ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Communication and Deliberation as Tools for Sustainable Political Serenity and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Political communication is fashioned towards the enlightenment of the citizenry on sustainable democratic political development. Nigeria as a political entity has been polarized from inception with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates for administrative convenience without recourse to the possible challenges associated with such decision. Political communication and deliberation from the Nigerian perspective seem to be advancing political aspiration(s) in ways such as propaganda, segregation, prejudice and lobbying through the use of different channels and forms of communication. The functionality of a system is dependent on the collection of organs working in a co-ordinate fashion for the survival of the organism. In the context of this study, various socio- political groups in Nigeria have made attempts to address the political serenity in Nigeria. Findings show that in political communication and deliberation, the origin and alliance of the political elites and the media houses cannot be separated from their various geo-political zones. This paper adopted the content analysis research methodology which involves a review of existing literature on political communication and deliberation as tools for sustainable political serenity and development in Nigeria. It is pertinent to state that political communication is a veritable tool for achieving and sustaining peace and serenity as well as development in the country .It therefore strongly recommends among others that it is important to develop a viable political communication framework that will ensure constant political enlightenment programmes. In addition, the government should focus on addressing the issues of marginalization and injustice in the appointment of people into key political positions, and embrace transparency and inclusiveness in all affairs.

Keywords: Political Communication, Media, Deliberation, Sustainability, Political Serenity.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this discourse is to examine political communication and deliberation as tools for sustainable political security and development in Nigeria. The question is : How can political communication and deliberation be used to sustain political serenity and development in the Nigeria political milieu ?Nigeria is characterized by diverse ethnicities who have over the years been involved in contestations for identity and favourable allocation of power and resources, quota systems, appointments into key political positions and the like .

It is a known fact that Nigeria is pluralistic in terms of ethnic, regional and religious identities . Political elites, ethnic and religious organization have over the years exploited these identities which later stirred up agitations for power and control of resources by the social groups that were once silenced (Danaan, 2017). This has contributed immensely to sowing seeds of discord , mutual distrust and intolerance among Nigerians, as individuals and socio-cultural groups seek means to promote and protect personal , sectional and religious interests rather than national interest .

Consequently, Nigerians have always been polarized along ethnic, regional and religious lines in their discussions about issues of national importance. The relevance of these socio-cultural groups: Pandevu (South-South), Afanifere (South-West), Ohaneze Ndi Igbo (South-East) and Arewa Consultative Forum (Northern Region) notwithstanding, there is need to check or assess their mode of operation in order not to set the unity of the nation on a precipice while agitations for recognition and fairness cannot be undermined It is paramount to be meticulous in ways of achieving their objectives to avoid acrimony that will rather lure the nation into disintegration. Therefore choice of words, aspersions ,etc . should be weighed and

articulated properly .

Communication at all levels is a crucial variable in any human endeavour and the political sphere is not exempted. The essentiality of communication is to disseminate information, and exchange and/or share ideas or views. However, political communication and deliberation have been identified as viable tools for sustaining political serenity and development in a diverse society like Nigeria. Both are means of communication and expressing political thoughts, and addressing national issues that has political undertone. Communicating political thoughts and ideas that will bring about serenity and development in Nigeria cannot be achieved only by the instruments of political communication and deliberation. It is important to note that the media have a pivotal role to play in this regard so as to achieve the pre - determined goal .

The media are agents of political communication and deliberation. They are used to interpret the information to the citizenry. Media communicators do not only provide pages of facts and statistics that an average person might understand but sometimes weed out important issues and points in collaboration with some of the desperate politicians who may consciously or unconsciously chase their opponents and critics into existential tombs or valleys of grumbling, where they can remain for some time or permanently if they must stay alive.

The fundamental functions of the media include: flow of information and interaction, interpretation and acting as the watchdogs for the society.

Flow of information and interaction:

Humans and society at large can only advance if there is flow of communication as people are introduced to new ideas and views. With the freedom of the press, we can then know what the differing views in society are, opening the floor of debate, discussion , all of which are healthy functions of a democratic society .This enables the masses to interact and acquire new skills leading to their development .

Watchdogs :

Apart from the aforementioned, media also keep vigil on the government actions while empowering people to hold the government accountable via education. This promotes democracy in a country and encourages development as well as brings about sustainable political serenity. There are many events happening around us which may escape our attention .If it were not for media's focus on such issues ,the people would not have been informed . Therefore ,the media must be relevant in the whole process of national development in order to help in democratic transformation .For the media to be responsible for the process of sustainable national development, it should promote peace while ensuring that it creates a peaceful body polity in the state (McQuail , 2 0 0 5). There is call on the media and the government to work together and ensure that they assist in planned and beneficial development of the country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is anchored in democratic participant media theory and the diffusion of innovation theory.

