Research Paper

Social Cohesion and Youths in The Nigerian Polity: A Communication Perspective

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ABSTRACT:- The fabrics and strata of Nigerian society have been disorganized and in a state of flux. That accounts for why the nation after 50 years of independence with her abundant resources could not develop at a faster rate as expected. Every aspect of our socio-political life does not seem to work effectively. Indeed, a Nigerian magazine, *Newswatch*, once had a headline "…nothing works in Nigeria". There is a gradual trend of opinion formation in the country by youths. The youths are coming together in unison at newsstands, small gatherings and online foray, discussing national challenges and condemning the spate of progress in the country and asking for the way forward. This paper is concerned about the communication perspective(s) that has made this cohesion, interaction and unity of purpose possible. This work, therefore, takes on a qualitative and exploratory perspective to determine the types of communication that have made this possible; the network of communication, the mode of communication and how the communication processes have influenced the acquisition of opinions by Nigerian youths in the light of governmental or national issues in a quasi democratic setting. The paper suggests that the conduct of government informs basic opinions diffused, especially through inter personal communication and set in concrete by public discourse at newsstands, public gatherings and its extension in cyberspace. Such opinions by the Nigerian youth, forms the basis of his attitude to the polity. Solutions were proffered and recommendations made.

I. INTRODUCTION

When explicable or inexplicable forces draw people together in the face of development or threats to their welfare and purpose of existence in the society, we cannot but take cognizance of the formation of attitudes among social groups brought about through communication and crystallised in homogeneity of opinions. Emile Durkheim had argued that a society (group) that exhibits solidarity is characterised by its cohesion and integration which comes from relative homogeneity. Durkheim considered cohesion in the context of societal transformation. He was particularly concerned with primitive societies which, he found, were marked by mechanical solidarity and a strong collective ethos based on relatively homogeneous patterns of life and work.

More recently, social cohesion has been related to social capital. In the 1990s, Pierre Bourdieu and others focused on the benefits that accrue to individuals through their participation in groups and the need for individuals to invest in these relations. Social cohesion can be understood as a broader concept than social capital in that it considers intergroup relations in a wider context. Easterly, Ritzen, and Woolcock (2006) define social cohesion (or lack thereof) as "the nature and extent of social and economic divisions within society (income, ethnicity, political party, caste, language). Although social cohesion has multiple definitions with differences in focus and emphasis, some common trends emerge as presented in World Development Report (2013):

• That social cohesion is generally viewed as a positive concept. It can be an end in itself, as well as a means. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development describes a cohesive society as one that "works towards the well-being of all its members." The French Commissariat General du Plan defines social cohesion as "a set of social processes that help instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognized as members of the community."

• That social cohesion relates to the interactions among individuals, groups, and societies. These interactions are seen as "the forces holding the individuals within the groupings in which they are" and as linking diverse groups together.

• Social cohesion contributes to sustainable social development. According to the Club de Madrid, "shared societies are stable, safe and just and based on the promotion and protection of all human rights . . . , including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons."

For the purpose of this paper, we understand a socially cohesive society to be one made of interactive groups driven by communication and existing for common interests within and between identity groups, through the binding forces of language and communication. Social cohesion bonds people together in a society. Indeed, such a society cannot exist without the thin thread of communication running through it as the live wire that helps in bonding and sustaining its existence. The relationship between communication and social cohesion is juxtaposed with the assumption that communication is a basic and important variable to consider in understanding cohesion and that the types of communication to a large extent determine the extent and nature of social cohesion in a given society or group. The premise lies in the interactional link between communication and social cohesion as discerned in specific media as well as in relationships.

Media that are likely associated with heightened cohesion are local newspapers, local radio and television stations, as well as local websites. Interactions that tend to be associated with heightened cohesion include the availability of formal and informal meeting places (newsstands, meeting halls or town squares, offices, shops, schools, etc.). The role of communication is seen in the extent to which people use these spaces to discuss issues. We argue that the mass media like newspapers are only a first stage of the role of communication in social cohesion. The second stage is basically interpersonal communication which builds relationships that wield a group together.

Groups of social cohesion have a network of relationships established through communication as a web that weaves such relationships together to trust and identify within and between different groups instance, fighting discrimination, exclusion as well as excessive inequalities. It is such networks of relationships within and between groups that make up the society of every given state. Such different strata in the society could be, among others, in terms of demographic variables like age as in the case of issues that relate to the youths or gender as in the dichotomy between male and female. Indeed, the role of communication as a major force in wielding cohesiveness whether socially, politically or otherwise cannot be overemphasized. In the past in Nigeria, different strata of the population had wielded cohesion. There was a time the elders were more formidable in the social structure than the youths until now. There was also a time women were more formidable than the men in social cohesion and organisations. A case in point was the Aba women riot of 1929 in Nigeria.

