

# INDIGENOUS CULTURAL SYSTEMS AND SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION AMONG EGGON, ALAGO, AND KANURI COMMUNITIES IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

Fatima Musa Hudu<sup>1</sup>, Fatima Hudu Abdullahi<sup>2</sup> & Blessing Bulus Amin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria.  
[fatyHUDU@gmail.com](mailto:fatyHUDU@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Isah Mustapha Agwai 1 Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.  
[fatimahudua@gmail.com](mailto:fatimahudua@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>Department of History and Diplomatic studies, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria.  
[blessingbamin927@gmail.com](mailto:blessingbamin927@gmail.com)

## ARTICLE INFO

**Article No.:** 0270

**Accepted Date:** 24/03/2026

**Published Date:** 09/04/2026

**Type:** Research

## ABSTRACT

Communication and culture contribute significantly to shaping societies. Cultural systems perform communicative roles in which societies express their identities and values. Despite their significance, there is limited scholarly attention and documentation of how these systems function in many Nigerian communities. This study explores the cultural systems of three selected ethnic groups in Nasarawa State and their communicative significance. It is set on symbolic interactionism theory and examines how cultural systems such as language, myths, religion, festivals and others send messages across communities. Using qualitative research method, the research employs participant observation and interview to describe and interpret how cultural systems are symbolized among selected communities. The study also notes that despite globalization and modernization practices, certain traditions still remain intact. Some however, such as tribal marks and local language use may have eroded. The paper thus suggests that individuals, media and policy makers actively engage in communication of culture to boost sustenance.

**Keywords:** Cultural systems, Indigenous communities, symbolic communication, Nasarawa State.

## Introduction

Communication and culture are interrelated and essential aspects of life. Communication is a means of interaction by which cultural characteristics such as traditions, rituals, laws or other patterns are created and shared. Hall (1959) equates culture to communication by saying that cultures are born out of the interaction of people. Smith (1966) agrees that culture is a code we share and learn and that learning and sharing requires communication. Communication encompasses sharing meaning through verbal, non-verbal, written and visual means. This includes sharing meaning to cultural systems which are frameworks of behaviours beliefs, symbols and values that define and shape a group of people's way of life. These indigenous systems serve as tools for social cohesion and transmission of values across generations. Indigenous communities in Nigeria, such as the Eggon, Alago and Kanuri of Nasarawa state have rich cultural systems that includes rituals, festivals, attires, arts and crafts making and folklore. These cultural elements serve as symbols through which social values, norms and identities are communicated. Despite this, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how these indigenous cultural systems function as symbolic communication tools that transmit meaning, and sustain cultural identity across generations.

Previous studies have largely focused on descriptive ethnographies of individual communities without exploring the comparative symbolic practices across multiple groups. By analyzing various cultural systems of the Eggon, Alago and Kanuri communities in Nasarawa State, the study aims to explore what these systems symbolize in communication as well as explore the social relevance of these systems.

## Literature Review

### Culture and Communication:

Culture and communication are intertwined. Many Scholars posit that culture influences communication styles and behaviours while communication acts as a means of creating and sharing cultural values and traditions. The encyclopedia of communication and information (2002) states that cultural characteristics cannot be passed and preserved without communication while communication practices are similarly created and shaped by culture. Geertz acknowledges this symbiosis when he describes culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes toward life." (1973 p.89).

Triandis (1972) corroborates the relationship by describing culture as a patterned way of living by a group of interacting individuals who share similar sets of traditions, beliefs, values and communicative practices. Reuben (1988) concurs that people have the ability to initiate communication and share meaning through symbols, language, knowledge, meanings, rules, values and rituals. According to him, this in turn gives definition and creates relationship which makes it possible to pass along certain elements of a people's culture from one generation to the next and from one society to another.

### Symbolic cultural communication

When we communicate, we only pass across messages and it is left for the receiver to attach a meaning to the message we pass across. Individuals perceive differently. According to Gudykunst (2004, p.9), "when we send a message, we attach a certain meaning to that message and choose the symbols and channel of communication accordingly." He further says that we can transmit our messages through the spoken words, use non verbal cues or write them. Alternatively, messages can be transmitted through semantics or through artistic forms of expression such as painting, photography or music. Only when we use words or vocals is our communication verbal. Researchers have argued that a larger percentage of communication is done non-verbally. Non verbal communication are expressed through written communication, body language, gestures, signs, cues and symbols. Symbols may however also be expressed verbally.

