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PROMOTING PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY THROUGH MEDIA
TECHNOLOGY:

SOME SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIBILITIES

BY

M.E. INYANG-ABIA

ABSTRACT

Effective communication is one of the most potent instruments for fostering peace and national unity. Media Technologists are powerful agents in this noble quest. Various sociocultural responsibilities associated with media technology are examined in the light of current national problems and needs. Media producers and practitioners are urged to inject adequate dosage of Nigerian and African values into their messages through increased use of the hidden persuaders and the direct positive approach to enhance national unity and peaceful coexistence which originates from the human heart.

INTRODUCTION

Herodotus (C. 484 - c. 425 BC), the great Greek historian pointed out that people who constitute a nation have similar patterns of behaviour, some institutions and identical artefacts. Edmund Burk (1729-97) echoed this view when he said that societies differed in their concepts of the supreme values and that each society will protect its supreme values even with the last pint of blood. He stresses that living under a common government in a contiguous geographical location is no good indicator of nationhood. As in Mallinson (1975:363) Burke said nationality is an expression of continuity, an awareness of an extension of people in time, in number and in space. Nationality is the outcome of common political, legal and religious institutions and traditions which are "based on long continued uniformity of customs and manners."

People who have lived together for a long time and have shared a common history constitute a nation. Through the process of historical evolution a distinctive national character can be developed. Ginsberg (1949:76) defines it as the "totality of the dispositions of the thought, feeling and behaviour peculiar to and widespread in a people, and manifested with greater or less continuity in a succession of generations." National character determines is determined by the national educational policy and the structure of the educational machinery. It is also affected by geographical, economic, historical, political and sociological variables. The implication here is that for Nigeria to develop the required standard of unity and peaceful coexistence, that positive national character which can easily identify a Nigerian anywhere in the world must be established, protected and nurtured. This uphill task can hardly be achieved in a life time without effective intercultural communication strategies backed up by adequately

trained committed team of media producers. Their role in structuring communication cannot be over-emphasized.

The Problem

The creation of Nigeria along with other African countries with a stroke of the pen during the Berlin Conference (1884/85) chaired by Sir Otto von Bismarck was a simple task. But the problems of peace and national unity equally created by that same stroke of the pen for the African countries have long remained a herculean task. One reason why this problem has remained so is traceable to the diverse cultures of the people brought together by that singular act: the partitioning of Africa. It ignored the wisdom of Herodotus and the promptings of Edmund Burke.

Peace and unity are so highly valued in Nigeria that they form part, not only of the national Coat of Arms, the Pledge and the Anthem, but also reflect a basic philosophical stand of this nation. National unity which is a major step to our peaceful coexistence has always been a major goal for this nation. And various programmes have been evolved to achieve and sustain this supreme value. To wit: the National Youth Service programme, The Federal Government Secondary Schools and Colleges, cultural festivals and Interstate Visits and Exchange among other programmes have national unity and peaceful coexistence among the topmost aims for establishing them. They have almost always worked towards that. But more often than not we are deluded. Like a mirage in the desert to a hungry dry throat national unity and peace have always been. Yet that goal we must achieve. That elusive but undeniable entity can only be neglected to our woe.

The huge amount coughed out yearly by the nation to service the various "unity programmes" testifies to the national commitment. But most of these national value-oriented programmes have failed to achieve the

much desired peace and unity because the communication of the programme objectives and contents to the participants has not adequately catered for the needs and characteristics of the target audience. Sometimes the basic message contents trigger off the very characteristics and behavioural patterns preached against. In other cases the messages get lost in transit or are swallowed by the media used. Yet we have all realized the wonderful role effective communication can play in international relations. This again underscores the need for a new breed of mass and instructional media producers and practitioners to be constantly reminded of their essential sociocultural responsibilities. In the words of McLuhan and Fore (1970), "medium is the message" and conversely, message is the medium.

