Media and Society: Deconstructing the Role of the Media in Fostering Social Cohesion in Contemporary Nigerian Society

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Abstract
With an aggregation of over 200 ethnic groups, Nigeria is bedevilled with issues arising from social conflicts, marginalisation, fragmentation and ethnic rivalry. From the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents in the North East, the militancy in the South-South, the rampaging 'herdsmen' in the North Central to the secessionist agitations in the South East, the threat to national integration has become grave and increasingly worrisome. The erosion of national identity, the increase in structural inequalities and the rise in individualism are phenomena that have continued to disparage the modest achievements of the modern Nigeria state. Leveraging on its social responsibility roles in society, the media is expected to promote unity and the convergence of diverse ethnic interests. This expectation rests upon the assumption that the media as an institution is believed to have become one of the greatest influencers in contemporary societies. However, this is not always the case. Controlled by their owners and some pseudo-bourgeoisies, the media sometimes instigate social conflicts through the framing of news and contents in ways that project sectional interests and bias. Through analysis of extant literature, this paper focuses on unravelling the causal factors in social cohesion and the critical role of the media both in instigating conflict and also in engendering social cohesion in Nigeria.
Keywords: Social cohesion; Social conflicts, Marginalisation; Ethnic rivalry; Media and Society

1.   Introduction

The concept of social cohesion is both intriguing and complicated owing to the difficulty in its measurement or application and driven by multiple definitions. Conceptually, different scholars approach social cohesion from the perspective of their individual disciplines. Thus, in sociology, the social structure constitutes the framework for the understanding of social and organisational group behaviour; while in psychology, cohesiveness simply refers to shared emotions and behavioural characteristics among individuals within a group. In general, the term social cohesion refers to the complimentary social relationships existing between members of a group or society. It is the bond that binds people together within a given society (Cloete & Kotze, 2009). Thus, a socially cohesive society is one that promotes the mutual well-being of her people, dissuades exclusion, discourages marginalisation, encourages belongingness and trust, and supports her people to progress.

Social cohesion may be undermined by a variety of social trends, including unregulated migration, the erosion of national/state identities, the rise of individualism and increasing structural inequalities in societies (Green, Janmaat, & Cheng, 2011). These forces impact both developed and developing countries affected by globalisation, migrations and technological advancements. Increasing cases of terrorism, social disorder and tensions between diverse ethnic groups have led to the development of new initiatives aimed at promoting social cohesion. Some studies have recommended that the definition of cohesion be expanded to accommodate neighbourhoods, cities and countries with emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of individuals as well as their trust in political institutions (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). However, the increasing surge of migrants across national boundaries is a development that is complicating attempts to widen that definition. Several policies designed by the affected countries to inhibit the flow of migrants to their states have been mostly ineffective. As a result, countries are struggling with managing the influx of migration as well as integrating migrants into their societies. In some cases, the failure of social integration is evident in highly isolated and polarised populations necessitating a need to prevent social instability. Thus, accepting immigrants is usually at the risk of altering the nature of the society and distorting social cohesion (Duncan, 2007).

In a pluralistic and multicultural society like Nigeria**,** social cohesion may be seen from the viewpoint of the capacity of the nation to ensure and guarantee the well-being of her people while reducing disparities and polarisation to the barest minimum. This means the existence of a harmonious relationship between the major ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Ijaw, Tiv) and across the over 200 minorities in Nigeria. The protests against perceived marginalisation and agitations for self-determination across different geographical zones and ethnic groups have been on the increase since the return of democratic rule in 1999. This may be an indication that all is not well with Nigeria, which raises the issue of political restructuring and reintegration (Ajayi & Owumi, 2013). The activities of IPOB, MASSOB, Niger Delta Avengers, OPC, Egbesu Boys, Arewa Youths, and many others, are all symptoms of societal conflict arising from fear of domination or marginalisation. For instance, IPOB and MASSOB in the South East are asking for a separate state as a result of perceived neglect by the centre; OPC in the South West is propagating power shift to their zone while Niger Delta Avengers, MEND and other militias from the Niger Delta are fighting against what they refer to as 'social injustice and

marginalization' (Adejumobi, 2003). Thus, cohesiveness in Nigeria will require a deliberate strategy targeted at building a society where the people are mutually supportive and free to pursue common goals through democratic means, irrespective of their ethnic, religious or cultural orientations. To achieve this, a comprehensive knowledge of factors that contribute to social cohesion is needed. This paper primarily focuses on highlighting the critical role of the media in fostering social cohesion within the Nigerian society against the background of evolving patterns in social stratification.

