RE-EVALUATING COMMUNICATION USE IN THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL UNITY

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Abstract
The paper explores the forms and means of communication used to enhance national unity and observes that though a lot of efforts have been made in the use of communication for national unity, it seems the desired result is far from been achieved. Adopting Yale's Persuasion Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory of Behaviour and Attitude Change Communication, the paper argues that in spite of humongous efforts being made by individuals, groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, media organizations, Festivals of Art and Culture and Carnivals, much more is still desired in terms of genuine national unity in Nigeria. Lack of attitude and behaviour change have been identified as some of the factors militating against national unity. Boko Haram insurgency, communal crisis and conflict, killer herdsmen, disregard for moral and human values such as respect for elders as well as respect for one another, love, honesty and sanctity of human life also account for disunity. The paper also argues that every communication must have a message or information to pass across. The paper further raises the question: "in all sincerity. what is it that binds us together?" Thus, at all levels of society appropriate forms of communication should be employed in communicating the dire need for national unity. It is also the stand of this paper that without consistent and effective use of Behaviour Change Communication which influences people's attitude and behaviour towards peaceful co-existence, experiencing genuine unity in Nigeria will continue to be far from reality. Lack of attitude and behaviour change have been identified as some of the factors militating against national unity. How much value do we attach to such binding forces? The paper therefore, recommends that to succeed in living together peacefully as a nation**,** the rich values of Nigeria such as honesty, hard work, being one's brother's keeper and the highest regard for human life should be adequately and consistently communicated, re-evaluated, reemphasized, absorbed and zealously upheld by all.

Keywords: re-evaluating, communication, quest, national unity

Introduction

It has been observed by many communication scholars that the string of national unity which binds Nigerians together irrespective of their socio-cultural, religious and ethnic affiliations is constantly and speedily losing its grips. This is a very dangerous trend, because a functionally disunited nation is void of peace and therefore cannot enjoy peaceful co-existence and development. Over the years, the cankerworm of disunity has been eating and is till eating deeply into the fabrics of the much-cherished national unity in Nigeria. How are the fabrics of national unity falling apart? Ahmed (2015) traced the origin of the disunity in Nigeria to the period of colonial masters whose vested interest in amalgamating Nigeria was to accomplish their exploitative mission in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. However, it is worthy to note that a nation divided against itself cannot stand as the popular saying that "united we stand, divided we fall". It therefore means that there is an urgent need not only to bring together, but also to hold fast, the strings and fabrics of genuine love for one another, brotherhood, patriotism, honesty, sincerity and sanctity or respect for human life as well as peaceful co-existence that unite Nigeria as one indivisible entity.

The other forces of disunity that have been afflicting the country since independence include leadership bankruptcy, ethno-religious crises, nepotism and minority vis-à-vis marginalization syndrome. Some unity promoting measures such as educational policy, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, mass mobilization, physical infrastructures (roads, national grid, etc) and some lessons from history and so on, have been put in place by successive governments in order to checkmate the centrifugal forces of disunity (Osaghae, 1998). Timothy (2016) observes the alarming menace posed by killer Fulani herdsmen in different communities across Nigeria. As they migrate for the purpose of grazing their cattle, the killer herdsmen are becoming more and more sophisticated, daring and destructive as they update and upgrade their arsenals for destruction of lives, properties and communities with highly sophisticated weapons and therefore, not only pose security threats to their host communities and farmers, but also a threat to national unity. It is easier to say that people should be united, but practically and humanly difficult to be united with a "group of people" who are supposedly regarded as "brother", or citizens of the same country, who constantly kill and destroy others at will. Agreed, every Nigerian has right to live and work in any part of Nigeria, but what happens when the sojourner not only chases the host, but kills and destroys the host community? Humanly speaking, what sense of belonging does that portray? What message does the communicator has to convey when the power that be appears not to be decisive and forceful in bringing an end to such act of disunity?

Durojaiye (2014) and Akevi (2014) posit that both traditional and social media on a daily basis, report series of attacks by Fulani herdsmen who brutally kill natives of farming communities including women and children in various states across the country. These scholars affirm that the killer Fulani herdsmen constitute the second greatest security threat confronting Nigeria today. Akevi (2014) further states that apart from the Boko Haram insurgency, the scourge of Fulani herdsmen has become the most recurrent security challenge in many states in the country.