Shaefer and Lamn (1995) define symbols as the gestures, objects and language which form the basis of human communication system. Blumer in 1969 says people communicate using symbols such as dressing, language, rituals and that these Symbols have certain innate meanings culturally. For instance, wearing anklets by females in the Asian culture is considered fashion. However, in parts of Africa, the same symbol is interpreted as representing promiscuity. To understand a culture, we need to know the values and meanings of its core symbols. Often, we understand the essential values, meanings and identity of a cultural community through mastery of its core linguistics, symbols, critical non verbal artifacts and situational frames. This is in line with Mead (1934), who says that symbols have meaning when members of a culture agree on their significance.

### **The Alago, Eggon and Kanuri communities of Nasarawa State.**

Nasarawa State has over 20 ethnic groups including the Eggon, Alago, Gbagyi, Mada, Gwandara, Nungu, Migili (Koro), Aho, Kanuri (bare-bari, Kambari) and Agatu. However, this paper focuses on only three selected ethnic groups in the state as follows:

**The Eggon:** The Eggon community is contestably the largest group in the State inhabiting virtually all 13 Local Government Areas of the State but mainly reside in Nasarawa Eggon, Akwanga and Lafia Local Government Areas. They have three clans namely: Anzo, Eholo, and Eggon Ero and many other sub clans and Houses. The chieftaincy title "Aren Eggon" is the highest in the political chieftaindom contestable by sons of Eggon especially among the three clans. They speak mainly the language; Eggon, although there are other minute dialects within the tribe.

**Alago/ Arago/ Idoma Nokwu:** The Alago people may be the second largest group in Nasarawa state. Spread across Doma, Obi, Keana, Awe and Lafia Local Government Areas, the Alago are said to have broken off from the Kwarrarafa empire hundreds of years ago. They speak the Alago language and are known to have a very versatile culture.

**The kanuri/ Bare-Baris/ Kambari:** This group are not a majority in the State, but form a major part of the inhabitants of the capital; Lafia Local Government which is the largest and most populated in the State. Thus the coinage "Lafian Bare-Bari". The Kanuri people of Lafia are said to have migrated from the Borno Emirate of Borno State when HRH Muhammadu Dunama migrated in late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The two royal families of Ari and Dallah Dunama of the Kanuri people are the ruling houses of the Lafia emirate. The kanuris speak kanuri Language with sub-dialects such as the manga. The Hausa language though is most popular among the kanuris of Lafia and perhaps the entire state.

### **Indigenous cultural systems in Nasarawa State and their communicative roles**

#### **Myths/ beliefs:**

The greatest myths or beliefs of the ethnicities in Nasarawa State stem from their history of evolution.

The kanuris of Lafia trace their origin and migration to groups of kanuri people from Kanem-Bornu empire, led by Muhammadu Dunama in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to popular belief, they were received heartily by the initial settlers of the place where they settled down; Lafia, which means peaceful. The Lafia emirate, which was established toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century includes royal families such as the Ari and Dallah Dunama who have historically held leadership roles within the emirate (Wikipedia 2026).

The Eggon on the other hand were believed to be inhabitants of Ngazargamu, near modern Borno State. They migrated and joined the Kwarrarafa kingdom. After the dissipation of the kingdom, they crossed the Benue river while making several stops in various settlements. They finally arrived at Eggon hill of Nasarawa state and were known to be settlers on a hill top before coming down to the grasslands towards urbanization (Yakubu, 2025). The Alago traces their origin and migration to the defunct Kwarrarafa Confederacy. They came to their present location under the leadership of two brothers; Andoma Osabonya Ogoshi and Akyana Anyapa.

After the dispersion of the Kwarrarafa kingdom, the Alago crossed the River Benue and settled at Obasidoma. The older brother, Osabonya, decided to move further and finally settled at Doma thus becoming the founder and first Andoma of Doma. The younger brother, Akyana however stayed behind and discovered some salt springs during his hunting expeditions. Thus Akyana decided to settle there and founded the town Keana and he became the first Osana of Keana (Ezekiel, 2016).

These myths and beliefs, often times told as stories, serve as systems of understanding one's origin and preserving cultural identity. Bukenya (2025) agrees that folklore remains an active force in shaping collective identity and communication.

