

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM: A CATALYST FOR RURAL-URBAN INTEGRATION IN ISOKO NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF DELTA STATE

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Abstract:

This study examines the potential of community journalism to foster rural-urban integration in Isoko North Local Government Area, Delta State. The study is anchored on the Integrated Development theory, Rural-Urban Continuum theory, and Development Media theory. This research employed a survey design with a sample size of 300 residents from 13 wards. Findings revealed that residents are aware of community journalism, which has become popular even among rural dwellers. Community journalism can help establish a healthy relationship between the government and the governed, create awareness about government policies and programs, and promote rural development. The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice, highlighting the need for a supportive environment for community journalism to flourish. By promoting community journalism, we can improve the lives of rural dwellers. The study concludes that development issues and rural issues are prominent in community journalism. If properly harnessed, community journalism can be a catalyst for rural –urban integration in Isoko North local government area. The study recommends that government should create an enabling environment for community journalism to thrive, decentralize development, and leverage on digital platforms to reach wider audiences. Additionally, establishing a radio/TV station in Isoko North is necessary to bridge the information gap and promote community journalism as a catalyst for rural-urban integration.

Keywords: Community journalism, rural-urban integration, development, rural development.

INTRODUCTION

Community journalism is a form of development communication which is a vital aspect of journalism that focuses on the dissemination of information with the goal of promoting social and economic progress of the community. It goes far beyond traditional news reporting and its major focus is aimed to empower the communities, raise awareness and foster positive change in the community. It is an advocacy journalism, as a watch dog of the community, this journalism holds both the government and the public accountable for the overall interest and development of the community. Jock Lauterer (2012) noted that “community journalism is a form of journalism that is grounded in the communities it serves, giving voice to the people who live and work in the community, it focuses on local issues and concerns, and is committed to fostering dialogue, building community, and promoting civic engagement. It is a vital part of the media landscape, providing a valuable counterbalance to the mainstream media and helping to ensure that all voices are heard”. Promoting rural-urban integration is the major role of community journalism by providing a platform for local indigenous voices to be heard. It raises awareness about local issues and facilitates rural-urban dialogue aimed at bridging the gap between the rural and urban communities.

Community journalism can help to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas by highlighting common interests and common concerns and by promoting a sense of shared identity and belonging. In Isoko North and South local government areas, community journalism {CJ} plays a particularly important role in promoting rural-urban integration due to the LGAs' proximity to the state capital. The unique challenges faced by these local government areas with over 20 towns/communities need greater collaboration and cooperation between urban and rural areas. Community journalism has always been a catalyst for bridging urban-rural divides all over the world. In Isoko North and South LGA's community journalism is a driving force capable of urban-rural integration, and highlights its potential for bringing about positive change. Succinctly, community journalism can also play a key role in holding our leaders and institutions accountable by advocating for good policies and programmes that support the rural urban integration and development.

Community journalism serves as a powerful tool in promoting rural-urban integration in Isoko North and South by providing platforms for the government to hear and harkening to voices, so the fundamental needs of the local government can be met through dialogue and collaboration. This can help to break down barriers between urban and rural communities; hence the urbanisation of

Isoko north and south is a clarion call to the Delta state government and should not be joke with for so many reasons. It's important to note that information is vital for the continuous existence and survival of any group in the world today. The need for information has been demonstrated right from early civilization and that is why the newspaper as an organ of mass communication started in Abeokuta in Nigeria in 1859 with the publication of the newspaper called Iweirohin (Akakwandu, 2013, p.46). Since the advent of modern mass media, Abbey (2014) observed that various media organizations have only focused on the urban areas. The media are usually concerned with events in developed cities due to proximity. Since the media are always focused on the urban areas, there has been a gap in the information flow and thus an insatiable information need in the rural areas. Nwodu (2014) observed that due to the information gap that exists in the rural areas, there has been a wide array of underdevelopment, illiteracy and misinformation in the rural areas. Offor (2012) noted that the information gap created by lack of adequate community media is responsible for governments' negligence of the rural communities. He further noted that an uninformed society is a deformed society. The information gap in rural areas needs to be bridged for an all-round development. Abbey (2014) recalled that it was the need for information in the rural areas that gave rise to the use of town criers in the pre-mass media age. He further recalled that it was also the urge to satisfy the information needs of the rural populace that made the Catholic Mission to introduce what is today known as newspaper in Nigeria, with the Jehovah witness doing their part with "awake and high tower" in the disseminations of gospel news to rural and urban dwellers.