The National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO, 2017), a veritable instrument of national integration and peaceful co-existence, asserts that culture is a very important element in any society. There are several festivals in Nigeria to emphasize and showcase the rich cultural heritage of the people. The cultural festivals such as The Osun Oshogho Festival in Osun State, the Ofala Festival, Onitsha in Anambra State, Calabar Carnival in Cross River State, Eyo Festival of Lagos State, Abuja Festival and so on, are available in all the geo-political zones in the country and some of them have become international events which attract tourists from all over the world. However, instead of using these events to foster national unity, peaceful co-existence and development, many have turned these rich cultural and economic potentials to cause destruction and disunity. A situation whereby a supposed brother in the name of being a brother's keeper, co-habiting and national integration turns destructive to the host community calls for serious concern and worry and of course, raises many questions. Questions such as; "are we truly brothers, or is there some kind of hypocrisy and conspiracy?" What has gone wrong? Where have we got it all wrong? And, for every sincere Nigerian who genuinely desire national unity and peaceful co-existence, the next question naturally

would be "how do we fix it?" These are some of the concerns of this paper which is designed to re-emphasize communication use in the quest for national unity.

The importance of communication in creating and sustaining every relationship cannot be over emphasized. According to Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017), the whole essence of communication is to persuade people to change their attitude towards positive behaviour. This means that though communication can take various forms and it has many functions, the drive is to positively affect or influence the behaviour of the receiver. This is the essence of Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) which is needed and should be constantly reemphasized for change of attitude and behaviour towards achievement of national unity. Communication of this kind is usually directed towards a large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences. That is, people from different socio-cultural, political, ethnic and religious affiliations as well as personal and psychological traits.

Furthermore, it has been observed that the western culture had invaded and is still very influential dividing Nigerians apart culturally and traditionally. Many cultures and traditional values and norms, especially languages are fast fading away because of the forceful and persuasive manner in which the western nations communicate their cultures and make them not only attractive but also appealing to the psyche of the developing nations particularly Nigeria. A recent study shows that about 23% of languages in Nigeria have been completely eroded. The question is, how can someone be patriotic and passionately pursue the course of national unity and peaceful co-existence of a nation or community he or she does not believe in its citizenship and originality? That individual has certainly lost the sense of belonging and identity which are the bedrocks of patriotism. Therefore, it behooves on every Nigerian, irrespective of socio-cultural, religious, economic and political affiliation, not only to re-emphasize communication use in all its forms and ramifications, but also to passionately communicate the need for national unity, integration and peaceful co-existence.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, several forms of communication have been used in the quest for national unity in Nigeria. Sadly, however, the unfolding events and the reality on ground currently do not show that there is national unity in the real sense of unity in Nigeria. All over Nigeria and on daily basis, media reports reveal more messages of communal clashes, herdsmen unabated killings in most states of Nigeria as well as socio-cultural, political and ethno-religious bloodbaths. As a matter of fact, the main fear of every sincere Nigerian in recent times, is the fear of insecurity and the insincerity in the crusade or quest for national unity among both the leaders and the led. Because most times, the actions displayed among some of these groups of people contradict the message of national unity being disseminated. It is for this reason that this paper is designed to x-ray the use of communication in the quest for national unity and to re-evaluate communication use for national unity.

Conceptual Clarification
Communication

Several scholars have examined the concept of communication. This section of the paper re-examines some of them and draws some relevant explanations and lessons that will enhance communication for national unity. Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) observe that communication does not imply what happens in personal and professional life only, but also it helps people to iniate personal relationships as well as professional practices. Asemah et al (2017) further assert that communication is a process which involves how to plan, manage, control, persuade people, understand one another, lead and love among others. According to Asemah (2009), communication is the process of sharing information, ideas and attitudes. The word "sharing" or "share" in this definition implies having something in common. That is, the parties involved in the communication process are actively participating in the process for achievement of a mutual goal or understanding. While some create the message, others should be active in consumption of the messages created. There should be no sitting on the fence. The process includes action of the initiator of the communication process and the reaction or response of the recipient of the message communicated. The communication can continue into a form of interaction based on the response of the

receiver. A positive response from the receiver induces interactive communication. Communication is further described as a process or act which entails exchange of ideas, information and feelings through the use of suitable medium.

