



Grassroots Communication Channels and Agribusiness Awareness and Adoption among Farmers in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State

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ABSTRACT

Background: Agribusiness is increasingly recognised as a catalyst for economic growth, employment generation, and rural development in Nigeria. Promoting its adoption among rural farmers requires communication approaches that align with local contexts and existing community information networks. Despite growing interest in agricultural transformation, limited empirical research has examined the role of grassroots communication channels in promoting agribusiness awareness and adoption among rural farmers.

Objective: This study assessed the influence of grassroots communication channels on agribusiness awareness and adoption among farmers in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria.

Method: The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 10,240 registered farmers, including 4,500 maize farmers and 5,740 general crop farmers. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire validated by experts in Mass Communication and analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages.

Results: The findings revealed that farmers' cooperative meetings, church and mosque announcements, and town criers were the most frequently used grassroots communication channels for disseminating agribusiness information. Most respondents (92%) reported that these community-based channels increased their awareness of agribusiness opportunities and encouraged adoption, while 86% indicated that information received through these channels influenced their decision to engage in agribusiness activities.

Conclusion: The study concludes that grassroots communication channels remain effective pathways for promoting agribusiness awareness and self-reported adoption among rural farmers. Although the descriptive design does not establish causality, the findings suggest that community-based communication systems play an important role in facilitating knowledge dissemination and encouraging agribusiness participation.

Unique Contribution: The study contributes to agricultural communication scholarship by providing empirical evidence that locally embedded communication channels remain valuable mechanisms for promoting agribusiness awareness and the diffusion of agricultural innovations among rural farmers in Nigeria.

Key Recommendation: Agribusiness stakeholders should integrate traditional mass media with grassroots communication channels to strengthen information dissemination and enhance the adoption of agribusiness practices among rural farming communities.

Keywords: Agribusiness adoption, agribusiness awareness, grassroots communication channels, Nigeria, rural farmers.



INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria today, agribusiness has become a dominant subject in national discourse and scholarly literature. This growing interest is driven by the recognition that agribusiness can contribute significantly to economic growth, employment generation, food security, and rural development (Asresie et al., 2025; Olayide, 2023). However, establishing and sustaining an agribusiness-driven economy in a developing country such as Nigeria is not without challenges. One of the most significant constraints threatening the success of agribusiness promotion is the failure to employ communication channels that resonate with rural farming communities. Development actors such as government agencies, the media, agribusiness advocates, and non-governmental organisations—often rely predominantly on mainstream media such as television and national newspapers to promote agribusiness initiatives. This approach overlooks the grassroots communication channels that are more accessible and culturally relevant to rural farmers, who constitute the majority of Nigeria's agricultural workforce (FAO, 2024).

Inegbedion et al. (2021) argue that governments at various levels have consistently prioritised mainstream media over traditional and community-based communication channels in promoting agribusiness initiatives. Supporting this position, Jongsuksomakul and Roehl (2022) contend that participatory communication systems, particularly grassroots media, are more effective in reaching a substantial proportion of the Nigerian population. Consequently, agribusiness awareness and adoption efforts are likely to achieve greater success when they incorporate these indigenous, community-based communication systems.

Although conventional mass media, particularly radio, have been effective in creating widespread awareness among Nigerian farmers, they often lack the interactive and participatory elements required to stimulate behavioural change and encourage the adoption of improved agricultural practices (Adebayo & Okocha, 2021). Consequently, there is a need to investigate how grassroots communication channels—such as town criers, cooperative meetings, village assemblies, religious gatherings, and other indigenous communication platforms—influence farmers' awareness, knowledge acquisition, and eventual adoption of agribusiness practices.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to:

1. Identify the indigenous community communication channels used in disseminating agribusiness information in Imo State, Nigeria.
2. Examine farmers' perceptions of the role of these communication channels in promoting agribusiness awareness and knowledge acquisition.
3. Explore the relationship between grassroots communication channels and agribusiness adoption among rural farmers.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Grassroots communication systems, also referred to as community media, are communication channels employed to disseminate development-oriented and social change messages to people living in rural communities. They are culturally embedded, participatory, and community-driven means of information dissemination, knowledge sharing, and skills acquisition. These communication systems operate primarily through interpersonal interactions, cooperative engagements, and community participation, thereby creating awareness, shaping attitudes, and encouraging behavioural change.