According to Igwe (1991) cited in Nwodu (2014) for the primary purpose of achieving a sustainable development in the rural areas, community journalism have to provide the greatest services to their host communities. According to the authors, the rural community journalism should serve the information need of a particular locality where they operate. Schramm (2014, p.114) said that "there is an unequal coverage in one part of this country to the detriment of others". Recently, a lot of community media have been established to correct the differences in news coverage. In the light of this, the researchers were committed to study Community journalism as a catalyst for rural-urban integration in Isoko north local government area.

Nigeria's population is divided, with over 46% residing in rural areas and approximately 54% in urban and semi-urban regions. According to the Worldometer, (2024), approximately 53.9% of Nigeria's population is urban. In fact, Nigeria's urban population has been growing rapidly, driven by factors such as economic opportunities, better living standards, and access to services. Some

projections even suggest that by 2043, around 63% of Nigeria's population will reside in urban areas. With the rural regions housing the bulk of the less privileged people, the rural areas are characterized by a lack of well-structured building areas, inadequate road networks, insufficient water supply, and a low level of life and lack of services. Rural regions are communities and villages that lack appropriate access to basic amenities like water, sanitation, secure tenure; and their buildings are of low structural quality with insufficient living area.

Rural areas foster poor health and insecurity and are the most apparent manifestations of poverty in cities. While there have been significant attempts to alleviate poverty at the global, national, state and municipal levels, efforts to successfully improve the lives of individuals living in rural regions have been either absent or less than anticipated.

Development communication is the use of communication or community journalism to promote rural development. Development communication is the use of all kinds of communication in reporting, publicising, and supporting development at all levels of society. It takes the form of a transaction between the source and the recipient, is participatory and collaborative in character and the desired outcome is behavioural change. Furthermore, Okorie (2016) stated that the main goal of such communication is to improve the economic lives of people in a given society by encouraging them to understand the development agent, accept to participate by developing their capacity and skill, and change from unprogressive and underdevelopment conditions of the past to a better condition.

Community journalism, as an organ of mass communication can provide materials for opinion formation and attitude, transformation of social cultural heritage and mobilize the community towards realizing government objectives. A distinguishing aspect of development communication is that it is exclusively concerned with people's wellbeing as defined by them. Thus, radio and television placed the people's self-determined wants at the centre of development communication. In this research, rural development refers to gradual economic transformation aimed at improving the rural areas and, by extension, the society's conditions. Since a result, development is not possible without communication, as most of the articles or contents of community journalists are packed with the development requirements of rural residents in mind, such as agricultural information, health education, cultural awareness, environmental alerts, and so on.

Yet Obala (2012) opined that rural dwellers are totally under-informed because of the absence of the media in those areas and the very few media that are found in the rural communities most times under-report the activities and events in the areas. It is against this backdrop that the researcher

sought to offer an empirical study of community journalism: a catalyst for urban- rural integration in Isoko north. The rural communities have been cut off from the rest of the country and indeed the world due to obvious lack of information and lack of basic amenities. Such gap in information flow among rural dwellers is as a result of high concentration of media organizations in the urban areas and neglecting the needs of the rural dwellers.

Objectives of the Study

The following constitutes the objectives of this study:

1. To determine the contribution of community journalism in bridging the information gap of rural dwellers?
2. To find out the extent to which community journalism can be used in bridging the gap between urban and areas?
3. To ascertain how community journalism can be a catalyst for rural-urban integration in Isoko north local government area of Delta state?
4. To find out if community journalism covers more urban activities than rural activities?

This research work will also assist the readers in understanding the importance of community journalism as a tool for general development of the community it serves. This research is a deliberate attempt to discover and study facts and add to the already existing ones, this study will provide the rural dwellers the authority of the community journalism as an instrument of rural development. Finally, this study will serve as a reference material and source of literature review for future studies in this area and similar studies. Geographically, the study covered Isoko north and South Local Government Area of Delta State. Thematically, the study focused on revealing the importance of community journalism in meeting the information needs of rural communities

The concept of urban- rural integration

Rural-urban integration is the process of creating a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between urban and rural areas. This involves ensuring that both urban and rural areas are able to develop and progress in ways that are complementary and supportive of each other. The concept of rural-urban integration has been around for many years, with scholars and practitioners recognizing the need for greater collaboration and coordination between urban and rural areas to

address the challenges of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. The key aspects and complex dynamics of rural-urban integration as identified by Ekhato (2024) are:

1. Physical connectivity: this involves the development of physical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and transportation networks, to connect urban and rural areas and to facilitate the movement of people, goods and services between them.
2. Economic integration: This has to do with promoting economic activities that will benefit both urban and rural areas, such as supporting the development of medium and small scale enterprises, supporting improved rural tourism and encouraging skills and knowledge transfer between rural and urban areas.
3. Environmental integration: Addressing climate challenges and sharing scarce resources should be balance between rural and urban areas. There should be equitable economic growth in the fight for environmental protection.
4. Cultural and Social integration: Cultural values should be shared between urban and rural areas and promoting the traditions of the people
5. Technological integration: involves harnessing technology to promote rural-urban integration through the use of information communication technologies, remote sensing and geographic information system to enhance town planning for both the urban and rural areas.
6. Political integration: This actually involves ensuring that political programmes and policies are developed in ways that will benefit and promote the interest of the community
7. Social Political integration: This involves ensuring that policies and programs are developed in ways that promote the interests and needs of both urban and rural communities, and that address the specific challenges and opportunities facing each.
8. Technological integration: This involves harnessing technology to promote rural-urban integration, such as through the use of information and communication technologies, remote sensing, and geographic information systems to enhance the planning and management of urban and rural areas.
9. Human capital development: This involves promoting education and training opportunities for people in both urban and rural areas, with a focus on developing skills that are relevant to the needs of the local economy and community.

10. Financial inclusion: This involves promoting access to financial services, such as banking, insurance, and credit, in both urban and rural areas, to support the growth and development of businesses and communities.
11. Governance: This involves creating governance structures and mechanisms that promote effective collaboration and coordination between urban and rural areas, and that encourage the active participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes. This involves strengthening the capacity of government and non-governmental institutions to effectively address the challenges and opportunities of rural-urban integration, through training, capacity-building programs, and the development of appropriate policies and regulations.
12. Partnerships and networks: This involves building partnerships and networks between urban and rural areas to promote knowledge-sharing, innovation, and capacity-building, and to address common challenges and opportunities.

Community Journalism

One major means through which people can get information, informal or even formal education is through the media. The media serves many functions in the society and they vary based on their area of coverage. The community media is the closest form of media to the people. According to Tabing (2010, p.75), community media means “a communication facility that is in the community, for the community”. He cites the characteristics of community media as being owned and controlled by people in the community; usually small and low-cost, providing interactive two-way communication; non-profit and autonomous, therefore, non-commercial; having limited coverage or reach; utilizing appropriate indigenous materials and resources; reflecting community needs and interests; and supporting community development with a large part of the programme or content. Cholmondeley (2010, p.13) adds that community media, in both urban and rural settings, serve groups of people who are physically isolated from the mainstream. Beneficiaries of community media usually have many social and cultural links and perceive themselves as distinct in some respect from the larger society or region within which they exist.

In most societies and the Nigerian society in particular, community journalism is used almost interchangeably with community newspaper. This is because the electronic media has not quite broken the jinx as much as the print media (newspaper) has in the area of community journalism. Most, if not all community media in Nigeria are simply community newspapers.

Therefore, a community newspaper is a form of community journalism and is a periodic publication that serves specific communities, typically geographic communities. A “community newspaper” is sometimes a small circulation daily but more often a bi-weekly, weekly or monthly (Yamamoto, 2011, p.20). It can also be described as a newspaper which carries news, features, editorials and pictures about and for a particular community; though outside assistance is not ruled out (Oso, 2013, p.159).

Osunbiyi (2013, p.169) defines it as “a type of newspaper that provides services to its immediate rural community. It provides information on who does what, in which place, when, why, how and with what effects on the community as a unit. Such information is utilitarian in nature in the sense that they are meant to assist the overall development of the community”. According to Yamamoto (2011, p.20), community newspaper as a central system of local information, communicate the activity of local institutions such as government agencies, businesses, schools, churches and volunteer organizations are generally supportive of those institutions’ agendas and perspectives. Janowitz (2009) suggested that the extent to which people learn about a community from community newspaper content is dependent upon their group contacts such as friendship and associated ties. Community newspaper reading likely has enhanced effects for readers who have dense group contacts as these readers tend to be highly interested in and identify with a local community when reading a newspaper (Yamamoto, 2011, p.23). Community newspapers have been described by Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg as the “public conversational commons” (Terry, 2011, p.71). Oso (2013, p.157) states that “the typical community newspaper in a developing society is not published as a profit making enterprise. The main objective is to meet the needs and interests of the community. To truly fulfil its mission, a truly community newspaper should be non-sectarian, non-partisan and be open to all members of the community, that is, it provides access as the voice of the community”.

