



## **Influence of Radio Benue’s Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha Programmes on the Cultural Renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma People of Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Cultural heritage is a vital element of societal identity, providing a link between the past and present, while shaping the future. In an era of rapid globalization, and increasing dominance of western media, indigenous media play an important role in safeguarding local cultures.

**Objective:** This research examined the impact of Radio Benue’s Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha programmes on the cultural renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State. These programmes are central in promoting traditional music, storytelling, language, and values.

**Method:** The researcher relied on surveys, primary data were gathered through questionnaire administered to 400 sampled respondents within Makurdi metropolis, which is the state capital. This is to enable an easy and fair representation of the Tiv and Idoma people being researched.

**Results:** Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha programmes serve as significant platforms for fostering cultural awareness and pride, particularly among the younger generations who may otherwise face cultural erosion due to globalization and urbanization. These programmes effectively promote traditional storytelling, music, language, values and community dialogue, acting as cultural repositories that strengthen communal bonds and identity. However, the study also identifies challenges, such as language barrier and inconsistent programming, which constrain their broader impact.

**Conclusion:** By bridging generational and linguistic gaps, Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha exemplify how local media can serve as agents of cultural renaissance, continuity and resilience in a rapidly changing society.

**Unique Contributions:** This study contributes valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in the field of media, culture and community development.

**Key Recommendations:** The research underscores the critical role of community-based media in cultural promotion and preservation, and recommends enhanced government and private sector support for sustaining such initiatives, and also an improvement on the consistency in programming as well as wider audience engagement.

**Key Words:** Radio Benue, Kwagh-hirr, Obatoha, Tiv, Idoma, cultural renaissance, heritage Nigeria



## INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is an important element of societal identity, providing a link between the past, and present, while shaping the future of a people within a society. Culture, integral to societal fabric, shapes beliefs, values and practices (UNESCO, 2021). Among the many media of mass communication, radio has emerged as a vital tool used for cultural education, and preservation as it transcends illiteracy and its associated programmes have the tremendous ability to transform the way the masses behave, view or perceive topical issues in the society. The cultural lifestyle of citizens in a community is learned and passed from generation to generation and the culture of a society is dynamic, people learn and embrace new ideas, new behavioural patterns and emerging trends (Ezaka, & Nwafor, 2016).

Communication and culture share a symbiotic relationship within any social group or community, serving as inseparable facets of human existence (Lisa, 2015). In Nigeria, a country known for its diversity, the media has contributory roles in the sustenance of indigenous cultures. However, globalization, and urbanization have significantly threatened the continuity of these cultural traditions. In this context, the role of radio in cultural preservation and renaissance cannot be overstated (Nwafor, 2019). Radio Benue, established in 1978, being a state owned media, stands out as a significant platform for cultural advocacy in Benue State. Through its programmes Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha, among other cultural programmes, the station has utilized radio broadcasting in contributing to the preservation of unique cultural elements of the Tiv and Idoma ethnic groups in Benue state.

### **The Tiv People and Kwagh-hirr**

The Tiv people have their origin associated to the Bantu of Central Africa (Iorshagher & Aande 2022). They live on both sides of the Benue River in Nigeria, the largest ethnic group in Benue State speak a language of the Benue Congo branch of the Niger Congo family, and are subsistence farmers whose main crops are yams, millet and sorghum.

Kwagh-hirr has its roots in the story-telling tradition of the Tiv people called 'kwagh-alom', a practice where the family was treated to a story telling session by creative story tellers, usually in the early hours of the night after the day's farming work. With time, creative story tellers began to dramatize these stories, culminating in the present stage performance and status of Kwagh-hirr, showing past and current social realities. Kwagh-hirr incorporates puppetry, masquerading, poetry, music, dance and animative narratives in articulating the reality of the Tiv people (UNESCO, 2019).

