

New Media and the Question of Security in Contemporary Nigeria

Ugulah, Bright, PhD, MALD, MA, PGD (Mgt), B.Sc. (Hons.) FIMIM, MNIPR, ACIPM.

*Department of Theatre Arts,
Faculty of Arts, Wilberforce Island,
Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

Abstract

There have been raging debates about the proliferation of arms, wanton distraction of lives and properties since the dawn of 21st century pre-dating the shift in political order. In Nigeria, heinous conflagrations of barbaric attacks by hoodlums and religious sects such as Boko Haram amongst others have left several dead, displaced and suffering resulting from insecurity in contemporary times. While adopting national interest strategies in tackling the home grown terrorist attacks, the mass media have been disdained and cut in the web of cross-fires between the insurgents and government forces. In order to pontificate the course of peace and tranquility, the mass media have continued to strategies on its modus-operandi (operations) through the new media in communicating and publicizing the onslaughts by government authorities and policies against belligerent attacks. These nefarious traumatic situations have necessitated the need to assess the security situation in the country especially in some part of the North-East of Nigeria with the view of utilizing the new media networks and apparatuses to ensuring social order through communicative messages towards achieving positive behaviour outcomes in Nigeria.

Keywords: *New Media, Security, Community, Behaviour Changes, and Social Order.*

Background to the Study

The communication revolution is happening rapidly due to information globalization all over the world. A major breakthrough of the glut of the New Communication Technologies (NCTs) vindicates the social media networks equally referred to as new media. For as aptly, reckoned by Defleur (1994:84), the computers using satellites and benefiting from the microchips and optic fibers accordingly, have become part of an integrated system of communication and traditional mass communication have become major users of the new technology.

The development of information technologies and communication innovations has drastically changed the processes and structures of mass communication methods and approaches following the orthodox application of ancillary systems. No wonder a Communications pundit and scholar DeFleur Dennis remarked "Gutenbergs innovation torched off a veritable communication revolution in the Western world (DeFleur, 1994:38)".

The revolution in communication systems have accentuated in the areas of information sourcing, packaging and dissemination through the application of new media have resulted deluxe of information accessibility and utilization in propelling the activities of heterogeneous human societies. It is on this backdrop, the mass media have continued to strive in mitigating terrorists activities so as to bestow peace, tranquility and order.

In Nigeria, the spade of extra-judicial killings, heinous conflagrations and barbaric attacks by the impeccable Boko Haram sect in some parts of the country attracts global attention. These attacks also affects the media as they (the mass media) are cut in web of cross-fires between the insurgents and government forces because of the kind of messages speedily transmitted through the social media networks.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the critical contemporary security challenges in North – East of Nigeria and restore sustainable peace through the social media.

Literature Review & Ttheoretical Framework

A series of recent terrorist acts indicates the emergence of trends that impact on the relationship between the media, the terrorists and government, and the overall fight against belligerent in the country. Some assertions have been made in the wave of these undaunted barbarisms. These includes a trend which indicates that other groups are getting involved in the scenario making more complicated in resolving the issues of insecurity in the country and the media attention have been

drawn in the areas of communicative network. Succinctly, it is on these bases that the theoretical thrust of this study is predicated on the Convergence of Technology and Peace Journalism theories of the press.

The Convergence of Technology Theory according to Aina (2003:72), explicates that new communication technologies have brought about technological convergence and have made the boundaries between “what is communication and what is information processing inseparable”. There is now an integrated system of information processing and communications hardware. Some examples of convergence are the use of satellite technology for broadcasting, telecommunication operations, the publication of international editions of newspapers, combination of the use of computer, mobile cell phones, new media and digitalization of music communication equipment.

The alternative or new media technology brings about a revolution in the field of communication theory. This is quite evident with the use of social media networks which transmit messages speedily and widely to the heterogeneous audiences or society. The orthodox of these theories emanates from the need to convoke social order in human societies.

A part from other pundits in this school of thought, a Norwegian peace researcher, Professor Johan Galtung advocates the adoption of peace in reportage of events by the mass media. According to Schrowange (2012:2), the peace journalism approach provides a new road to see the consequences of reporting and shows opportunities for journalists to promote peace. In doing this, journalists can have a positive impact on conflict situations and state of belligerence through holistic reporting on issues, actors, causes and conflict resolution initiatives. This reduces the power and spread of rumors. In order to strengthen the strategy of peace journalism, Jake Lynch, an international correspondent defines peace journalism as a broader, fairer and more accurate way of framing stories, drawing on the contemporary developments in communication and globalization of information technology as enunciated by a mass media scholar, Marshal MacLuhan who asserts that “the way technology evolves, it translates to the fact that the world will experience information explosion and the entire world will become an information global village”.