Information plays a vital role in the development of any society. The quality and quantity of information at the disposal of the citizenry (especially those in rural areas) to a large extent, determine the level of development. Aliede (2015, p.218) stressed that it is important to note that no society can survive today if it is not properly informed about events that directly or indirectly affects it. He however points out the inequality in access to information between the urban and rural people of Nigeria noting that, apart from main government circle and a few private enterprises which are usually well informed, many local bodies lack access to organized information. Supporting the above, MacBride et al (1980, pp.137-157) note that: Information imbalance is of

both quantitative and qualitative and exists within the third world countries. National development no doubt, is closely tied to availability and accessibility of information in a given environment. Where there is a weak internal information flow structure, there is no national development because national development is a product of good information system. Aliede (2015) noted that the goal of development can only be achieved where the information available is capable of exploring and exploiting the potentials of the people of different classes in the society for development purpose.

Community journalism functions to meet the information needs in rural areas created by the imbalance of news reportage of the mass media between urban and rural areas. Anaeto (2018) opines that the information gap that exists in rural communities is as a result of the high concentration of the media in major cities and urban towns. According to the authors, this is why the community journalism is very imperative in meeting the information needs of host communities. According to Offor (2015), the gap in information flow or lack of information in rural communities is responsible for the under-development of the rural areas. Supporting this view, Oguma (2017) opines that community journalism brings government policies and information closer to the people and thus engenders mutual understanding between the people and the government. This, according to the author, creates a favourable environment for rural development.

Community journalism is a critical component of local news and information dissemination, with a focus on serving a specific geographic area or community. It encompasses a range of media, including newspapers, radio stations, television channels, and online platforms, that provide news and information that is relevant and meaningful to local residents. Here are some key characteristics of community journalism:

1. **Local Focus:** Community journalism is deeply rooted in local issues, events, and people, providing a platform for local voices and perspectives.
2. **Public Service:** Community journalism often serves as a watchdog for local government and a conduit for community engagement and dialogue. It provides a space for citizens to voice their concerns, hold leaders accountable, and work towards solutions to local problems.

3. **Citizen Journalism:** Community journalism often relies on citizen journalists, volunteers, and contributors to provide content and engage with readers and listeners, fostering a sense of community ownership and participation in the news-gathering process.
4. **Community Spirit:** Community journalism often reflects and promotes a sense of community spirit, highlighting local successes, highlighting local traditions and customs, and celebrating the diversity of the local community.
5. **Engaged and Responsive:** Community journalism is often more responsive to the needs and interests of local audiences, tailoring content to meet their needs and encouraging feedback and participation from readers and listeners.
6. **Multimedia Approach:** Many community journalism outlets are exploring new ways of storytelling, including multimedia journalism, using text, images, audio, and video to create engaging and immersive content that resonates with audiences.
7. **Local Advertising:** Community journalism outlets often rely on local advertising to support their operations, which can create a symbiotic relationship between the outlet and local businesses. This can result in greater visibility and recognition for local businesses, while also providing a vital source of funding for community journalism.
8. **Hyper local News:** As traditional media outlets have scaled back their local coverage, community journalism outlets have emerged to fill the gap, providing hyper local news that traditional media cannot match. This often involves covering community events, local politics, and everyday stories that might otherwise go unreported.
9. **Collaborative Reporting:** Many community journalism outlets are exploring collaborative reporting partnerships with other media outlets, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions to provide more comprehensive and in-depth coverage of local issues. This can create a network of reporters and contributors who are able to cover a wider range of topics and provide more diverse perspectives on local issues.
10. **The Impact of Technology:** The rise of social media and digital platforms has transformed the landscape of community journalism, allowing outlets to reach wider audiences and engage in new forms of storytelling. This has also created new challenges, such as maintaining quality standards and overcoming issues of misinformation.
11. **Citizen Engagement:** Community journalism outlets are increasingly exploring new ways to engage citizens in the news-gathering and storytelling process. This can involve crowd

sourcing stories, using interactive tools to gather feedback and opinions, and organizing events and forums to encourage community dialogue and participation.

12. The Local Economy: Community journalism can play a critical role in supporting local economies by promoting local businesses, highlighting economic development opportunities, and fostering a sense of pride and investment in the community.