#### **Arts and Crafts:**

The Eggon who are predominantly farmers are rich in the skill of bead making in form of earrings, necklaces, bangles, waist beads, anklets and other bodily decorations which enhance beauty and because the colours used are quite particular to the group, these beads symbolize belongingness when worn. The Eggon are also known for clay pot molding in different shapes and design for ceremonial and religious purposes. Clay pots are said to symbolize a long and healthy life and the mother earth. The group is also known for cassava processing and manual stone drilling. The Alago people of Nasarawa state are known farmers and hunters. Their Soil is rich for farming crops such as yams, beans cassava, millet and melon. They were great contributors in the Yam and Yam flour exportation to the UK several years ago in the state. They are also great in cloth weaving (Opa). Cloth weaving symbolizes skills, identity and rituals. The Alago are also known for salt extraction and refining.

The early Kanuris to settle in Lafia were traders and blacksmiths. They produced farming implements such as hoes, cutlasses, knives and other utensils which they exchanged with their neighbours for food thereby promoting economic growth and interaction. This depicts their artistry and warrior-like nature. Although modernization may have impeded on the Kanuris traditional craftsmanship, blacksmithing is still very popular among the group alongside wood carving and mat and cap weaving. The Kanuri caps are symbols of ethnic identity. The diverse patterns and colors may signify the wearer's social class or position. It is also associated with maturity and responsibility and sometimes commands respect.

#### **Language:**

Language is a system of symbols that allows members of a culture to communicate with one another. Communication is based upon the use of mutually understood symbols. Words symbolize objects, ideas and actions. Language is so important that communication can occur only if people know how to use and interpret a shared set of symbols in a language. The Alago group speak Alago language and the Eggon; Eggon language as well. These two tribes are active in language transfer. However, same cannot be said for the Kanuris of Lafia and the Kanuri language.

#### **Religion:**

The Eggon are predominantly Christians or Muslims. However, a significant number practice the traditional religion. There is the general belief in the Supreme Being; "Ahogben", who is found beyond the sky. He is the Creator and is very far from man. Traditional folklore further states that man communicates with him through "Ashim" or other objects kept by the people. The "Ashim" symbolizes the supernatural and rids off all forms of evil from the possessor. It is also known to extract truth from thieves and liars. The traditional Eggon also attach importance to the God of the land; "Angbashim" who blesses their land, and gives them good harvest. According to believers, his cult is consulted or appeased before planting season, harvest season and before festivals commence. There are other religious cults within the group. Among such cults are: "Ashim", "Akuk", "Gango", "Yamba" and "Arikya". These religious societies are represented by objects like pots, stones, sticks or cowries. They are believed to function in various ways, that is, to make the soil fertile for good harvest, to protect the family

or clan from any misfortune or evil, to bless the wombs of women so that they might give birth, and to ward off sicknesses and diseases of all sorts. That is why sacrifices of chicken, goat, and beer are made to these gods in order to appease them, and to maintain a good relationship with the Gods of the land.

The Alago people are predominantly Muslims or Christians as well. A few however believe in ancestral worship in which spirits, men, animals, plants and other elements are engaged in continuous interaction. This interaction, they believe, signifies harmony in the world and also in their affairs. The ethereal world of ancestral spirits; "Aleku" and the real world; "Ese" influence each other. There are "Owuso K'Iso", the creator, the "Eka" lesser gods or deities which manifest themselves through important phenomena such as the sun, the sky, thunder and the earth.

The Kanuri people on the other hand are a hundred percent Muslims. Islam stands as a reference point for the Kanuri lifestyle and the entire Kanuri culture. The actions of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) stand as a reference point at all times and in making every decision ranging from jurisprudence, to marriages, issues of inheritance, types and nature of foods to be eaten and even dress codes among others.

### **Marriage:**

The Kanuri wedding is guided by the teachings of Islam. However, a couple of traditions are peculiar to the group. Marriage events such as "kamu" or "wushe wushe" are highly revered and signify status or wealth. The Kanuri wedding is one event that is colorful and exciting. They are occasions that bring the people's culture to life through music, dance and other colorful cultural activities. Horse riding is also a cherished event during the Kanuri marriage. The Kanuri attach a high value to horses such that they go far and wide in search of rare breeds. Horses signify Prestige. Marrying a young virgin in Lafia is a very expensive form of marriage. Marriage practices such as "nagani ina so", the presentation of clothing items or money to a woman signifies interest in marriage. Upon acceptance by the bride's family, the groom's family presents a bride price representing responsibility and honor, the amount reflecting the social status of both families. The groom also presents "kayan lefe", which consists of several boxes of clothes and accessories to the bride to show his ability to cater for her. The bride's family on their part furnish the couple's home and provide "gara". These are all kinds of food items to be consumed by the couple. This signifies love and participation on the part of the bride's family.

