



**Use of Oramedia for communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft
in Nembe LGA, Bayelsa state**

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Abstract

Illegal local refining of petroleum products and pipeline vandalism is a pseudonym for crude oil theft perpetuated by Nigerians against the Nigerian state, often with international collaborations. Crude Oil theft also referred to as economic sabotage, portends grave consequences to the nation's economy but communicating the adverse effects of this practice among the local populace has been of great challenge until Oramedia was developed. The study thus explored the perception of the use of Oramedia among the residents of Nembe LGA in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe LGA, Bayelsa State. Oramedia is hinged on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory of the press. The survey research design was adopted for this study, while data were presented using frequency distribution tables, and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed among others, that the adoption of Oramedia eliminated the challenge of communicating oil theft for effective enlightenment among the residents of Nembe LGA. The study concludes that Oramedia is potent and therefore, recommends exploring better strategic ways of sustaining the momentum for the peace, safety and economic prosperity of the people.

Keywords: Communication, crude oil theft, economic effects, media, oramedia.

Introduction

Oil theft in Nigeria has assumed an alarming dimension. It is a hydra-headed menace that portends grave consequences for the nation and the international community. Oil theft consists of illegal oil refining and illegal oil bunkering through the process of pipeline vandalism perpetuated by Nigerians against the Nigerian state; often with international collaborations.

Accordingly, Assi, Amah, and Edeke(2016, P. 72) posit that “Oil theft has become a major (sic) to the Niger Delta and the Nigerian economy, but those involved in this crime are highly connected personalities”.

Crude oil theft is a calculated and organized process of stealing crude oil through pipeline breaches by both individuals and oil firms. Ayanruioh (2013, p. 2) defines illegal oil theft as “the process through which crude oil or refined petroleum products are illegally siphoned from pipelines and sold to interested dealers or buyers waiting on the high sea or the unscrupulous individuals. Similarly, Asuni (2009) maintains that “oil theft is an act of stealing crude oil from the pipelines or flow stations, as well as extra crude oil added to legitimate cargos that are not accounted for”. The extrapolation is that oil theft is not perpetuated by individuals but in most cases a high-level collaboration of the staff of multinational firms.

These illegal activities are tantamount to economic sabotage and have resulted in environmental degradation and ecological devastation in crude oil-producing communities, and worst of all is the economic effect of crude oil theft. This presupposition is premised on the fact that the economy of a nation constitutes the substructure upon which the other sectors (superstructures) rest. (Akintayo, 2023 April 25) informs that “Nigeria has lost an opportunity to produce and sell about 65,700,000 barrels of oil in the last one year due to issues bothering on pipeline vandalism and the resultant oil theft”. This portends danger to the Nigerian economy. Similarly, Ogungbowa (2023) reported that:

From NNPC estimates, about 700million dollar worth of crude oil is lost to oil theft monthly. Between January and July 2022, Nigeria lost 10 billion Dollars to this crime and this is equivalent to 4.3trillion Naira (at N430 official exchange rate to the dollar) which is more than fifty percent of Nigeria’s Foreign Reserves. The figure is also more than double Nigeria’s total revenue between January and April 2022. It is on record that during this period, Nigeria’s total revenue was unable to service its debt. Nigeria had to borrow for everything, including payment of salaries. (2023. Friday, June 9).

The media over the years have played a strategic role in disseminating information about crude oil theft as communication remains a fulcrum in all human activities. This enunciates not just the usefulness but also the importance of communication in all human societies. The media: print, electronic, and digital media forms have been disseminating information about crude oil theft and how to curtail this menace. Yet this hydra-headed menace of crude oil theft has continued unabated. Scholars severally have adduced reasons for the failure of the conventional media to effectively communicate the effect of crude oil theft. Lending his voice to this debate is Nsereka (2013, p.3) who argues that “defective communication strategy, observers believe, is one of the factors that impede media campaigns”. Despite the beautiful trappings of

the mass media and the new media platforms in disseminating information about crude oil theft, oramedia has continued to be a potent channel for creating awareness and crystallizing communication messages among rural dwellers. Commenting on this, Nsereka (2013) argues that "the traditional media can perform such functions as mobilizing grassroots support for active participation in development projects; aiding in the diffusion of innovation; and serving as a potent source of socio-cultural, health and political information".