These communication channels are established, owned, and managed by members of local communities and are specifically designed to address rural information needs. Their primary content revolves around communication for development, including agriculture, health, education, governance, and community mobilisation. Examples include on-farm demonstrations, town criers, village square meetings, open market interactions, announcements in churches and mosques, farmers' cooperative meetings, traditional festivals, and other community gatherings.

According to Olaniyi (2020), grassroots communication systems may also encompass community radio broadcasting in indigenous languages and community newspapers that serve rural audiences. Examples include *OGENE Ndigbo* newspaper in Imo State, published by Val Mgbenani, and *Oriwu Sun* newspaper, published by Monzor Olowosago. Similarly, rural-focused radio programmes, such as the historic *Better Life for Rural Women* initiative championed by Nigeria's former First Lady, Mariam Babangida, illustrate the role of localised communication in promoting rural development. Mojaye and Lamidi (2015) describe community media as localised communication platforms established and operated to address the needs of rural populations while accelerating grassroots development. These media provide opportunities for dialogue, participation, and collective problem-solving among groups that are often marginalised or inadequately represented in conventional mass media.

Grassroots communication systems have consistently served as vital instruments for rural mobilisation and occupy an important position within Nigeria's overall communication landscape. Many pro-poor and community development initiatives have experienced limited success because they relied primarily on national communication channels while neglecting indigenous communication systems (Ezeah & Gever, 2020). These indigenous media remain important sources of educational, economic, and enlightenment programmes for rural Nigerians because the implementation and adoption of most government development programmes ultimately occur at the grassroots level through communication systems that are familiar, trusted, and culturally acceptable to local communities.

Mdoda (2022) argues that community-based communication channels are powerful tools for disseminating development information to rural dwellers, who constitute the primary target audience for agribusiness promotion and other rural development interventions. Beyond



information dissemination, these communication systems foster community cohesion, facilitate knowledge exchange, and encourage farmers to share practical experiences and innovations, thereby enhancing agribusiness awareness and adoption.

Agribusiness is a combination of the words *agriculture* and *business* and broadly refers to business activities associated with agriculture. The concept was first introduced by Harvard economists John H. Davis and Ray A. Goldberg in the 1950s to describe the entire spectrum of operations involved in agricultural production, including the manufacture of farm inputs, production, processing, storage, transportation, marketing, and distribution of agricultural products (Kozera-Kowalska & Uglis, 2021). Similarly, the World Bank (2020) defines agribusiness as encompassing every stage of the agricultural value chain, including the production, processing, marketing, and distribution of agricultural products to final consumers.

Compared with conventional mass media, grassroots communication channels possess several distinct advantages. Because they are deeply embedded within local cultures, social norms, and community trust networks, they often generate higher levels of awareness, understanding, and acceptance of development messages. Their participatory nature and reliance on indigenous languages enhance message comprehension and facilitate greater knowledge acquisition regarding agricultural innovations and agribusiness opportunities (Atser et al., 2023).

Several indigenous communication channels contribute to agribusiness promotion among rural farmers. Town criers, commonly referred to as gong men, use traditional gongs to disseminate agricultural and other development-related information throughout villages. Village square meetings provide opportunities for community members to discuss farming innovations, exchange experiences, and collectively address agricultural challenges.