According to Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017, p. 1, 2), "communication is the process which individuals or group of individuals exchange ideas, information, messages, feelings and notions through previously agreed symbols, in order to influence each other". In other words, the symbols used to pass the information or message should be agreed and understandable by all the parties involved in the communication process. The implication is that communication can only be effective if the codes and symbols for transmission of the information are such that everyone involved understands. The bottom line here is that any communication which information or message is not understood by the receiver is not effective. Hence, Ella and Onwochei (2005) states that effective communication is one which transfers understandable message or information.

National Unity

In its simplest form, national unity is a feeling of being united as a country especially in terms of trouble. In other words, it is the process of coming together to fight against anything that affects the human development of a particular people. This concept describes a situation whereby citizens of a country increasingly see themselves as one people. One people bound by many things in common such as experiences, common values and imbued by the spirit of patriotism and unity that transcends traditional, primordial diverse tendencies (Jega, 2002). In postcolonial societies such as Nigeria, national unity embodies a strategy of forging unity in diversity. This implies a striving to be unified people in a modern, colonially created nation-state. Striving here is rather a strong word which could also mean determined, go-getting, ruthless pushy and motivated. Creating and sustaining national unity is a battle not only to be fought by the best and most sophisticated of military arsenals alone, but also and most importantly by the use of communication.

Other terms associated with national unity include national cohesion, national integration, nation building and social solidarity. According to Ojo (2009), national unity is the process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon order its members regard as equitably harmonious. In other words, equity and harmony are important elements in the struggle for national unity. The other words for equity are evenhandedness, fairness, impartiality, justice and justness. These words need to be examined in the mirror or in the light of our social, economic, political, religious and regional affiliations. Most pronounced and the most appalling is the disunity within and among the different political parties in Nigeria. Regional and religious infractions are not left out. How much can one say about the social and economic class differences. Words are powerful tools in communication. However, actions and inactions are equally if not more powerful than the use of words. A leader that talks about unity but does things or fails to do things that bring about national unity creates dissonance in the minds of his audience. Onifade (2013) sees national unity as a process by which members of a social system become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process, members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community. This forum is meant for academic exercise. However, the demands of national unity should stretch us beyond this forum.

The definitions and explanation of national unity can go on and on, but the many definitions and explanations of this concept alone will not make us realize or achieve its reality. In an attempt to see national unity as a process of unifying a people, states and their representatives or institutions guided by respect for the unique traditions and cultural background of ethnicities have produced omnibus of initiatives. Their aims have always been to harmonize all interests through a form of dialogue and representations addressing differences that may be divisive and conflictual. In doing this, several instruments are being used such as fairness, justice and equity in sharing the resources, benefits, opportunities and responsibilities so as to guarantee national cohesion. But alas! The realities on ground are far from being the case; rather unfair treatment, injustice, inequality and divisive tendencies are the order of the day.

Theoretical Framework

Persuasion and Attitude Change Theories are employed for this study. The theories are Yale's Persuasion Theory and the Cognitive Dissonance Theory of Behavioural Change Communication (BCC). Persuasion can be described as the skillful presentation of information or messages in order to influence the audience or the publics towards achieving the aim of the communication. Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017, p. 122) view persuasion as the "series of messages designed and initiated with the intention of making the recipient to voluntarily accept or internalize new ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes, in order to act in the desired way towards realizing the ultimate reward for the communication efforts". Contributing to the various definitions of persuasion, Folarin (1998, p. 76) asserts that "persuasion is a process whereby an attempt is made to induce changes in attitudes and behaviours through involvement of a person's cognitive and affective process. In other words, persuasion is an attempt which is made with the main goal of changing the attitudes, behaviours and or beliefs of another person or groups of persons by conveying a message (Baker, 1981). Persuasion and attitude change theories are psychological concepts concerned with behaviour change communication. Hence, Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) opines that persuasion is a mental concept which depends on cautious choice of message in order to modify a person's dormant behaviour and the ability to control human behaviour. Martson (1979) points out three basic ways through which human cooperation can be sought; power, purchase and persuasion. For the purpose of this study, persuasion is the most desirable. Cognitive dissonance on the other hand is created when the recipients of communication message see a contrary action from the message they receive (Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). Then, Nigerians, in their millions are left with the onerous task of balancing up what they hear with what they see or experience.

Discussion

The term, "Re-evaluating" in the topic of this paper suggests that a lot has been said and done about the role communication plays in creating and sustaining national unity in Nigeria. Be that as it may, it appears that a lot more needs to be said and done.