Democratic Participant Media Theory

The theory allows for multiplicity of ideas as well as democratic participation by citizens in a society. Democratic participant media theory is an advocate of democratization of communication. It grew as a reaction against other theories and actual experiences and positive move towards new forms of media institutions (McQuail, 2005). For people often neglected by the media this theory affords them an opportunity to actively interact by engaging in political, economic, social and cultural debates for development purposes.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The diffusion on innovation theory of development better explains the issue of this discourse in that the theory describes how new ideas, information and culture are passed from people to people or from one geographical area to another. It involves a system of

explanation on how freely or rapidly people in a society accept new ideas, depending on time, nature of media of communication and demographic variables of the target audience. This theory explains the development of nations and the spread of different cultures.

METHODOLOGY

From the outset, amalgamation heralded the Nigeria-State to enthnocentricism which over the years metamorphosed and escalated to its nadir. The country's diversity and plurality which should have been its source of strength has become its Achilles heel. Tussle for religious identity, political dominance, allocation and control of resources have posed obstacles to unity and peaceful co-existence which is a pre-requisite for political serenity and sustainable development.

This study adopts the content analysis method of research. In the submission of Babbies (1975), the pragmatic question in the content analysis method is:

Who says what?
To whom?
How and with what effect?

In contemporary research, the year 1975 might be considered obsolete, but the relevance of Babbies' assertion to the context of this study cannot be overemphasized.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to attain a measure of conceptual clarity, it is perhaps worthwhile to elucidate the meaning of these key variables: 'sustainability', 'political serenity' and 'development'.

According to the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development, the word sustainability is an approach to development which allows nations to meet their present needs without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs.

Diamond (2004) opines that political development occurs in an environment in which the citizens are well educated with political news, activities, processes and they are allowed and encouraged to participate equally and to play critical roles.

In support of the above, Meyer (2009) cited in Muhingi, Agongo, Maiye and Mangare (2015) states that politics is nothing but communication and deliberation that shapes the political behaviour of the citizenry of any country. "In democracies" the media has a complex relationship with sources of power and political system.

On the other hand, political serenity simply means the creation of a conducive political atmosphere which includes all the processes of running a successful election, as well as deliberation and agitation in a peaceful and calm way in order not to cause division or thwart the national unity in the country.

Emezi, (1971) cited in Okoli and Onah (2002) state that development involves progression, movement and advance toward something better. It is improvement on the material and non-material aspect of life. It involves action, reaction and motion.

Keghaku (2005, p 53) says that development generally implies changes. IDS report June, 2005) states that development involves not just the expansion of resources, skills, and power in any given state but also the political processes of "state/society bargaining" over their distribution that occur within it. Therefore, development is fundamentally political. It involves enabling those who are excluded to gain a greater and just share of power and resources, through participation in political, policy and decision making processes at every level.

To sustain political serenity and development, the following steps should be upheld:

1. Develop a viable political communication and deliberation framework and network that will ensure constant political enlightenment programmes.
2. Enhance political emancipation by creating platform for debate, exchange of ideas, and reaction to planned projects.
3. The polity should be politically educated and enlightened enough and furnished with relevant

political information that will help them make informed decisions on political, economic, social, issues which may include favourable allocation of power and resources as the case may be.

4. Ensure that a truly deliberative and participatory democracy, the main channels of political communication are open and inclusive enough to accommodate the full range of voices available in the polity.
5. Provide voice to the teeming population in political milieu to be heard on issues that concern them.

Political Communication and Deliberation: Conceptual Clarification

Different scholars have variously defined political communication. Agudosy (2005) cited in Mboho and Batta (2012) defines political communication as the dissemination of information about functioning of a polity entity in order to influence the behaviour of the audience in a variety of ways.

Noris (2004) notes that political communication is the interaction process concerning transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public. It can create relations or even crisis of interests, goals and political structures in the process of attaining power and keeping it while Swanson and Nimmo (1990) sees political communication as "the strategic use of communication to influence public knowledge, belief, and action on political matters". They emphasize the strategic nature of political communication ,highlighting the role of persuasion in political discourse .

Complementing the above, Idiong (2004) opines that political communication is "the study of the flow of information through political processes". In other words ,political communication is the use of different systems ,channels and forms of communication to facilitate the achievement of predetermined ends .

According to Oxford Learners Dictionary of Current English (2010), deliberation is the process of carefully considering or discussing intentionally on purpose. This implies that for the media to effectively and efficiently communicate to the citizenry about political matters, it is imperative to carefully consider the issue under discussion and ensure that it is communicated based on purpose .