2.   Social Cohesion: Definition and Components

Social cohesion can simply be described as the 'glue' which binds society together. A fundamental concern for sociologists, however, is to isolate or identify that 'glue'. In general, it is not surprising that the interest in a clear understanding of social cohesion has been on the increase. What is rather curious is that the desire to arrive at a universal definition of the concept has been jettisoned, with scholars and government functionaries affirming that the concept is multidimensional. Consequently, the focus now is more on unravelling the nature of its multidimensionality. Larsen (2013) defines social cohesion as the belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other. Most discussions on social cohesion almost always dwell on its absence than its presence. Conceptually, social cohesion posits that there is a need for a bond that sustains societies over time through some shared orientations within their population with ways of testing convergence or divergence of ideas and values (Jakubowicz, 2007).

Theoretically, social cohesion has been described as incorporating five different components (Jenson, 1998; Kearns & Forrest, 2000). Jenson (1998) identified five distinct dimensions within the concept of social cohesion. The first dimension is belongingness or isolation represented by the sharing of a similar set of values. The second is inclusion or exclusion: referring to unbiased access to economic institutions. The third dimension deals with participation or non-involvement within the local society in the context of democratic practices while the fourth dimension deals with recognition or rejection which recognises diversity within the society. The fifth dimension focuses on legitimacy or illegitimacy and deals with institutional legitimacy.

Table 6: Components of social cohesion

BELONGINESS (Shared values and identity)	• A sense of connection to and pride in the community or the nation. • A sense of trust in others in one's community. • Measure: Strong identification with particular social groups, sense of connectedness to the community.
INCLUSION (Equal opportunities for access)	• The extent to which community members have equal access to resources in the community, including education, employment, healthcare and housing. • Providing opportunities for individuals to maximise their rights (social, political, cultural and economic).
PARTICIPATION (Engagement in structure and systems)	• Political/civic participation, • Community/social participation, including volunteering
RECOGNITION (Respect and Tolerance)	• Mutual respect and tolerance. • The extent to which community members feel they are accepted or rejected by others in the community. • Measures: intergroup attitudes, the experience of discrimination/prejudice/racism, general perceptions of the extent to which there are tolerance and mutual respect in the community.
LEGITIMACY (Pluralism)	• Reflects more formal institutional level factors (policies relating to pluralism and multiculturalism), and public confidence in institutions such as the political system, governments and unions. • Reflects the need for macro-institutions that can manage or mediate potential conflict in pluralistic societies.

Source: Jenson, J. (1998). *Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research.* Ontario: Canadian Policy Research Networks

In another investigation on social cohesion, Kearns & Forrest (2000) also arrived at five dimensions:
- Commitment to the political system and sharing of similar values;
- Social order and control;
- Social solidarity and drastic reduction in disparity in wealth;
- Social interactions;
- Strict adherence to a specific territory.

 In summary, both studies sought to identify those components that are very critical in high cohesive

societies. These can be summarised as follows:

Table 2: The core elements of social cohesion

Key Components	Jenson (1998)	Kearns & Forrest (2000)
Culture	Belonging/isolation	Shared values and civic culture territorial belonging and identity
Civil Society	Participation/non-involvement;	Social networks and social capital
Citizenship	Inclusion/exclusion recognition/rejection	Social solidarity. Drastic reduction in wealth disparities
Social Order	Legitimacy or illegitimacy	Social order / control

The first component identified within this framework is the culture. In high cohesive societies, individuals share a common set of values, norms, and rules within a specific territory, akin to what Emile Durkheim referred to as 'conscience collective'. This was, perhaps, more prevalent in pre-modern cultures but rarely exists in contemporary pluralistic societies. However, in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, people aggregate along cultural lines with those sharing similar culture more likely to relate with each other than with those from different cultures.