In that context, Iji (2001:42), opine “the medium is the message”. More so, as enshrined already, in the world as a global village is triumphantly accorded much celebration due to influx of kaleidoscopic changes brought by electronic and technological developments, culminating in ripples of communication and information revolution.

The conceptual foundations of Peace Journalism are anchored in Development Communication theories. The proponents and astute scholars of peace journalism hold-sway to the fact that, journalism has a great role to play in conflict situations especially, to ensure insights of conflict analysis and transformation. More so, journalists need skills for the purposes of understanding and analyzing conflicts, either violence or peace, including non-violent acting and sensibility or the consequences of their reporting. A cooperative or collaborative adoption of these theories is necessary for generalizations and foundations for ensuring tranquility for sustainable growth of the nation's economy. Prescriptively so, because both the Convergence and Peace Journalism theories are characterized in resolving conflicts due to the reason as stipulated below;

1. All the main actors in a conflict are working together (through the mass media) to address problems jointly.
2. High levels of communication is maintained between them
3. High concerns for goals and high concern for relationship that promote sustainable peace process,
4. Stimulates increased level of trust in negotiation of alternative dispute settlements.
5. Improved relationships and
6. Mutually satisfactory outcomes resulting in win-win-solution (Schrowange,2012:4).

The New Media in the Era of Information Globalization

The fact that each of these networks (social media, new media or alternative media) are born out of information globalization and these concept may have its negative flipside does not mean that any part of the world should short-change its by refusing to be caught in its "virus" while urging us all to be on the bandwagon of these revolution. Caution and prudence should be exercised to make the best out of them (Iji 2001:39).

The revolution brought about through mass communication messages explicates the new media as a fundamental instrument of modern communication. The new media as an embodiment of mass communication is characterized as the process by which a complex organization with the aid of one or more machines produces and transmits public messages that are directed at large, heterogeneous and scattered audiences. The sponce in the mass communication though the social media networks is a situation in which a group of individuals who usually act within predetermined roles in an organizational setting. This means it is the end product of more than one person that receives the message (Dominick 1999:15). According to

Okon (2001:38), the necessity of these messages or news makes us human because we live in an informed society. News emanating from new media otherwise referred to as the social media tells us what we should know about our society, about the world and what is happening around us and the people we live with as individuals and collective activities. More importantly, the media in this globalized world gives us news

In this era of information globalization, the roles played by the new media aside the orthodox functions to inform, educate and entertain, were perceived as providing among other things, reward, relaxation and most importantly, reduction of tension, which makes it easier for people to cope with real life problems and for societies to avoid breakdown.

McQuail et al (1992), dovetailed the role of the media within the framework of “individual functionalism” in social networks and avow that it depends on the motives of individuals, media usage and consequences of the source as regards credibility and validity of such information.

However, Okon (2001:37-38) highlights these emergencies as enshrined below:

Information

1. Finding out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world.
2. Seeking advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choices
3. Satisfying curiosity and general interest
4. learning, self-education
5. Gaining a sense of security through knowledge

Personal Identity

1. Finding reinforcement for personal values
2. finding models of behaviour
3. identifying with values
4. Gaining insight into oneself

Integration and Social Interaction

1. Gaining insight into circumstances of others, social empathy
2. Identifying with others and gaining sense of belonging
3. Finding a basis for conversation an social interaction
4. Having a substitute for real life companionship
5. Helping to carry out social roles
6. Enabling one to connect with family friends and society

Entertainment

7. Escaping or being diverted from problems
8. Relaxing
9. Getting intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment
10. Filling time
11. Emotional release.

The technology that propels society today according Biakolo et al (2011: 114-115), has expanded the universe of permissible opinions, unconstrained by prejudices taste of interests of even the old media elite and those who may want to colonize the global world of free flow of information. The implication of the potency and popularity of the new media on media theory scholars and the elite (government officials) is that it can no longer be business as usual in a world that has been gravely violated by the new media. Innocence and ignorance no longer exist. Freedom of expression, information and the press is not only being given, it is being seized aggressively. The net is given, it is being seized aggressively. The net is given voice to those typically denied expression because of professional incompetence and other encumbrances. Now, every user is a potential mass communicator, a publisher who does not only deserve to be listened to, but is being listened to already.