The traditional media of communication or African traditional media comprises modes and processes of communication engrained in a given culture –oramedia or folk media, extramundane media of communication, traditional media centers, and institutional media amongst others. In a similar view, Ugande (2010, p. 112) informs that "folk media occupy a strategic position in the rural areas of the developing world in terms of disseminating information to the rural populace. As products of the local culture, they are rich in cultural symbols and are highly participatory".

This paper therefore critically examines the perception of the Nembe LGA residents on how best Oramedia can be effectively used to communicate the economic effects of crude oil theft. Emphasis shall be on the understanding of oramedia and utilizing it to package and deliver messages about crude oil theft, and its economic effects on the residents of Nembe LGA.

Statement of the Problem

The oil theft menace has continued with its multifaceted effects on the economy. Attempts by the government through security agencies and the media to curb crude oil theft has failed to yield the desired result. The conventional news media plays its watchdog role by reporting crude oil theft and related activities. For instance, in Bayelsa State-owned broadcast station Niger Delta Television (NDTV) programme "Anti Oil Theft Campaign is aired only in the evening and not also consistently. Campaigns against oil theft carried out by the media are inadequate and have failed to address the problem due to the elitist nature of the campaigns and the type of media used for such campaigns.

For any media campaign to achieve the desired result, appropriate media or a combination of media should be employed in conducting the campaign. This study observes that oil theft campaigns do not go down to the rural areas where the activities of oil theft are most prevalent. Campaigns should reflect the type of communication mostly used, media preferences, and most importantly timing of the campaigns in rural areas or most interior areas of Bayelsa State. Failure to put these factors into consideration has made earlier campaigns on oil theft ineffective. However, Folk media have proved useful in generating grassroots participation, engagements, and dialogue. Specifically, the study explores the various components of the oramedia to find out the most suitable component(s) to effectively communicate the economic effect of crude oil theft. This can be done through participation, engagement, and dialogue. Through these processes, oramedia can engender a mutual understanding of the economic effect of crude oil theft among rural dwellers. In light of the foregoing, this study

focuses on the proactive steps of oramedia in communicating the economic effect of crude oil theft in Nembe Local Government.

Theoretical framework

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The diffusion of innovations theory was propounded in 1962 by Everett Rogers in his book titled "Diffusion of Innovations". He defines diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time, among the members of a social system. The key elements in the diffusion research are the innovation, types of communication channels, time or rate of adoption, and the social system which frames the innovation-decision process"(Rogers, 2003). It seeks to explain how innovations are taken up or spread in a population.

The innovation process involves three types of innovation - decisions: optional innovation - decisions, collective innovation - decisions, and authority innovation - decisions. While five stages are identified: awareness. Interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. The oramedia approach to communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft has the potential to utilize these aforementioned processes through dialogue, engagements, and awareness creation. An innovation is an idea, behaviour, or object that is perceived as new by people. What we are looking at from the perspective of this study is for residents of Nembe LGA to be aware of the economic effects of crude oil theft using oramedia which in a sense is innovation. This can lead to a change in their practices that leads naturally to behavior change communication (BCC).

Literature Review

Understanding Oramedia

Oramedia is communication channels that are unique and endogenous to a particular culture through which they communicate, exchange information, and share meaning. Oramedia, as used in this study, can be substituted for "traditional communication system", or "indigene media". Different scholars have assigned varied nomenclature to the traditional communications system. laying credence to this fact (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998:2-3) points out that, "other ways of referring to traditional communication systems are "man media", "Oramedia", "informal media", "informal channel of communication and communal media". Nwabueze (2009) quoted in Agbo, Usua & Edego,2013 assert that "the traditional media are customized communication channels which people in specific societies adopt in sharing ideas, meanings, values, and information dissemination". Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998: 2-3) in Akpabio (2003) defines traditional communication as:

Any form of endogenous communication system, which by virtue of its origin, forms an integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and

manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes.

