



## Town Criers as Traditional Newsmen: Ikot Udota Resident's Perception of the Credibility of Information Disseminated by Town Criers

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### ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate Ikot Udota residents' perception of the credibility of information disseminated through town criers. Specifically, the study objectives were to: examine the extent to which Ikot Udota residents are exposed to information disseminated by local town criers; find out the perception of Ikot Udota residents of information disseminated by town criers; examine Ikot Udota residents' perception of the credibility of information disseminated by town criers; and find out the effectiveness of town criers in disseminating credible information to positively influence Ikot Udota residents' perception. Anchored on the Social Category Theory and Perception Theory, the study adopted a survey research design, administering questionnaires to 342 respondents selected through a combination of purposive and systematic random sampling techniques. Findings reveal that a significant proportion of Ikot Udota residents are exposed to town crier announcements to a very large extent (54%); hold a positive perception of town crier announcements (71%); perceive town criers as credible sources of information (65%); and believe that town crying ensures accuracy and maintains credibility (77%). Recommendations are that town criers in Ikot Udota should continue to leverage local dialects and cultural references; community leaders should support town criers with accurate and timely information; Ikot Udota residents should remain receptive to town crier announcements and provide feedback; and relevant stakeholders should collaborate with town criers to promote public health campaigns, community development initiatives, and social cohesion

## INTRODUCTION

For many years, the spread of knowledge in rural areas has been essential to the advancement of society. Through the use of oral communication and local resources, traditional media systems have been instrumental in reaching a large audience in rural Africa. The town crier, who is tasked with informing the public and frequently uses a gong or bell to draw attention, is one example of a traditional medium. In many Nigerian villages, town criers have long been the main source of communication, declaring social issues, governmental directives, and significant news in a lively and rhythmic way (Ogunyemi, 2018).

In Nigeria, the reliability of town criers has a big impact on how information is shared. Town criers are reliable information sources who can be extremely helpful in government, community development projects, and public health campaigns. They are vital partners in spreading correct information and combating false information because of their capacity to reach audiences in isolated locations where contemporary media might not be able to reach them successfully. However, political manipulation and the dissemination of false information have caused faith in these communicators to decline, and some town criers have been used to promote skewed information that supports particular agendas (Ogunyemi, 2020). This development calls into question the veracity of information spread by town criers and emphasizes the necessity of critically analyzing their function in modern communication.

This study looked into how Ikot Udota locals viewed the reliability of information spread by town criers. The study specifically intends to investigate the degree to which town criers are seen as reliable information sources, the elements that affect their credibility, and the consequences of their function in fostering social cohesion and community development. This study aims to advance knowledge of the dynamics of traditional communication systems in Nigeria and their capacity to foster social change by providing a detailed examination of the town crier's function in information transmission (Nwankwo, 2020). The study's conclusions will have a big impact on how communication plans are created and carried out in rural areas, emphasizing how crucial it is to use conventional media platforms to advance social cohesion and development.

### *Statement of the Problem*

It has long been known that traditional newsmen, especially town criers, are effective in getting information out to remote populations. Town criers, who use their special position and regional dialects to engage their audience, have long been essential in informing the public about social issues, governmental orders, and critical news. However, this conventional communication system's efficacy is compromised by a few restrictions and difficulties. For example, the hierarchical structure governing the town crier's role can limit the flexibility of the dissemination process and restrict access to information, while the reliance on particular instruments, like the "kpokpo" (wooden block), may not always attract the attention of the intended audience. Furthermore, there are serious questions regarding the neutrality and trustworthiness of town criers when they are used by local political personalities to spread false information. In light of these difficulties, it is questionable if town criers are still a reliable source of information in the modern era, especially in areas like Ikot Udota. This ambiguity

draws attention to a knowledge vacuum about how community members view town criers' credibility, which this study aims to fill by examining how Ikot Udota locals view the veracity of information spread by town criers.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. What is the extent to which Ikot Udota residents are exposed to information disseminated by local town criers?
2. What is the perception of Ikot Udota residents of information disseminated by town criers in Ikot Udota?
3. What is the Ikot Udota residents' perception of the credibility of information disseminated by town criers?
4. What is the effectiveness of town criers in disseminating credible information to positively influence Ikot Udota residents' perception?