The second component of social cohesion described as civil society is quite intriguing. The high interest in this area can be attributed to Robert Putnam's (1993) seminal work on social capital and democratic performance. He posited that social efficiency is driven by social capital – trust, norms and networks – rather than economic preconditions. The structural component of social capital is well treated by both Jenson (1998) and Kearns & Forrest (2000) with the later describing it as the most critical component of social cohesion. Civil society relates to those factors that bind individuals together. For instance, irrespective of the ethnic group or religion one belongs to, Nigerians have common needs. They want health care, sound education, and good governance. That is what most people are interested in when they vote for their leaders. Ethnic orientations may not necessarily impinge on the commonality of aspirations among people living in civil societies. To that extent, it is possible that trust and social relations can easily grow between such individuals regardless of their ethnicity.

The third component deals with citizenship. Citizenship consists of three elements, civil, social and political rights. According to Berger (1988), citizenship is essential because, in contemporary pluralistic societies, there is bound to be conflict over the control of scarce but valuable resources. There is a need, therefore, to ensure that no individual or group is excluded or denied access to the commonwealth. One of the reasons for militancy in the Niger Delta is the perception that the wealth accruing from the region is spent outside the region leading to the impoverishment of the Delta region. Whenever any section of the country feels marginalised, it is bound to result in some form of agitation or conflict. The protests from the South East region against the lopsidedness in the appointments to political offices by the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari are illustrative of this fact. If left unaddressed, those protests can inflame secessionists' tendencies or bolster the demand for a new Biafran state.

The final component of social cohesion is social order. This is by far the most interesting aspect for sociologists. In describing social order, Kearns & Forrest (2000) made reference to social cohesion as 'a byproduct of the routines, demands, and reciprocities involved in everyday life'. In this context, social cohesion is viewed as a process through which individuals depend on, cooperate and make exchanges with each other. Social psychologists argue that in diverse settings, social order is hard to achieve because the human person has the tendency to associate with mainly those who share similar beliefs with him (Rokeach et al., 1960). However, it is not impossible for individuals who have different beliefs to associate with each other particularly when resources are distributed across different zones. In such circumstances, interdependence will most likely enhance social cohesion. This symbiotic relationship is evident when we highlight the fact that the Northern states in Nigeria produce most of the food eaten in the country whereas the main natural resource – crude oil – comes from the Niger Delta.

2.1   Epistemology of Social Integration and Social Cohesion

Like other scholars in the field of sociology, Durkheim was fascinated by the question, 'What keeps societies together?' His curiosity was driven by his observation of two different forms of social realities which laid the foundation for his work titled, *De la Division du Travail Social, 1973*. Durkheim found out that in pre-modern societies, social cohesion is a consequence of similarities between individuals. This simply means that societies are cohesive because the individuals are similar. This resulted in some form of mechanical solidarity where every member of the society carried out the same tasks as all others within the society. Social cohesion here is driven by dependency on the society, and not necessarily on the individuals.

With the industrial revolution came drastic changes in societies. One of such is the rise of differentiation and specialisation which embedded people in large networks of specialised groups that depend on each other for productivity. This led to the formation of a new kind of solidarity which Durkheim called 'organic solidarity' and which refers to, 'the interdependence of people in a systematic relationship of exchange with one another

(Giddens, 1978). According to Durkheim, modern societies do not disintegrate as a result of this differentiation. Conversely, "organic solidarity creates among men an entire system of rights and duties which link them together in a durable way" (Durkheim, 1964). This increase in interdependence is evident in the production structure. For example, in an agrarian economy, a large number of individuals could be self-sufficient. However, in modern society, industries depend on raw materials supplied by others and sell in markets operated by others (Larsen, 2013). According to Durkheim, this relationship is what gave rise to organic solidarity. Some scholars have questioned the assumption that organic solidarity is capable of binding people together in highly differentiated societies. However, Durkheim's argument points to the fact that in modern societies, we all are compelled to interact with people we do not know. This concept is at the heart of modern sociological view on the centrality of trust in social relations.