The handicap of traditional quality control of contents is all too clear. The only way to ensure that people get same information is to break the ice of self-barriers of information regulation, quit hoarding of information and get involved in making information readily available. In the online republic which aptly captures Thomas Jefferson's preference of newspapers (free information) to a government with closed information, knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And people have made their choice to be their own governors. They are every arming themselves with the power of knowledge through increased flow of information via the Internet. Nevertheless, as we acknowledge the boundless opportunities brought about by the net, Dare (1999) and cited in Biakolo et al (2011:115), hints that boundless abuses in the net dovetail into issues of ethics. Be that as it may, personal information about the workings of the new media will guide people and forestall belief in a hoax that is freely sold through the media.

Tackling Insecurity in Contemporary Nigeria

Nigeria has unfortunately become known in disasters resulting in massive losses of lives and properties including significant losses of productivity due to terrorists' attacks in some parts of the country, especially in North-East. In this part of the nation, neither the people, nor the country is ever at peace in stable and predictable manner.

In recounting the state of barbaric attacks by hoodlums and insensitive sect Boko Haram, Oodua foundation as a pan-social organization embarked on massive campaigns through the mass media with the theme “to save Nigeria now”. It lamented that “the situation has steadily grown worse and worse since independence, in the past three decades, hardly any half-year has passed without a staggering national conflagration” and most recently in some parts of Northern Nigeria (Oodua 2015:68). Under the Boko Haram siege, it is perhaps trite to say that never in the history of Nigeria have there been acts more shocking in violence and cruelty than the carnage that Boko Haram continues to perpetrate. It is therefore appropriate to say that never has there been greater need for the Nigerian government to re-assert its control over the territory called Nigeria and assure all citizens of safety in their country.

The dreaded sect unleashed mayhem mostly on Yobe, Brono, Adamawa and some parts of Kaduna States. Historically, the implacable seat sorrow and tears sprang up as Boko Haram in 2009 and dreaded Islamic jihadists by 2010 and so forth until it has become a routine and a staple on Nigeria's political firmament. According to Obogo (2012:16), what started as an uprising between fundamentalist sect and Nigerian security forces in 2009 soon began to spread in form of violent attacks across several states in northern Nigeria. Since then the casualty figures is over 5,000 dead and properties destroyed over 3.4 billion naira and like an incubus, the country remained haunted every year. Although other issues of corruption, air crash of course few including flooding in 2012 have been recorded, what have continued to form the headlines of the mass media is the unbridled insecurity attacks of Boko Barram.

It is on record that apart from the United Nations office attack in 2011 and subsequent mayhems on police Headquarters in Abuja the Federal Capital Territory, the Air Force bombardment in Kaduna and Army have received their fair share of the bounties of Boko Haram. Worse was the kidnapping of the Chibok girls whose disappearance has become a mystery for both the government and citizenry. According to reports the young school girls have become mothers of Boko Baram babies (Adesina, 2015:64).

The mass media because of their coverage, packaging and dissemination also recounts serious hurdles including destruction of media institutions by the insurgents. A point in hand was the bombing of vanguard building in the federal capital territory Abuja. Since then the press have been cut in cross fires. Tackling the security challenges in Nigeria thus requires more than artillery and mortar bombs or Air strikes alone. The situation in Sabisa forest has housed the proliferation of this Islamic sect whose sponsorship no doubt attracts external supports. Just like the

Isils in Syria and other parts have gone beyond military operations alone. Thanks for the co-operation for the coalition forces of neighbouring countries such as Chad, Cameroun, Niger and others, no doubt these countries also have their own share of the terrorists actions.

Succinctly, it would be recalled that between 1999 and 2003, the United States Institute of peace (USIP) in programmes with participants from USAID, Bosnia Kosovo and the Republic of Georgia administered diplomacy of sense. According to Tolani (2012:52), diplomacy of sense has also been used in the conflict situation in Iraq aside US led forces in Bagadad. Refine participants' skills in conflict analysis and resolutions were introduced in scenarios of these natures. Accordingly, two things are quite necessary in this direction..... Help them master negotiation styles and techniques and

- i. Teach the roles that parties can play in mediating disagreements.