On the basis of this, media production can be essentially message production. Without adequate dosage of sociocultural orientation it may be difficult to produce media and messages capable of effectively integrating the about three hundred different ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria, not to talk of orientating them for purposes of unity and peace.

National unity and peaceful coexistence borders on axiological questions. But this paper will not delve into the philosophies behind national peace and mutual co-existence of the Nigerian populace. Rather, it will attempt to:

- (a) examine the role of effective communication and media production in fostering national unity and peaceful co-existence of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria;
- (b) identify strategies in media production which can facilitate unity and peace;
- (c) specify sociocultural responsibilities in media production for national unity and peaceful coexistence.

The Role of Communication in Fostering National Unity and Peaceful Co-existence

In this paper, co the process of affecting the behaviour of a specified target audience through interaction and information exchange. Media, its essential component and the central focus of this paper refers to the various means through which messages can be produced, stored, retrieved, amplified, reproduced or channeled to the target audience. Decisions on production of messages inevitably go along with the vital consideration of the media through which such messages can efficiently and most effectively be carried. Invariably, media production is intrinsically interwoven with message production. In this paper, media production will, therefore, be discussed in "pari passu" with message production in line with McLuhan's epigram: "Medium is the Message". Media producers include the journalist radio and television reporters and broadcasters, and all other media practitioners, commercial and freelance artists, teachers, educational technologists and authors of books,.

Whether mass (those that appeal to a large number of widely scattered heterogeneous population simultaneously) or instructional (those that are used exclusively for purposes of learning and teaching), media, more than anything else, has the intrinsic capability to make or an individual, a community or a nation. This can be done via the contents that are allowed to pass through them.

Media can be a symbol of close relationship if the issues presented are of common interest to the target audience. Consider the participation of the masses in the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) of the campaign of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, the 1986 International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan debate, the Political Bureau debate, etc. Through such national issues with minimal ethnic bias, the media symbolizes

cultural homogenization which facilitates national unity and peaceful coexistence.

Media can be a vital developmental machinery if constructively manipulated for that purpose. Development here refers to the locus in the continuum of man's ability to exercise deliberate control over his environment in such a way that harmonious existence is established with nature. A nation, people or community can be spurred to more developmental activities because of the progress it learns through the media about others. When all sections of the nation move at almost equal pace of development less inter-ethnic friction may be experienced and national unity and peaceful coexistence can thus be facilitated.

Despite its single-directional information flow, the radio, for example, could be used to a greater advantage to publicize development programmes and mobilize the heterogeneous audience because of the "hypodermic needle effect" it has on the listeners. According to Schramm (1977), radio is the only "broad channel to the rural region, the one long-range, relatively inexpensive, easily deliverable medium that overlaps the commonest barriers of sharing information with remote places". Through panel discussions involving local people and common problems, adequate motivation, awareness and acceptance have been created for mass literacy programmes, health services and other major developmental programmes that cut across cultural barriers. No government can successfully carry out new programmes or implement new policies without adequately mobilizing the masses. This can only be successfully executed through effective communication which subsumes relevant media. It therefore, means that the media can disseminate information about national development, focus the masses attention on the needs, opportunities, methods and means of change as well as motivate people for change. In this way media should be

totally mobilized for the all-important role of national unity and peaceful coexistence at all times.

Through its assigned mutually interdependent tripple roles of informing, educating and entertaining, the media liberates the human mind, frees conscience, facilitates mutual understanding within our complex society and energizes significant contributions to the development of our nation thus increasing our ability to direct the course of future developments.

But media can also enslave a nation, stifle national consciousness and assault the national psyche if it polutes the mind or continuously feeds the citizens with the soul-destroying diet of ethnolinguistic differences through the rascality of its controllers and producers. The television, for example, can be used to divert people's attention from their personal and societal problems through entertainment programmes. In such ways the media can become a tranquilizer instead of an energizer.