The oramedia occupies a strategic position in the rural areas of the developing world in terms of disseminating information to the rural populace. The oramedia are part of the rural social environment and constitute a credible source of information for the people.

Oramedia creates two-way communication. Through dialogue and participation, oramedia can engender mutual understanding among communicators. Nsereka (2013) states that "traditional media can perform such functions as mobilizing grassroots support for active participation in development projects, aiding in the diffusion of innovation; and serving as a potent source of socio-cultural, health and political information".

Oramedia is indeed appropriate means of communicating with the ruralities in Nigeria and developing countries because they engender the participation of their audience. It is instructive to note that, oil theft and related activities are endemic to rural areas in all oil-producing host communities. African communication systems scholars argue that the dissemination of development messages without factoring in the indigenous communication modes will be an exercise in futility.

Moemeka 1981 conducted a survey to determine which of such media (traditional and modern), social forums, town-crier, village market, village schools, Newspapers, radio, and television in former Bendel State. The findings indicate that such traditional modes as social forums, town criers, and the local market proved to be more effective than radio, newspaper, and television. Akpabio (2003).

Nsereka (2013) points out that "interpersonal channels stimulated by social mobilization allow the wide diffusion of concepts and innovation". Oramedia channels include instrumental systems, demonstrative systems, iconographic, systems, extramundane systems, visual systems, and institutional systems. There is no doubt saying that other sub-themes are subsumed under this major taxonomy of the traditional system of communication.

Using Oramedia in communicating the economic effect of crude Anti-oil theft becomes effective when these channels are properly harnessed. In clans that have a centralized system of traditional administrations, an order followed by a sanction could emanate from the king in Council, to converge at a designated place to listen to messages on the economic effect of crude oil theft. Marketplaces over the years have proven to be a veritable avenue for the exchange of information and ideas in our rural settings. This crystallizes information as people interact and listen to or seek an explanation from one another and were necessary opinion leaders.

The age grades are also a potent and strategic communication platform for disseminating the economic effect of crude oil theft. They mobilize and take decisions and actions for the common good of the people. They are also known to vehemently oppose or fight any programme, project, or activity that is antithetical to society. Town crier has continued to be potent in information dissemination in rural areas. Through the town, crier awareness is being created among rural dwellers on the economic effect of crude oil theft, which to a large extent knowingly or unknowingly affects them, may induce them to have a behaviour change, accept and adopt the message as well as help share the message with others.

Oramedia encourages and enhances social change; which allows greater audience participation, and to that extent should be used in the spread of realistic information about the economic effects of crude oil theft. Ugande (2010) in corroboration puts it this way: They are part of the social rural environment and hence, credible sources of information for the people. They command the audience as live media and are ideal examples of two-way communication. They have proved useful in generating grassroots participation and dialogue between performers and the audience (p.112).

Communication to create awareness of the economic effect of crude oil theft should study the audience, taking into consideration the psychographic and demographic characteristics and personal idiosyncrasies. This gives adequate knowledge on how to structure the messages and how to reach the audience in a given locale. Interpersonal communication should be used in winning the support of community opinion leaders and influential people whom the community dwellers look up to as their role models.