Farmers' cooperative meetings promote peer learning by enabling members to share practical knowledge, business experiences, and production techniques. Similarly, local markets function as informal centres for exchanging farming ideas, marketing information, and agribusiness opportunities. Religious institutions, including churches and mosques, also serve as effective communication platforms through sermons, announcements, and community outreach activities. Likewise, age-grade associations provide structured opportunities for educating and mobilising members around agricultural innovations and entrepreneurial opportunities. Traditional rulers—including village heads, chiefs, and councils of elders—remain respected opinion leaders whose endorsement of agricultural programmes often enhances community acceptance and participation. Cultural festivals and other community events equally provide opportunities to demonstrate improved farming techniques, agricultural technologies, and agribusiness innovations to large audiences.

Traditional storytelling and folklore continue to serve as indigenous educational tools through which agricultural knowledge, values, and entrepreneurial attitudes can be transmitted across generations. Community theatre groups and local drama performances similarly employ



entertainment-education approaches to communicate improved farming practices and encourage agribusiness adoption.

Agricultural extension agents constitute another important grassroots communication channel through face-to-face interactions, practical demonstrations, farm visits, and technical advisory services provided directly to farmers. Community radio programmes broadcast in indigenous languages further complement these efforts by making agricultural information accessible to rural audiences. Finally, informal interpersonal networks involving family members, neighbours, friends, and respected community members facilitate the continuous exchange of farming experiences and practical knowledge that ultimately influence agribusiness adoption decisions.

Collectively, these grassroots communication channels reinforce trust, enhance message comprehension, encourage active participation, and improve the relevance of agricultural information. Their culturally embedded and participatory nature positions them as effective mechanisms for promoting agribusiness awareness, facilitating knowledge acquisition, and ultimately encouraging the adoption of agribusiness practices among rural farmers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study found its anchorage on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory as propounded by Everett Rogers in 1962 and subsequently revised in 2003. The theory expounds how latest ideas, practices, or innovations diffuse within a social system over time via communication channels. Rogers identified information channels as the means by which knowledge about an idea is shared from one individual to another, which thereby influences awareness, persuasion, decision-making, implementation and subsequent adoption.

In this present study, the relevance of Diffusion of Innovation theory lies in its recognition of information channels as important vehicles for distributing information and engendering behavioural change. For Rogers, awareness remains the first stage in the decision process, which occurs when people are exposed to communication about fresh innovation with some understanding of the functions. In rural environments, where interpersonal relationships, community structures and cultural norms strongly shape communication flow, localised communication systems often serve as publicly trusted conduits for disseminating knowledge and other experiences.

In the context of this present study, grassroots information channels such as town criers, village assemblies, farmers' cooperative meetings, extension visits, religious gatherings and all other informal interpersonal networks facilitate exposure to agribusiness information, thereby enhancing agribusiness knowledge among agripreneurs. Increased awareness creation may subsequently motivate farmers to consider and experiment with agribusiness practices.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is appropriate for collecting data from a relatively large population and describing respondents' perceptions, experiences and behavioural tendencies through questionnaires and statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). The



population of the study comprised registered farmers in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. The area was selected because it possesses vast expanses of fertile and arable land and hosts major agricultural zones and plantations, making it one of the major farming hubs in the state. According to data reported in *Nigerian Library and Information Science Trends* (2024), Ohaji/Egbema had 4,500 registered maize farmers and 5,740 registered crop farmers, giving a total farming population of 10,240. Taro Yamane's (1967) formula was employed to determine an appropriate sample size, yielding 400 respondents. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique to ensure that each farmer had the equal chance of being incorporated in the study. Specifically, the respondents were selected from farming communities within Ohaji/Egbema LGA. Participation were eligible farmers actively engaged in crop production across the study area. The sampling approach ensured that every qualified farmer had the equal chance of being selected which promoted fairness and minimised bias. Also, a structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection. The instrument consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to elicit quantitative responses as well as qualitative insights from respondents. To ensure validity of content, the instrument was subjected to expert advisory by scholars in UNN Mass Communication who reviewed its clarity, relevance and the suitability in addressing the study's objectives. Thereafter, modifications were made in line with their observations before administering the questionnaire.