The typical Eggon practice the act of betrothal right from the birth of a child. Upon the acceptance of the betrothal, gifts are exchanged and a cordial relationship is maintained among the families thenceforth. The marriage ceremony is marked by many styles of dances, with special songs sung in honour of the groom, the bride and the moment. Feasting and merry making from families mark the occasion. On the wedding day, the Groom's family prepare a special delicacy in form of beans porridge in large quantity for consumption by those present at the ceremony. This is critical to the Eggon marriage and is said to symbolize a happy and hitch free marriage life for the bride and groom. Failure to prepare this may lead to issues such as barrenness for the couple or other predicaments.

Modern day events may have tampered with the Alago traditional weddings. However, The typical Alago weddings are characterized with days of unending series of activities and games marking the celebration of a Union. Elaborate feasts are planned which are marked by singing, dancing and general merriment. The bride and groom are dressed in traditional regalia and the entire clan shows up to participate in the event.

### **Music and Instruments:**

All ethnic groups of Nasarawa State share a high sense of value for music and their instruments. The Eggon and Alago enjoy live musical performances in their local language during social events and public gatherings. These social events are also made vivid by cultural

dances and instrument play. Instrumental plays symbolizes cultural richness and social status. The Kanuri enjoy a musical praise singing by a group of people called "Maroka" or praise singers who are hired at weddings, naming ceremonies, title conferment or turbaning ceremonies and other festivities to sing the praises or achievements of the parties involved. This symbolizes honour and dignity. All groups have similar musical instruments such as the drums, gongs, beaded vine gourds or maracas, flutes, "kalangu" or talking drum, "kakaaki" or Trumpet.

#### **Costume/Clothing:**

The Kanuri male mostly wear gowns which are locally known as "Babban riga" in the Hausa language, and also Kaftan in addition to traditionally made local caps such as the "Zanna", "Dara", "Ajji" and "Damanga" among others. The traditional wear for Kanuri women includes a red coloured, patterned material sewn loosely as skirt and blouse with a matching head scarf. This is paired with bead earrings and matching necklaces. Kanuri women typically cover all parts of their bodies excluding the face, palms and feet especially when they are going out to public areas. Other costumes consist of hijab and colourful Ankara fabrics sewn in different styles. They also wear "laffaya", a long flowing material tied all over the body. Generally, the dressing of both men and women here depicts the social class and wealth of the individual.

The Eggon traditional costume consists of a blue coloured woven fabric with stripes of white, red and green worn by both men and women. Ornaments include red or multicoloured beads worn over the necks, trinkets and anklets made of large beads and other hair accessories. The Alago traditional costume is similar to this, their fabric is however blue and white and another consisting of the multi colours: green, white, yellow, red and black.

Modern ways of dressing have greatly infringed on local costumery generally. Common ways of dressing now in Nasarawa state are characterized by the western or Arabian attires such as suits, abayas and sewn fabrics. Cultural attires now may only be seen during traditional events and festivals. They nonetheless distinguish between one group and another and help to foster a sense of belonging and togetherness when worn.

#### **Body tattoo/ Tribal marks and body decoration:**

All groups have tribal marks endemic to them though nowadays, most of these marks are not seen on young ones, only on the elderly people. The Eggon draw patterns of lizards and birds on the neck, while some choose to draw drums or arms and other objects. Marks are also cut on other parts of the body like the belly, the face, sometimes even the legs, and women's backs. All these marks are for decoration and to prove how brave those who had them were, to have endured the pain of making them. The Alago group also have body and face tribal marks. The Kanuri group are known for their vertical facial marks in both cheeks, on the forehead and on the temple with varying number. Tribal marks are also a cultural practice for beautification. The marks were used as a symbol of honour, beauty and heritage and something worn with pride, although now they only symbolize mutilation.

For decoration, the hands, feet, nails and arms of the Kanuri women are often times adorned with henna (Lalle) designs and arts. The Kanuri bride no matter how well dressed is deemed incomplete unless her arms and feet are covered with red and black fluid of henna made with tree leaves and dye. The henna application is a culture which has now extended to people of various ethnic groups of Nigeria including those of Nasarawa state especially the Muslims. The henna signifies beauty and aesthetics, religious and ceremonial purposes. Henna improves the beauty of women and symbolizes prosperity and happiness (Al-Amin et al, 2018).

