# Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh

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| KEYWORDS | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| Traditional Communication, Modern Communication, Uraon Tribe, Primary Data, Tribal Development. | Communication systems play a vital role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural life of tribal communities. The present study offers a comparative analysis of traditional and modern communication systems and examines their impact on the development of the Uraon tribe in Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh. Based on primary data collected from 200 Uraon households in Manora and Pathalgaon blocks, the study evaluates the effectiveness of indigenous communication practices such as folk traditions, village councils, and interpersonal networks vis-à-vis modern communication tools including mobile phones, television, radio, and internet. Quantitative data were analysed using percentage methods, tables, and charts. The findings reveal that while traditional communication systems continue to play a crucial role in cultural preservation and social cohesion, modern communication systems contribute more significantly to educational awareness, employment opportunities, and economic improvement. The study highlights the need for an integrated communication approach that combines traditional and modern systems for sustainable tribal development. |

## Introduction

Communication is a fundamental social process through which knowledge, values, and experiences are shared within a community. In tribal societies, communication has historically been rooted in indigenous practices that are closely linked to culture, tradition, and social organisation (Singh, 2002). Traditional communication systems such as folk songs, rituals, community meetings, and oral narratives have played a central role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity.

With the advancement of technology, modern communication systems have increasingly penetrated tribal regions, introducing new channels of information and interaction. Media such as mobile phones, television, and digital platforms have expanded access to information related to education, employment, health, and government welfare programmes (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). These changes have significant implications for

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Neelima Minj &
Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

43

tribal development.

The Uraon tribe of Jashpur district presents an appropriate context to study the interaction between traditional and modern communication systems. Despite socio-economic challenges, the community continues to practice indigenous forms of communication alongside emerging modern media. This study aims to compare these two communication systems and analyse their relative contribution to tribal development.

**Traditional Communication System of the Oraon Tribe**

The Oraon tribe (also known as Kurukh), primarily inhabiting regions of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal, has a rich and well-structured traditional communication system. This system is deeply embedded in their social organization, cultural practices, and customary governance, and it functions as an indigenous mechanism for information dissemination, social regulation, and community cohesion.

1. **Oral Tradition and Folk Narratives-** Oral communication forms the backbone of the Oraon communication system. Knowledge is transmitted through: Folk tales, myths, and legends, which explain origins, moral values, and social norms. Proverbs and sayings, used in daily conversation to guide behavior and decision-making. Songs and ballads, particularly during agricultural activities and festivals, which convey collective memory and shared experiences. This oral tradition ensures continuity of cultural identity across generations.

2. **Traditional Village Institutions-** The Oraon village functions as a communicative unit governed by customary institutions:

**Parha system (inter-village federation):** Facilitates communication among multiple villages on matters of social justice, dispute resolution, and collective decisions. Pahan (village priest): Communicates religious norms, ritual calendars, and ecological ethics. Mahto/Munda (village head): Acts as the central authority for announcing decisions and coordinating village activities. Panch (village council members): Support deliberation and consensus-based communication. Information flows through meetings, public announcements, and collective discussions, ensuring participatory communication.

3. **Youth Dormitory (Dhumkuria)-** The Dhumkuria, a traditional youth dormitory, serves as an informal educational and communication institution. Here: Elders instruct youth in customs, social discipline, folklore, and tribal history. Cultural norms, gender roles, and community responsibilities are communicated through practice and storytelling. This system plays a critical role in socialization and leadership development.

4. **Festivals, Rituals, and Symbols-** Festivals, rituals, and symbols play a significant role as collective communication systems within the community. Cultural festivals such as Sarhul, Karma, and Sohrai function as mass platforms through which religious faith, agricultural practices, and social unity are expressed and reinforced. These events transmit shared beliefs

*Neelima Minj &*
*Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra*

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

44

related to nature worship, seasonal cycles, and collective responsibility, while also strengthening emotional bonds among community members. Traditional musical instruments like the Mandar and Nagara serve as auditory symbols to convey important messages, including announcements of village meetings, ritual occasions, or emergency situations. In addition, ritual performances, dances, and symbolic actions communicate social values, moral codes, and cultural identity in a non-written form. Through repeated participation and observation, individuals internalize these meanings, ensuring the continuity of cultural knowledge and collective consciousness across generations.