Crude Oil Theft

Crude Oil theft remains a major headache to government and multinational firms; besides robbing the country of a colossal amount of money, it also causes pipeline vandalism with its attendant environmental degradation and ecological devastation. Crude oil theft manifests itself in Nigeria through illegal refining of petroleum products, and pipeline vandalism. However, crude oil theft and illegal refining of petroleum products are not new to Nigeria's oil industry, but the current dimension it has assumed is alarming. Crude oil theft is a carefully planned, complex, and high-level conspiracy of illegal access to crude, processing either by taking the raw crude to market internationally or locally. Soremi (2020, p. 2) elaborately examined and analysed the dimensions involved in crude oil theft when he referred to (Watts, 2007, Katsouris and Sayne, 2013, Asuni, 2009, Ikelegbe, 2005) who argue that:

Oil theft, which is also referred to as oil bunkering occurs in three different modes in the Niger Delta: The first mode involves siphoning oil from pipelines that had been punctured or cut with a hacksaw. In the second mode, oil thieves attach plastic hoses to wellheads or manifold points to divert the oil directly into barges, ships, or canoes. The

third mode involves lifting of excess crude oil by extraction license holders and falsification of bill of lading records to cover up the actual quantity of oil being shipped out of the country.

In alluding to the above proposition on how oil is being stolen, Ngada and Bower (2018) examined three major ways of oil theft in the Niger Delta; pipeline siphoning, attaching plastic hoses to wellheads or manifold points to divert the oil directly into barges, ships or canoes, and white collar branch of oil theft. While Yeeles and Akporiaye (2016) focus their attention on only one of these three means i.e. pipeline siphoning. Still others argue that certain socio-economic cum political factors in the enabling environment gave rise to oil theft; this implies that poverty, violence, and insecurity are responsible for oil theft. I disagree on the grounds such should not be a justification for illegality against one's nation. Poverty, crisis, and insecurity are pseudonyms for illegality. One thing is clear, a maxim says that "there cannot be fire without smoke".

This study locates the economic effects of crude oil theft on two levels- macro and micro. At the macro level, the economic effects of crude Oil theft manifest on the economy of the nation in terms of dwindling finances, budget deficit, and the national government's inability to provide infrastructure, etc. At the micro level, the economic effect is on the individual and the crude oil-producing communities. Here the communities and individuals count their losses in terms of lack of fish, as well as a low-level catch which makes the inhabitants not able to meet their needs. Sometimes oil spills occasioned by crude oil theft kill fish farms rendering the affected farmers hapless, it could also affect other crops, and this by extension affects the economy.

Although there have been efforts to combat oil theft and illegal refining of crude oil have been unsuccessful. This study identifies the potential of oramedia in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft. Oramedia engenders participation and dialogue through various channels as well as interpersonal communication which has been proven to be effective in persuasion, diffusion of innovation, attitude change, and crystallization of information.

One area of inestimable value is the concept of sustainability; which is the ability to meet the needs of the present generation without necessarily causing an obstacle for the future generation to meet theirs. The activities of oil theft have contributed in no small measure to the economy negatively, causing environmental degradation and ecological devastation and emission of nitrogenous gas into the atmosphere resulting in global warming and depletion of the ozone layer.

Economic Effect of Crude Oil Theft

The economic effect of crude oil theft can be viewed from two functional perspectives viz macro and micro level analysis. At the macro level, the economic effect of crude oil theft manifests in:

Decrease in unemployment: This is a form of economic effect linked to subsidiaries of multinational firms operating at the upstream and downstream levels. The incessant activities of oil theft have resulted in some companies closing down operations in areas where there is a high level of crude oil theft activities. For instance, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) operators of the Nembe Creek Oil field sold off the Nembe Creek OIL field to AITEO Company as a result of related activities. Instances such as this have resulted in the layoff of company staff with its consequent economic effect on the laid-off staff.

Loss of revenues to the government at all levels: Nigerian economy largely depended on the oil sector for its survival. The nefarious activities of those who engage in crude oil theft have resulted in the loss of revenue to governments at all levels – national, state, and local governments, as well as to multinational oil-producing firms. The loss and decrease in revenue have been attributed to the process and mechanism of oil theft such as siphoning from pipelines that had been punctured, attaching plastic hoses to wellheads or manifold points to divert the oil directly into barges, ships or wooden canoes, and more advanced method which is termed “white collar branch of oil theft” involves lifting of excess crude oil by extraction license holders and falsification of bill of lading records to cover up the actual quantity of oil being shipped out of the country. The aggregate of the above scenario could only speak volumes of the loss of revenue as a major economic effect with its attendance effects.