#### **Food:**

The Eggon traditional food is called "Ebekma" in Eggon language. It is prepared with buttered beans mainly mixed with black sesame (grinded beniseed) and a great amount of palm oil. The Alago enjoy a wide range of delicacies including Pounded Cassava ("Fufu") and millet porridge (madidi). Their native soup is called "Ama'ara". The Kanuri also enjoy "madidi" to

such extent that Lafia is known for "madidi" production Nationwide. This they eat with "Miyansoye", a special pepper stew made with meat and lots of vegetable oil or other varieties of soup. Other foods common among the group includes: "Tuwo", "Masa" (Rice cake) and "Danwake" or beans dumpling. The food here symbolizes heritage passed down from generation to generation.

#### **Festivals:**

The Eggon conduct an annual Eggon carnival in Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area of the state. The event contains different cultural practices such as music and dancing, masquerade displays and often times a procession to monumental places around. The Eggon costume is observed and various cultural items are displayed. Other festivals are also common within the group relating to religious practices. The festivals brings natives of Eggon land from far and near to socialize.

The Alago festivals include the "Odu" festival. It is conducted to celebrate victory over enemies and also usher in the rainy season. The festival is characterized by fanfare and "Ekwu" masquerade displays. The "Amiri" festival is also conducted by the group to give thanksgiving to the gods for good harvests and long life.

The Kanuri group are known for the "Wasan Kaho" (Play of Horns) festival conducted on the eve of Sallah day celebrations. Here, able-bodied men gather at the Emir's palace to show their prowess in bull riding and horn locking. The Sallah festivities at the Emir's palace lasts for days with loads of fanfare for children and adults. The Kanuris are also known for colourful horse riding events. Generally, festivals are tools for promoting unity, love and reawakening culture in the state.

#### **Empirical Review**

In an ethnographic study of the Eggon people of Nasarawa state, Abubakar (2021) examines joint labour, initiation rites and storytelling in Eggon community, highlighting its centrality to generational knowledge transfer and community coexistence. The study showed how artifacts such as clothes and masks can be symbolic and convey identity, values and responsibility. The study informed the use of ethnographic method in the current research and also the need for a holistic study of multiple ethnic groups in order to allow cross-cultural comparison. Abubakar's study adopts a case study approach limited to one ethnic group making cross-cultural comparison difficult. The case is similar to Mohammed (2020) who found that symbols such as cultural attires and objects act as non-verbal channels of communication. His study on the Alago's use of ritual performances, masquerades and traditional councils in Nasarawa state employed the use of qualitative interviews and participant observation showing that these symbols regulate behaviour, communicate lessons and transfer understanding of social hierarchy. Mohammed's study similarly informed the current study's choice of research methods but also lacked in a comprehensive approach.

For the Kanuri community, Usman (2018) focused on symbols such as cap weaving, art and other ceremonial objects revealing that the symbols depict leadership, class and knowledge. Usman showed that material culture such as cap weaving and traditional attire serve communicative and identity purposes. He however only focused on material cultural elements informing the current study's need to fill the gap by including broader systems that depict meaning.

In the communicative significance of traditional symbols in Oron Local government Area in Awka Ibom State, Udomisor, Ekpe & Inyang (2014) examined some traditional symbols in communication among the "Oros" of Oron local government Area of Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria and how these symbols served as various means of communication during the ancient times and how they were useful in solving conflicts in the past.

Using interviews and questionnaire, findings from this research revealed that the symbols under are not only part of the "Oro" people's cultural heritage but also serve