5. **Language as a Communication Medium-** Language plays a central role in the communication system of the Oraon community, with Kurukh serving as the primary medium of traditional interaction. As a mother tongue, Kurukh carries rich indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, health practices, environmental management, and social relationships, which has been preserved and transmitted orally across generations. The use of Kurukh in everyday communication, rituals, and community discussions ensures that knowledge remains context-specific and culturally meaningful. Communication in the mother tongue enhances clarity and mutual understanding, as messages are conveyed in familiar expressions and cultural symbols. It also builds trust and encourages inclusive

participation, especially among elders, women, and less formally educated members of the community. By strengthening cultural identity and facilitating effective knowledge sharing, the use of Kurukh as a communication medium supports social cohesion and sustainable community development (UNESCO, 2018).

**Importance of Traditional Communication in Societal Development**

Traditional communication systems are crucial for the holistic development of Oraon society, particularly in rural and tribal contexts.

1. **Preservation of Cultural Identity-** Traditional communication plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural identity of indigenous communities by safeguarding their customs, values, and worldview. Through oral traditions, folk songs, rituals, festivals, symbols, and community gatherings, cultural knowledge is continuously shared and reinforced across generations. These communication practices transmit collective memories, moral values, and social norms, helping community members maintain a strong sense of belonging and identity. In the face of rapid modernization and external cultural influences, traditional communication acts as a protective mechanism against cultural erosion by sustaining indigenous languages, belief systems, and ways of life. By strengthening social identity and cultural continuity, traditional communication not only preserves heritage but also enhances community resilience and self-respect, which are essential for inclusive and culturally

Neelima Minj &
Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

45

grounded development (Berkes, 2012; UNESCO, 2016).

2. **Social Cohesion and Collective Action-** Community-based communication serves as a foundation for social cohesion and collective action in indigenous and rural communities. Through participatory forums such as village meetings, traditional councils, festivals, and everyday interpersonal interactions, community members develop shared meanings, mutual trust, and a strong sense of unity. These communication processes facilitate cooperation in collective development activities, including agricultural work, sustainable forest management, and the use of common resources. They also provide culturally rooted mechanisms for dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building, which are essential for resolving conflicts peacefully and maintaining social harmony. By reinforcing common values, social norms, and collective responsibilities, community-based communication strengthens cooperation and collective decision-making, thereby supporting inclusive development and effective grassroots governance (Gadgil & Guha, 1995; Desai, 2005).

3. **Participatory Governance and Social Control-** The traditional council system functions as an important mechanism of participatory governance and social regulation within the community. It provides a structured platform where community members actively engage in collective decision-making on social, cultural, and developmental issues. Through open discussions and consultations, the council ensures that decisions reflect shared values and local needs rather than the interests of a few individuals. Disputes and conflicts are usually addressed through dialogue, mediation, and mutual understanding, which helps maintain harmony and prevents the escalation of tensions. Instead of relying on force or formal legal coercion, social norms and rules are upheld through consensus, moral authority, and collective approval. This approach encourages voluntary compliance and reinforces a sense of responsibility among community members. Overall, the traditional council system strengthens grassroots democracy by promoting inclusion, transparency, and community ownership in governance processes.

4. **Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge-** Traditional communication systems play a vital role in the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge within tribal communities. Through oral narratives, demonstrations, rituals, and everyday social interactions, elders pass on valuable knowledge related to agricultural practices, such as crop selection, soil management, seed preservation, and seasonal farming cycles. Similarly, knowledge of herbal medicine and indigenous health care including the identification of medicinal plants, preparation methods, and preventive health practices is shared through experience-based learning rather than written records. Traditional communication also

Neelima Minj &
Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

46

supports the transfer of environmental conservation methods, such as sustainable use of forest resources, water management, and respect for ecological balance rooted in cultural beliefs. This accumulated indigenous knowledge, preserved and transmitted through generations, contributes directly to sustainable development by promoting self-reliance, environmental sustainability, and culturally appropriate development practices (Berkes, 2012; Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993).

5. **Effective Development Communication-** Development messages related to education, health, sanitation, and livelihood are more effective when conveyed through trusted traditional channels. Integrating modern development initiatives with traditional communication enhances acceptance and behavioural change.

6. **Empowerment and Self-Reliance-** By maintaining their own communication institutions, the Oraon community retains autonomy, confidence, and resilience, which are foundational to long-term societal development.

## Modern Communication System of the Oraon Tribe

The modern communication system of the Oraon tribe refers to the adoption and use of contemporary, technology-driven and institutional channels of communication alongside traditional systems. These systems enable faster, wider, and more formal transmission of information related to development, governance, education, health, and economic activities.