The Aba Women's Riot started in November 1929, when thousands of Igbo women from the Bende District of Nigeria, the nearby Umuahia and other places in Eastern Nigeria traveled to Oloko clan to protest against the Warrant Chiefs (representing colonial officials), whom they accused of restricting the role of women in the government and especially for attempting to extend taxation to women. This incident became known as the Igbo Women's War or Rebellion of 1929. During the events, many Native Courts were attacked, most of which were destroyed and burned down. And, using the traditional practice of censoring men through all night song and dance intended to ridicule (often called "sitting on a man"), the women chanted and danced, and in some locations, forced warrant chiefs to resign their positions. The women also attacked European owned stores and Barclays Bank and broke into prisons and released prisoners. Colonial Police and troops were called in. They fired into the crowds that had gathered at Calabar and Owerri, killing more than 50 women and wounding over 50 others. During the two month "war" at least 25,000 Igbo women were involved in protests against British officials.

The women's revolt was ignited by a dispute between a widow named Nwanyereuwa and a man, Mark Emereuwa, who was helping the Warrant Chief, Okugo, to make a census of the people living in Oloko rural community. This was after a rumor had spread among the women that the recently introduced taxation of men was to be extended to them. The rumor was all through the locality in a few days, spreading anger and dismay which were all the more intense because at this time the price of palm-produce was falling, and new customs duties had put up the cost of several imported articles of daily use. There was what could be described as hyperinflation in the land. The women were greatly perturbed: "We depend upon our husbands, we cannot buy food or clothes ourselves and how shall we get money to pay tax?" They decided to mobilize. "We women," as one of them stated afterwards in her evidence, "therefore held a large meeting at which we decided to wait until we heard definitely from one person that women were to be taxed, in which case we would make trouble, as we did not mind to be killed for doing so".

On the morning of November 18, Mark Emereuwa arrived at Nwanyereuwa, the widow's house and told her to "count her goats, sheep and people." Since Nwanyereuwa understood this to mean, "How many of these things do you have so we can tax you based on them", she was angry. She replied by saying "Was your

widowed mother counted?" meaning "that women don't pay tax in traditional Igbo society."[1] The two exchanged angry words, and Nwanyeruwa went to the town square to discuss the incident with other women who happened to be holding a meeting to discuss the issue of taxing women. Believing they would be taxed, based on Nwanyeruwa's account, the Oloko women invited other women from other areas in the Bende District, as well as from Umuahia and Ngwa. They gathered nearly 10,000 women who protested at the office of Warrant Chief Okugo, demanding his resignation and calling for a trial. The leaders of the protest in Oloko, which we could also refer to as opinion leaders are known as the Oloko Trio: Ikonnia, Mwannedia and Nwugo. The three were known for their skills in speaking, their intelligence and their passion.

Instructively, the women were able to win their cause partly because of the role of language and communication within and between the women group(s) which established trust, common values an a form of cohesion among the women. In communicating, they spoke one language; they spoke with one voice! In effect, communication within and among groups is not "just" talk; rather, it can mobilize people to action (which can be either positive or negative in its effects).

In the same vein, the youths as a stratum in the society can present significant outcomes to the social cohesion and political stability of a country if their basic welfare and living conditions are not secured as a group in their own right. The new dawn of transformation in Nigeria which brought with it high expectations of a democratic era seems still, to have largely unfulfilled promises and the youths of today in the polity, are the most affected. Nigerian youths have metamorphosed over the years from apathy and passitivity to become a force to be reckoned with in the Nigerian polity and the change agent seems to be rooted in receiving, processing and dissemination of information. Today, Nigerian youths take advantage of any communication fora for discussions and debate. The issues discussed range from politics, economy, human interest, crime to sports. The fora of these discussions are bringing together the youths to arrive at decisions on issues, developmental challenges and the way forward. There is therefore the need to know the social communication fora, particularly the new, influencing the discussion and debate of youths on issues.

Consequently, the Nigerian youth of today have attained a high level of awareness and interactive communication. The youths have metamorphosed into 'citizens' as they become aware of local issues and learn of opportunities for participation. This has helped them to achieve social cohesion on stances bothering on national development, good governance and participatory politics. This paper seeks to identify the communication perspective that might have helped facilitate such social cohesion among the youths. It is primarily concerned about the interpersonal and group communication perspective instead of the perspective of the modern mass media which have been the delight of many researchers in Africa.