The challenges facing community journalism are encapsulated as the key points, including but not limited to:

1. Underrepresentation of marginalized groups
2. Difficulty attracting readers and advertising revenue
3. Struggling to gain community trust
4. Limited resources to cover local stories
5. Financial sustainability challenges due to declining traditional advertising revenue and digital platform competition

However, these challenges highlighted need innovative solutions and support mechanisms to ensure the viability and impact of community journalism. Some potential strategies which are expected of the leadership of His Excellency, Elder Sheriff Francis Oborevwo, the executive governor of Delta state to put into action include:

1. Diversifying revenue streams (e.g., memberships, grants, crowd funding)
2. Building community engagement and trust through participatory journalism practices
3. Leveraging digital platforms to reach wider audiences
4. Collaborating with other local media outlets and organizations
5. Seeking support from philanthropic organizations and foundations to build functional radio and TV
6. Having Radio/TV station in Isoko North to bridge information gap

By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, community journalism can continue to play a vital role in promoting local voices, stories, culture, language and perspectives, and fostering more inclusive and informed communities.

Isoko North LGA

Isoko North Local Government Area in Delta State, Nigeria, has a population of approximately 196,700 people as projected for 2022 by www.citypopulation.de. However Isoko North is one of two Local Government Areas (LGA) in the Isoko region of Delta State, southern Nigeria the other being Isoko South and According to the 2006 Nigerian census, the population was 143,559, with 71,948 males and 71,611 females. Isoko North headquarter is in the town of Ozoro, which houses the southern delta university, formally the Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro, before it was upgraded to a University. The people are mostly Christian and traditional worshippers. Isoko North is an oil producing region. Major towns in Isoko North are Ozoro, Oyede, Odoga-Oyede, Owhelogbo, Otor Owhe, Oghara-Iyede and Emevor. Isoko North Local Government Area comprises 13 electoral wards, which are:

1. Iyede I, 2. Iyede II, 3. Ellu/Radheo/Ovrode, 4. Ofagbe, 5. Iluelogbo, 6. Owhe/Akiehwe, 7. Emevor, 8. Okpe Isoko, 9. Ozoro I, 10. Ozoro II, 11. Ozoro III, 12. Oyede, 13. Otibio

Theoretical framework

There are several key theories and theoretical frameworks that have emerged to support the practice of rural-urban integration. Therefore, this research is built on the theoretical framework of the Integrated Development theory, The Rural-Urban Continuum Theory and the development media theory as they complement each other in several ways, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding rural-urban integration and environmental aspects of development. By combining these theories, gives a nuanced understanding of rural-urban integration, recognizing the complex interdependencies between rural and urban areas, the importance of holistic development, and the critical role of media in facilitating social change and community engagement

The Integrated Development Theory: The Integrated Development Theory was propounded by FHI 360 in 2015. The theory is aimed at addressing the interrelated challenges faced by communities by designing customized responses. The theory also emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of the multiple aspects of the lives of people in these communities. This theory proposes that urban and rural areas should be developed in a mutually supportive and complementary manner, to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and development. The theory

suggests that global development efforts can be more effective if integrated development approaches are used when appropriate.

This theory also lays emphasizes on the need for a deeper understanding of the multiple aspects of the lives of people in these communities.

The Integrated Development Theory is highly relevant to community journalism in the context of urban-rural integration in Isoko North Local Government Area. Here are some connections:

1. **Holistic approach:** The theory emphasizes a comprehensive approach to development, considering multiple aspects of community life. Community journalism can adopt a similar approach, covering various issues and stories that impact the community, fostering a more nuanced understanding of urban-rural dynamics.
2. **Interconnectedness:** The theory highlights the interconnectedness of urban and rural areas. Community journalism can showcase these connections, featuring stories that illustrate the relationships between urban and rural communities, promoting mutual understanding and integration.
3. **Grassroots focus:** Integrated development emphasizes the importance of local-level initiatives. Community journalism, by its nature, focuses on grassroots stories and perspectives, empowering local voices and promoting community-driven development.
4. **Participatory approach:** The theory encourages active community involvement in development processes. Community journalism can facilitate this participation, providing a platform for citizens to share their experiences, opinions, and ideas, fostering a sense of ownership and inclusivity in urban-rural integration efforts.