communicative and conflict resolution purposes ranging from indication of prohibition to enter a place, justice and truth establishment, communication of proof of innocence and a mark to confirm a thief, witch or wizard and other purposes. Again, the scholars only identified and analyzed material cultural elements and their communicative significance. Adebayo and Oladipo (2020) on the other hand explored symbolic interaction in Yoruba land, exposing through interviews and focus group discussions how systems such as festivals, traditions and ritual practices facilitates social integration and cultural continuity. This study also exposed the gap in the research area which is the need for a comprehensive study of multiple cultural groups as well as both material and immaterial cultural systems and their communicative symbolization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The symbolic interaction theory is a suitable theoretical framework for this paper. According to Asemah (2014, p.208), symbolic interaction is sociocultural as it relies on the creation of shared meanings through interactions with others. Developed by George Herbert Mead in 1934 and later formalized by Herbert Blumer in 1969, Symbolic interactionism explains that symbols are central to communication, representing something beyond their physical form, that individuals learn the meaning of these symbols through interactions with members of their communities and that this in turn shapes behaviour. Esimokha (2014, p.122) agrees that the theory "focuses attention on the way that people interact through symbols: words, gestures, rules and roles." The theory is relevant in the research as it posits that the world is full of social objects that have various meanings culturally and that people tend to perceive these symbols and attach meaning to them accordingly in order to understand events in the culture of others. Baran (2022) agrees that these symbols are learned through interaction. The theory emphasizes the role of symbols in shaping interaction and behaviour.

### **Research Methods**

**Research Design:** The study adopts a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach. Ethnography allowed the researchers to immerse in the communities, observe cultural practices firsthand and understand the meanings embedded in cultural systems.

**Population:** The study's population comprises members of the Eggon, Alago and Kanuri communities in selected local government areas of Nasarawa State. Participants include elders, artisans, festival organizers and members of the communities involved.

**Sampling:** A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who have knowledge and experience on rituals and systems. This ensured a collection of rich and relevant data.

**Data collection method:** The research employed participant observation method to observe ceremonies, festivals and lifestyle of community members and record symbolic practices and artifacts in their natural environment. Interviews were also conducted with community leaders, elders, festival organizers and other members of communities to know the communicative symbolism of the systems recorded.

**Ethical Consideration:** Informed consent is obtained from participants of the study and their identities are kept confidential. Also, permission is sought from community leaders after assurances to maintain sensitivity and respect for traditions.

### **Data analysis/ Findings:**

Findings are presented based on data gathered through participant observation and interviews conducted with participants in the communities under study. The following themes emerged and are analyzed using thematic analysis:

#### **Theme 1: Cultural practices as carriers of identity:**

The researchers found that cultural systems function as strong markers of identity. Traditional wears, language, food, festivals and other elements shape belonging and distinguish one ethnic group from another. During fieldwork, researchers observed for instance, that even

patterns in cap weaving and cloth embroidery were particularly tied to specific ethnic groups. They symbolized status and cultural belonging.

Interview evidence: “When you see a man wearing our cap, you already know he is kanuri. It tells you where he comes from.” - Male respondent, 56 years

“Our weaving is not just for fashion, it shows who we are as eggon people. These set of colours show love, strength, unity and peace.” - Female artisan, 40 years

### **Theme 2: Cultural systems are tools for symbolic communication:**

These systems are used as means of symbolic communication to transmit culture across generations. Religious symbols for instance shape morality and spirituality. Music, festivals and other ceremonies function as symbolic expressions of social cohesion and merriment.

“Our annual festivals depict unity in the land, even our elders attend as well as community and political leaders. This is to foster love and cooperation among us.” - Eggon festival organizer.

“The Kanuri dressing is guided by Islam. We are told to cover our bodies as women and not to use perfume while going out so as not to attract the opposite gender and cause problems.” - Kanuri woman, 28 years.

### **Theme 3: Role of oral traditions in communication**

Myths, proverbs and oral folklore helps transfer knowledge and preserve history.

Interview evidence: “We teach children about our origin through folklore. They are not just stories. It shows that knowledge our historical origin must be passed down.” - Alago elder

“Our parents told us we came from Kanem Bornu through our ancestors led by Muhammdun Dunama. We believe that because it is what has being passed down for generations and it is what we will tell our children” - Kanuri man 25, years.

### **Theme 4: Impact of modernization on indigenous practices.**

Evidence show that religion, modernization and globalization heavily impacts indigenous symbolic practices. Some practices such as tribal marks, local language speaking, crafts are gradually eroding among younger generations.