Radio Benue's adaptation of Kwagh-hirr into a radio programme aims to preserve these traditions while making them accessible to a broader audience. It is a cultural programme that is dedicated to folk tale, cultural education, and the transmission of Tiv proverbs and history. The programme airs 10 minutes every Saturday at 7:30pm, enjoys a repeat broadcast on Sundays at 9:30pm for 10 minutes, and is hosted by a team of Tiv cultural experts.



### **The Idoma People and Obatoha**

Obatoha, in the Idoma language of Nigeria literally means ‘living together’, reflects the communal nature of the Idoma society, living in harmony, unity and mutual respect within a community. Obatoha programme on Radio Benue is a magazine discussion programme where the discussants interact with the target audience through phone-in on the studio call line. Topical issues of the day are raised on the programme such as bride price reduction /increment in the Idoma nation, alekwu, traditional attire, language development, traditional beliefs, discussion on the tenacity of the cultural values, beliefs and norms among the Idoma speaking people, conflict resolution, etc. The 30 minutes programme airs every Tuesday at 9:30am and enjoys a repeat broadcast every Saturday at 9:30am for 10 minutes. It aims at instilling a peaceful co-existent nature in listeners as rightly captured, when Abuh said; Idoma people are ancient expert warriors and hunters and peace –loving ethnolinguistic group of the larger Niger-Congo language family residing at the lower and western areas of Benue State in Nigeria (ABUH SANI, 2018 personal Communication).

Radio is found to be an important medium in supporting the propagation of local cultures of the people in developing societies hence, it can be employed to pass vital information about the right attitude, behaviour, knowledge, techniques and skills, which are expected from the people for sustenance of their cultures. Asemah, Anum & Onyeka (2013) demonstrate how radio can be used for promoting cultural norms and values thus: radio can be used as a source of entertainment through arts and cultural festivals, musicals and dramatic performance, by local singing groups, masquerades and other music and drama groups. According to these authors, the mass medium can be used to share the world around them and beyond their immediate environment.

Crucial factors are attributed to why radio is suitable for the renaissance of cultures. According to Asemah, Anum & Onyeka as cited in Chile & Aer (2017),

...the medium’s appeal to both the literate and illiterate audiences, make radio the most fertile medium. Radio is the most effective medium of information at the grass root level in Nigeria. It has assumed this powerful dimension because of many factors like, natural disposition, coverage area and cost.

The preceding discourse shows that when appropriately used, the news media particularly radio could play effective and contributory roles in facilitating the renaissance of indigenous cultures among the people in Nigeria and beyond. That is, media content can be packaged and designed in such ways that facilitate the development and sustainability of cultures of the people. Radio, due to its wide reach, portability and its ability to transcend literacy barriers is noted to be a potent tool for promoting indigenous cultures of the people in developing societies such as Nigeria.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The role of radio in cultural preservation and promotion has been extensively studied in media and cultural studies. This section reviews existing literature on the influence of radio as a tool for cultural renaissance, with a focus on indigenous programmes like Radio Benue’s Kwagh Hirr and



Obatoha. The review covers theoretical foundations, empirical studies, and gaps in the literature relevant to the cultural revival of the Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State.

### **Radio and Cultural Renaissance**

Radio is a branch of mass communication. It is a very potent mass medium of communication through which individuals share in the world around and beyond their immediate environment. By means of broadcasting, every individual becomes a partner of ideas and experiences that will enrich his life and help him live in a complex, dynamic and human society. Radio fulfills this educational function of the mass media through featuring of programmes which are educative in nature (Aligwe, 2015).

Radio can be used to mobilize the people at all levels of the society for cultural renaissance and national consciousness. Development programmes, especially in rural communities in Africa will record little or no success without the active involvement of the people within the traditional systems. Cultural development programmes are communicated to the targeted audience through various programmes which often result to practical changes, new ways of life, new ideas. It integrates the power of radio with local community systems to communicate to the society and induce sustainable change. When we do not understand a particular culture, communication becomes challenging because the intended meaning of a conversation or message might be distorted, misrepresented and misunderstood, thereby having a negative impact or partial success of modern radio application for development projects, especially in the rural areas have resulted in various calls by communication scholars for rural development agents in the field, for a greater utilization of radio channels for cultural development (Nwafor, & Ogbodo, 2015).