The field Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics, principally frequency counts and percentages. These statistical tools were used to summarise the data and identify patterns as they concern agribusiness awareness, knowledge acquisition and adoption among farmers. Furthermore, the analysis enabled the researchers to identify the communication channels that were commonly reported by respondents as it concerns agribusiness information sharing and adoption. Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their informed consent was obtained prior to participation. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and all information provided was used strictly for academic purposes.

RESULTS

The presentation of results was guided by the three objectives of the study.

Objective One: To identify the indigenous community communication channels used in disseminating agribusiness information Ohaji/Egbema, Imo State, Nigeria

Communication Channel	Frequency (n=400)	(%)
Farmers' Cooperative Meetings	128	32
Religious Announcements (Churches/Mosques)	96	24
Town Criers	72	18
Village Square Meetings	48	12
Local Language Radio Programmes	28	7
Others (Traditional Rulers, Cultural Festivals, Age Grades, Interpersonal	28	7



Communication, On-farm Demonstrations)		
Total	400	100

Table one indicated, farmers' cooperative meetings made up the most-commonly reported localised communication channel engaged in disseminating agribusiness information. It accounted for 32% of responses. Followed by religious announcements in churches and mosques at 24% and town criers constituted 8%. Note that other channels like village square meetings, traditional rulers, local language radio programmes and other grassroots platforms were less frequently mentioned by respondents.

Objective Two: To examine farmers' perceptions of the role of grassroots communication channels in agribusiness awareness and knowledge acquisition.

Perceived Role (Response)	Frequency (n = 400)	(%)
Engendering awareness of agribusiness opportunities	118	30
Offering practical knowledge on agribusiness programmes	102	26
Facilitating participation in agribusiness activities	84	21
Facilitating experience and discussion sharing among rural farmers	64	16
Offering little or no useful agribusiness information	32	7
Total	400	100

Table two showed that the largest proportion of respondents represented by 30% perceived grassroots communication systems as useful for availing awareness of agribusiness opportunities. This was followed by 26% of the respondents who viewed the channels as important sources of practical agribusiness knowledge and 21% who indicated that the channels pushed for participation in agribusiness initiatives. Only 7% believed that these communication sources provided little or no useful agribusiness awareness and information.

Objective Three: To explore farmers' perceptions of the role of grassroots communication channels in agribusiness adoption.

Perceived Contribution to Adoption	Frequency (n = 400)	(%)
Encouraged me to adopt agribusiness practices	132	33
Contributed to my confidence to engage in agribusiness	96	24
Increased my understanding before adoption	72	18
Improved learning from experiences of other farmers'	44	11
Did not influence my decision to adopt agribusiness practices	56	14
Total	400	100

Table three results revealed that one-third of the respondents represented by 33% perceived localised communication media as having stirred and encouraged them to adopt the agribusiness profession. Other respondents also stated that these channels increased their confidence to go into agribusiness – 24%, 18% said it increased their understanding before adoption and 11%



reported it encouraged learning from the experiences of fellow farmers. 14% however, said that the communication sources never contributed to their decision to adopt agribusiness practices.

DISCUSSION

For this current study, first objective sought to ascertain the localised community communication systems used in distributing agribusiness information to farmers in Ohaji/Egbema in Imo State. Findings suggested that farmers' cooperative meetings and religious announcements as well as town criers make up the most commonly indicated community-based communication channels by which participants received agribusiness information. This finding aligns with the position of Mojaye and Lamidi (2015), who described community media as grassroots communication platforms designed to serve the information necessities of rural people and facilitate their development. The finding also lays credence to the submission of Mdoda (2022), who argued that grassroots communication systems remain useful media for disseminating developmental information to rural Nigeria who often constituted the primary target audience of all agricultural innovations. Note that the prominence of cooperative meetings and religious gatherings reported in this research may be attributed to the trust, familiarity and daily interaction that characterise these social structures in rural communities.