Deliberation can also be defined as a process of thoughtfully weighting options. It emphasizes the use of logic and reason as opposed to power-struggle, creativity or dialogue. Group decisions are generally made after deliberation through a vote or consensus of those involved. In 'deliberative' democracy, the aim is for both elected officials and the general public to use deliberation rather than power-struggle as the basis for their vote. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberation).

Overview of Political Communication

Political communication is one of the oldest forms of communication .The primitive men used it as their means of communication .It was used by our forefathers to advance their political cause and achieve certain goals .

Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) cited in Mboho and Batta (2012) identify three distinct ages in political communication namely:

The first is severed political structures and credits. The second was political communication facing mobile and professional citizens and institutions, and the third, the political communication facing media abundances with the attendant consequences .

Ryle (2001) cited in Ani (2008) notes that political communication is multidisciplinary . This is so because it touches areas such as mass communication, social psychology, political science as well as history. Political communication has been variously understood or explained by many Professionals. Bovee and Arens (1982) cited in Mboho and Batta (2012) see it as political advertising while Okigbo (1992) see it as marketing politics.

Mcnair (2011) provides a definition that political communication is a "purposeful communication about politics". That is, that this not only covers verbal or written statements, but also visual representations such as dress, make-up,

hairstyle or logo design. It is observed that political communication is not only essential for politicians and their supporters who need to sell their political messages for predetermined ends .It is also essential for people who need it for their enlightenment. This is because if people are not politically informed they would not be able to make politically informed decisions. Such decisions are not only made during electioneering and election periods as to knowing whom to support and / or to vote for.

Ani (2004) avers that "political communication entails the issues, ideas, policies, personnel, structures, organs, channels, problems, people, messages and even feedback involved in political activities or matters". This is sending political information across to the people for the purpose of enlightenment .

The Role of Political Communication Deliberations in Sustaining Political Serenity and Development

Political communication and deliberations are the most potent and powerful as well as effective tools that facilitate and sustain political serenity and the process is a means of dissemination of information especially in a developing country like Nigeria. They play crucial role in dissemination of information about the functioning of a political entity in order to influence the behaviour of the audience in a variety of ways. These are interactive processes concerning the transmission of information among politicians. The sustenance of the above can be realized by ensuring political communication and deliberations particularly in a multi-ethnic society, like Nigeria. Blumler (113) states that "without doubt the media are the heart of social and political power". Political actors need them not only to publicize their views but importantly to set agenda in the full appreciation of the fact that "control over the definition of a problem is a major state in the policy process". It is therefore important that in a truly deliberative participatory democracy, the main channels of political communication be open and inclusive enough to accommodate the range of voices available in the polity .

Corroborating the above view, Idiong (2004) opines that "political communication is the study of the flow of information through political processes." Political communication therefore is the use of different systems , channels and forms of communication to facilitate the achievement of predetermined ends.

Areas of Contestations/Agitations by Different Socio-cultural Groups in Nigeria

Obioha (1999) defines a socio-cultural group as a collection of people who interact and share a sense of unity on account of a common ethnic, ancestral, generational or regional identity. He further posits that consciousness of one's ethnic origin or background is a psycho-sociological reality that is largely universal in nature.

From the foregoing ,competition pervades all spheres of our existence .Nigeria's socio-cultural environment is characterized by differences with regard to the cultural heritage, religious inclination, language, etc. Conflicts are bound to occur when people with diverse cultures ,economic conditions and political systems are brought together regardless of their dissimilarities. In this context caution is needed in tackling the diverse needs of Nigeria's many ethnic groups and in taking decisions to ensure that the nation's scare resources reach a reasonable percentage of the population rather than benefit only a selected ethnic groups or persons (Mbakaogu, 2002).

The West Africa Weekly Magazine (1996) cited in Mbakaogu summarizes thus : "because our societies comprise a multitude of religious ethnic groups with competing interest, competing values and needs, conflict is inevitable and natural to most African Societies···The challenge is how to develop African Political Processes , constitutions and cultures that can mediate these competitions peacefully ,routinely and in a way that does not plunge our society into spiral of conflicts and violence."

It is imperative to assert that in political communication and in deliberation, the origin and alliance of the political elites and the media houses

cannot be separated from their various geo-political zones. This is so because pressure of identification, sympathy, and popularity will always emerge at some points.

