

## **MEDIA, POWER RELATIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Media and the society are the different sides of the same coin glued together by power relations for the belligerents. While the media express power via communication in the society, the society on the other hand exudes its power through its culture upon which forms and influences media content and context. This paper seeks to examine the co-relationship between media and multiculturalism in Nigeria particularly as it affects various ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State: Annang, Ibibio, and Oro. Technological determinism and diffusion of innovation theories were found suitable for the research while a survey method was used among the aforementioned cultural grouping. Out of 124 responses from respondents across the study area, 104 representing 84% concurred that media wield enormous power and pressure on the society since media animate culture. Again, respondents were unanimous in their submission that multiculturalism in Nigeria has exerted steady influence and power on the media. The study recommended that media should do more in the area of cultural inter- relationship and integration by bringing various cultural groupings on the same table for national development than beating the drums of war since the multicultural nature of Nigeria is its strength.*

**Key words: Media, power Relation, multiculturalism**

### **INTRODUCTION**

"You haven't seen anything yet" were the first few lines by the inventor of telephone. This statement was indeed profound and perhaps deep rooted in eternal fact and truth when judging the miracles in communication and media spheres. Technology has endless potentials, unlocked by creations, inventions and innovations and media have maximize various windows in technology to figure, configure and reconfigure the global cultures. Enahoro (2002), states that communication is a fundamental life-giving process, and that the media play a prominent part in the social construction of our reality.

Media have wielded enough power in the society and will continue to wield even more. The global theatre and its activities are washed in the media such that the minds of individuals are so resolutely focused on mass mediated images.

The multicultural posture of Nigeria is no doubt its best asset and the diversity in culture, combined with population and land mass form a critical mass for development. A quick reflection on Nigeria's diversities is the common fact that the state is weaved together by the media with the threads of unity (Udoh 2021).

In Akwa Ibom State, the diversity in culture has resonated on the daily enterprises and there seems to be some sort of agreement on one hand and some disagreements on the other hand. The points of convergence and divergence are expected since they are traced to media and the power with which media exert on the society. Media can plunge the best of friend or nations into wars and bring worst enemies on a banqueting table.

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### **Statement of the Problem**

The media have been blamed for the erosion of norms, values and traditions of cultures all over the world. As a matter of fact, some countries like Afghanistan and North Korea have censored and controlled media content in their various domains for the simple reason that they want to preserve their culture from being invaded by western media.

Nigeria for instance has established some instruments to checkmate media contents particularly as they may affect its multicultural characteristics. This informs the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcast Commission (NBC), Nigeria Press Council (NPC) and the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB).

It has been observed that the level of values, norms and traditions exists in the three cultural groups in Akwa Ibom: Annang, Ibibio and Oro, has been eroded drastically because of media. It is also observed that the trio ethnic groups are living in mistrust of one another and this of course has caused hostility, disunity and has impeded development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Now the question is: going by the perceived and actual power of the media, is it possible to utilize the media to bring the three ethnic groups together, forge unity among them so as to bring about sustainable development? This forms the crux of the study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study has the following objectives:

- (1) To locate the role of media play within and across the multicultural Akwa Ibom in terms of eroding the cultures, enhancing them or harnessing same for national unity and development.
- (2) To identify areas of cultural similarities common among the three ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State and utilizing same for cultural cohesion, collaboration and integration and through media for the unity and greater good of Akwa Ibom State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is essentially anchored on two basic theories: Technological determinism and Diffusion of Innovation theories.

#### **Technological Determinism**

This theory is considered appropriate because of the enormous influence wielded by the media and through technological innovation with which message is massively sent across the world with speed of light. While developing the theory, Marshal McLuhan in 1964, based his premise on the fact that media bring about new perceptual habit while media technology decisively shapes how individuals think, feel and act, and how societies organize themselves and operate. Again, the theory states that the medium determines the content of communication and has the power and or influence to manipulate the perception of the world. McLuhan's assertion therefore flows the thought that media can alter significantly and transmogrify same into a new cultural paradigm. Therefore, every culture is blended with the flavor of media interference and power.

#### **Diffusion of Innovation**

This theory seeks to explain what, why and how new ideas spread. The theory was popularized by Everett Rogers. According to him, diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated over time among the participants in a social system. In this case, the idea spread is power relations of the media and how the media exert tremendous influence on the social system and altering the valued system of the culture and bringing the new ones to bear without any instrument of coercion. This what Harold Lasswell in 1927 as cited by Enahoro (ibid) refers to as the hypodemic needle or magic bullet. Media do actually sell idea and spreads it fast through technology. In this case, media have exerted enormous influence on the multicultural posture of the Nigerian State.

