

# Media Influence on Nyokum: Cultural Shifts in the Nyishi Community

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## ABSTRACT:

*The research paper aims to investigate the impact of mass media on the intercultural adaptation process, specifically focusing on the intricate relationship between the media and traditional festivities among the Nyishi Community of Arunachal Pradesh. This study employed mixed method to shed light on the challenges and transformations occurring within the Nyokum festival celebrations. The Nyokum festival, in particular, has evolved over time, serving as a means to preserve the rich heritage of a culture facing decline amidst modernization and the encroachment of dominant cultures. One notable shift in traditional practices observed during the Nyokum festival is the transition from ritualistic observances to a greater emphasis on merrymaking and revelry. This paper delves into the role of media in shaping the structure of festival celebrations, highlighting how the fusion of foreign influences has led to deviations in cultural production and ongoing changes in traditional practices.*

**Keywords:** Mass media, Festivities, Nyishi, Nyokum, Culture

## Introduction

Mass media plays a significant role in shaping social and cultural transformations within society. Mass communication encompasses the dissemination of information through various forms of media, including print and electronic platforms, that are controlled by institutions or individuals with authority. This communication is directed towards a wide audience across multiple locations, with the intention of achieving a specific societal impact. The mass media, as a catalyst for change, plays a crucial role in driving social transformation within society. This includes shifts in mindset, attitudes, and material culture. The mass media serves as a powerful force for change, particularly in shaping social dynamics. Its influence extends to shaping individual personalities and community identities. The communication channels provided by mass media have a profound impact on cultural and behavioral shifts, influencing the collective mindset

and lifestyle choices of society. Furthermore, mass communication media plays a pivotal role in shaping national identity and can lead to cultural evolution within society.

### **Nyishi Community: A Profile**

The Nyishi tribe is the largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh, both in terms of population and territorial occupation. They have a population of 249,824 according to the Census of India, 2011, and are dominant in five districts of Arunachal Pradesh: East Kameng, Papum Pare, Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kumey, and Upper Subansiri. They are also settled in some districts of Assam, such as Lakhimpur and Sonitpur. The Nyishi people belong to the Paleo Mongoloid stock and speak the Sino-Tibetan family language. The name 'Nyishi' comes from 'Nyi,' which means man or human race, and 'Ishi,' which means hills or highland.

The Nyokum festival is the most prominent celebration among the Nyishi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The word 'Nyokum' is a combination of 'Nyok,' meaning land or earth, and 'Kum,' meaning collectiveness or togetherness. Nyokum is all about gathering together, feasting, and celebrating for a few days before going back to their daily lives. It's a time to come together without any biases based on social or economic status or caste. This festival is a common event celebrated for the welfare of the people and as a way to give thanks to nature.

The first recorded collective observance of Nyokum took place in Joram in August 1967. This was followed by another collective observance in Yazali in August 1968. However, the first time Nyokum was celebrated in the month of February was in Doimukh in 1969. Since then, the festival has been observed annually in February. The decision to shift the festival from August to February was influenced by several factors. In August, which is the summer season, frequent rainfall occurs, making it difficult to hold collective gatherings and celebrations at the community level due to communication hindrances caused by landslides and other weather-related issues. Additionally, February, known as Limi Pollo in Nyishi, is considered the first month of the year by the Nyishi tribe. This is because it marks the beginning of the spring season, with pleasant weather conditions that are more conducive to communication. Furthermore, February is when the plantation process begins, making it an ideal time for a pre-sowing festival or New Year celebration for the Nyishi tribe.

Patel, R., & Davidsson, B. (2003), Contemporary festivals have emerged as significant platforms for representing, encountering, incorporating, and researching various aspects of cultural diversity. Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in the number of annual festivals across all continents, showcasing a wide range of cultural expressions and attracting diverse audiences from both local and global communities. Festivals have become a popular avenue for individuals to engage with and consume culture, while also serving as a lucrative opportunity for promoting cultural performances and boosting tourism.

Pegu, (2005) In the modern world, festivals find themselves at a crossroads between age-old traditions and the ongoing process of preservation and adaptation. Within every society, there exists a dual dynamic of maintaining traditional structures while also embracing modernization. To truly comprehend the complexities of a society, it is essential to analyze the changes it undergoes and the continuity it upholds. By

examining both processes, we can gain insight into the evolution of traditional structures, the trends shaping social dynamics, and the level of continuity within a given society.

### **Statement of the problem**

The Nyokum festival, celebrated by the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh, is undergoing significant changes due to modernization, acculturation, and the influence of various media sources. These factors are greatly impacting and altering the long-standing traditions of the festival. The influx of modern influences has begun to overshadow the moral and ethnic practices that have been central to the festival for generations. This research aims to delve into the cultural transition and process of festivalization that is currently taking place within the Nyokum festival. It seeks to understand the cultural impact of media technologies, and how these new media platforms are affecting and reshaping the culture and society of the Nyishis. By examining these dynamics, we hope to gain insight into the evolving nature of this traditional festival and its significance in the face of modern influences.