On a general note, cultures everywhere are fluid, complex and adaptive to change and continuity in time perspective, and exert domineering influence on the sharers both, either tangible or intangible (Olusola, 2019). The tangible components of cultural heritage may be seen and, and include carvings, statues, paintings, monuments, sites and landscapes; while the intangible elements, which can be felt, practiced and experienced, include languages, oral traditions, literature, customs, dance, legends, rituals, festivals and various skills which constitute that what gives cultural identity to a people (UNESCO, 2002; cited in Isola, 2010).

Isola explores the symbiosis between tangible and intangible elements of culture by stressing that it is the intangible aspects of culture that sustain the tangible aspects because it is the intangible through stories, folktales, proverbs, idioms, taboos, and poetry, that teaches those valuable ideas as dignity, hope, sense of duty, hard work, faithfulness, accountability, transparency, honour, and other human qualities (Isola, 2010).

Cultural renaissance refers to a period of cultural revival and flourishing, marked by renewed interest in arts, science and human creativity. It often stirs up as a reaction against decline in cultural activities, leading to a transformative process that shapes society's values, practices and achievements. Cultural renaissance triggers critical reflections on the beauty of a people's culture with a view to relating effectively with indigenous arts, philosophy, languages and history.

The essence of cultural renaissance as articulated by Oloruntimehin as cited by Olusola (2019) is quite revealing:



- i. To be a movement in the direction of rediscovery of knowledge, ideas and institutions;
- ii. To lead to a rediscovery of self-identities shorn of the denigrating images of a past characterized by oppression and denials by others who had either enslaved or colonized our peoples, establishing in the process alien rule and institutions over our continent and over our people in the Diaspora;
- iii. To find expression in new directions to rebuild our societies and states, and their related institutions on the basis of continued contributions to the knowledge of ourselves, our relations with the rest of the world, as well as of our needs for one another, as Africans within Africa and as Africans in other continents; and
- iv. Based on levels of achievement on goals listed in (i) to (iii) above, to lead to the emergence of leadership elites in our various communities and nation states who would be committed to new forms of social order that would project distinctive core African identities and values upon the international community.

In other words, that our knowledge of our heritage as Africans would have been brought to bear upon the manner of arranging our lines, our societies and states away from the paradigms, structures and values of inherited from colonial states and their institutions. In Nigeria, radio has been instrumental in promoting local cultures. For instance, Adamu (2015) examined the use of radio in Northern Nigeria to preserve Hausa traditions and found that culturally-focused programmes encouraged intergenerational learning and identity reinforcement.

Further, on the socialization role of the mass media, Moemeka writes as cited in Simon & Ndoma (2016) that the mass media help in unifying society and increasing social cohesion by holding and teaching a broad base of common social norms, values, and collective experience. Through this activity, the mass media help transmit culture from generation to generation. Social norms, values and culture in general have become topics for conscious education by the mass media through the formal school system.

### **How Radio can promote Indigenous Cultures in Nigeria**

According to Onabajo as cited in Chile & Aer (2017) and supported Nwafor, & Ezike, (2015), since independence, radio broadcast programmes have tried its best to live up to its objective of promoting cultural awareness throughout the Nigerian federation. Part of these objectives is to essentially cover the areas of aesthetics, religion, ethics, philosophy, language, history and arts. In line with their objectives, radio programmes have tried as much as possible to be oriented towards:

- (a) Seeking, identifying and preserving Nigerian culture and promoting the study of Nigerian history and language.
- (b) Selecting critically, relevant foreign culture for the purpose of enriching Nigerian culture.
- (c) Developing and promoting the appreciation of indigenous aesthetic values by citizens.

### **Cultural Renaissance among the Tiv and Idoma People**

The Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State are known for their rich cultural traditions, including oral storytelling, festivals, music, and communal activities. However, study by Ejue (2024) highlight the challenges faced by these communities in preserving their heritage due to



urbanization, Western education, and declining use of indigenous languages. These scholars advocate for media interventions as a means of reviving cultural practices and promoting pride in indigenous identity.