### Concept Review

Media are the various platforms and means of communication. Whether conventional or traditional, media have played critical roles in the society. Media is the tripod upon which communications is mounted for the determination of societal loci. The role of media goes beyond information, education, enlightenment and entertainment. In the belly of media lies the power to structure societal actions and outcomes (Scott 2001).

According to Castells (2009, P. 10), "power refers to the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in a way that favour the empowered actor's will, interest and values". Hence, power means influences. It could be soft or hard. The realistic utilizes hard powers while the idealists explore soft ones.

For Tarrow (1992), power refers to the use of resources by one organization to gain compliance by another organization. Connecting the dots together and locating the nexus on the spectrum of communication, there is therefore interconnections between the media and the society. This means that the economics, political technology and cultural dimensions of media power are not insulated from the society but both are influenced in application of power. Media power relations therefore refers to the relationships between actors, institutional structure and contexts that organizes the allocation of the symbolic resources necessary to structure our knowledge about, and by extensions, our capacity to intervene in the world around us.

It is extremely difficult to isolate communication from media because they are the different ears of the same horse and or the different sides of the same coin and as such, the study finds it very convenient to use the duo interchangeably. While media are the containers, communication is the content.

Communication itself is the process which people interactively create, sustain and manage meaning. As such, communication reflects the world and at the same time creates the world. (James 2020). Everything revolves around communications – actions, reactions and interactions. This is why Onwumechili (2009) sees communications as an exchange or sharing of information, ideas or feelings between persons, using appropriate means (media). The process of communications involves the transmission and transfer of meaningful information and messages between a sender and a receiver in such a way that the receivers understands the message and reacts appropriately by giving the rights responses (Ibid).

Media as the platforms of communication have overtime evolved from traditional to conventional and now to new media. The new media are technologically driven via internet. The emerging communication have impacted greatly on power relations on the conversations and enactment of such dramas on the national theatre. This of courses was envisaged by Marshall McLuhan in 1964 when he first came out with the Mantra of global village which Becker (1982) says:

*electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of 'times' and that of 'space's and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concern of all other mean it ties together this communication society to recreates the image of a global village" (Becker 1982:7).*

Going by the excerpts above, it is easier to conclude that media have wielded enormous power on the society. As veritable agents of socialization, media have shaped all spheres of humanity. Media maintain and animate life. They serve as the vehicles for expression of social activations and civilizations. They lead people from instinct to inspiration, create a common pool of ideas, strengthen the feelings of togetherness, bring thoughts into actions and reflect every emotion and

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need from the humblest task of human survival to supreme manifestations of creating or destruction (Enahoro 2001).

McLuhan's arguments of media power relations are vast social metaphors in the sense that media do not only transmit information but more importantly determine knowledge that orient people to the world, tell them what kind of world exists and alter the ratio of sensory equipments which actually changes the character of the people.

### **Culture and Multiculturalism**

Culture is a set of learnt or shared beliefs, traditions and customs which are common to a group of people living together for a long period of time. It is the total way of life of the people pinches majority on norms, values and the relationships they enter into the productions of their material existence.

According to Gofwery (2001), perhaps, Edward Tylor (1832 – 1917) had come up with the most classic social science and anthropological definition of culture in 1871. He captured knowledge, beliefs, acts, law, moral, custom and other capabilities that can be acquired by man as a member of the society.

Similarly, Marx in his German ideology used culture more dynamically as a decisive or a productive force. In analyzing the term "culture" in Marx believes that culture is:

1. the total ways of life of a people.
2. the social legacy the individual acquires from his group.
3. a way of thinking, feeling and believing.
4. an abstraction from behaviour.
5. a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people behave
6. a store house of pooled learning
7. a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems
8. a learned behaviour
9. a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour
10. a set of techniques for adjusting both the external environment of man
11. a precipitate of history; and turning, perhaps in desperation, to similes, as map, as a sieve, and as a matrix.

Bearing these tenets in mind, Udoh (2021) says, culture is the pedicels upon which the entire community perches for its survival. If the pedicel collapses, the culture dies a natural death. He goes on to say that culture is the institution of institutions. It encapsulates the physical, spiritual, intellectual, technological and moral entities of man and the universe. Culture is the essence of formulated precepts of morality by a people to mediate mutual interest.