Specifically, the paper has as its objectives: identifying types of communication that have made possible group formations among youths; the network of communication, the mode of communication as well as how the communication processes have influenced the acquisition of opinions and attitudes among Nigerian youths. In line with this, salient questions were raised: what type of communications engages the youths more? What about the mode and their network of communication? And how does such communication processes influence opinions and attitudes that they hold? These would be dealt with after reviewing some literature of relevance to this paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A relatively large literature has addressed the concept of social cohesion. However, there is a dearth of records of systematic studies that have been conducted with respect to the communicative perspectives of social cohesion among youths in Nigeria. In this section therefore, we propose relevant theories that serve as foundation for this paper.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical approach takes on a collection of theories; first, with the multiple step or two-step flow theory as one of several theories relevant to our discussion. The basis of this theory as propounded by Lazersfield, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) is that information flow through two basic stages. From the media to relatively well informed person who frequently attend to the media and then, from those well informed persons, through interpersonal communication to individuals who have less exposure to the mass media or are largely dependent on the significant other for information.

This means that though not all youths in Nigeria may be continually exposed to the mass media, they get information from the media about government from other opinion leaders who are more exposed to the mass media. The opinions of such informed individuals who may be members of youth peer groups are respected even though they most often inject their own interpretations of the communication content which they get from the media before passing information to others. This may be of great influence on others. The theory implies

that the mass media are the first gatekeepers and that they do make important inputs into a very complex web of social relationship in competition with other sources of ideas and knowledge.

This is in line with the Interpretative and Interaction theories whereby communication is seen as an exchange of ideas among people who act with information and interpret their real situation based on the information at their disposal. Thus, we situate communication in a social and cultural context where all communication is based on meaning and interaction. In this context, we understand communication to mean first and foremost, a multi-faceted aspect of a class or group that 'can act as a glue to bind people together; as oil to lubricate social and economic relations; and as a web to mark lines of influence and interaction. Thus, effective communication can be seen as a cause of social cohesion, inasmuch as it can build a stock of common experience and common purpose' (Emke, Bruce and Wilkinson, 2012*).

III.   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To come up with the outcome of this paper, the focus group discussion was employed. A panel sampling method was used to select six (6) members for each of the two groups. Each group was moderated by each of the authors of this paper. Also, each group had three (3) sociologists and three (3) communication experts. The idea of two different discussion groups is to achieve validity and reliability of the outcomes. The choice of sociologists and communication experts was based on injecting expert inputs and ensuring objective analysis. The panel discussed on the types of communication that have made possible the present cohesion among youths to take stances on issues of national development, the mode of communication, the communication network and the communication processes.

•   On the types of communication, the discussants identified that there is majorly, a new interpersonal communication that emerged, christened newsstand chain communication, and acknowledged that there were also other types of communication which made the news stand chain communication possible, such as the Internet and its social media, the critical press, the independent broadcast media as well as other interpersonal and small group communication found in drinking bars, conversational bands, informal and formal public gatherings, etc.

The news stand chain communication is a chain of small groups of people usually youths who gather at newsstands in different places in Nigeria to read newspapers and magazines free of charge. This new type of communication accidentally emerged, owing to the poverty level in the country where many youths who could not afford to buy newspapers and magazines to read, gather at newsstands to read them and informally discuss issues arising from them.

To analyze and put this finding into perspective, there is a need for a historical, integrative and interpretive approach. This is because one type of communication leads to another and attitude and behavior of youths as social beings also change dialectically from time to time. In the time past which spanned from the colonial, independence and military eras, some types of communication shaped the fabrics and polity of Nigerian society. These affected all strata of Nigerian society including the youths who were then dependent, subservient and submissive to the elders.

The polity was held together by the government, and radio which began in 1932 and later television, which was first established in 1959 were used to hold the people together. Communication from the broadcast media had status conferral of credibility of truth and any messages from them were accepted by the people. Communication then was exclusive, majorly targeted at the then ignorant but rural mass audience. Broadcasting enjoyed power of social control, more importantly to the audience that were then passive, without mass education and ignorant of their rights, particularly right to information and free speech.

This development held the major fabrics of society cohesively for the government. The print media although earlier introduced in Nigeria in the late 19th century, was urban inclined and served the few literate audience. They brought together radical elements of the elites who used them to woo the masses to clamour for independence. In the course of national development, two elite groups emerged: the radical group and the conservative group. The radical group wanted early termination of colonial rule. The conservative group was composed of civil servants, traditional rulers and their scions etc., who were more colonial than the colonial masters, wanted colonial rule to last longer so that Nigerians would understand properly the arts of governance.