Specifically, the Kwagh Hirr tradition of the Tiv, which combines puppetry, storytelling, and music, has been studied by many scholars. They argue that Kwagh Hirr is not just entertainment but a repository of Tiv philosophy, history, and social values. The adaptation of this tradition into a radio format by Radio Benue has the potential to expand its reach and ensure its survival. Similarly, Idoma cultural expressions, such as those featured in the Obatoha programme, have been identified as critical for sustaining community cohesion and transmitting values across generations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This exploratory paper is guided by the Social Learning Theory.

**Social Learning Theory:** The development of the *Social Learning theory* is attributed to the works by Bandura (1986). The theory, according to McQuail (2005), is the idea that we cannot learn all or even much of what we need to guide our own development and behavior from direct personal observation and experience alone, we have to learn much from indirect sources including mass media.

The social learning theory posits four basic processes of social learning processes that occur in sequence – *attention, retention, production* and *motivation*. Our attention is directed at media content of potential relevance to our lives. We may then retain what we have learnt and add it to our stock of prior knowledge. The third stage, which is production refers to the actual application in behavior of lessons learnt, where it may be rewarded (reinforced) or punished, leading to greater or less motivation to follow any particular path (McQuail, 2005).

Social learning theory basically focuses on the learning that occurs within a given social context. The theory considers that people learn from one another, including observational learning, imitation and modeling. According to Uganda as cited in Chile & Aer (2017), the social learning theory by Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others.

The theory principally explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive behavioural and environmental influences. According to Bandura (1977) cited by Sutton (2021),

Learning would be exceedingly labourious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them on what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.



The relevance of the social learning theory to the current study can be explained in the theory's provision that people can learn and adopt certain behaviours as represented in communication content (particularly mass communication) aside direct personal interactions and experiences. In this regard, people concerned with the packaging and production of cultural radio programmes are guided to put forward broadcasts that greatly hold the people's attention and enable them put the self-efficacy and social modeling elements into practice.

### **Empirical Studies on Radio Benue's Kwagh Hirr and Obatoha**

A number of empirical studies have examined Radio Benue's indigenous programme contents. However, studies on similar initiatives offer valuable insights. Chile & Aer (2017) carried out a study on the role of radio broadcasting in promoting indigenous cultures in Benue State and found that majority of Benue people are occasionally exposed to radio broadcasts on indigenous cultures.

A study conducted by Ibrahim, Yake, Alsadique, Gasau & Nguru (2021) titled radio broadcast and indigenous language development in Nigeria: Contributions of the radio service of BRTV Maiduguri toward the promotion of Kanuri language. This study examined the impacts of the Kanuri broadcast service of BRTV Radio, Maiduguri on the promotion and preservation of Kanuri language among the people living in Khaddamari town. It used a semi-structured qualitative design approach. The study was anchored on the cultural norms theory. 14 participants were recruited for in depth interviews from BRTV radio and Khaddamari town. The study found that BRTV's Kanuri broadcasts' contribution toward the promotion of Kanuri language at Khaddamari was progressively diminishing compared to how much it could have done so three decades ago and that some of the listeners were dissatisfied with several BRTV's Kanuri programs/news broadcasts. The study concluded that BRTV radio's contribution toward the promotion of Kanuri language in Khaddamari town was crucial but was minimal, often hampered by the dwindling broadcast power and reach of BRTV radio signals. Therefore, BRTV should address its infrastructural deficits and formulate articulate broadcast language policy. This study is relevant to this current study because they both seek to examine how radio can influence the promotion and preservation of culture but differ in coverage and focus.

Tsafa, Onyilo, Unogwu & Awunah (2023) similarly, conducted a study on Listeners' response to Radio Benue indigenous language messages on COVID-19. Findings showed that messages disseminated in indigenous languages through jingles on radio had more lasting effects than those disseminated in English language.