Interestingly, all scholars of anthropology and sociology converge on points that culture is based on shared expectation of the people. Secondly, culture is not static by dynamical, modified and changed as interactions take place. In addition, culture has a set of values and norms that govern the behaviour of its adherent. Moreover, culture is transmittable.

Multiculturalism mirrors the notion of the multiplicity of culture in a particular state. Nigeria for instance is said to be multicultural with over 250 ethnic groups with diverse cultural backgrounds coming together to form the wholes. The major ethnic groups are the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. Aside these are some that are very prominent such as the TIV, Fulani, Edo, Igbsira, Annang, Ibibio, Idoma, Eggon etc. All of these combined together have their distinctive and unique characteristics that make up the federal entity called Nigeria.

### **Media, Power Relations and Multiculturalism in Nigeria: Connecting the Dots**

Having x-rayed the various variables, next is to connect the nexus and links among the variables in considerations.

As stated earlier, Nigeria has a myriad of ethnicity, showcasing stupendous multifacet and complex dimensions in cultures. This has made Nigeria socio-cultural outlook colourful, salad in nature and uniquely attractive. Udoh (2021) argues that the cultural form prevalent in Nigeria is a mixture of Greek and Arabic – the Greek based on the superiority and prestige of reasoning and arguments and the Arabic based on the abstract but both are aimed at philosophizing humanity.

From the above, it could be summed that tradition defines culture. Tradition is the way and manner individual ethnic group go about practicing its culture. Udoh (2021) avers that tradition is visible in all the aboriginal communities in Nigeria. This of course is expressed in both verbal and non verbal forms. The non verbal forms are made up of drums, dances, music, signs, symbols, colours, images, costume, structural designs and many more. Also, verbal forms are found in folktales, legends, myths, divination, proverbs, idioms and many more.

These all constitute the gamut of the philosophical ideas of the cultures that cut across the physical, spiritual and metaphysical realms of thought. They also serve as carriers of the thought system from one generation to the other. A culture weaved with these qualities is best described as organic and serves the need of the community with which it is evolved. This place of media is located at the centre stage of culture.

Media play the prominent role in culture documentation, act as archival materials, provides orientation and become the veritable vehicles of socialization. The traditional media specifically is the bastion of cultures in Nigeria. They provide linkages and spring boards through which culture is launched and transmitted from one generation to the other (Marriott 1963). They also serve as culture preservers.

The conventional media such as radio, television, print, film theatre and recently new media however have eroded the seeming borders of cultures among various cultural enclaves in Nigeria and have much more extended the frontiers of cultures tremendously.

It is this force that the media have exerted and exerted on culture that media power relations come to play.

The advent of conventional and new media have provided a common pool where various ethnic groups and/ or cultures are influenced to contribute part of their cultures whether similar or not to form a common identity. For instance, though some cultures still hold on assiduously to the songs, music and dance; the conventional and new media have influenced these cultures with modern and alien songs, music and dance. Greater percentages of the Nigerian literatures are written in English and from English background. Education which is the exchange and or transfer of knowledge is done in English, government transactions such as judicial, legislative and executive activities are carried out in English. The traditional crafts, architectures, farming, dressing, food etc are replaced with foreign cultures practices. Virtually every aspect of the Nigerian diverse cultural practice is replaced and substituted for foreign one. This is brought about by the overt and covert power of the media (James 2020).

Nigeria came about by the amalgamation of both the belligerents of the northern and southern protectorate in 1914s in the era of Lord Lugard. Nigeria became an independent state on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960. Military autocracy was introduced on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966, with democratic rule by October 1, 1979, only for the military to reappear on the Nigerian political platform on December

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31, 1984. The Nigerian civil society was rendered captive to marshal law and order till May 29, 1999 (Enahoro 2002).

The Nigeria's civil war from 1967 – 1970 has widen the fissures among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. This, the then military junta did appreciate and called for national reconciliation and unity of reconstruction rehabilitation and reintegration. This led to the introduction of National Youth Service Corps, the NYSCs scheme to drive the unity of Nigeria but the wounds of the civil war have further exacerbated by weak institution, perverted leaderships, way ward citizenship and a convoluted social order that borders on anarchy. When subjected to dialectical analysis, the Nigerian culture reflects ethnicity, religious bigotry, regional and tribalism. Job, appointments, projects etc are strictly on the aforementioned factors which have caused ethnic enclaves and strike the chord of parochial interest. The diverse cultures use the media to succinctly advance their courses and interest.