By applying the principles of Integrated Development Theory, community journalism can effectively catalyse rural-urban integration in Isoko North Local Government Area, promoting a more cohesive long-term sustainability and equitable development trajectory

The Rural-Urban Continuum Theory: The Rural-Urban Continuum Theory was propounded by Robert Redfield in 1938. The theory is also known as the "folk society" theory. Robert Redfield made an important contribution to develop the concept of folk, rural and urban continuum. He has constructed a continuum from small rural villages to large cities. Redfield proposed that there exist a continuum on which all societies can be placed, with the pure folk society at one end and the completely urban society at the other. This theory suggests that there are gradations of societies that mix elements of both rural and urban characteristics. It relates to creating and sustaining connections (Cyriac, 2022). In contemporary literature, the origin of a continuum concept is hinged

on the notion of continuity, which goes back to the ancient traditional African and Greek civilisations. This theory proposes that urban and rural areas are not discrete and separate entities, but rather part of a continuum of economic, social, and cultural relationships with gradual changes and overlaps between the two. This theory advocates, that the continuum further suggests that societies can exhibit traits from both ends of the spectrum. This perspective recognizes that: Urban and rural areas are interconnected through economic, social, and cultural ties. There are no clear boundaries between urban and rural areas, but rather a gradual transition from one to the other. Rural areas may exhibit some urban characteristics, and urban areas may retain some rural features. The continuum reflects the complexity and diversity of human settlements, which cannot be reduced to simple categorizations.

The Rural-Urban Continuum theory is closely related to rural-urban integration in several ways:

1. Gradations of urbanization: The theory suggests that rural and urban areas are not distinct categories, but rather, there are gradations of urbanization, with some areas exhibiting both rural and urban characteristics. This highlights the need for integrated approaches to development.
2. Rural-urban linkages: The continuum emphasizes the interconnectedness of rural and urban areas, with people, goods, and services moving between them. This underscores the importance of integrating rural and urban development strategies.
3. Urban-rural migration: As people move from rural to urban areas, they bring rural characteristics with them, influencing urban culture and vice versa. This migration highlights the need for integrated policies to address the social, economic, and cultural impacts of urbanization.
4. Shared development goals: The theory implies that rural and urban areas share common development goals, such as improving livelihoods, healthcare, and education. Integrated approaches can help achieve these goals more effectively.
5. Spatial planning: The Rural-Urban Continuum Theory informs spatial planning strategies that consider the interconnectedness of rural and urban areas, promoting more efficient use of resources and infrastructure.

The relevance of this theory is that it highlights the interdependencies between rural and urban areas, recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive and by recognizing the continuum between rural and urban areas, community journalists, researchers, policymakers and development practitioners can better understand the dynamics of urbanization, migration, and development. And therefore design more effective integrated strategies that address the unique challenges and

opportunities of both rural and urban areas, promoting more inclusive and sustainable development in Isoko north local government area.

The development media theory: The development media theory was propounded by Dennis McQuail and is one of the new theories added to the first four normative media theories. The development media theory states that the fundamental purpose of community journalism in utilising this theory is societal development especially at the grassroots level. The principles of this theory underpin the notions of television-mediated communications and rural development. Folarin (2015, p.32) describes the media as an instrument for national integration, socioeconomic modernisation, literacy development, and cultural inventiveness. All of the preceding factors, as well as others, demonstrate why the researchers performed this study within the theoretical framework of Development Media Theory. The justification for using this theory for this study is based on the fact that the theory is centred on the use of the media for development purpose by emphasising the critical role of media in promoting development, social change, and community engagement. Also recognises the importance of access to information and communication in facilitating development and social progress while the study is centred on the use of community journalism for rural development advocacy.

Synergies between the theories are as follows

1. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of rural-urban integration, encompassing social, economic, environmental, and communication aspects.
2. They highlight the interconnectedness of rural and urban areas, the importance of holistic development, and the role of media in facilitating development and social change.
3. By considering the continuum between rural and urban areas, these theories allow for context-specific approaches to rural-urban integration, acknowledging the diversity of development challenges and opportunities.

Empirical review

Appraisal of Empirical Studies, researchers have conducted empirical research on the Appraisal of community journalism. This section reviews works of such scholars as they relate to the study. The empirical works reviewed are

Azeez Ishola Ramon's 2023 study on the role of community journalism in community development: A Comprehensive Analysis: Community gist: <https://communitygist.ng/the-role-of-community-journalism-in-community>.