Economic losses to the International Oil Companies: The multinational oil firms also have effects economically as a result of shut-ins and shutdowns, loss of man-hours, and cost incurred for repairs. Accordingly, “Attacks on oil production facilities have led to several shutdowns and declaration of force majeure by the International Oil Companies (IOCs), ultimately resulting in loss of revenue to the oil companies as well as the government” (Alohan, 2013). Similarly, Adishi and Hunga (2017, p.56) explained that:

The activities of vandals in the Niger Delta have led to several shut-ins and shut-downs of operation by international oil companies and thus resulted in a decline in production capacity as well as loss of revenues to the companies and government. International oil companies (IOCs) operating in Nigeria are counting heavy losses as a surge in illegal bunkering and supply disruption have impacted their earnings.

While Asu (2013) posits that:

However, there will be urgent need by the oil companies and Federal Government to repair the pipelines and clean-up of oil spills in the environment this involves huge capital expenditure and it invariably leads to lose of revenues to the oil companies and government. And According to the

Minister of Power, Works and Housing, Babatunde Raji Fashola,

Also, Adedoyin (2016) cited in Adishi and Hunga (2017) argues that:

the attack on the Nigeria gas company's pipeline connected to Chevron Nigeria Limited's facility at Escravos, –is costing the country a whopping sum of N470 million daily. The attack has impacted negatively on the Olorunsogo Nigerian National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) plant with 600 megawatts capacity, as well as other power plants (p.56).

While at the micro level which is at the individual and community level, it manifests in terms of the following:

Reduced catch per individual fisherman due to spill from crude oil theft: Fishermen in Nembe LGA are affected economically by the menace of crude oil theft with a consequent decrease or low level of catch hence could not afford to train or cater to their families and meet the necessities of life

Death of aquatic animals: Incessant crude oil spill caused by the activities associated with crude oil theft has severally led to the death of different aquatic animals, animals if caught by the fishermen would raise revenue for them.

Loss of economic activities for the host communities: The inhabitants of most communities in Nembe LGA are either fishermen or farmers, this explains why oil theft activities involving spills could lead to loss of economic activities. An entire farm is rendered useless as the crude oil destroys all the economic crops, the same applies to the fishermen where the rivers are affected.

Oil theft has ripped the nation of enormous amounts of economic resources at both the macro level and the micro level.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design using the questionnaire as instruments for data collection to elicit information from the respondents.

The population of the study comprised all residents of the Nembe local government area. The population of Nembe Local Government Area according to the 2006 National Population Commission census figure is 130,966.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size of 398 was arrived at using Slovin's formula. While the cluster sampling technique was used by adopting the four Rural Development Areas (RDAs) namely; Nembe East RDA, Nembe West RDA, Okoroma/Tereke RDA, and Mini Ikensi RDA. The RDA Headquarters and three communities were then selected from each RDA. The 398 copies of the questionnaire were divided equally among the four RDAs which is 99 copies of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then administered randomly.

Slovin's formula
 $n = N / 1 + Ne^2$

where n = sample size
N= total population
E= error tolerance
 $n = 130,966/1+130,966 \times 0.0025$
 $= 130,966/328,415 = 398$
The sample size is 398.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were presented in tables of frequency distribution and analysed using descriptive statistics. Out of the 398 copies of the questionnaire administered, 375 were dully completed, returned, and found useable. While 23 copies of the questionnaire could not be retrieved. The 375 copies of the questionnaire retrieved constitute 94.2%, therefore, the data presentation and analysis are based on this number.

Table 1: Potentials that make Oramedia suitable for communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe LGA?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage%
Oramedia participatory	187	49.9
Radio	80	21.3
TV indigenous channel	62	16.6
Social change instrument	46	12.2
Total	375	100%

Table 1 which sought to elicit information on the potential of oramedia shows that. Out of the 375 copies of the questionnaire administered, 187 representing 49.9 percent believe that audience participation is a major potential of oramedia. While other potentials are credibility, indigenous channel, and as a social change instrument respectively as recorded. It implies that oramedia by the majority opinion of the respondents is amenable to creating necessary change in behaviour by its potential.