Furthermore, the print media which were generally critical of colonial rule eventually wooed the majority of the emerging middle class and workers to their side which culminated to dismantling colonial rule. The print media, particularly newspapers, were the vocal communication media that terminated colonial rule.

At the end of colonial rule, the indigenous government in Nigeria held to the broadcast media exclusively while eyeing to emasculate the liberalism enjoyed by the print media. The early military government that overthrew the civilian administration controlled the print media both at federal and state levels. Dissent voices in the media were dealt with and frustrated which discouraged independent print media. This development muzzled the opinion of the masses in favour of the government through massive propaganda.

Over time, the masses lost interest in the government print media such as Daily Times, New Nigeria etc., and the independent or private print media such as Newbreed, Concord, Newswatch, Tell, etc., emerged. The independent print media helped in terminating military rule. Before then, the absence of vocal and critical press had entrenched a culture of muteness and what a famous Nigerian musician, Fela, called "suffering and smiling' which became the order of life in Nigeria. Rumour was rife in all facets of life while truth and public opinion were stifled.

It is important to state that under the military rule, the entire polity was not radicalized except students in tertiary institutions who were influenced by the Marxist books they read, the Marxist philosophy of the teachings they received and their exposure to topical issues in the print media. They formed the nucleus of what led to the distinctiveness and cohesion of Nigerian youths on issues of national development. Then, the rest of the youths were docile and passive.

Today, almost every youth is radicalized. It is pertinent to state that the fabrics of Nigerian society are no longer knotted together and led by elders, as they use to be because of the introduction of certain communication dynamics which have separated the youths among other fabrics or strata of society. Many youths have become well exposed and vulnerable to the new media – the Internet and its social media. They correlate issues of development among themselves and among other countries and relate them to the Nigerian case.

In addition, the broadcast media have undergone radical change with the emergence of independent broadcast media that present alternative views different from government propaganda. This development has afforded the youths the opportunity to zip and zap out of government owned broadcast media. There have been mass education and high increase in literacy level of which the youths are beneficiaries. The development has created centripetal forces binding the youths together and making them distinctive from the rest of the strata as formidable stratum and cornerstone with which the Nigerian society in near future may rest. New communication means and modes have emerged such as the multi-media, ICT, newsstand chain which is our focus here, and other small social gatherings attractive to youths.

- On the issue of the new communication network used, the discussants looked at the news stand chain communication as basically informal. They agreed with Ogbulogo (2004) that a communication network is concerned with the routes through which information, messages or all aspects of communication flow in a society or organization. Among all the networks of communication associated with this type of communication, they were of the understanding that the cluster pattern communication network which is informal represents better, the news stand chain communication and its ancillaries of other small gatherings of drinking bars, conversational bands, social networks etc.

It is called cluster pattern communication network because there are thousand and one small groups of newsstand chain communication scattered here and there in Nigerian Urban and semi-urban areas. News stand chain communication is mostly urban situated. This is because supply of newspapers and magazines are usually more in urban and semi-urban areas. In Nigeria, there is rural-to-urban migration involving youths. Many, if not most youths live in the urban areas. The news stand chain communication is made of several clusters not too many distances from one another. Contacts with each cluster are achieved either accidentally or purposively. Some participants of one news stand cluster migrate unintentionally to another cluster and continue discussions there. Also, there is a new development in this communication situation where some participants enjoy moving from one news stand to another for the fun of the discussions and eliciting of opinions. This is evidenced more in sports and crucial political developments. It is purposive. These participant migrants provide the chain to link various news stand clusters. The same or similar pattern exists in the case of other small group gatherings.

Ogbulogo (2004), describing cluster pattern communication network, states that cluster pattern operates in the organization or society in which an individual can belong to many groups. He further states that:
There are chances whoever gets this information first
Will share it with members of the groups he belongs to.
Information circulates in clusters depending on the
Subgroups to which members belong (p.20).