### **Methodology:**

This study utilized the survey method, as described by Kerlinger (1964), to conduct social scientific research focusing on people and their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. The survey research aimed to evaluate the factors and dynamics of mass media in the socio-cultural changes observed during the Nyokum festival in Arunachal Pradesh. The study population consisted of Nyishi residents in the capital complex area, specifically Itanagar and Naharlagun. Data was collected through questionnaires and interview schedules, allowing for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The analysis aimed to understand the impact of modernization and media intervention on the festivalization and commodification of the Nyokum celebration in the Capital complex of Papum Pare district.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The study focuses on analyzing and interpreting data collected through questionnaires consisting of 20 questions from the Nyishi people living in the twin capital of Itanagar Capital Complex. The aim is to understand the celebration patterns, issues of commodification, and the effects of mass media on the people of Papum Pare District. The data collected has been organized and presented in tables and diagrams to facilitate analysis and interpretation in order to achieve the objectives of this research.

**Medium for Access of Information through which respondents get information regarding the event taking place in their locality.**

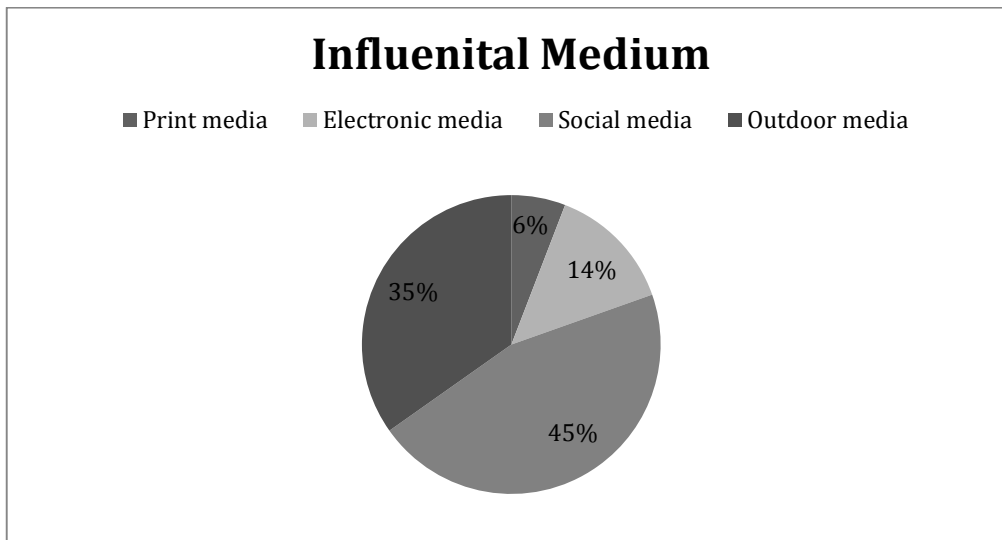
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Local dailies	25	20.83%
Social media	95	79.16%
Website of the Festival	18	15%
Words of mouth	55	45.83%
Total	193	100%

\*The number is more than the actual number of respondents as multiple response were made by respondents

### Chart No.1 Medium for Access of Information

According to the majority of respondents, 79.16% rely heavily on social media to stay connected, adapt, and maintain relationships. Additionally, 45.83% receive information verbally from family, friends, and acquaintances, while 20.83% read it in local newspapers and 15% check online festival websites. It is evident that individuals do not rely solely on one source for accessing information.

### Chart No.2 Influential medium



The research indicates that individuals consume news and information through a variety of mediums, including print, outdoor, electronic media, and social media. They do not rely solely on one medium for accessing information. According to the survey results, 45% of respondents found social media to be the most influential medium for active participation, followed by 34% who were influenced by outdoor media advertisements such as posters and hoardings. Additionally, 14% credited electronic mediums like television and radio, while 7% believed print media was capable of influencing active participation. It is clear that a combination of mediums is utilized for different purposes, whether it be for recreational activities, commercial endeavors, cultural preservation, or ritualistic practices.