## **LITERATURE RIVIEW**

### ***Traditional Communication***

Traditional communication, as defined by Nwosu (1990) in Ottah and Umar (2017) is the process of disseminating information, ideas, and attitudes by certain specialised institutions set up for that purpose. It focuses on the exchange of information or messages that have traditional undertones. Thus, traditional modes of communication therefore mean the ways Africans communicated among themselves, their societal modus operandi, the benefits of their cultural communication and how the process evolved to the present age from years back. Every nation in Africa had and still has communication patterns to suit its terrain. Wilson (1997), in Ottah and Umar (2017) believes that traditional modes of communication are employed in predominantly traditional and rural societies. Although the modern media of mass communication appear to have replaced the traditional media, the fact remains that different parts of Africa still employ various aspects of the traditional media in their daily living (Ottah, 2016). Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) in Akpabio (2003) defines it as any form of indigenous communication system which by virtue of its origin form and integrate into a specific culture, serves as a channel for message in a way that requires the utilization of the values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes. Traditional communication was an important activity which touched every sphere of human life, bringing people, cultures, communities and races closer for meaningful development and peaceful co-existence. It is also seen as the process of social interaction that helps people to understand themselves and live harmoniously as organised people of a given state, country, or nation.

### ***The Town Crier and His Role***

The town crier is the link between the traditional governing council of any community and the people. He is not a member of the cabinet of the traditional ruler, but he conveys the decisions of the council that are necessary for the people to know, so that the people will be carried along in all decisions made concerning them. In his role as the spokesman of the traditional governing council, he provides members of the community with vital information. Occasionally,

according to Nwanmuo (2014), the town crier could be called to attend the traditional governing council meetings where vital decisions are taken, but generally, information is often conveyed through him to the community. Before the introduction of a formal police force, the Town Crier, being a true, trusted royalist, was also often empowered to uphold the law. Town Criers or Heralds, as they were known in earlier times, were considered to be sacrosanct. An assault on a Town Crier was regarded as a treasonable act, as the crier spoke with the voice of the King. Town Criers were protected by law. "Don't shoot the messenger" was a very real command back in those days. To this day, any Town Crier in the British Commonwealth is protected under old English law that they are not to be hindered or heckled while performing their duties.

The town crier is in most cases appointed by the tradition ruler, or through inheritance from family lineage. The person must have retentive memory to retain instructions given and recall them at different times and places where he has to make the announcements. He should have a clear voice, courageous and effective in the use of his dialect. The town crier must equally be resonant in voice, which is, he could be heard even in remote corners of the village. He should be a man of perseverance and patience since he has to go too far distances at odd times. He should be able to respond on time if he is called upon. He should know the culture of his people and be able to interpret it to fit the objectives of his community. He should not only be respected and revered but also regarded as authoritative and credible source of information. Finally, the sound from his communication medium; the gong (wooden or metal), or the drum should be decodable appropriately and receive attention from the audiences to whom they are addressed. In most cases, the town crier is always a matured and respected man.

#### ***Town Criers as Traditional Newsmen in Nigeria***

In the rich tapestry of Nigeria's cultural heritage, town criers have emerged as pivotal figures, serving as traditional newsmen who bridge the gap between information and the community. Town criers have historically functioned as the primary sources of news in many Nigerian communities, particularly in areas where literacy rates are low and access to modern media is limited. As Ogunyemi (2015) notes, "town criers are the voice of the people, delivering news and information that is vital for communal living." Their presence is often marked by distinctive attire and a loud, rhythmic call that commands attention, ensuring that messages reach a wide audience. The role of town criers extends beyond mere announcement; they serve as a conduit for local governance, relaying decrees, community news, and events. Their announcements can range from public health advice to cultural celebrations, making them indispensable in the daily lives of community members (Eze, 2020). In this capacity, they help foster civic awareness and engagement, encouraging citizens to participate in community affairs.