In Oraon-dominated regions such as Jashpur district Pathalgaon block and Manora Block, modern communication has gradually expanded due to state intervention, digital penetration, literacy growth, and development programs.

Major Components of Modern Communication among the Oraon Tribe

**1.1 Electronic Mass Media-** Radio remains the most accessible modern medium due to low cost and use of regional languages. Television provides visual exposure to educational programs, news, agricultural practices, and government awareness campaigns. Mass media plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and awareness in tribal areas (Rogers, 2003).

**1.2 Mobile Phone Communication-** Use of basic mobile phones and smart phones has increased significantly. Mobile phones are used for interpersonal communication, emergency information, banking alerts, welfare scheme updates, and market information. Mobile communication has reduced spatial isolation and improved information flow in tribal societies (Castells, 2010).

**1.3 Internet and social media-** Limited but growing use of WhatsApp, Face book, and YouTube, especially among youth and students. Digital platforms facilitate access to online education, employment notifications, and development-related information. Digital communication enhances social connectivity and knowledge exchange (UNDP, 2019).

**1.4 Print Media-** Newspapers, posters, pamphlets,

Neelima Minj &
Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

47

and wall writings are used by government departments and NGOs for awareness campaigns related to health, sanitation, elections, and welfare schemes. Print media supports literacy development and public information dissemination.

## 1.5 Institutional Communication Channels-

Schools, Anganwadi centres, health sub-centres, Gram Panchayat offices, and Common Service Centres (CSCs) act as formal nodes of modern communication. These institutions bridge tribal communities with government administration. According to Melkote and Steeves (2015), institutional communication is crucial for participatory development.

## 2. Importance of Modern Communication in Societal Development of the Oraon Tribe

**2.1 Educational Development: Modern communication increases awareness about-** School enrolment increased, Scholarships and hostels, Digital learning platforms, Exposure to educational media improves literacy and educational aspirations among tribal youth (NCERT, 2018).

**2.2 Health and Sanitation Awareness-** Modern communication media plays a crucial role in enhancing health and sanitation awareness within communities by widely disseminating essential public health information. Through channels such as radio, television, mobile phones, and digital platforms, information related to immunization programs, maternal and child health services, and preventive healthcare measures reaches a broad audience in a timely manner. These media platforms also promote awareness about proper nutrition, personal hygiene, safe drinking water, and sanitation practices, which are critical for preventing communicable diseases. Repeated exposure to consistent health messages helps reinforce knowledge, shape attitudes, and encourage the adoption of healthier behaviors over time. Such sustained communication efforts contribute significantly to behavioral change by improving health-seeking practices, increasing utilization of health services, and strengthening community participation in public health initiatives (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017).

**2.3 Economic Development and Livelihood Enhancement-** Modern communication systems significantly contribute to economic development and livelihood enhancement by improving access to information and opportunities. Through mobile phones, mass media, and digital platforms, individuals become more aware of government employment schemes such as MGNREGA, skill development programs, and self-employment initiatives. Timely information about market prices, wage rates, and demand for labor enables workers, farmers, and small producers to make informed economic decisions and reduce exploitation by intermediaries. In addition, digital communication supports financial inclusion by promoting access to digital banking services, direct benefit transfers, mobile payments, and savings schemes, especially in rural and tribal areas. Enhanced communication access strengthens economic participation by increasing transparency, improving income-generating opportunities, and encouraging integration with formal economic systems. As a

Neelima Minj &
Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

48

result, communication-driven access to information plays a vital role in poverty reduction and inclusive economic growth (World Bank, 2020).

## 2.4 Political Awareness and Democratic Participation-

Modern communication channels have played an important role in strengthening political awareness and democratic participation among Oraon communities. Access to news media, mobile communication, and digital platforms enables community members to gain information about their voting rights, electoral processes, and the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions. Such exposure helps individuals better understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens within a democratic system. In addition, communication media increases awareness of government policies, welfare schemes, and constitutional provisions related to tribal rights, which empowers the community to engage more effectively with administrative and political institutions. Improved access to political information encourages informed participation, collective decision-making, and accountability at the local level. As a result, communication-driven political awareness contributes to the strengthening of grassroots democracy and promotes more inclusive and participatory governance (Drèze & Sen, 2013).