Nigeria has witnessed conflicts and insecurity to life and property as part of its transition experience. Before Boko Haram, the Niger Delta, which can be described as the economic power-house of the country, contended with an insurgency that nearly crippled the oil production capacity of the country until the grant of "Amnesty" to the elements that were involved in the struggle by the Late Umar Yar'Adua Administration. Boko Haram has become the greatest challenge, threatening to tear apart the country and its fragile democracy. With nearly 1,000 lives lost and a countless number of bombings, the country is in dire need of redemption. Several commentators have offered different insights into the immediate and remote causes of the crisis; but to date there has not been any appreciable solution to the problem. However, everyone is certain that:

1. The country cannot continue with the spate of killings. It is destructive and there is the risk that it might spread not only to other parts of the country; but also to neighbouring countries within the sub-region.
2. The problem cannot be separated from poverty, endemic corruption in the national life, lack of good governance, the poor leadership. These failings cannot be attributed to one administration alone.
3. The solution to the problem does not lie in killing those who are perceived as members of the insurgency. It does not even lie in capturing or imprisoning them. Dialogue with the insurgents is not as easy as it has been randomly suggested, and, for the most part, it is impracticable in most cases to engender dialogue with insurgent groups. The sense simulation shows how one sector or organization alone cannot solve the problem. It requires inter-agency collaboration, adept negotiations, robust monitoring of

objective fundamentals of state apparatus to deliver good governance, transparency in the management of the resources of the country, equitable distribution of national resources as well as robust discussion of issues and more inclusive participation by all the actors in the country: the security forces, civilian government, international community, business community (local and international) as well as civil society actors to engender the conditions for peace and prosperity.

Sense has become the most potent tool that we can explore to tackle the dire security situation in Nigeria. The aim is to make sense an indispensable practical good governance and security tool for every senior security operative, political leaders (from local government level to the federal level), business actors, civil society actors, traditional rulers, faith community leaders as well as strategic international actors in the country. This is based on the evidence that peace and security is the business of all.

The New Media Role in Resolving Nigeria's Security Challenges

Just as globalization has become the defining process of the present age, the new media grows stronger in the spread of information accessibility all over the world. However, while the widows and opportunities including the benefits according to Khor (2000:1), have been stressed by its proponents, supporters and users, recently there has been increasing disillusionment among many policy-makers, analysts, academics as well as communities and non-governmental organizations. According to Stiglitz (2002:6), globalization and the introduction of a market has not produced results in Russia and most of other economies making the transition from communism to the market (in this case, the internet) a worrisome development.

Although technological determinism through the communication media becomes of veritable increase and importance, astute observers have different reservations about the kinds of messages been transmitted to the heterogeneous society from the social media. The reason amongst others is that the new media has characteristically shown a strong bias for individualist traits in its explanation of response to media content. The variegated responses have shown the tendency for reactions based on anger, pleasure, changes in behaviour, environment and interpretation of certain phenomena and so forth (Biakolo et al, 2011:67).

In the case of Nigeria, the recently concluded 2015 elections alluded to these antecedences as reported through the social media networks. It was evident that while some parts of the country were still voting, the results were already flooded in the various web sites and ancillary communication sources or networks. According to Ugulah (2015:4), the social or new media influenced to some extent, the nature

results were announced by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). Recommendation for any messages emanating from the social media to succeed lies on the credibility of their sources, contents and distributions. The reason amongst others includes public confidence in resolving the security tension in the North-East of Nigeria.

The functionality and efficiency of the new media has been deeply entrenched in improvements in technology. According to Biakolo et al (2011:66) improvement in new technology are therefore seen as being synonymous with a boost to the reach and effectiveness of information in resolving crises and conflicts resolution processes.

Conclusion

The New media as ambit of mass communication does not operate in a social vacuum as a machine does. The fact remains that human beings source and transmits interactive messages through New Communications Technology (NCTs). This implies that we have become part of our social network system and according to Bitner (1989:17), computers permits us to two-way interactive communication and avail to us more personalized information choices.