3.   The Media and Societal Conflict

Studies have shown that war, conflict, and the media are inseparable. Owens-Ibie (2002) describes this relationship as one driven by natural attraction. The underlying reason for this is because war is a major story. Butler (1935) declared that war is a racket, possibly the oldest and easily the most profitable that benefits only a handful of insiders. According to him, the First World War produced 21,000 millionaires and billionaires in the United States alone. In the era of modern communication, conflict is attractive to a broad audience such that the greater the conflict, the larger the audience and consequently, the more the financial returns to the media 'hegemons'(Akin, 2005). Although there may be some element of truth in these conjectures, the insinuation that the media are both advocates and the highest beneficiaries of conflicts appear a bit far-fetched. One strong voice that has risen in defence of the media is David Loyn, a BBC correspondent, who completely disagrees with the view that war correspondents are overtly addicted to violence. According to him, the media under-reports conflicts as they always fail to expose the beginning stages of conflicts. Critics of media role in conflicts contend that their attention is more in the visible and, in many cases, on the violent manifestations of conflict and not in the root causes (Lynch & Galtung, 2010).

Nevertheless, the postulation that the media are implicated in the proliferation of wars is worrisome. Some scholars have accused the media of complicity in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya (Zenebe, 2012). The Rwandan civil war was fuelled by strong sentiments based on the projection of ethnic, cultural and religious differences by the media, albeit with some financial motivation (Chirot & Seligman, 2001; Henderson & Watson, 2005; Kriesberg, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2001). In the case of Rwanda, the media were allegedly used to mobilise societal groups by political leaders seeking personal gains from the conflict (Frohardt & Temin, 2003; Howard, 2003). In Yugoslavia, political heavyweights were accused of having hijacked the media to stir ethnic tensions during the period preceding the civil war (Frohardt & Temin, 2003). And in Nigeria, the agitation for Biafra was driven by the media – Radio Biafra.

However, it is important to note that extant literature on conflict reporting is not entirely biased against the role of the media. The media may have contributed in triggering wars, but some believe that they have also helped in ending same, as was the case in Vietnam (Lynch & Galtung, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2001). In the Nigerian situation, the media have played critical roles in both instigating conflicts as well as advocating for social cohesion. A case in point is that of Ese Ororu, a teenager that was abducted and 'forcefully' married by a Hausa young man. The news was framed in such a manner that it moved the Christians in the southern part of Nigeria against the Moslem North. What is instructive is that similar crimes do occur within the Christian communities in the South without generating any significant interest from the media. Another instance of where the media instigated conflict is the recent 'herdsmen' attacks across the country. The media branded the killers 'Fulani Herdsmen' even when the Nigerian Police was struggling to unravel the identities of individuals behind the rampage. The labelling of the killers as 'Fulani' invoked tribal sentiments and resentment against the tribe in many parts of the country, notwithstanding the fact that the president himself is of Fulani extraction. Contrary to this framing by the media, there are perceptions in some quarters that the killers could be fleeing Boko Haram members who may not even be herdsmen or members of the Fulani tribe. Media misrepresentations such as these contribute in dividing the nation along ethnic and religious lines. On the other hand, the Nigerian media has contributed in bringing all kinds of individuals who had no prior relationships with each other together. This is evident in the interactions and activities of individuals in the various social media platforms. The evolution of the new media has contributed a lot in this respect. Hausas, Igbos, Yoruba and others who share the same feeling, ideologies, and beliefs but come from different sections of the country aggregate on chat rooms, forums and groups on social media. This has facilitated the formation of relationships across ethnic lines.

