

PROMOTING YOUTH'S INTEGRITY IN OGHARA, DELTA STATE: THE ROLE OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS

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Abstract

This study examined the promotion of youth integrity in Oghara Kingdom, Delta State, Nigeria: The Role of Cultural Symbols. The specific objectives were: to examine whether transmission of cultural symbols has impact in the growth and development of youth in Oghara kingdom, to ascertain the extent the use of symbols to communicate with youth make them to maintain good behavior, to determine how the knowledge of idol image guide youth in the kingdom, to establish the extent nodding and winking of eyes correct the youth and sustain their moral values in the kingdom. Symbolic theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The cross-sectional sampling procedure was used to select the relevant respondents from the study population. In-depth interviews were administered to eighteen (18) key informants. Structured questionnaires were administered to 600 youth. Data generated from the field were analysed using percentages and content analysis. The result of all the analyses showed that transmission of cultural symbols has impact in the youth growth and development in the kingdom, using symbols to communicate with the youth make them maintain good behavior, the knowledge of idol image will guide the youth, nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in Oghara kingdom. The study therefore recommends that cultural symbols should be used in communicating with the youth, idol image should also be used in guiding the youth into morality, frequent use of nodding and winking of eyes to correct the youth and sustain their moral values.

Keywords: Symbols, Cultural, youth, integrity.

Introduction

Every culture has symbols which capture people's attention, and those who belong to such a culture understand the meaning. Jennings and Hoebel (1972) opined that human behaviour starts with the use of symbols, which makes us human, and these symbols are globally shared by humanity. According to Jennings and Hoebel, symbols came into the limelight through the natural processes of organic evolution. This exercise brought culture into existence, which is being perpetuated today. Jennings and Hoebel (1972) stated that speech is a symbolic expression, and the behaviour of anybody is either symbolic or non-symbolic. Oludumiye (2018) affirmed that the purpose of symbols is to capture one's attention; the cultural identity can be displayed in symbols such as rituals, arts, and myths, the interpretation of which differs.

Symbolic thought is said to be undoubtedly very important or indispensable to humans, and it is also peculiar to their learning of culture. It is on this note that anthropologist Leslie White in Kottak (2004), define culture as being "dependent upon symboling. Culture consists of tools, implements, utensils, clothing, ornaments, customs, institutions, beliefs, rituals, games, works of art, language" and have roots in our ancestors when they acquired the ability to use symbols, that is, to create and convey ideas of an object or event and, therefore, to understand and appreciate the details as such (Harris, 1997). He described the symbol as "verbal or sign language, in the same culture, which represents something. "This means that there are no obvious, natural, necessary or intrinsic connections between symbols and what they symbolize or represent. Notable here is that language and symbols are distinctive possessions of *Homo sapiens*. The fact is that no other animal apart from humans has anything close to and can be compared with the complexity of language. Symbol, although it is said to be linguistic in nature, yet there are also non-verbal symbols such as a flag, holy water, etc, that people who have them do not have difficulty in understanding what they mean (Le Vine, 2001).

Symbols in Africa

Just like other continents, Africans have symbols that are distinct, which bring peace to the society, make them live harmoniously and bring understanding among the people, both the senders and the receivers (Ushe, 2012). The word symbol is a Greek word derived from symbolon, which means to throw together. Humans create symbols, and according to Ogunbameru and Rotimi (2009), symbols changed prehistoric ancestors to well-organised people, and it is created based on the way they perceive them. And to fully assimilate the meaning. Ifesieh (1989) opined that one must clearly understand the history and knowledge of the particular thing which is being used as a symbol, and these meanings differ from one culture to another, which can only have meaning when everybody who belongs to that group agrees together. According to him, the symbol stands in between and it brings remembrance of things that happened. Gonzalez (2018) describes cultural symbols in Africa as a physical existence that influences the way people behave in a particular culture. Some African symbols can be handshakes, gestures, plants, calabash, talking drum, beads, materials for rituals, kola nuts, cowries, etc, and all these have meaning which most of the present youth do not like (Khosa, 2009). Kola nut, according to Nnenne (2013), is very important in African culture and symbolizes sacredness, it is used to pray to gods, reverence, hospitality, solemnity, and there is an adage that goes with it: "He who brings kola nut brings life".