Therefore, so many ethnic groups in Nigeria have community media and publish or broadcast in local languages. Some films from Nollywood, Igbo, Ibibios, Yoruba etc. enact dramas in their local dialects reflecting their culture respectively. The media of course have informed, educate and set new agenda for the building on various cultures as opposed to multi-culturalism.

Udoh (2021, P.3) refers to this multiculturalism as "multi-culturozygosis" and defines it as "forceful insemination, formation and synthesis of cultural union from more than two holistically differentiated ideologies with the view to extirpating a subsisting culture and/or civilization or civilization".

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a survey to gather data for analysis. The survey was carried out the three major ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria: Annang, Ibibio and Oro. The Annang nation has 8 local government areas, Ibibio has 18 while the Oro nation has 5 local government areas. The entire population of the study is projected by the National Population Commission (NPC) 2020 at about 7.5 million people.

For convenience, researchers adopted the system sampling technique using ratio 8:18:5 respectively to get the sample size and to reflect the number of local government areas cut across the entire study area which is 31. This is to ensure a fair and balance distribution of respondents. 10 respondents each of the local government areas were given questionnaire by accidental method. That is four research assistants who were drafted into the study issued questionnaire as they see the respondents without any prejudice in terms of personal selection of respondents. Therefore 310 respondents were administered questionnaire and this number hence formed the sample size. Out of this number, 124 copies of questionnaire were returned and found useful while 86 suffered facility. Therefore researchers made use of 124 as the basis for analysis of the study.

**RQ.1** Do media play critical role in eroding or enhancing cultural values in your cultural setting? The above question elicited clear responses. 108 respondents which represent 87% expressly affirmed that media have exerted so much influence in terms of eroding long aged values system, customs, traditions and norms on culture. Further investigation revealed that the young generations do not speak or want to speak in their dialect and language – looking at it as uncivilized. This has also affected greetings, farming, dressing, music, poems, folklores and interpersonal communication among the people. While 16 respondents representing 13% responses thought otherwise.

The response is as expected. According to Rogers, McLuhan, Lasswell and other scholars in the media field, all corroborate that media's influence on culture is both covert and overt and culture

has little or no resistance to media except such culture is without the media which they are very much in doubt.

**RQ2:** Do media enhance or make your relationship with other ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom. 60 respondents representing 48% confirmed that media have marred the relationship of one ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State with other ethnic groups. Further findings revealed that media are owned by people from the various ethnic groups across the state and the media are therefore used to fan the embers of ethnicity and cultural chauvinism. 64 respondents (52%) affirmed that media especially the ones in Akwa Ibom State have contributed enormously in enhancing relationship among various ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State. Again, this is as expected because the power of media to set two best friend nations apart and to bring worst enemy nations on the same dining table is indeed indisputable. All scholars in communication, media, sociology and related fields corroborate to this fact. Further findings revealed that the hitherto brick walls that were standing among the three ethnic groups were eroded by the media and media is still doing more in building bridges across the state.

**RQ.3** Do you have cultural similarities common to other ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State and the media use these similarities to unite the state?

From the question above, 115 respondents (92%) upheld that there are numerous cultural similarities as well as differences among the three cultural grouping in Akwa Ibom State and the media have utilized these similarities to galvanise unity and cohesion in the state.

9 respondents (8%) said otherwise. To them the similarities among the ethnic or cultural groups in Akwa Ibom is not very pronounced and media do not do enough to bring the three main culture on the common table to enhance unity and cohesion. Rather, some of them are fanning embers of hatred and ethnicity.

Further analysis revealed that the people want media to do more in bringing the three major cultures together. They also say that media can project the differences in culture and turn them to the strength of the state. Again, this response is as expected. Media influence is indeed immeasurable

### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

Based on findings, the study concludes that multiculturalism has exerted steady influence on the media and therefore recommends that the proper use of the media to proper unity, cohesion, love among diverse cultures in Nigeria.

- (i) Media should also project the several cultures in Nigeria and coordinate same for national development.
- (ii) Media should be circumpectial in content development packaging and delivery, taking into consideration that poor content development, unprofessional packaging and delivery could marr the relative experience in the multicultural Nigeria.

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