The cluster pattern is represented diagrammatically thus:
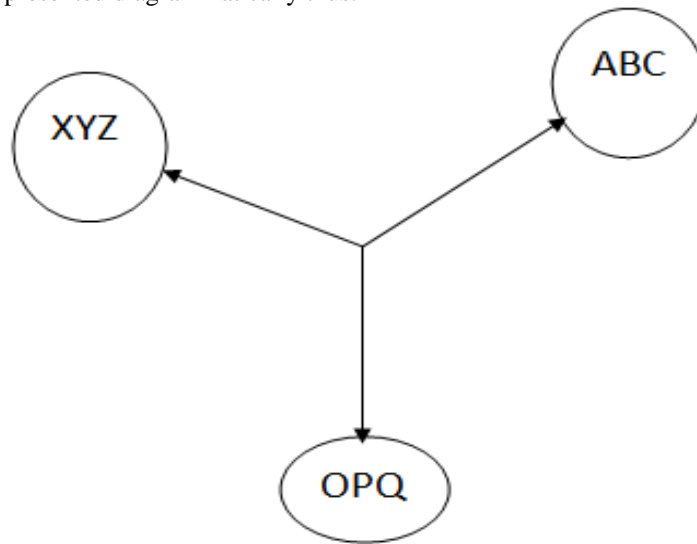
Source: Ogbulogo (2004)

According to Ogbulogo, the clusters are made up of XYZ, ABC and OPQ. An individual can belong to these groups and pass the same information to them.

- The panel also looked at the mode of communication which is the way a communication type operates. It recognized the news stand chain communication as either interpersonal communication or group communication. Sometimes, the participants may be two or few persons and in some up to 25 persons or more. The scenario is a face-to-face communication, requiring multi-sensory appeal.

This kind of communication is naturally interactive or two-way. It is primarily structured for discussion and debate on issues arising from the print media. The discussions and debate could say public opinion. This agrees with the two-step flow communication theory and agenda setting theory. The two-step flow theory, as cited in Bittner (1989), states that:

> Much of the information disseminated by the mass media
> Comes to the individual's attention secondhand from people
> Who relay their interpretation of it.

In the case of Agenda-setting function theory, Mbazie and Ogbulu state that:

> The agenda-setting theory posits that the media
> Determine the issues and their importance to the
> Public which the public worry about and discuss (p.20)

News stand chain communication operates by information disseminated in the press and passed to opinion leaders among the participants who interpret the information to other participants at the news stands. The issues in the media are of worry to the participants and are discussed by them.

It is pertinent to state that apart from discussion and debate, the news stand chain communication is used to disseminate information as grapevine and other sources of information on the issues unknown to some of the participants. It provides a forum to gauge feedback on the news issues.

- On the process of the communication, the discussants were of the view that news stand chain communication is a type of communication where any person in the news stand reading or standing by could raise the issue. Every other person begins to contribute his or her own opinion. Opinion leaders among them are listened to. The communication process is ongoing and reciprocal which could sway the opinion of others.

Sometimes, the atmosphere could be charged with sentiments that could nearly result in fisticuffs. In spite of that, one thing is clear; in many cases opinions are formed from the newsstands or influenced from them. The stands are now attracting a lot of youths, not necessarily because they cannot afford to buy the newspapers and magazines but because they want to participate in the newsstands discussions and debate. The issues discussed range from politics, social, economic, human interest, and environment to sports.

In these issues, the newsstand participants have developed a pattern of querying the national developmental challenges, condemning the spate of slow progress which they heap on the past military rule, selfish politicians, corruption in the system, ethnicity and so on. Some participants in some cases had gone ahead to suggest the way forward. This order of discussion has been consistent for some time now. The focus

group panel of discussants agreed that the development (newsstand communication) is a good omen likely to shape the polity and governance in due course. They appreciated the unison or cohesion persisting among the youths through the news stand chain communication and similar groups of that nature.

IV. CONCLUSION

From this paper, it is clear that communication is central to cohesion in society. The types and perspectives of communication shape the cohesion of strata or a stratum of society. In Nigeria, news stand chain communication and its sundries are now a factor in helping in establishing cohesion among youths in taking stances on developmental issues and attitude formations towards governance and development. This type of communication employs the cluster pattern of communication network, the mode is face to face and the process is interactive in form of discussions and debate. The outcome of this paper lends credence to the limited effects media theory which states that the media have limited effects and that most of their effects are drawn from interpersonal communication.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of newsstands chain communication need not be over-emphasized. The news stand chain communication can be enhanced upon to be more effective. The newsstand chain communication and its sundries can be utilized as follows:

i.   Change agents can use it to gauge public opinion on topical issues of development.

ii.   They can use it for advocacy. Advocates can zone the newsstands and participate to sell ideas on issues to the groups. Those converted can convert others.

iii.   Studies on entropies of newsstands chain communication should be encouraged to ascertain and improve on it.

iv.   Newsstand chain communication can be developed to accommodate multi-step flow where opinions drawn from newsstands can be extended to homes to build cohesion across strata.

v.   Newsstand chain communication as strong communication links can be used to mobilise youth groups for action in the face of a crisis, political campaigns or in general enlightenment of developmental issues that bother on their existence.

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