Nnenne (2013) further itemized the following and their meaning: Calabash comes with various sizes and uses such as utensils, pipe, musical instrument, and graphic design. Talking drum serves as the voice of the community, swords depict power and strength.

Native Chalk (Kaolin) This is commonly used by the Igbe (Marine) worshippers, and a large quantity of it is kept in the shrine. Urhibo (2020) affirmed that it is a symbol of purity and protection.

Palm Fronds This symbolizes a lot of things like warning to keep off from a place, consecrate shrines entrances, place specially marked and garment of divinities. *ibid*.

Cowries Chidume, Osisioma and Chem (2015), Opined that they are kept in shrine and it symbolizes purity, prosperity piety, money for bride wealth by man during marriage and money for the dead to transport to the great beyond.

Thunderbolt: Chidume et al affirmed that Axe and some stones are the symbols used in different cults and shrines for this deity, which symbolizes God's wrath, and this is expressed through lightning and thundering on the wicked. *Ibid*.

Iron: They reiterated that iron symbolizes the power of justice, fair play and war. This is associated with Ogun, the tutelary deity of hunters, blacksmiths, drivers, and other ironworkers.

Colour/Clothes: Black symbolizes mourning and evil, especially an annoyed spirit, like witches used it to commit wicked acts. White symbolizes purity. Others are red, which means danger, scarlet and green (Adelowo, 1990).

Levels of meaning

Ritual symbol can only give a message that is found based on the ritual context; hence Sekhukhune (2013) asserts that it is the ritual context that interprets the act of such communication force that has cultural values and possesses constituting beliefs, customs, attitudes and traditions.

There are three levels of meaning as Sekhukhune enlisted: Exegitical detail, operational and positional. The detailed meaning of ritual symbol is made known at the real level of meaning and the way it is viewed by the ritual specialist. The meaning of the operational level is viewed based on the way the people are saying or doing with the symbol, and then the people who do it. The way the symbol is handled shows the role and the relationship among the participants. Operational level talks about how the symbol has a relationship in the total ritual complex with the way it exposes the hidden senses. All these represent the arrangement of cultural quality and social true situations. Urhibo (2020) further opined that some African cultures define status as a social rank which also improves and establishes social relationships, magical ends, religion and accomplishes them.

Worship

There are a lot of meanings that a sign transmits in worship, either through pictures or words, contextual, denotation or connotative. One major role of ritual symbol in worship, as Oladumiye asserted, is to understand and share the meaning of what it's saying by the sender to the receiver. He reiterated that the denotation of a sign in a symbol is the reality shared by people that involves the literal association of the sign, and it makes the symbol work for what it represents. Connotation of a sign is an idea being connected to a word, which is more than the basic meaning, while contextual is specific or influenced by that particular thing or story, e.g. visual, mental or oral.

Nature and Role of African Ritual-Symbols in Worship

When one observes ritual symbols, one can use anything as a symbolic significance, such as plants, stars, the sun, the moon, animals, etc. Symbols in religious rituals can be classified into communicative, natural, artificial, ritualistic and artistic (Uviekovo, A., Enifome, T.P., Amererhoro, F, 2024). According to them Artistic symbols are purposely for aesthetic use to convey ideas, communicate information, concepts and emotion while ritualistic are to instruct devotees and indoctrinate them concerning their faith articles, artificial are manmade materials, objects to openly represent innermost being in their religion experience, natural symbol emanate from supernatural encounter that involve natural occurrence such as lightning and thunder.