Town criers utilise a variety of techniques to convey information effectively. Their announcements are often infused with local dialects, proverbs, and folklore, which resonate with the community and enhance the message's relatability. As Adeyanju (2018) highlights, "the art of town crying is not just

about shouting; it involves storytelling and cultural references that connect with the audience." Additionally, town criers often adapt their messages to suit the context, employing humor, music, and rhythm to capture attention and maintain engagement. This dynamic approach not only informs but also entertains, making town criers critical figures in the cultural landscape of Nigeria.

The impact of town criers as traditional newsmen is profound, influencing various aspects of community life. First and foremost, they play a crucial role in information dissemination, ensuring that even the most remote community members are aware of important news and events. This function is particularly vital in times of crisis, such as during public health emergencies, where timely information can save lives. Abubakar (2021) notes that "town criers have been instrumental in communicating health information, especially in rural areas where access to modern media is limited". Moreover, town criers contribute to cultural preservation by recounting local histories and traditions through their announcements. They act as custodians of cultural identity, ensuring that younger generations remain connected to their roots. Eze (2020) emphasizes that "through their storytelling, town criers keep the community's history alive, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among residents. Despite their significant contributions, town criers face numerous challenges in contemporary Nigeria. The advent of digital media has diminished their prominence, particularly in urban areas where information can be disseminated rapidly through social platforms (Ogunyemi, 2018). Additionally, many town criers struggle with economic instability, as their roles are often unpaid or poorly compensated (Adeyanju, 2018).

However, some town criers have adapted to these changes by incorporating digital tools into their practices. For instance, some have begun using mobile phones to share information via social media, thereby reaching a broader audience while maintaining their traditional role as community communicators (Ogunyemi, 2015). This adaptability highlights the resilience of town criers and their commitment to serving their communities.

#### ***Information Dissemination by Town Criers in Nigeria***

Town criers have historically played a pivotal role in information dissemination within Nigerian communities, serving as essential conduits between local authorities and the populace. In many Nigerian communities, particularly in rural areas, town criers are the primary source of news and information. Their loud and rhythmic announcements ensure that important messages reach a broad audience, transcending barriers of literacy and access to modern media. As Ogunyemi (2015) notes, "town criers are the voice of the community, delivering vital information that fosters civic engagement and awareness."

Town criers are often employed by local governments to communicate public announcements, such as health advisories, community events, and government directives. This role becomes especially critical during crises, such as natural disasters or public health emergencies, where timely information can significantly impact community safety and well-being (Abubakar, 2021). Town criers utilize various techniques to convey messages effectively. Their

announcements often incorporate local dialects, proverbs, and cultural references that resonate with the community, enhancing the relatability of the information. Adeyanju (2018) emphasizes that "the art of town crying involves storytelling that connects with the audience's cultural and social context."

Additionally, town criers often adapt their delivery style to suit the audience and occasion. They may use humor, music, or rhythmic chants to capture attention and maintain engagement, making the information more memorable. This dynamic communication style not only informs but also entertains, reinforcing their role as vital figures in the community (Eze, 2020). The impact of town criers extends beyond mere information delivery; they play a crucial role in cultural preservation and identity formation. Through their announcements, town criers often recount local histories, traditions, and folklore, ensuring that cultural narratives are passed down through generations. Eze (2020) asserts that "town criers are not just messengers; they are cultural custodians who keep the heritage of the community alive." Moreover, their role in information dissemination fosters a sense of community cohesion. By announcing events, celebrations, and public gatherings, town criers encourage participation and unity among residents. This communal engagement is vital for social stability, as it strengthens ties and promotes collaboration (Ogunyemi, 2018). Despite their significant contributions, town criers face numerous challenges in contemporary Nigeria. The rise of digital media has diminished their prominence, particularly in urban areas where information can be disseminated rapidly through social platforms (Ogunyemi, 2018). Additionally, many town criers struggle with economic instability, as their roles are often voluntary or poorly compensated (Adeyanju, 2018).