Although some scholars have argued that it is wrong to assume that there is a cause – effect relationship between the news coverage by the media and the chances of preempting, preventing or even limiting conflict without other supporting or collaborative evidence (Gowing, 1994), it may be necessary to pursue further investigation of that connection through more research in this area.

3.1   The Media and Social Cohesion

The public sphere is the epicentre where social cohesion can be negotiated and experienced and provides the avenue for discursive engagement among diverse groups that make up contemporary societies (Habermas, 1989). Usually, the public sphere incorporates the media as well as the myriads of diverse individual clusters in the society. According to Anderson (1991), the public sphere is a space where creative energy is utilised in imagining communities and where interactions, negotiations, engagement, resolution, and accommodation are enabled and facilitated.

With the increase in public concern about social conflicts in Nigeria, the media are positioned to highlight the underlying factors that contribute to disengagement, violence, and antipathies within groups. One key characteristic of many complex societies is the existence of processes and procedures that instigate cohesion as well as deepen divisions (Jakubowicz, 2007). This has been termed as the synthesis and catalysis of social capital. Social capital in this sense comprises of two key elements: bonding, which links people within groups together, and bridging which builds bridges across different groups. The pertinent question at this point is to ascertain how the Nigerian media have fared in propagating these links and thus facilitating social cohesion. How much does the media support for social cohesion contribute to a unitary system of values or the diversity of the same? Moreover, how have the media helped in assisting individuals to gain a better understanding of the relevance of social cohesion as well as in stimulating attitudinal changes that enhance social integration?

It is mostly through the media that debates are carried out on acceptable cultural values in the Nigerian context. The media provides the platform for the production, circulation, consumption and negotiation of meaning in societies held together by cultural networks (Jakubowicz, 2007). Because they provide the direction for communication in complex societies, the media is critical in promoting both cohesion and conflict in the society (Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). For some Marxist theorists, the media is seen as a critical tool in the creation of social order (Thompson, 1995). In societies where the ruling class comes from a single ethnic group, political and economic power may merge to produce a strong ethnocultural dominant group focused on promoting and preserving the interests of one ethnic group through the media (Jakubowicz, 2007). In some cases, the control of media messages may lie somewhere between the media proprietors, interest groups and government agencies. In such scenarios, the media facilitate the emergence of the public sphere and are firmly embedded in social relations. Thus, the media taxonomy by mode, location, technology and audience ensure a wholesome public debate and flexible communication arena. In this respect, the media could easily be dominated by interest groups focused on selfish goals and involved in the competition for power and other scarce resources in the society. A third viewpoint is that the media represents the interests of the masses and the essential values of the society are found among the common citizens. In this case, the media binds the citizenry to the society and ensures that they become an essential part of the production and consumption process by empowering them with the information they need to fulfil both individual and collective aspirations.

Although the view that the media facilitates social cohesion more than they engender social conflict in Nigeria appears more widespread, it is pertinent to interrogate that assumption further using the different parameters the media adopts to process information about social relations and disseminate same to the public as a yardstick. According to Jakubowicz (2007), such methods include mobilisation, fragmentation, stereotyping and marginalisation. The table below highlights the modes and examples of media practices in consideration to social cohesion and offers a summary of how an understanding of media theories fuse with media practices.

Table 3: Modes and Examples of Media Practices

Theory/Process	Mobilization	Fragmentation	Stereotyping	Marginalization
Media as Instrument of control	Directs society against those seen as threat	Limits participation of marginalised groups; supports fragmentation of minority media	Selectively simplifies and characterises threats to interests of dominant cultures	Sustains dominant ethnocultural groups; represents dominant worldviews
Media as public sphere	Supports the expression of culture and opinions by multiple publics	Supports participation and group interaction	Acts to undermine stereotypes by portraying contradictory and complex realities	Seeks to facilitate expression of diverse worldviews
Media as populist hero	Mobilises masses when perception that threat to core values not acted on by elites	Only allows mainstream views, seeks to fragment and exclude others	Operates on crude stereotypes that differentiate 'mainstream' from others	Supports the expression of populist real values against perceived elites.