For ritual-symbolism to be fully understood, there must be mental development on how to add to our cultural beliefs, values and experiences. According to Miller (2018), symbols have a great effect on ideas and feelings that words cannot do, as the deities are connected with the worshippers through communication. He affirmed that ritual-symbolism makes one have a deeper understanding of the essential constitution and ritual, to be intentionally conscious of the religion and make it more meaningful. Apart from those mentioned above, Sekhukhune (2013) and Odey et al (2023) listed the following roles of ritual symbolism;

1. It acts as a bridge between the sacred and a lack of respect to the deity, thereby enabling us to reach the unknown by harnessing possible ways to man's salvation.
2. Every human character is predicated through our attitude and conduct as the symbols are used.
3. Ritual-symbol gives impregnated messages revealing insights which would have been seen in another dimension beyond the physical realm.
4. Ritual symbols enlarge the way we see things, thereby bringing details to our mental development to a better conclusion when grasped fully.

Statement of the problem

One vital way parents and those in the community use to instil moral values in the lives of the youth is cultural symbols such as winking of the eyes, whistle, images, anger, cough, etc., because it is one of the elements of culture which makes its perpetuation possible. Just as Oludumiye (2018) stated, the purpose of a symbol is to capture one's attention. But today we see a lot of the youth not following the cultural symbols; this is of great concern and needs urgent attention. We need to know why the youth are acting contrary to the cultural symbols.

This research work seeks to bridge this gap in unravelling the culture and moral value system among youth in this community and how cultural values could be adopted to enhance the development of knowledge and character in the society at large.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is;

- to examine whether the transmission of cultural symbols has an impact on the growth and development of the Oghara community

- To ascertain the extent to which the usage of symbols to communicate with the youth enables them to maintain good behaviour
- To determine if the knowledge of idol image will guide youths in the community.
- To establish the extent of nodding and winking of eyes to correct the youths in the community.

Theoretical Framework

The functional theory used in this work was the theory of symbolism, which says that people learned symbols and meaning in societal interactions and respond to them in a considerate manner. According to Ritzer (2011), in his book on sociological theory, he explained symbols as social objects used to represent anything that people with the same opinion represent. He opined that people constantly use symbols to communicate things about themselves, which makes one distinct because it stands for things.

Clarke (2014) highlighted some of the forerunners of symbolic interaction as follows, and how they see symbols: George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer opined that there is a symbol in any language human beings speak. These symbols they share have meaning among themselves, which comes from interaction, and the meaning is created, developed or modified and changed within an interaction situation. This meaning is due to interpretive procedures employed by actors in the space of interaction contexts.

On the other hand, Max Weber laid emphasis on the importance of subjective meaning; that every action takes into account the behaviour of others, which can be purely inward, overt or subjective.

Georg Simmel, another forerunner, used human organs like the liver, heart, stomach and lungs to buttress his point that none can be neglected; they all work together.

Charles Horton, on his part, used a looking glass to explain his points that the looking glass is an important element, despite the fact that the imagination of people has, on the other hand, the solid facts of society, and to see and explain the meaning, these should be the most important aim of society.

Criticism

Symbols have been seen as a bedrock in our tradition, shaping people's identity, bringing to light and keeping our heritage. However, Ritzer pointed out certain aspects that contradict symbolism. The forerunners of symbolism did not acknowledge the relevance of norms and the origin of social interaction, and the issue of source meaning was not addressed. More so, little attention was paid to the historical and social setting, making it occur in a vacuum. Similarly, Clark (2014) accused the symbolic theorists of making a fetish of our everyday life. He reiterated that symbolic interactionism was not sufficiently microscopic, that it ignores the importance of factors like unconscious and emotions, psychological factors that might force the actor to take an action that parallels their neglect of larger societal constraints on the actor. According to Clark, this theory gave up on conventional scientific techniques.

Application of Symbolic Theory.

This theory is applicable to this research because human beings act according to the meaning they assign to any symbols. And to fully understand one's view, you must listen or put yourself in the position of that person.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. Hence, on the whole, a total of six hundred (600) respondents representing the population and randomly selected were used. Sequel to this, an equal number of respondents of sixty-six (66), except Oghareki and Ogharefe, which had sixty-nine (69) each (because they are bigger than the other communities), were used for this study as a questionnaire. The villages and communities that made up the Oghara kingdom are thirty-three, but nine were randomly selected for this research: Ogharefe, Oghareki, Otumara, Oblomudu, Edjemuoyavwe, Ovwovwo, Okuefe, Okparode, and Okurode.