## 2.5 Social Integration and Empowerment-

Modern communication systems have significantly contributed to the social integration and empowerment of the Oraon tribe by strengthening their connections with the wider society. Through mobile phones, mass media, and digital platforms, community members are able to interact more

easily with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and development institutions. This improved communication facilitates access to welfare schemes, legal support, educational opportunities, and emergency services, thereby reducing barriers created by geographical isolation and limited information flow. Enhanced communication also allows the Oraon community to voice their concerns, seek assistance, and participate in social and developmental initiatives beyond the village level. As a result, improved connectivity helps reduce social marginalization and promotes greater inclusion, dignity, and empowerment within the broader social framework (UNESCO, 2016).

## 2.6 Complementing Traditional Communication -

Modern communication does not replace traditional systems but strengthens them. Development messages are more effective when modern channels are supported by traditional leaders such as Pahan, Mahto, and dhumkuriya, & Parha institutions. Rogers (2003) emphasizes that innovation adoption is faster when new communication channels align with existing social systems.

The modern communication system of the Oraon tribe plays a decisive role in accelerating social, economic, educational, and political development. While traditional communication preserves cultural identity, modern communication expands opportunities, awareness, and participation. The integration of both systems ensures inclusive, sustainable, and culturally sensitive tribal development.

*Neelima Minj &*
*Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra*

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

49

## Objectives of the Study

- To identify the major traditional and modern communication systems used by the Uraon tribe.

- To compare the effectiveness of traditional and modern communication systems.

- To analyse their respective impact on education, employment, and income.

- To assess the role of communication systems in overall tribal development.

## Research Methodology

- **Research Design:** The study follows a descriptive and comparative research design, based on primary data.

- **Area of the Study:** The research was conducted in selected Uraon-dominated villages of Manora and Pathalgaon blocks, Jashpur district, Chhattisgarh.

- **Sample Size and Sampling Technique:** A total of 200 Uraon households were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of different age groups and occupational categories.

- **Tools of Data Collection:** Structured interview schedule, Household survey, Informal discussions with community elders (FGD)

- **Tools of Data Analysis:** Percentage method, Tables, Bar charts and pie charts.
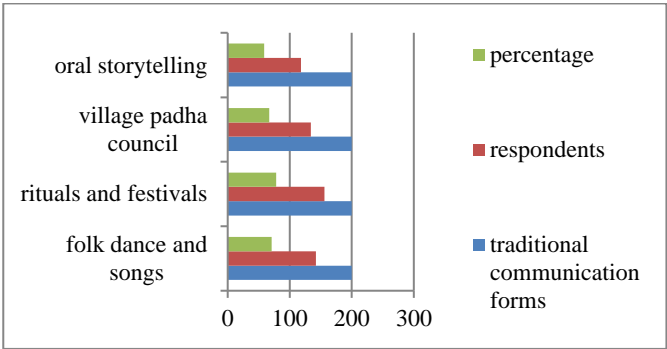
## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

**Table 1:**

Use of Traditional Communication Systems among Uraon Households (out of 200)

| S. no. | Traditional communication forms | Respondents | Percentage |
|--------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 01 | Folk songs and dance | 142 | 71% |
| 02 | Rituals and festivals | 156 | 78% |
| 03 | Village council (padha) | 134 | 67% |
| 04 | Oral storytelling | 118 | 59% |

The data indicate that traditional communication systems remain widely practised among the Uraon tribe, particularly during festivals, rituals, and community decision-making processes. These findings support earlier observations on the cultural significance of indigenous communication (Singh, 2002).
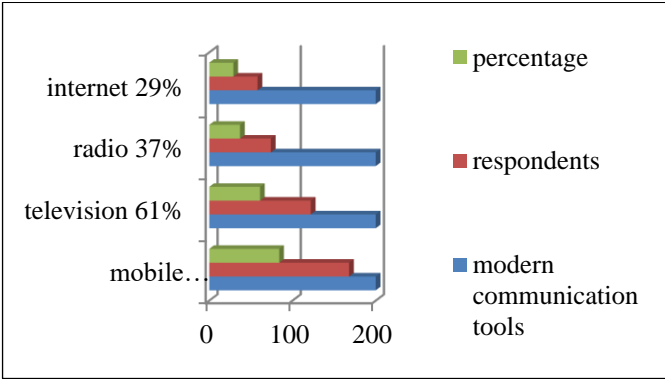


(Chart 1: Bar chart showing traditional communication usage)