### **Gaps in Literature**

While existing studies provide insights into the potential of radio for cultural promotion, there is limited research specifically addressing the influence of Kwagh Hirr and Obatoha on the cultural renaissance, cross cultural dynamics of the Tiv and Idoma people as well as a comparative analysis of the programmes in cultural context. Addressing these gaps can offer a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Radio Benue's Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha programmes on the cultural renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma people.



**METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive survey design. Questionnaire were distributed to respondents in randomly sampled areas within Makurdi metropolis to obtain insights into the topic being researched.

**RESULT**

**Table 1: Frequency of listening to Kwagh-hir and Obatoha radio broadcasts**

<b>Listening Frequency</b>	<b>Tiv (%)</b>	<b>Idoma (%)</b>	<b>Combined (%)</b>
Weekly	60	54	57
Occasionally	30	36	33
Rarely/ Never	10	10	10

*Source: Field Survey 2024*

Table 1 is a distribution of respondents according to their frequency of exposure to Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha radio broadcasts. From the table, weekly, 57 percent of the respondents listen to Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha broadcasts, 33 percent of the respondents occasionally listen, while 10 percent rarely/never listen to Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha broadcast on Radio Benue. It can be deduced from the data contained in the table under review that majority of the respondents listen audience to Radio Benue’s broadcasts on Kwagh-hirr or Obatoha on a weekly basis.

**Table 2: Influence on Cultural Awareness**

<b>Cultural Aspects</b>	<b>Tiv Respondents (%)</b>	<b>Idoma Respondents (%)</b>	<b>Combined (%)</b>
Language	60	55	57.5
Folktale and storytelling	70	65	67.5
Traditional songs	50	45	47.5
Contemporary cultural issues	30	35	32.5
All of the above	40	50	45

*Source: Field Survey 2024*

Table 2 show the influence of Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha programmes on cultural awareness of the people. It is revealed from the table that a majority of 67.5 percent of the respondents agree to becoming aware of folktale and storytelling, 57.5 percentage of the respondents agree to language learning, 47.5 percent of the respondents agree to traditional songs, 32.5 percent agree to becoming aware of contemporary cultural issues of Benue people while 45 percent of the respondents note that they became aware of all the above mentioned cultural aspects through Radio Benue’s Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha programmes.





**Table 3: Perception of Programme Impact**

Response Category	Tiv (%)	Idoma (%)	Combined (%)
Strongly Agree	50	55	52.5
Agree	30	25	27.5
Neutral	10	10	10
Disagree	5	5	5
Strongly Disagree	5	5	5

*Source: Field Survey 2024*

Table 3 show the audience perception of Radio Benue’s Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha Programme impact. It is revealed from the table that a majority of 52.5 percent of the respondents strongly agree that the programmes have a positive impact on the cultural renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma people, 27.5 percent agree, 10 percent are neutral, 5 percent disagree, while 5 percent strongly disagree that the programmes have a positive impact on the cultural renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State, Nigeria.

## **DISCUSSION**

Majority of respondents listen to the programme at least weekly, indicating a consistent audience base. Tiv respondents show slightly higher engagement levels than Idoma respondents. Both programmes significantly enhance cultural awareness with particular strength in promoting folktales, storytelling and language., as such, the programmes are perceived as effective tools for cultural preservation, with a belief of playing an essential role on the cultural renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study suggests that Radio Benue’s Kwagh Hirr and Obatoha programmes significantly contribute to the cultural renaissance of the Tiv and Idoma people, especially in preserving traditional values, languages, and practices. These programmes are seen as a valuable tool in cultural education and community building. The study recommends that the Kwagh-hirr and Obatoha programme producers should highlight more diverse subcultural elements within the Tiv and Idoma societies as this could broaden the programmes’ appeal. Also, engaging younger audiences and incorporating more interactive formats for deeper involvement in cultural preservation, improvement on the consistency in programming as well as wider audience engagement.

## **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the respondents used in the main study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.



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### **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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