It is succulent to state that the New Communications Technologies (NCTs) therefore facilitates our interactive processes as it transmits messages which constantly floods the heterogeneous society, thus serves as channel when properly utilized, and become a veritable communicative means of settling conflicts such as the Boko Haram saga and other dastardly acts that confronts contemporary Nigeria as a developing nation in Africa.

Recommendations

The new media could be tapped seriously as a weapon for resolving the contemporary security challenges of Nigeria, especially the terrorism influxes of Boko Haram sect in some parts of the North- East of the country. However, Aina (2003:15-16) opines and supports utilization of the new media based on the followings:

1. There must be a prudent choice of codes to prevent the message from being misunderstood. If verbal codes are used, the message must avoid ambiguity, obscurantism and malapropism. Words and expressions must suit the profile of the receiver. The sender must target accuracy, conciseness, clarity, coherence and simplicity.

2. Message clutter must be avoided by being brief. Since human capacity to absorb details is low, the receiver may resort to selective exposure and ignore some aspects of the message. Brevity will reduce distortion especially when there are few message units. However, the information content of the message must not be too low.
3. Depending on the type of message and the goal, the Sharpening and leveling methods may be used. Certain details which are crucial to the communication can be sharpened while less important ones can be leveled. In many mass communication messages, amplification is done to project a certain message above others. This is achieved through headlines with bold typefaces and by consistent production. The message can also be amplified through endorsement by a respected public figure.
4. The message must be made available to the receiver(s) with relative ease. For example, many receivers listen to radio and television messages when they are strong and clear. They prefer such to faded and blurred ones which require them to strain their ears and eyes. The same applies to billboards. People read them when large and located at a junction with traffic light, or where there is a traffic hold-up. Additionally, the reader is likely to read a newspaper at home or in the office may be through their cell phones or laptops and so forth.
5. The timing of the message delivery must be appropriate for it to produce the desired response. It is serious indiscretion to send a telephone message on an insignificant issue in the early hours of the day (e.g 2 a.m, 3 am) when most people are sleeping. Also, messages must be suspended if the receiver is in the wrong mood to act positively on it.
6. To avoid distortion, the message must reflect some internal order or organization. A well-organized message is less prone to distortion. Message must reflect some internal order or organization. A well-organized message is less prone to distortion. Message distortion may even be averted by repetition of certain ideas. In communication, this is referred to as redundancy.
7. The message must carry must informative to sustain the receiver's attention. To achieve this, it must have fresh perspectives and contrasts. Contrasts can be used to design advertising messages.

References

- Adesina, F. (2015), "Boko Haram Babies". Daily Sun, Friday, May 8. P.64
- Aina, S. (2003), "Anatomy of Communications". Sabo- Abeokuta: Julian Publishers.
- Biakolo, et al (2011), "Journalism and New Media Technologies in Africa". Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC)
- Bitner, R. J. (1989), "Mass Communication: An Introduction". 5th Edition, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Dara, (1991), "Ethics, Professionalism and the Internet, in Biakolo et al (2011) Journalism and New Media Technologies in Africa". Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) P. 115.
- Defleur, D. (1994), "Understanding Mass Communication". 2nd Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Dominic, R. J. (1996), "The Dynamics of Mass Communication". Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Iji, M. E. (2001), "Towards Greater Dividends Developmental Imperatives". Calabar: BAAJ International Company.
- Kho, M. (2003), "Globalization and the South, Some Critical Issues". Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- McQuail, et al (1992), "McQuail's Mass Communication Theory". 5th Edition. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Obogo, L. (2012). "Insecurity: Implacable Sect, Sorrow and Tears". The Nation, Saturday, December 29 P. 16.
- Okon, G. B. (2001), "Basic Dimensions in Mass Communication". Lagos: Hdx Communications.
- Oodua, F. (2011), "To Save Nigeria Now". The Guardian Thursday May 19. P. 68.

- Schrowange, C. (2012), "Understanding Conflict, Violence, Peace and the Power of the Media in Peace Journalism Development Training Manual". Ibadan: Justice, Development, and Peace Commission (JDPC), Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan.
- Stiglitz, J, (2002), "Globalization and its Discontents". London: Penguin Books Limited.
- Tolani, P. (2012), "Tackling Nigeria's Security Challenge with sense". The Guardian, Wednesday, June 27. P. 45.
- Ugulah, B. (2015), "The Mass Media and Anti-Terrorism in Nigeria". Ibadan: S.H Publishers (Nig.) Ltd.