However, some town criers have adapted to the changing media landscape by incorporating modern communication tools into their practices. For example, some have begun using mobile phones and social media to share information, thus expanding their reach while maintaining their traditional role as community communicators (Ogunyemi, 2015). This adaptability highlights the resilience of town criers and their commitment to serving their communities.

#### ***Credibility of Information Dissemination by Town Criers in Nigeria***

Town criers have historically served as vital communicators in Nigerian communities, disseminating information that shapes public perception and civic engagement. As traditional newsmen, their credibility is paramount in ensuring that the information they convey is trusted and accepted by the community. The tradition of town crying in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial times, where it served as a primary means of communication in societies with low literacy rates (Ogunyemi, 2015). Town criers have been entrusted with the responsibility of announcing important news, public health directives, and community events. Their role as community informants positions them as credible sources of information, particularly in rural areas where modern media may be inaccessible.

According to Abubakar (2021), "town criers are often seen as the voice of authority within the community, providing vital announcements that impact daily life." This perception is rooted in their longstanding presence and the cultural significance they hold, which further enhances their credibility among

community members. Town criers are typically local figures who are well-known within their communities. Their familiarity fosters trust, as residents are likely to believe information from someone they know personally. As Eze (2020) points out, "the local nature of town criers allows them to build relationships with community members, which enhances their credibility. The use of local dialects, proverbs, and cultural references in their announcements also plays a significant role in establishing credibility. By embedding cultural elements into their messages, town criers resonate with the audience, making the information more relatable and trustworthy (Adeyanju, 2018).

Town criers often engage with their audience during announcements, allowing for immediate feedback and clarification. This interactive approach not only reinforces their credibility but also fosters a sense of community ownership over the information being shared (Ogunyemi, 2018). In an era where misinformation can spread rapidly, town criers must navigate the delicate balance of delivering accurate information while countering false narratives. The influx of digital media presents a challenge, as competing sources of information can lead to confusion and distrust among community members (Ogunyemi, 2015). Many town criers operate on a voluntary basis or receive minimal compensation, which may affect their motivation and commitment to delivering accurate information (Adeyanju, 2018). Economic instability can lead to compromised integrity, as financial pressures might tempt some to disseminate unfounded rumors for personal gain. The rise of digital communication has led to a decline in the prominence of town criers, particularly in urban areas where information is rapidly disseminated through social media platforms. This shift challenges their traditional role and raises questions about their credibility in a digital age (Ogunyemi, 2018).

Despite these challenges, town criers continue to adapt to the changing media landscape. Some have begun to embrace modern technologies by using mobile phones and social media to enhance their reach while maintaining their traditional role as community communicators. This adaptability not only preserves their relevance but also reinforces their credibility by allowing them to verify information through multiple channels (Abubakar, 2021). Moreover, during public health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, town criers have emerged as critical sources of accurate information. Their established trust within communities has enabled them to effectively disseminate health guidelines and safety practices, further solidifying their role as credible information sources (Eze, 2020).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This study is anchored on two key theories: Social Category Theory and Perception Theory. Social Category Theory, propounded by Melvin DeFleur in 1970, posits that individuals within the same social category, determined by factors such as age, gender, location, and socio-economic status, will seek out similar communication messages and respond to them in a comparable manner. This theory is relevant to the study as it provides a framework for examining how residents of Ikot Udo, grouped by their social categories, perceive and interpret messages disseminated through town criers. However, a critique of this theory is

its potential oversimplification of individual differences within social categories, which may lead to a lack of consideration for unique experiences and perspectives.