The media can be a major instrument of political and economic control because it has direct effect on human mind and soul and therefore lives of the target audience. This is partly so because of the monodirectional information flow inherent in most media - the contents of most media are not questionable. A good percentage of the masses accept their contents as the the gospel truth. Even the gospel truth in recent years is being questioned. This point has serious implications for media producers.

Media utilization presupposes manipulation. The colonial masters used the textbook, for example, to indoctrinate and brainwash their victims; by this means, along with religion, we were deculturized. The neocolonialists who had long realized the critical nature of knowledge acquisition in mind development have widened the scope, given the phenomenal developments in media technology which in

has reduced the world, according to McLuhan, to a "global village".

The television, radio, filnosound, print media of various forms, recorded video and audio cassette tapes, T-shirts, stickers, billbogrds, posters among other media loaded with subtle hidden persuaders of cultural imperialism are daily eating into our minds without our realization. What this means is that foreign media controllers are constantly using the local media producers to invade our cultural heritage to our disadvantage. If we accept Pruitt's (1986) estimate that about "90% of all published information in most third world countries come from outside their national boundaries", particularly from France, United States and United Kingdom, and realizing that most of such information are loaded with the hidden persuaders of cultural imperialism, then we shall have appreciated how enormous the problem of media production for national consciousness, unity and peaceful coexistence can be for us. This awareness needs to be adequately created so that third world media producers and practitioners can jealously guard against this new wave of imperialism. Cultural imperialism can enslave a people for ever because it affects the people's soul.

But can we not use the same soft-selling hidden persuaders as well as the direct positive approach to our advantage, particularly in areas of national unity and peaceful coexistence of the various ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria?

MEDIA PRODUCTION STRATEGIES FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

Communicability, to my mind is one of the most important aspects of human development. Ability to communicate effectively promotes broadmindedness, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence between and among individuals groups and nations. Therefore,

to optimize these benefits, there is need to maximize the individual's power to communicate effectively. All forms of communication is known, make use of codes and symbols. Where the individuals' or society's general communication skills including the encoding and decoding ones, are seriously deficient, the ideas available to them as well as the ability to manipulate those few available ideas are seriously limited. This underscores one important role in media production: education. But because education, communication and development have strong links among themselves and can only be successfully executed through the media, media production based on scientific basis can be very necessary for national unity and coexistence. The following considerations are therefore, crucial strategies in producing effective communication media for national unity and peaceful coexistence.

- (a) Content Factors: This refers to the factor that affect the actual physical product of communication: the message. People relate best to what they are best convinced. The content must be couched to persuade and convince the audience adequately. It must strike a balance between the cultures. This is a difficult task. Events and information must be interpreted accurately, logically and objectively without ethnic or emotional bias. Cultural similarities and common bond instead of differences should be highlighted. Culturally, familiar symbolic messages through hand-bills, billboards, posters, car stickers, cartoons and other forms of visuals must be increasingly used as visual referents particularly if such messages have common implication for all ethnolinguistic groups. The visual media can appeal very easily to the print illiterates and therefore, can be very strategic in appealing to the generality of the masses.
- (b) Target Audience Factors: Nigeria is a country with widely diverse cultures: wide ethnolinguistic differences that also incorporates geographical, religious, educational and socio-economic variations. Therefore, in producing media for national use, these variations

should not be lost sight of. In this area, the use of local languages in radio and television, and recently in local newspapers in some states of the federation is a giant step in the right direction. Such papers should, as much as possible, emphasize the positive side of other ethnic groups. "Spot light" and "focus" on various ethnic groups if considered for publication can facilitate unity through enlightenment, understanding and trust. Data from target audience analysis provides adequate springboard for modern media producers because media choice and message content can be tailored to adequately reflect their needs, desires and aspirations.