**Table 2:**

**Use of Modern Communication Systems among Uraon Households**

| S. no. | Modern communication tools | Respondents | Percentage |
|--------|----------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 01 | Mobile phones | 168 | 84% |
| 02 | Television | 122 | 61% |
| 03 | Radio | 74 | 37% |
| 04 | internet | 58 | 29% |

Mobile phones are the most widely used modern communication tool, followed by television. Internet usage remains comparatively low due to infrastructural and literacy constraints, as also noted by Nayak and Mahapatra (2016).
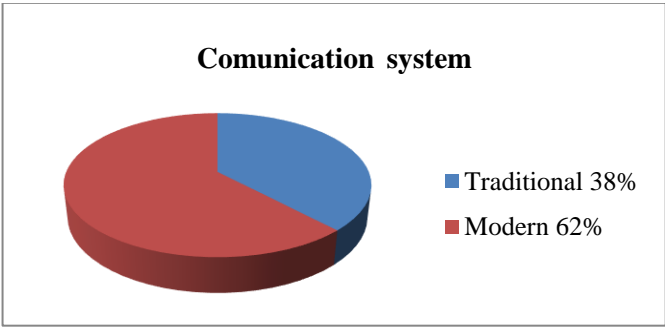
*Neelima Minj &*
*Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra*

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

50

(Chart 2: Bar chart showing modern communication usage)

### Table 3:
### Comparative Impact on Educational Awareness

| S. No. | Communication system | Respondents reporting positive impact | Percentage |
|--------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| 01 | Traditional | 76 | 38% |
| 02 | Modern | 124 | 62% |

Modern communication systems have a stronger influence on educational awareness, including school enrolment and scholarship information. This aligns with development communication theories that emphasise media access for knowledge dissemination (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).



(Chart 3: Comparative pie chart)

### Table 4:
### Comparative Impact on Employment and Income

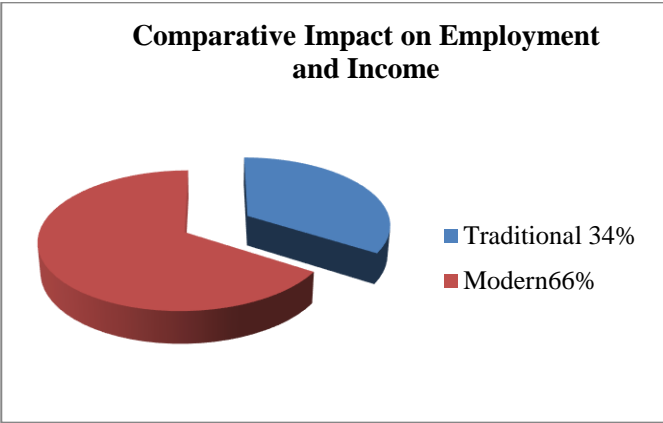| S.No. | Communication system | Respondents benefited | Percentage |
|-------|---------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 01 | Traditional | 68 | 34% |
| 02 | modern | 132 | 66% |



Chart 4: comparative pie chart

Modern communication systems contribute more directly to employment and income generation by providing information about job opportunities, government schemes, and market prices (Rogers, 2003).

**Discussion**

The comparative analysis reveals that traditional and modern communication systems perform distinct yet complementary roles in tribal development. Traditional communication systems are deeply embedded in cultural practices and social institutions, making them effective for maintaining social cohesion and cultural identity. In contrast, modern communication systems are more effective in facilitating access to development-oriented information.

The findings suggest that exclusive reliance on modern media may weaken cultural structures, while ignoring modern communication may limit development opportunities. Therefore, an integrated communication approach is essential for sustainable tribal development (Servaes, 2008).

**Findings of the Study**

Traditional communication systems remain central to cultural and social life among the Uraon tribe.

*Neelima Minj &*
*Prof. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra*

*Traditional and Modern Communication Systems and Their Comparative Impact on Tribal Development: A Study of the Uraon Tribe in Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh*

51

Modern communication systems have greater influence on education, employment, and income. Both systems coexist and complement each other in the development process. Limited digital literacy and infrastructure restrict the full potential of modern communication.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that both traditional and modern communication systems play significant roles in the development of the Uraon tribe. Traditional systems strengthen cultural identity and community participation, while modern systems enhance socio-economic opportunities. Development policies and communication strategies should integrate indigenous communication practices with modern media to achieve inclusive and culturally sustainable tribal development.

## Scope for Further Research

Future research may examine gender-wise communication access or conduct comparative studies across different tribal communities using longitudinal data.

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