### Chart no. 3 Deviation in cultural production

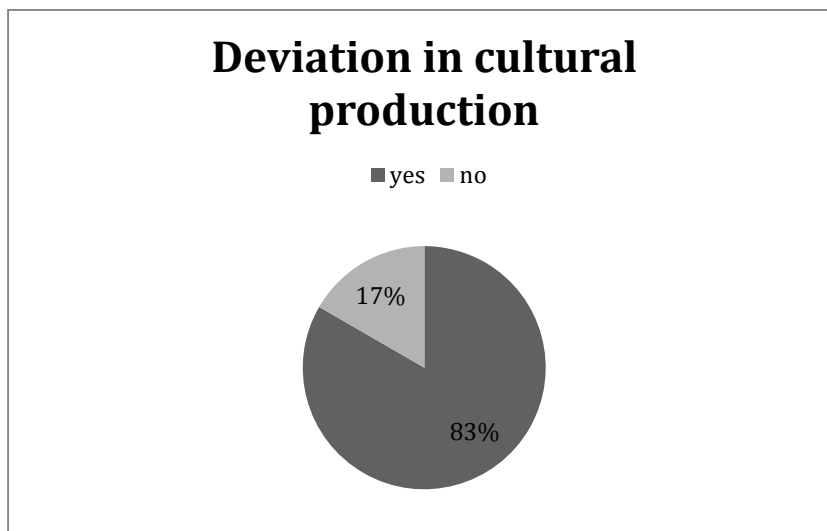


Chart number 3 shows that 83% of total respondents agree with the deviation in cultural production and representation of the Nyokum Festival, while the remaining 16% disagree. These deviations are evident in the transformation of customs and traditions during the celebration and festivalization of the event.

## Findings and discussion

- The impact of mass media, particularly social media, has been found to be highly influential in spreading information about festivals. In addition, a significant portion of individuals (35%) obtained information through word of mouth and social networking sites. Outdoor media also played a significant role, with 59.16% of individuals receiving information through this channel.
- A significant 79.16% of respondents indicated a heavy reliance on social media platforms for staying connected, adapting to new information, and maintaining relationships. In addition, 45.83% reported receiving information verbally from family, friends, and acquaintances, while 20.83% rely on local newspapers and 15% check online festival websites. This data clearly demonstrates that individuals utilize a variety of sources to access information, highlighting the importance of a multi-faceted approach to communication.
- The fusion of foreign cultures has brought about significant changes in cultural production and integration. A recent survey found that 83.3% of respondents believe that this deviation in cultural production is still ongoing. This shift can be seen in the evolution of celebrations, which now often include celebrity guests, beauty pageants, and culturally-themed events influenced by popular culture, particularly Bollywood and K-pop trends.

## Discussion

Nyokum has undergone significant changes over time, as people have embraced and adapted to the evolving customs brought about by assimilation and acculturation. However, the fundamental values of Nyokum seem to have faded in modern times. In the past, the festival was celebrated with sincerity, through communal gatherings, sacrificial offerings, and adherence to traditional norms. Nowadays, a new trend has emerged where attending the festival has become more of a fashion statement, with people simply coming to take photos and wander around. The event has transformed into a recreational hub, featuring various shows, shops, and cultural programs designed to attract visitors. Unfortunately, this shift has led to the loss of the true essence and integrity of Nyokum. It is crucial for Nyokum to serve as a platform for promoting equality and unity, regardless of caste, tribe, or religion. Previously, villagers would voluntarily contribute sacrificial animals based on their own means, emphasizing the spirit of communal giving. However, in the present day, everything must be purchased, detracting from the authenticity of the festival.

Tara, a committee member of Nyokum Yullo Doimukh, emphasises on the day of celebrations, traditionally, Nyokum concludes on February 27th, and any form of excessive revelry or celebration beyond this date should be discouraged. While some individuals have accepted these changes, they have contributed to a deviation from our genuine cultural practices. The trend of pre- and post-Nyokum celebrations, occurring before or after the scheduled dates, is particularly concerning. This practice appears to be influenced by a culture of consumerism, akin to the pre-Christmas festivities in Western societies. Even Hindu traditions do

not typically include pre-festival events. Such deviations should only be tolerated in areas where no other festivities are taking place, or when individuals are far from home. It is essential to steer clear of commercializing Nyokum and maintain its cultural sanctity, while mass media has played a significant role in promoting and popularizing the Nyokum Festival of Arunachal Pradesh, it has also posed challenges in maintaining its cultural authenticity and traditional values. It is important for stakeholders to strike a balance between leveraging the benefits of mass media for promoting the festival and preserving its unique heritage for future generations.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyze the evolving celebration patterns of the Nyokum festival within the Nyishi community. The cultural influences of music, dance, religion, lifestyle, and food culture have gradually brought about significant changes in the way the Nyokum festival is celebrated. In the past, religious ceremonies were confined to specific communities and held their own unique religious significance. However, over the years, the traditional heritage, ideas, meanings, and methods of celebration have undergone drastic transformations. The Nyokum festival in Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed a significant shift in celebration patterns, including changes in cuisine preferences, traditional attire, participation levels, and rituals. Traditional dances such as rikham pada and ponung have been replaced by Bollywood dances to cater to the evolving interests and preferences of the attendees. This transformation reflects the changing dynamics of cultural celebrations and the impact of external influences on traditional practices.

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