Every communication has a message or information to convey. Communication is not just about telling someone something or just passing a message or information. Communication is not just about sharing ideas, views, opinions, feelings, it is also about how the communication is done. Who does the communication, through what means or channels or media and for what purpose? Many communication scholars have agreed that although communication has many functions, there is one purpose of communication. The purpose is to affect the behaviour of the receiver. According to Asemah et al (2017, p. 2) **"whether you are communicating to entertain, socialize, inform or educate, it boils down to changing the behaviour of the receiver"**. Salami (1987) also observes that if properly conceived, communication should be a means through which organized activities can be unified, behaviours changed or modified, productivity enhanced, change effected and goals achieved.

Is Nigeria truly united? What values do we truly hold in common as a nation? So that such values can be communicated, enshrined and enforced. What is it that every Nigerian can confidently say at anytime and anywhere that unifies us as a nation? Nigeria is a country with multi social, cultural, religious, economic, political and ethnic differences. These diversities do not only call for the need for unity in diversity, but also make the quest for national unity more complex and challenging (Echum, 2014). Uniting the members of different classes of people in Nigeria is an uphill task. Today, many Nigerians have little or no value for their own socio-cultural and economic values; many prides in their children's inability to even communicate in their own languages, let alone teaching the children to adhere to socio-cultural norms and moral values. Some even consider their cultural values such as moral dignity as outdated and unmodern. The question is, what legacy do such parents communicate to their children who are always considered the future leaders; people who will sooner than later take over from the present generation? If we do not have any value we can consider as national value, what do we communicate? In all sincerity, what is it that binds us together as a nation? What can we hold unto and say with every sense of pride, dignity and confidence, that unite us? What is it that a Nigerian from the north can hold unto as common value with a Nigerian from the south?

What is it that the socio-economic, political and educational elites in Nigeria have in common with the so called down trodden or the less privileged? What is it that truly unites the leaders and the led in Nigeria? What is it that unites the urban dwellers and the rural dwellers in Nigeria? What is it that unites the highly placed and the lowly placed in Nigeria? What national value does a Nigerian from east hold dearly in common with a Nigerian from the west? These questions can go on and on. The essence is that in communication, the message is important, as well as the medium or channel that carries it. Most importantly, however, the source of the message needs to be credible enough to influence a change of attitude and behaviour towards the message of national unity.

To succeed and live peacefully as a nation, the rich cultural values of Nigeria such as honesty, hard work, being one's brother's keeper and sanctity of human life should be communicated, absorbed and zealously upheld by all. The media can and has been promoting and protecting the rich cultural and moral values of honesty, hard work, sanctity of human life, respect for elders and constituted authorities, unity in diversity and love for one another and the nation as whole (Uhakheme, 2013). The media has enormous power to decide what the people should read, see or hear. However, the controversy has been for those who have the capacity to use the enormous powers for public interest.

Conclusion

From the study, it shows that there are a lot of factors that can and are affecting the national unity in Nigeria. The study has also established that in spite of several efforts aimed at enhancing national unity, there are traces of acts of disunity across all the states of Nigeria. All forms of communication, particularly, behaviour and attitude change communication should be vigorously used to appeal to the conscience of all Nigerians to embrace attitude and behaviour change communication which fosters national unity. This paper is of the view that if there is any time in the history of Nigeria to strongly re-emphasize the need to vigorously use communication in all its forms and ramifications in the quest for national unity, it is now. As citizens of the same country, Nigerians need one another to live and succeed as a nation. The communication for national unity should be such that the message is clear to all and sundry. The message and action, especially among the elites and the privileged few in positions of authority should be in consonance with each other. This is because a leader whose action contradicts his message of national unity can only succeed in creating dissonance rather than the much-desired change of attitude and behaviour which are required for realization of national unity.

There is need to renegotiate our fighting spirit thereby restructuring the national unity in Nigeria. The clarion calls on Nigerians to inculcate the spirit of unity and peace can never be overemphasized. The paper also argues that every communication must have a message or information to pass across. The paper further raises the questions: "in all sincerity. what is it that binds us together?" How much value do we attach to such binding forces? There is need to continue to reevaluate and reemphasize the message of national consciousness, nationalism, patriotism and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

Recommendation

The paper therefore, recommends that to succeed in living together peacefully as a nation, the rich values of Nigeria such as honesty, hard work, being one's brother's keeper and the highest regard for human life should be adequately and consistently communicated, re-reevaluated, reemphasized, absorbed and zealously upheld by all.

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