Source: Jakubowicz, A. (2007). The Media and Social Cohesion. In J. Jupp, J. Nieuwenhuysen, & E. Dawson
    (Eds.), *Social Cohesion in Australia* (pp. 158-169). Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Generally, it appears that the way the media portrays ethnic and racial minorities contributes to the emergence of stereotypes. Representations of minority groups in the western media, for example, are characterised by reports that focus more on their shortcomings, which leaves the audience with the negative perceptions of such minorities (Liu, 2006). For Mastro (2003), exposure to negative racial images in the media has a negative impact on subsequent evaluations of minority groups. Usually, minorities are stereotyped through the process of exclusion in news and entertainment media by offering limited coverage and space or by ignoring their viewpoints outrightly (Fursich, 2010). In many cases, the media often portray minorities as deviant. This, however, is not always the case. In Nigerian where most of the big media houses are owned or managed by the elite and those with strong political affiliations, the news is frequently framed in line with their political inclinations. It is common for news that project the interests of the media owners to be amplified while those that are perceived as negative are downplayed. The Nation Newspapers, for example, owned by the Tinubu family tends to take a pro-APC (the ruling political party) stance in many cases. Thus, the media in Nigeria can and are most times used as weapons of political warfare and domination in the hands of the political class.

On a global level, it is instructive to observe that the media have consistently painted a picture of fear of the migrants from the Middle East since the September 2011 attacks. By replaying the images of the terrorist attacks, the media succeeded in heightening public fear and anxiety (Huddy, Feldman, Lahav, & Taber, 2003). Thus, social cohesion has suffered greatly as a result of negative media stereotypes. To counter this trend, Fursich (2010), suggests that the media should create an entirely new content that presents previously stereotyped minority groups in a more positive light. Irrespective of the negative stereotyping, the mass media can equally facilitate the cultural adaptation of ethnic minorities (Liu, 2006). Specifically, ethnic media can be used to foster adaptation and integration of minorities with the dominant groups rather than just for the maintenance of cultural identity and connections to their homeland (Croucher, Oommen, Borton, Anarbaeva, & Turner, 2010; Sutton-Brady, Davis, & Jung, 2010). This was the case with radio Biafra which was established to foster cohesion within the Igbo ethnic group. Unfortunately, the medium was used to propagate secessionists' ideologies which further inflamed ethnic tensions in Nigeria as a result of the various provocative messages and hate speeches that were broadcasted from there by Nnamdi Kanu, the self-acclaimed leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The role played by Radio Biafra both in the mobilisation of support for the IPOB cause and in the escalation of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria portrays the potency of the media as a 'double-edged sword'. It is, therefore, imperative for regulatory agencies to ensure that media platforms are not manipulated by centrifugal forces that exacerbate distrust and social malaise in Nigeria.

The social media presents another unique opportunity for developing and maintaining relationships across groups, expanding social connectedness and facilitating freedom of expression. The internet is today viewed as a resource which can help increase the social capital of communities (Dutta-Bergman, 2005). Social media promotes participation and social inclusion in both civic and political activities. In Nigeria, there is no doubt that political engagements and social relations have blossomed across the social media, especially Facebook. It has been observed that individuals who hitherto stand the risk of social exclusion as a result of various stereotypes including homelessness, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and domestic violence have found solace through the social media where they now have the opportunity to participate in a wider discourse on issues and contribute to the conversations around them. Notley (2009) refers to this phenomenon as 'digital inclusion' and highlights the role of technology in promoting social inclusiveness in contemporary societies.