The youth organisation of each community was used as an entry point, with a simple random sampling method used to select them. A structured questionnaire was used for the youths among the indigenes of the community who reside in the community. Only those who have been residing there were given the questionnaire. A purposive interview was used for the respondents who are knowledgeable about this study to enhance the accuracy of information and build confidence.

The instrument and method of data collection adopted were both a quantitative and qualitative method of data collection for clarity of purpose and for a better understanding of the issue investigated. With respect to the key informant interview, the researcher scheduled an interview session with the selected respondents. The data for the key informant was analyzed using the content analysis method. While questionnaires were analyzed using percentage and frequency as appropriate

Data Analysis

Table 1: Response on whether the transmission of cultural symbols has an impact on the growth and development of this community.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	39	6.5
Disagree	84	14
Agree	300	50.0
Strongly Agree	177	29.5
Total	600	100

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork computation 2025

The result showed that out of the six hundred (600) responses, 39 (6.5%) strongly disagree that the transmission of cultural symbols has impacted in the growth and development of Oghara kingdom, 84(14%) disagree that the transmission of cultural symbols has impacted in the growth and development of Oghara kingdom 300(50%) agree that the transmission of cultural symbols has impacted in the growth and development of Oghara kingdom and 177(29.5%) strongly agree that the transmission of cultural symbols has impacted in the growth and development of Oghara kingdom. The result revealed that most of the youths in Oghara kingdom believe that the transmission of cultural symbols has had some impact on the growth and development of Oghara kingdom.

Our youth know the various symbols in our community and they respect it. If palm front is placed on any item, it symbolized “juju”. No youth will go there to pick things from such place. (This is the

To complement the quantitative data on the respondents, responses on ways cultural symbols can be display in promoting youth in Oghara, qualitative data was collected from the study through in-depth interview, the interviewers were asked to compliment on their perception or experience whether transmission of cultural symbol has impact in the growth and development of the kingdom. The following were their responses:

Table 2: Using symbols to communicate with the youth helps them maintain good behaviour.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	138	23
Agree	195	32.5
Disagree	156	26
Strongly disagree	111	18.5

Total	600	100
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Source: Researcher's fieldwork computation 2025

The result showed that out of the six hundred (600) responses, 111(18.5%) strongly disagree that using symbols to communicate with the youth helps them maintain good behaviour. 156(26%) disagree that using symbols to communicate with the youth helps them maintain good behaviour. 195(32%) agree that using symbols to communicate with the youth makes them maintain good behaviour, and 138(23%) strongly agree that using symbols to communicate with the youth makes them maintain good behaviour. The result revealed that the youths in the Oghara kingdom believe that using symbols to communicate with the youth makes them maintain good behaviour.

The respondents from the nine villages aired their views as follows

Majority of the youth listen to us when we use symbols to talk to them. We use different ways to talk to our youth and young ones. We use eyes to communicate different things depending on the occasion. The facial appearance tells the child what he is being told. We also use hand to communicate to them. There are occasion we use our body or leg. The youth fear the ihwurhe idol image and the community idol a lot because they know that they cannot withstand its wrath. It can kill, maim and render the person useless in life. (All the communities' elders interviewed except Ogharefe.5/3/25 and 6/3/25)

The youth are very Okuefe, some of them do not care about the idol eyes to communicate with some of the (Elders in Ogharefe view 6/3/25)

All the elders agreed that the youth listen to symbolic communication except the Ovwowwu and Okuefe elders who said some of the youth do not listen to eye communication

Table 3: Whether knowledge of idol image of the community will guide youths in the community. (I.D.I All the elders' interviewed.5 and 6 March 2025)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	29	4.8
Disagree	65	10.8
Agree	274	45.7
Strongly Agree	229	38.2
NR	3	0.5
Total	600	100