Table 2: Specific ways oramedia can be deployed in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe LGA.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Str Agree- town crier	214	57
Agr town hall meeting	113	30.1
Disa-Agree market square	30	8
Stro Agree-folklore	18	4.9
Tot	375	100%

Responses on the components of oramedia that can be deployed in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft 2 shows as follows, majority of respondents representing 57% believe that town crier is one credible channel of oramedia to utilize in communicating the economic effects crude oil theft. while 30.1% of respondents are of the view that the town hall

meeting component of the oramedia is a way to effectively communicate the economic effects of crude oil theft.

Table 3: The extent to which the specific ways of oramedia can be deployed in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft.

Var variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high	156	41.7
High	178	47.4
Low	41	10.9
Total	375	100%

Table 3 showed the data on the extent to which specific ways of oramedia can be deployed in communicating the economic effect of crude oil theft. Based on the data, it is evident that the majority said the extent to which the specific ways or components of oramedia can be deployed in communicating the economic effect of crude oil theft is high.

Discussion of Findings

RQ 1: What are the potentials that make Oramedia suitable for communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe LGA?

The majority of responses see audience participation as a potential of the oramedia in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft. Participation makes it possible for the audience to understand, as well as seek clarification on the economic effects of crude oil theft. An appreciable number of respondents believe oramedia to be a credible source of information dissemination. This is all about believability as the information source is known and interacts with them. While other respondents see oramedia's potential because it is an indigenous media and an instrument of social change. This agrees with the diffusion of innovations theory which states among others that the key elements of the diffusion process are the types of communication channels, oramedia is a type of communication channel.

RQ 2: In what specific ways can oramedia be deployed in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe LGA?

This research question sought to know the components of oramedia that are suitable and can be used to communicate the economic effects of crude oil theft. The greater majority of responses were favourably disposed to the town crier component, this implies that the town crier can be used to communicate the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe Local Government. While a majority of the responses are of the view that town hall meeting is one way the oramedia can be used to communicate the effect of crude oil theft. The aggregate view of the responses is that Town Crier and Town Hall Meetings are veritable ways or components of oramedia to be deployed to effectively communicate the economic effects of crude oil theft.

RQ 3: What is the extent to which the specific ways of oramedia can be deployed in communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft?

Aggregate response on the extent to which Town Crier and Town Hall Meeting components of oramedia are suitable for communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft as recorded is high. This can be explained to mean that because of their participatory and interactive potentials, they are most suitable for communicating the economic effects of crude oil theft in Nembe Local Government.

Conclusion

The spate of oil theft has assumed an alarming dimension. All hands must be on deck to fight the menace. Oil theft over the years has resulted in an unimaginable proportion of economic effects on the inhabitants of Nembe LGA. Based on the findings, the study concludes that Oramedia in its various channels (town crier and town hall meeting) are potent communication media and its effectiveness in communicating the economic effect of crude oil theft is not in doubt. The town crier and town hall meeting components of Oramedia are found to exert enormous influence on its audience, this is premised on the grounds it is accessible, participatory, interactive, and easy to understand and is used by rural dwellers to support and promote development programmes in rural societies. The study also concludes that oramedia's ability to utilize symbolisms, values, and institutions endogenous to the people makes it suitable for communicating the economic effect of crude oil theft.

Recommendations.

1. Government, development agents, campaign strategists, and research agencies should critically look inwards to oramedia to realize their potential and capacity utilization.
2. Researchers should carry out further research into oramedia and help determine their strengths and weaknesses. This will engender communicators to employ oramedia as an effective medium for communicating the economic effect of crude oil theft.
3. Preservation, democratization, popularization, and demystification of all forms of oramedia should be accorded utmost priority by media professionals and development agencies.

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