This study investigates the contribution of community journalism to community development, exploring its potential to empower local communities, promote social change, and foster civic engagement and provides valuable insights into the potential of this medium to drive social change. The comprehensive literature review and case study of Zululand Observer in South Africa provide insights into the role of community journalism in promoting community development. The study highlights the importance of community journalism in providing a platform for marginalized groups, promoting local issues, and encouraging community participation. The findings suggest that community journalism plays a crucial role in community development, It further noted that community journalism has emerged as a vital tool for promoting community development, particularly in rural areas where mainstream media often falls short but faces challenges such as funding, competition with larger media outlets, and credibility issues. The study recommends strategies to support community journalism and promote community development through support and strengthening, in order to promote community development and democratic participation.

Ekhatu (2024) also did a study on Community Journalism as a Catalyst For development of Aniocha North Local government Area of Delta State. The study investigated rural urban integration. Survey design was employed. This research is built on the theoretical framework of the Integrated Development theory, The Rural-Urban Continuum theory and the development media theory. The result shows that the respondents in Aniocha north are aware of the concept of community journalism in Nigeria. This implies that community journalism has become popular among the people even rural dwellers. This is due to the special needs of the rural areas and the obvious information gap in the rural communities. Therefore more effort should be put in place especially having a radio and television station which will encourage the practice of community journalism as a necessary catalyst for rural urban integration. Finding also shows that community journalism can help in the development rural communities. This is because community journalism is grass rooted and developmental in nature and structure. Community journalism can help establishes healthy relationship between the government and the governed. Therefore, community journalism can help to create awareness about government policies and programmes for rural communities. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby offered: There should be Collaboration with other local media outlets and organizations. There is need of having Radio/TV station in to bridge information gap. Both studies relates in terms of theoretical framework.

Ruigong Wang, Li Gao, Yaling Zhu, Ying Liu, Yangyan Li and Jiachen He (2023). Study was on Urban–Rural Integration and how it empowers High-Quality Development of Tourism Economy: Mechanism and Empirical Evidence: 15893; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152215893>

Urban–rural integration has become an effective way to promote the high-quality development of the tourism economy in China’s policy evolution. Based on provincial panel data for China for the last ten years, this paper measured the high-quality-development level of the tourism economy based on multi-dimensional indicators, including by empirically analysing the influence mechanisms in urban–rural integration. We found that urban–rural integration has a positive empowering effect on the high-quality development of the tourism economy as a whole, with the integration of urban and rural areas in the central and eastern regions playing a considerable role; however, its role in the western region is not obvious. This was shown through an analysis of the mediating effect by which urban–rural integration empowers the high-quality development of the tourism economy by improving residents’ income levels. However, urban–rural integration does not empower the high-quality development of the tourism economy through technological innovation, which instead has a covering effect. This paper makes suggestions on three levels: country, region, and enterprise. Firstly, at the national level, we suggest strengthening the overall planning for the high-quality development of the tourism economy, as well as improving its construction system. Secondly, at the regional level, governments at all levels should emphasize the functional differences between urban and rural areas and regional characteristics. Finally, at the enterprise level, enterprises in the western region should seize the opportunities provided by urban–rural integration.

Methodology

The survey research design was chosen for this study due to the large population of Isoko North local government area. According to National Population Census (2006) Isoko North local government area population was 143,559. However, according to city population (2022) projection they are 196, 700 persons, resident in Isoko North local government area as at 2022. www.citypopulation.de

The Taro Yamane sample determination formula was used to draw a sample of 399 respondents from the study population. The sample size for this study was determined using a simple random sampling procedure. The questionnaire was utilised as the data collecting tool, and it was administered directly to the respondents. The results for this study were provided in tabular form and evaluated using frequency and simple percentage.

Presentation of Findings

To achieve the objectives, the researcher set some research questions which were targeted at eliciting certain information. A total of 399 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Out of 399 copies of the questionnaire provided to respondents, 300 were correctly filled and returned, while 99 were not. The following presentation and analysis are based on this return rate.

Table 1: Responses on awareness of the concept of community journalism in Nigeria

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	300	100%
Agree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data on the above table shows that all the respondents are aware of the concept of community journalism in Nigeria. This implies that community journalism has become popular among the people even rural dwellers especially in Isoko north.

Table 2: Responses on if having a radio station in Isoko North will encourage the practice of community journalism?

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	300	100%
Agree	-	-

Strongly Disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data on the above table reveals that all the respondents representing 100 percent said that having a radio station in Isoko North will encourage the practice of community journalism.

