as long as the Third World countries continue to air western civilization programmes, then the Third World countries will always believe they should act, feel, think and live as the West. This theory is suitable to this study because, the Westernisation is the major reason for the fast fading nature of our indigenous ways of life in Africa.

Research Methodology

Survey research method wasadopted. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed at the state capitals of the five major states that make up the core states of Igboland.

Table 1: Population of the Selected Areas for the Study

AREAS	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE	%
Abakaliki Capital city	672,616	52	13.1%
Enugu	712,610	69	18%
Awka	1,437,729	97	25.3%
Umuahia	788,260	71	18.5%
Owerri	1,118,489	95	24.7%
Total	4,729,704	384	100%

Source: http/population/Nigeria.

Determination of Sample Size

A sample of 384 was drawn using the automated online sample size calculator advanced by Wimmer and Dominick (2013) with confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 5.0%. Cluster multi-stage sampling technique was adopted.

Table 2: Extent of use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo* for colour communication

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Respondents who still make use *nzu, uhie* and *odo*for communication	107	27.9%
Respondents who do not make use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo*for communication	302	78.6%
Respondents who do so once in a while	50	13.%
Respondents who made no comments	25	6.5%
Total	**384**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 2 shows that, out of the 384 respondents, 27.9% people make use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo*, 78.6% people rarely make use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo*while13% people do not make use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo* again. 6.5% of the respondents have no opinion on the issue. This shows that People rarely make use of *nzu, uhie* and *odo* in Igbo land. This shows that few people now make use of nzu, uhie and odo in Igbo land while majority of the people rarely make use of them.

Table 3:Possible reasons for the decline of colour communication in Igboland

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Influence of foreign culture	172	44.8%
Non availability of the materials	82	21.3%
New technology in communication	66	17%
Lack of interest for the use	34	8.8%
Lack of knowledge about the use	30	7.8%
Total	**384**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2018

In table 3 above, respondents agree that colour communication is fading in Igbo land due to influence of foreign culture(44.8%), non-availability of the materials(21%), new technology in communication(17%), lack of interest for the use(8.8%) and Lack of knowledge about the use(7.8%). This shows that colour communication is fading in Igbo land due to influence of foreign culture

Table 4. Possible measures to revive colour communication among the people of Igbo land of Nigeria.

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Sensitization of the indigenous people	112	29%
Revival of Igbo culture and tradition	132	34.4%
Promotion of their economic value	40	10.4%
Promotion of their use through the media	44	11.5%
Use of modern equipment in processing the materials	56	14.6%
Total	**384**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 4 shows that more of the respondents (34.4%) agree that revival of Igbo culture and tradition is a measure to adopt to improve on theuse of Nzu, Uhie and Odo in Igbo land. Other respondents agree on sensitization of the indigenous people (29%), use of modern equipment in processing the materials (14.6%), promotion of their use through the media (11.5%) and promotion of their economic value (10.4%). Among the measures suggested by the respondents, revival of Igbo culture and tradition is the most important measure to adopt to improve theuse of nzu, uhie and odo in Igbo land.

Findings and Recommendations

The first finding of this study indicate that only 27.9% of the respondents indicate that they still make use of *nzu, uhie* and *Odo*for colour communication while majority of them, 78.6% indicated that they rarely do. The study further found that colour communication is fading in Igbo land due to influence of foreign culture, non-availability of the materials, *nzu, uhie* and *odo; as well as* the influence ofnew technology in communication are some of the factors responsible for the decline in the use of colours for communication in Igboland.These findings agree with the observation of Okpala (2016), who reports in her study of traditional music in Igbo culture, that Igbo culture is fast fading in most communities as the younger generation is losing interest in traditional music. They also agree with the observation of Mmuo (2014) who indicates that the impact of foreign cultures and ideologies on the traditional Igbo culture are very profound and have made the people especially the youths to abandon their Igbo cultures, thereby threatening their survival.

On what should be done to revive the trend, findings indicate campaigns for cultural revival, sensitization of the people on the need to preserve and protect their culture which represents their identity, as well as synergising of traditional with modern media of communication for greater interest and effectiveness.

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