Perception Theory, on the other hand, explores how individuals interpret and make sense of the world around them, highlighting the active role of individual interpretation in shaping reality (Goldstein, 2018). This theory is pertinent to the study as it offers a valuable framework for understanding how Ikot Udota residents interpret and evaluate the credibility of information disseminated through town criers, taking into account their prior experiences, cultural backgrounds, and contextual factors. A critique of Perception Theory is its emphasis on individual subjectivity, which may overlook the role of social and cultural factors in shaping perception.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a survey research design, deemed suitable for investigating people's opinions, feelings, and attitudes, particularly in the context of Ikot Udota residents' perception of the credibility of information disseminated by town criers. The population of the study comprised 2,362 individuals residing in Ikot Udota community, Eket Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. A sample size of 342 was derived using the Taro Yamane formula, with a 0.05 error margin. The study employed a combination of purposive and systematic random sampling techniques to administer questionnaires to respondents. Four streets were purposively selected, and 92 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to each street, except for Heritage Park, which received 93 copies. The questionnaire, comprising 12 items divided into two parts, was used as the research instrument, with Section A focusing on demographic data and Section B reflecting the research questions and objectives. The instrument's validity was ensured through expert validation, while reliability was ascertained through a pilot survey conducted among 20 subjects not part of the population. Data collection yielded a 98% return rate, with 340 out of 342 copies administered being filled and correctly returned. The data were tabulated and statistically analysed using frequency scores and simple percentages.

## **RESULT**

Table 1. To What Extent are You Exposed to Information Disseminated by Local Town Criers?

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Minimal Extent	111	33
Large Extent	47	14
Very Large Extent	182	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

The analysis presented in Table 1 above shows that 33% of respondents indicated that they are exposed to information disseminated by local town criers

to a minimal extent, 14% of them identified that they are exposed to a large extent, while 54% of them stated that they are exposed to a very large extent.

Table 2. What is Your Perception of Information Disseminated by Town Criers?

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Positive	240	71
Negative	49	14
Neutral	45	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

On what respondents' perception of information disseminated by town criers is, data presented in table Table 2 above shows that majority of 48% of respondents affirm that they hold positive perception of information disseminated by town criers, 14% of them identified negative while 13% of the respondents identified that they hold neutral perception.

Table 3. Do Town Criers Disseminate Credibility of Information?

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Yes	340	100
No	---	--
I can't say	---	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

On whether town criers disseminate credibility of information, data presented in table 4.9 above shows that majority of 100% of respondents affirm that town criers disseminate credibility of information. Meanwhile, none states that it not neither can't say.

Table 4. What Is Your Perception of the Credibility of Information Disseminated by Town Crier?

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Positive	222	65
Negative	25	7
Neutral	93	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

On the perception of respondents on the credibility of information disseminated by the town crier, data presented in Table 4 above shows that the majority of 65% of respondents affirm that the perception of respondent on the credibility of information disseminated by town crier is positive, 7% of them state that they hold negative; 29% of them state neutral.

Table 5. What is the Effectiveness of Town Crying in Disseminating Credible Information That Positively Influences Your Perception?

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
ensure accuracy and maintain their credibility	261	77
interactive nature	22	6
persuasive enough	17	3
allows for immediate feedback from the audience	27	8
promoting accurate information and countering misinformation	13	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