Consequently to aver that political communication and deliberation is enormously influenced by geo-political alliance is not an overstatement. The inalienable resolve to show unalloyed support and identification with one's place of origin and cultural background is paramount and a determinant factor in the quest for political advancement, logic, and promotion of ideologies (some very fallacious and inciting) in the Nigerian context. Even some media houses inadvertently fall to the pressure of these geo-political zones in information dissemination either for the purpose of allegiance or sympathy.

The different socio-cultural groups such as Pandevu (South-South), Afanifere (South-West), Ohaneze Ndi Igbo (South-East) and Arewa Consultative Forum (Northern Region) have continued to agitate. Some of the areas of contestations are as follows: favourable allocation of power and resources, appointment into key political offices/positions, quota system, and marginalization among others.

Favourable allocation of power/resources

Allocation of power and resources are identifiable points that the socio-cultural groups have been agitating for in Nigeria. Almost all the groups contest for power and resources. Each group wants their geo-political zone to hold the power and control the country's economy and/or resources. The agitations are not only about holding of power but that one geo-political zone should not have dominance in terms of power and resources allocation. They see the agitation for power and resources as a do-or-die affair because whoever wields power and resources dictates what happens in the country.

Appointments into key political positions

Another agitating factor of the socio-cultural groups in Nigeria is the appointments of people into key political offices such as Senate President, Minister of Information, Chief Justice of the Federation, Secretary to the Federal Government, Minister of Finance, Chief of Army Staff, Attorney General of the Federation and Inspector General of Police. It has been alleged based on records that almost all the appointed key positions are from the Northern Region. This has continued arousing animosity in the minds of the citizens and other regions.

In a recent telecast the Ohaneze Ndi Igbo had expressed dismay over the issue of marginalization in the appointments of key positions in the country. Recently in the appointment of the new Service Chiefs, the region was excluded hence the agitation to appoint a new IGP from the zone as compensation. This has necessitated an uproar following the retirement of the former Inspector General of Police, Adamu Mohammed. The Ohaneze Ndi Igbo stressed that they have been denied these strategic positions and that it would be wise for a man from the South-Eastern region to be appointed as the new Inspector General of Police in order to pacify them.

Quota system

Quota system is another point of contestation by socio-cultural groups. There have been considerable cases in the past where dividing the national cake has been a serious challenge amongst the six geo-political zones. The national cake includes dividends that accrue from the country's resources. The different socio-cultural groups have continued to contest for such things and their argument have been why they have not been receiving allocations/resources commensurate with the resources they produce. "Why do they have to share in equilibrium with those groups that have little or nothing to offer saying that their resources are being drained towards the sustenance of the next producing regions thereby starving the hen that lays the golden eggs.

Marginalization

Another point of agitation by different socio-cultural groups in Nigeria is marginalization. Different geo-political zones, namely South-East, South-West, South-South and the Northern region state that they were not given the pride of place in

the nation's economy and were not allowed to lend their voices while taking decisions on national issues as it pertains to their individual zones and by so doing, this has caused them to feel less important.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is a known fact that Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones. The quest for superiority and control of national resources has always been the crux of the struggle. Unguided utterances, allegations and bias have always bedeviled political communication and deliberation which has posed a threat to political serenity in Nigeria. Therefore, the media, the agents of the media and the leaders of these political zones should as a matter of urgency censor the interviews, advertorials and programmes they air taking cognizance of the choice of words, and proper validation of information being disseminated.

Without proper and effective political communication and deliberation sustainable political serenity and development cannot be realized. A sustainable political serenity and development in Nigeria is critical and can be achieved through the media, agents of political communication and deliberation with the tools of objectivity, integrity and also ensure there is free flow of information and interaction between them and the citizenry. This will help them to make informed political decisions and as well as bring about peace and harmony in the political milieu.

In view of the foregoing, the media as agents and/or the conveyor belt of political communication and deliberation should as a matter of priority seek ways to create a conducive environment with healthy political information that is capable of sustaining political serenity and development.

Media debate is undoubtedly one of the potent ways of providing political education cum enlightenment for the masses. They should entrench media debate as a culture because it is one of the potent ways of providing political education for the masses.

Media should create and make the main channels of political communication and deliberation open and inclusive enough to accommodate the wide range of voices available in the political milieu.

The government should focus on addressing the issues of marginalization, injustice, appointments of key political positions, transparency and inclusiveness in all affairs. This will go a long way in resolving the increasing agitations by the various socio-cultural groups, in addition to strengthening unity among the country's diverse population as well as in the political environment.

The media should also create adequate space and time for political education and enlightenment to be given the masses. They should give access to all political parties and aspirants to untold their manifestoes and programmes. In addition, the media should organize political debates to ensure that people are acquainted with the qualities and capabilities of political candidates and their parties as well as other political matters that concern the polity.

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