4.   Media Strategies for Conflict Reduction and Social Integration

As an institution with a vested interest in a socially cohesive society, the media must devise strategies to facilitate social cohesion even when their short-term interest may be in the spurs of social conflicts that attract audiences and patronage. In this regard, the social responsibility theory of the media provides justification and a framework for understanding and analysing the behaviour of media organisations. In traditional media, for instance, it is common for stories with elements of stereotyping, discrimination and stigmatisation to be dropped or downplayed because of the perceived negative influence on the society. In Nigeria, efforts are made to moderate or regulate the activities of the media especially as they relate to the exacerbation of ethnic, religious and cultural differences. The rapid increase in conflicts after the Cold War and the perception that these conflicts are, to a large extent, fueled by the media has necessitated the introduction of 'conflict-reduction journalism' (Betz, 2011). The argument, therefore, is that only the media possess the "unique capacity" to increase or decrease societal friction by conditioning attitudes and perceptions and also influencing policy responses (O'Sullivan, 2001). This view has led to a new media genre called 'peace journalism', a term coined by Johan Galtung. In a study titled, 'The structure of foreign news' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), the scholars analyzed the Norwegian press representation of international conflicts in Cuba, Congo and Cyprus and revealed a bias towards the coverage of violent acts, a preference for elite sources of information, a lack of interest in peace initiatives, no regard to views from the grassroots and virtually no evidence of in-depth reporting. They described this form of media reporting as 'war journalism'. However, in a subsequent study undertaken twenty

years later, Galtung (1986) proposed the concept of 'peace journalism' as an alternative paradigm anchored upon interpretative, grass-root, non-elitist approach to conflict reportage that speaks to the social responsibility function of the media.

No doubt, for Nigeria to survive and prosper as a nation there is a need for cooperation and solidarity among the myriad ethnic nationalities across the country. Such cooperation can be achieved through media advocacy and a conference of stakeholders where the framework for internal cohesion can be discussed and adopted. The media, therefore, should lead this campaign such that the present fear of subjugation and domination by one ethnic majority would abate. The focus should also be on emphasising those areas of convergence among the ethnic groups instead of highlighting the differences. Although there is abundant evidence of a high level of interdependency among the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, this has always been downplayed by the media. On the contrary, the differences in religion, ethnicity, cultures and values have been continually magnified to the detriment of social integration. The fact that Nigeria is made up of many ethnic nationalities is nothing new or strange. No great nation on earth today is monolithic. Many countries around the globe have found prominence through their diversity. Rather than accentuate the differences or divisions, the media can promote unity and the interdependence of the various groups by the conscious reawakening of national pride and belongingness. Indeed, a closer look at the Nigerian state may reveal that the commonalities are far more than the diversities and that every part needs the whole to excel. For example, while the nation depends, to a large extent, on the South-South region for the revenue from crude oil, it must also be mentioned that most of the food production takes place in the North. The recent scarcity of tomatoes in the southern part of Nigeria got lots of media attention because of the increase in the cost of food, but the media failed to mention that the situation underlines the interdependence of all the regions and the need for greater cohesion among constituent parts.

5.   Conclusion

Social cohesion remains a phenomenon with diverse connotations. It can manifest in mono-cultural societies, or the existence of egalitarian groups joined by trust, mutual understanding and tolerance. The concept of social cohesion focuses on two major goals. The first involves the reduction of inequalities, social exclusion, and disparities. The second dimension is concerned with strengthening societal relationships, better referred to as social capital. There is no doubt that the media is well positioned to help reduce inherent disparities or mitigate conflicts arising from inequalities, marginalisation, stereotyping and fragmentation in contemporary societies, including Nigeria. With the increasing spate of hate speeches and provocative ultimatums issued by different ethnic youth groups across the country, instructing non-indigenes to vacate from their respective states, there is no better time than now for the media to step out and chart a course of reconciliation and redemption for Nigeria. To do that, a significant degree of social responsibility, sensitivity and altruism must be demonstrated. In sensitive cases, the media can foster the strengthening of social ties within groups as well as across diverse groups. As an institution, most times referred to as the 'Fourth Estate of the Realm' the media must rise to the demands of its responsibilities and social functions. Regardless of any short-time financial rewards that can be reaped from fanning the embers of discord or through 'War Journalism', it is in the strategic interest of the media that the unity and cohesiveness of the country are preserved. In any case, if Nigeria fails, every media organisation within it will equally collapse!

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