- (c) Dynamic Factors: The economy, national security, available resources, technological skills, socio-cultural level of users, religious biases, degree of urbanization, acceptability and accessibility of the media, cost effectiveness, location, distribution and size of the audience all matter in media production for national unity and peace. When these factors are analysed and specified clearly, they facilitate balance at the planning and design stages of media production. Failure to consider them can be very dangerous to national unity and peaceful coexistence.

SOME SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN MEDIA PRODUCTION

Media production is a very important link in the promotion of functional education and economic development because it is through the media that effective communication can be ensured. That task goes with serious responsibilities, some of which are highlighted below.

Culture and Need Relevance: To be effective, media must be related to the needs and culture of the people. The use of foreign values to sell messages and products to the Nigerian populace is gradually

depriving us of our cultural heritage. This means the target audience may buy the ideas presented as well as how such ideas and products are presented. Both the foreign values and the products happen to be sold to the masses. In some cases, the messages (products) may be contrasting and the masses just select whichever appeals to them most. Consider, for example, the poster which screams "A FULL DAY'S JOB FOR A FULL DAY'S PAY" but it has the pictures of a lazy lady in strict Western fashion relaxing in the office, painting her lips and exposing her long manicured nails while her male colleague in a three-piece suit puffs off his cigarette as the fan blows off some of the contents of the files in the in-tray.

What this poster simply portrays is the message contents of the pictures. In effect, it means what they are doing right there constitute the full day's job for a full day's pay - that is the hard-sell message content. Again, the soft-sell message elements which the poster emphasizes are the western values such as long manicured finger nails, and western dressing and hair style. It fails to emphasize the work ethics which is our need. Such media do more harm than good to the Nigerian masses. The Nigerian media producer has the sociocultural obligation to provide media that reflect our cultural needs and aspirations.

CROSS CULTURAL OPEN COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

There is need for media producers to evolve and emphasize a communication system that is capable of uniting the widely scattered ethnolinguistic groups within Nigeria, while recognizing and respecting their individual identities. By this system, the Nigerian people will understand themselves better. Understanding is the beginning of national unity and peaceful coexistence.

While encouraging open communication among individuals and groups to foster individual and interethnic understanding, the culture and integrity of the participants must not be undermined. The media producer has this responsibility.

Local Contents: Media production should localize the contents in order to enhance its usefulness and effectiveness. On the basis of this, culture-related programmes with adequate local contents and elements should always be encouraged. Imported programmes should be modified and adapted to reflect the culture. For example, by replacing some exotic elements in the "Sesame Street" with local resources and elements, effectiveness, relevance and Nigerian values can be enhanced. Three popular T.V. programmes need mention here for their localness, cross cultural implication and relevance for national peace and unity: Mirror In the Sun, "Samanja" and "The Masquerade". Media producers have the responsibility of localizing media whether imported or home-made to reflect national unity and peaceful coexistence.

Multimedia Approach: The use of several media simultaneously to drive home some urgent national needs, popularize government policies and mobilize the masses has long been appreciated in this country. Apart from the television, radio and newspapers, the textbooks, billboards, T-shirts, stickers, key holders are various media which effectiveness can be explored to foster national peace and unity.

Textbooks, particularly at the elementary level, can focus on strengths, similarities and common ancestral origin of the various ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria. T-shirts, posters and stickers with direct positive messages such as "Proud to be a Nigerian", "I Love Nigeria", "I'm a Nigerian", "Nigeria: One Nation, One Destiny", etc can go a long way to soft-sell the much desired national unity and peaceful coexistence. This can even be enhanced

with pictures of Nigerian models exhibiting some truly Nigerian values such as respect for elders, dignity of labour and empathy towards our unfortunate brothers and sisters.

CONCLUSION: National Unity and Peace start from the individual's heart; media production can, however, re-echo their importance. Nigeria is fast undergoing value orientation and media production has serious sociocultural responsibilities to use both the soft-sell techniques as well as the direct positive approach to protect Nigeria from the emerging cultural imperialism while it promotes national unity and peaceful coexistence.

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