Objective two assessed farmers' perceptions of grassroots communication channel's role in agribusiness awareness as well as knowledge acquisition. The findings indicated that majority of the questionnaire participants indicated that grassroots communication tools served as avenues by which farmers were sensitised and mobilised to adopt agribusiness activities. This finding is in support of the argument of Jongsuksomakul and Roehl (2022), who contended that participatory communication channels were effective tools of reaching substantial segments of rural populations. This finding further agreed with Atser et al. (2023), who found that indigenous communication channels are often participatory and culturally-embedded, making developmental information easier to understand and relate to. One possible explanation for this is that community-based communication systems frequently engage local languages and interpersonal interactions, which may push for message comprehension and knowledge-sharing among farmers.

Objective three gauged farmers' perceptions of the role of grassroots communication systems in agribusiness adoption. Results revealed that majority of the respondents connected their exposure to information disseminated via cooperative meetings, religious meetings, peer discussions and extension visits with their decision to go into agribusiness activities. Although the descriptive nature of this study did not permit causal interpretations and inferences, the finding suggested that community-based communication channels may have encouraged exposure to agribusiness-related information and facilitated self-reported adoption among the rural farmers surveyed. Also, this is consistent with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which postulates that communication tools play an important role in aiding awareness on innovations as well as supporting the decision process that may lead to adoption. The finding again, aligns with Rogers' suggestion that interpersonal communication as well as community networks become essentially important during the persuasion and decision periods/stages of diffusion of innovation.



Overarchingly, the findings of this present study underscore the continued germaneness of grassroots communication channels as locally-embedded information routes for agribusiness dissemination across ruralities in Nigeria. Furthermore, the findings lays credence to communication strategies designed to sell agribusiness may benefit from blending indigenous and grassroots communication systems alongside traditional mass media platforms.

CONCLUSION

The study evaluated grassroots communication systems and agribusiness awareness and adoption among farmers in Ohaji/Egbema LGA of Imo State. The findings indicated that localised communication channels, especially farmers' cooperative meetings, religious meetings and town criers, are critical sources of agribusiness information by rural farmers. The respondents majorly perceived these channels as useful pathways for creating awareness, improving knowledge and mobilising engagement in agribusiness practices. Though the descriptive nature of this study did not permit causal inferences, the findings submits that localised communication channels continue to serve as critical information avenues for agribusiness dissemination. Therefore, integrating these participatory communication tools with the traditional mass media may contribute to more inclusive and context-sensitive agribusiness communication strategies in rural area of Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. Agribusiness stakeholders, including government agencies, agribusiness firms, extension services and development organisations, synergise communication approaches too to bring in both grassroots and mainstream media for even wider dissemination. While mass media can be engaged to create broader awareness, they should be complemented with traditional media channels which help to deepen understanding and push for behavioural change. That way, messages are not just widely disseminated but also internalised and acted promptly upon.
2. Employ the use of local languages. Agribusiness messages should be planned and executed in forms that are easily understood and culturally relevant to the rural farmers using demonstration-based learning approaches, local radio stations, storytelling, folk media etc. which align with the lived realities of these farmers.
3. Existing community structures, particularly farmers' cooperatives and religious institutions, should be leveraged more strategically for agribusiness sensitisation campaigns, capacity-building programmes and the dissemination of innovations tailored to the information needs of rural farming communities.
4. Future studies should engage inferential statistical methods and cover wider geographical areas in order to provide indepth insights into the relationship between grassroots communication channels, agribusiness knowledge and adoption among rural farmers in Nigeria.



Ethical Consent

The researchers sought and obtained the ethical consent from the respondents involved in this study. The participants were informed about the pure academic purpose of the research and made to understand that their contributions were entirely voluntary. They were further assured of their confidentiality and anonymity.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare that the study was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that may be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Queen Ifeoma Nwabueze conceived the study, designed the study's instrument and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. Joseph Oluchukwu Wogu supervised data collection and coordinated to the interpretation of findings. Ozioma Patience Nwokedi contributed in literature review, data analysis, and manuscript revision. All the authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript so accept responsibility for its content as well as the similarity index.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets upon which the conclusions of this study were based are available upon reasonable request.

Citation

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