On the effectiveness of town crying in disseminating credible information that positively influences respondents perception, data presented in Table 4 show that majority of 77% of the respondent's states that it ensure accuracy and maintain their credibility, 6% of them state interactive nature, 3% of them state that it is persuasive enough, 8% of them state that it allows for immediate feedback from the audience, 4% state that it allows for immediate feedback from the audience while 4% of them state that it promoting accurate information and countering misinformation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that a significant proportion of Ikot Udo residents are exposed to information disseminated by local town criers to a very large extent. Specifically, 54% of respondents indicated that they are exposed to town crier announcements to a very large extent, while 33% reported minimal exposure, and 14% reported large exposure. This finding suggests that town criers remain a vital source of information in Ikot Udo community, consistent with Ogunyemi's (2018) assertion that town criers are essential in disseminating information in rural areas where access to modern media is limited. The effectiveness of town criers in reaching a wide audience can be attributed to their ability to leverage local dialects and cultural references, making their messages more relatable and engaging (Adeyanju, 2018). This finding is also supported by the Social Category Theory, which posits that individuals within the same social category will seek out similar communication messages and respond to them in a comparable manner (DeFleur, 1970). In this context, the social category of Ikot Udo residents appears to be receptive to town crier announcements, which may be due to the cultural significance and trust accorded to these traditional communicators.

The study also investigated Ikot Udo residents' perception of information disseminated by town criers. The findings reveal that a significant majority (71%) of respondents hold a positive perception of town crier announcements, while 14% reported a negative perception, and 13% were neutral. This finding suggests that town criers are generally perceived as credible sources of information, consistent with Eze's (2020) assertion that town criers are trusted figures in their communities. The positive perception of town criers can be attributed to their ability to build relationships with community members and

provide accurate information (Abubakar, 2021). This finding is also supported by the Perception Theory, which highlights the active role of individual interpretation in shaping reality (Goldstein, 2018). In this context, Ikot Udota residents' positive perception of town criers suggests that they interpret and evaluate town crier announcements in a favourable light, likely due to the cultural significance and trust accorded to these traditional communicators.

The study further investigated Ikot Udota residents' perception of the credibility of information disseminated by town criers. The findings reveal that a significant majority (65%) of respondents perceive town crier announcements as credible, while 7% reported a negative perception, and 27% were neutral. This finding suggests that town criers are generally perceived as credible sources of information, consistent with Ogunyemi's (2015) assertion that town criers are essential in disseminating accurate information in rural areas. The credibility of town criers can be attributed to their ability to provide accurate information and maintain their integrity (Adeyanju, 2018). This finding is also supported by the Perception Theory, which highlights the importance of individual interpretation in shaping perception (Goldstein, 2018). In this context, Ikot Udota residents' perception of town criers as credible sources of information suggests that they interpret and evaluate town crier announcements as trustworthy and reliable.

The study finally investigated the effectiveness of town crying in disseminating credible information that positively influences Ikot Udota residents' perception. The findings reveal that a significant majority (77%) of respondents believe that town crying ensures accuracy and maintains credibility, while 6% reported that it is interactive, 3% reported that it is persuasive enough, 8% reported that it allows for immediate feedback, and 4% reported that it promotes accurate information and counters misinformation. This finding suggests that town crying is an effective means of disseminating credible information, consistent with Abubakar's (2021) assertion that town criers are essential in promoting public health campaigns and community development initiatives. The effectiveness of town crying can be attributed to its ability to provide accurate information and engage community members (Eze, 2020). This finding is also supported by the Social Category Theory, which highlights the importance of social context in shaping communication (DeFleur, 1970). In this context, the effectiveness of town crying in Ikot Udota community suggests that it is a culturally relevant and engaging means of communication that resonates with community members.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that town criers play a vital role in disseminating credible information to Ikot Udota residents, who perceive them as trustworthy and credible sources of information, underscoring the significance of traditional communication systems in promoting community development and social cohesion.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

1. Town criers in Ikot Udo should continue to leverage local dialects and cultural references to engage community members and enhance the effectiveness of their announcements.
2. Community leaders in Ikot Udo should support town criers by providing them with accurate and timely information to disseminate to the community.
3. Ikot Udo residents should remain receptive to town crier announcements and provide feedback to enhance the communication process.
4. Relevant stakeholders, including government agencies and community organisations, should collaborate with town criers to promote public health campaigns, community development initiatives, and social cohesion in Ikot Udo.

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