Interview evidence: “Young people now prefer modern clothes, hardly would you find them wearing our traditional woven fabrics. The best they do is wear it during traditional wedding events.” - Alago elder

“The tribal marks are now considered mutilation by the westerners, even in islam it is prohibited. So it is hard to find a kanuri man or woman below 30 years with the marks. Also, it is difficult to find a kanuri man in lafia who can speak the language. We also hardly practice any craft now. Our youths only want to go to schools and end up in offices occupying public positions.” - Kanuri chief.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that indigenous cultural systems in the Eggon, Alago and Kanuri communities are rich repositories of symbolic communication. Through systems such as festivals, rituals, dressing, arts and crafts making, these communities transmit social values, regulate behaviour, sustain community identity and preserve history. The findings show the centrality of symbolic interactionism in understanding how meanings are created, interpreted and shared within the communities. By engaging directly with the communities through ethnographic participant observation, the study revealed that symbolic communication plays a critical role in sustaining cultural continuity, fostering social harmony and educating younger generations. The study fills an important gap by providing a comparative research on multiple indigenous groups in Nasarawa State, highlighting both the similarities and unique aspects of symbolic practices among the group.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are critical:

1. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to show how symbolic communication evolves overtime exposing the impact of modernization and globalization on cultural practices.
2. Government agencies, community leaders and cultural institutions should establish programmes to document and preserve indigenous practices such as oral traditions, music, body art and festivals in order to maintain tradition and generational transfer.
3. Educational programmes should integrate cultural systems in the media to enhance cultural literacy and strengthen identity among younger generations. This can be done by incorporating local languages, folklore and symbolic practices into school curricula and academic programmes to prevent cultural erosion.
4. Stakeholders should provide training, microfinance and market access for local artisans engaged in traditional clothing, weaving, tattooing and others to spark interest in local manufacturing especially among youths.
5. Communities should encourage annual festivals that showcase local music, dance, food and rituals to reinforce identity especially among younger generations as well as attract tourism.

### References

- Abubakar, H. (2021). *Cultural practices and communal identity among the Eggon people of Nasarawa State, Nigeria*. *Journal of Nigerian Indigenous Studies*, 12(3), 45-62.
- Adebayo, A. O., & Oladipo, S. E. (2020). Symbolic interaction and cultural communication in yoruba communities. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32 (2), 145-160.
- Al-Amin, U., Shehu, H. B., Tor, A. A., & Babagana, Y. (2018). *Nalle arts; Notes on some aspects of henna application among the kanuri people of Borno, Nigeria*. *Journal of Science, Humanities and Arts*, 5(60). <https://doi/10.1710/josha.5.6.447>
- Asemah, E. (2014) *Selected mass media themes*. Maktol Press.
- Baran, S. J. (2002). *Introduction to mass communication: media literacy and culture* (2nd ed.). McGraw Hill.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Prentice-Hall.
- Bukenya, T.K. (2025). *The role of folklore in modern culture*. *Research Invention Journal of Law, Communication and Languages*, 5(2), 66-71. <https://doi.org/10.59298/rijlcl/2025/526671>
- Culture and Communication. (n.d.). In *Encyclopedia of Communication and Information*. Retrieved February 3, 2026, from Encyclopedia.com
- Esimokha, G. (2014). *Communication theories: Analysis and Application*. Agunbay Publishers.
- Ezekiel, O. (2016). *A history of Agatu and Alago Relations in the Lower Benue region*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Benue State University.
- Geertz, C., (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Gudykunst, W.B. (2004). *Bridging differences: Effective inter-group communication*, (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hall, E. T. (1959). *The Silent Language*. Doubleday.
- Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, self and society: from the standpoint of a social behaviourist*. University of Chicago.
- Mohammed, A. (2020). Rituals, councils and symbolic communication among the Alago of Nasarawa State. *Nigerian Journal of Anthropology*, 15(1), 34-50.
- Reuben, B. (1988). *Communication and Human Behaviour*. Macmillan.
- Shaefer, R.T., & Lamm, R. P. (1995). *Sociology*. McGraw Hill.
- Smith, A.G. (Ed.). (1966). *Communication and culture: Readings in the codes of human interaction*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Triandis, H. C. (1972). *The analysis of subjective culture*. Wiley.
- Udomisor, I W., Ekpe, J. U., & Inyang, U. A. (2014). Communicative significance of traditional symbols in Oron Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State: Trend and prospects in conflicts resolution. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 4(9), 482-498. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajibm.2014.49054>
- Usman, Y. (2018). Weaving, artistry and symbolic communication among the kanuri people. *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 10 (2), 55-71.
- Wikipedia. (2026, March 29). *Lafia*. In Wikipeda. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lafia>
- Yakubu, E. (2025, March 27). *The rich history & culture of the Eggon tribe*. Where in nasarawa. <https://whereinnasarawa.com/2025/03/27/the-rich-history-culture-of-the-eggon-tribe/>