Source: Researcher's fieldwork computation 2025

The result showed that out of the six hundred (600) responses, 29(4.8%) strongly disagree that the knowledge of idol image will guide youths in Oghara kingdom, 65(10.8%) disagree that the knowledge of

idol image will guide youths in Oghara kingdom, 274(45.7%) agree that the knowledge of idol image will guide youths in Oghara kingdom, 229(38.2%) strongly agree that the knowledge of idol image will guide youths in Oghara kingdom and 3(0.5%) did not respond. The result revealed that most of the youths in the Oghara kingdom believe that the knowledge of the idol image will guide the youths.

Oghara kingdom, 304(38.2%) strongly agree that the knowledge of idol image will guide youths in Oghara kingdom, and 4(0.5%) did not respond. The result revealed that most of the youths in the Oghara kingdom believe that the knowledge of the idol image will guide the youths.

Qualitative data were collected to ascertain if the knowledge of idol image will guide youth in the community. Interviewees’ responses in this regard went thus;

Table 4: Nodding and winking of eyes correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	0.5
Disagree	42	7.0
Agree	324	54
Strongly Agree	228	38
NR	3	0.5
Total	600	100

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork computation 20215

The result showed that out of the six hundred (600) responses 3(0.5%) strongly disagree that nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community, 42(7%) disagree that nodding winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community, 324(54%) agree that nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community, 228(38%) strongly agree that nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community and 3(0.5%) did not respond. The result revealed that most of the youths in the community believed that nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community.

Here is the view of all the in-depth interviews on whether nodding and winking of eyes correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community.

“It is not all the youth that respond positively to nodding and winking of eyes. Some of them still ignore when you are doing that to correct them but majority do respond positively”. (All the people interviewed 5 and 6/3/25)

Discussion

The result shows that youths in the community believe that cultural symbols can be used to promote moral standard of youth in Oghara through (i) the transmission of cultural symbols which has impacted in the growth and development of community, (ii) the youth believe that using symbols to communicate to them will make them maintain good behaviour. (iii) the knowledge of the idol image, which will guide youths. (iv) Nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community.

From the aforementioned, it is obvious that cultural symbols can be used to promote the youth's display of integrity in Oghara. According to Pekarsky (1998), the social universe that young people inevitably encounter affects their moral growth, for better or for worse. The community must be responsible for the moral growth of its members, and the community cannot be separated from the culture because community and culture are inseparable twins. With this in mind, it means that cultural symbols can be significantly used to promote the youth's display of integrity in the Oghara kingdom. This

community work can be successfully done by specialized institutions such as schools, religious houses, etc. This is possible because an understanding of broad cultural symbols refers to the social environment in which one is born and lives. Supported by Pekarsky (1998), who argues that culture in this sense includes the organization of community institutions (social, political and economic), proper cultural practice, and a mix will help promote youth display of integrity in the Oghara kingdom.

Jennings and Hoebel (1972) opined that human behaviour starts from the use of symbols, which makes us human, and this symbol is globally shared by humanity. According to Jennings and Hoebel, symbols came into the limelight through the natural processes of organic evolution. This exercise brought culture into existence, which is being perpetuated today.

Research findings

The result showed that youths in all the villages believed that cultural symbols can be used to promote youth display of integrity in Oghara through (1) the transmission of cultural symbols which has impacted in the growth and development of community, (ii) the youth believe that using symbols to communicate will make them maintain good behavior (iii) the knowledge of idol image will guide youth in the community. (iv) nodding and winking of eyes can correct the youth and sustain moral values in the community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher therefore proposed the following recommendations: that cultural symbols should be used in communicating with the youth; idol image should also be used in guiding the youth into morality; frequent use of nodding and winking of eyes to correct the youth and sustain their moral values should be utilized. Culture and tradition should be promoted and respected in our various communities through cultural symbols so that both can guide the youths and, in the long run, promote moral values among youths in Oghara Kingdom and other communities. This will help restore the glories of the past in the community and others

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