Table 3: Responses on the platform in which community journalism is most practiced.

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Newspaper	60	20%
Television	45	15%
Social media 2.0 (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter)	90	30%
Radio	75	25%

Others	30	10%
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in the above table shows that Social media 2.0 (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter etc) is mostly used in community journalism practice followed closely by radio and newspapers.

Table 4: Responses on whether community journalism can help in the development of Aniocha north local government area as a rural community

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	300	100%
Agree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in the above table reveals that all the respondents strongly agreed that community journalism can help in the development of Isoko north local government rural communities.

Table 5: Responses on whether community journalism can help establish healthy relationship between the government and the governed in the interest of economic development

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
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Strongly Agree	213	71%
Agree	66	22%
Strongly Disagree	21	7%
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Above data reveals that all the respondents are of the opinion that that community journalism can help establishes healthy relationship between the government and the governed.

Table 6: Responses on the factors militating against the use of community journalism in Nigeria

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Urban migration	150	50%
Spread of falsehood	60	20%
Social media censorship	30	10%
Others	60	20%
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Urban migration is the factor militating against the use of community journalism in rural areas in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one sought to know the level of awareness and contribution of community journalism to bridging the information gap in rural communities. The study found that respondents in Isoko north are aware of the concept of community journalism in Nigeria. This implies that community journalism has become popular among the people even rural dwellers. This is due to the special needs of the rural areas and the obvious information gap in the rural communities. It was also found that community journalism have the capacity to performed effectively in meeting the information needs of the rural communities. This finding is in line with Ojogwu (2011) who found that community journalism is a veritable tool for development and meeting the information needs of rural communities.

Research question two was concerned with if **having a radio station in Isoko North will encourage the practice of community journalism**. Findings revealed that having a radio station in **Isoko** North will encourage the practice of community journalism as a necessary catalyst for rural urban integration in **Isoko** north local government. Because community journalism is meant to covers more rural activities than urban activities. The literature review of previous study found that community media covers rural issues and rural development issues. This implies that community journalism covers more of rural or community based issues. This is in line with Ojonwu (2013) who opined that community journalism is necessary tools for the promotion of community based issues.

Research question three was concerned with **Responses on the platform in which community journalism is most practiced. The findings** shows that Social media (2.0) (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter etc) is mostly used in community journalism practice followed closely by radio and newspapers.

Research question four was concerned with **Responses on whether community journalism can help in the development of Isoko north local government area as a rural community. The study found that** all the respondents strongly agreed that community journalism can help in the development of **Isoko** north local government rural communities. This is because community journalism is grass rooted and developmental in nature and structure.

The study sought in question five to know Responses on whether community journalism can help establish healthy relationship between the government and the governed in the interest of economic development. It's revealed that rural issues on development are more prominent in community journalism. The study found that 100 percent of the respondents agreed that community journalism can help establishes healthy relationship between the government and the governed. Therefore, it's right to say that community journalism can help to create awareness about government policies and programmes for rural communities. This corroborates the opinion of Mordi (2012) who observed that there can hardly be any development in the rural communities without the community journalism. The study found that development issues, economic issues, cultural issues, entertainment, advertisements and sports took pre-eminence.

Finally, **responses on the factors militating against the use of community journalism in Nigeria. The study showed that** urban migration is the factor militating against the use of community journalism in rural areas in Nigeria. This is so as many people leave the villages to the cities due to the perceive inequalities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is safe to conclude that Community journalism is veritable tools in promoting rural development and in bridging the information gap in rural areas. It also concluded that development issues and rural issues are prominent in community journalism. If properly harnessed, community journalism can be a catalyst for urban- rural integration in **Isoko** north local government area. Therefore, its suffix to say that community journalism is a veritable tool for economic and social development as community journalism can help establishes healthy relationship between the government and the governed. Therefore, community journalism can help to create awareness about government policies and programmes for rural communities

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. Government should provide an enabling environment for community journalism to strive
2. Community journalism practitioners should increase their developmental coverage in order to engender more development in the rural areas
3. Community journalism should endeavour to include public affairs programmes in order to create awareness about government developmental policies

4. Government should ensure that development of urban and rural areas are decentralized and multi-centred, rather than focused on a single central urban area.
5. Leveraging digital platforms to reach wider audiences
6. There should be Collaborating with other local media outlets and organizations
7. There should be support from philanthropic organizations and foundations
8. There is need of having Radio/TV station in Isoko North to bridge information gap

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