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IS PEACE WITH THE PEOPLE?- EMPLOYING CITIZEN JOURNALISM AS A TOOL FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has been riddled with lots of crises both ethnic and religious since the democratic dispensation in 1999. However, these crises seem to have intensified in recent years particularly under the present government. Many technocrats and statesmen/women have proffered solutions to include government interventions in crisis-prone zones, however no one has bothered to look at the governed – the role they can play in engendering peace within the country. The media are no doubt powerful tools for the promotion of peace and the widespread utilization of the social media in Nigeria can be harnessed to promote the needed peace the country craves. Thus, this paper takes a look at the recent crises in Nigeria, and how citizen journalists particularly on the social media can lend their voices to the promotion of peace in crisis prone areas. The paper therefore advocates the continuous technological empowerment of the citizens anchoring its propositions on the Technological Determinism and Diffusion of Innovation theories to argue for inclusiveness of all citizens in the digital space. If the new media hold any chance for peace at all, then they should be maximized at all cost.
Key Words: Crisis, Nigeria, Social Media, Citizen Journalism, Peace

Introduction: The Nature of Conflicts
Conflicts, like change, are almost a regular feature in human societies and in the process of development. Arising most times from disagreements and disputes, conflicts can be severe to the point of war if it is not properly handled. Conflicting parties most times are so aggrieved that they take up arms which most times ultimately leads to the destruction of lives and property. This is why Countries and States have taken the initiative to

establish Conflict Management and Resolution Centres, and Crisis Control Agencies to nip disturbances in the bud and avoid them escalating into conflicts and/or wars. Conflicts often occur when one party feels cheated out or views another party as having unfair advantage particularly in aspects of shared interests and ownership.

Defining conflict on the other hand has been an ever evolving debate as the confusions in perspectives have left a number of scholars with differing views and opinions of what conflict actually is. While some may view it as a positive occurrence in the process of development, (Kellermanns, & Eddleston, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 2009 & Deutsch, 1969) others perceive conflict as negative in all its forms (Bruck & Allen, 2003). According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014), in a study conducted to understand the nature of organizational conflicts, conflicts generate considerable uncertainty particularly with scholars as they are most times unsure of its meaning, relevance or how to cope with it. Omisore and Abiodun further posit that:

The concept of conflict, because of its ubiquity and pervasive nature, has acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations, presenting us with nothing short of semantic jungle. Like other terms, conflict generates considerable ambivalence and leaves many scholars' and administrators quite uncertain about (1) its meaning and relevance; and (2) how best to cope with it. Conflict situations are inevitable in one's personal life, in organizations or even between nations. Conflict is a process in which one party suggests that its interests are being opposed by another party. As a rule, people see only the observable aspect of conflict –angry words, actions of opposition, etc. (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014, p. 118). Trying to exhaustively capture the scope of conflict, a UNESCO research document from 1957 resignedly started off with rhetorical questions on the conflicting thoughts regarding conflicts. According to this document:

The difficulties inherent in delimiting the concept of 'conflict', finally, are great, and it is almost impossible to distinguish the inter-relations of sociological phenomena. Conflict is not something separate from organization…Inherent in the whole problem of conflict are such phenomena as power, leadership, the elite, control [etc]. Where does one draw the line in a discussion of conflict per se? One looks in vain in classified summaries of research or in bibliographies for specialized studies on conflict as such. They are usually parts of other projects. (UNESCO, 1957, p. 34).

According to the above cited UNESCO document, conflicts could be anchored on the basis of socio-psychological conceptualization, sociological conceptualization or on the semantic school of thought. Each of these schools of thought or conceptualizations holds conflict to mean something differing to the other. For the socio-psychological believers, conflict or group conflicts are resultant of individual behaviour and not group mechanisms, while the sociological conceptualization of conflict perceive it as resultant from relationships between or among systems. Sociological conflicts usually deal with problems like secession, civil war etc. However, the semantic approach to conflict holds that conflict on the basis of mutually incompatible goals are totally non-existent and believes that conflict arises as a result of misunderstanding and/or breakdown in communication, and as long as there is mutually-inclusive and/or symmetric communication, there would never be need for a conflict.

Singer, (2018) in her book on conflict resolution perceives conflict as a situation that occurs when interdependent parties are experiencing strong emotions of discontent as a result of incompatible values, aspirations, outcomes or beliefs. It is thus a conflict when at least one of the parties perceives this incompatibility as problematic. However, note that this is just one way of looking at conflict. As stated above, conflict is a very contestable term with differing meanings for different people. A number of factors can also influence or ignite a conflict, however, it suffices to state that conflicts erupt when disagreements are not addressed. For example, the recent nagging clashes between Fulani Herdsmen and local farmers in Nigeria may be attributed to unresolved disagreements between the Fulani herdsmen who want grazing fields and access to farmlands for their cows and local farmers who are rightfully unwilling to give up their lands for that purpose. This is why some of the effective methods of resolving conflicts are through dialogue and peace negotiations.

Situating conflicts within Identities and Power structure in Nigeria
The concept of 'identity' is another very arguable concept. From time immemorial, humans have always sought to understand themselves and the world around them. Thus, the quest for identity and belongingness is as old as time. Identities are sometimes viewed as labels and measures of power and/or superiority. But while identity may be a social construct like gender, it matters to people in so far as it affects their daily choices, opportunities and threats, and generally influences their way of life. According to Oyserman, (2001, p. 409), "a man's Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body … but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works…self-concept and identity provide answers to these basic questions 'Who am I?', 'Where do I belong?', 'How do I fit? (Or fit in?)'" There is therefore no overemphasizing the fact of the importance of identity or the role it plays in the formation of nations, allegiances/alliances, wars and/or conflicts.

In the Nigerian context, identity may be fingered as the root cause of the popular 1967 civil war as the Igbos were reportedly not getting a fair/equal treatment from the Nigerian project for whose independence they all fought. This must have led the Igbos to begin to ask themselves the above questions highlighted by Oyserman (2001), "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" More so, the ragging requests for self-rule by some sections of the country are also identity induced. People desire inclusionary government and once any faction feels left out, they begin to ask the important questions which are all anchored on identity.

What then is identity and why is it important? Again, how does identity and power structure in Nigeria impact on or initiate conflicts? According to Jo Hatch, and Schultz, (1997), identity "involves how we define and experience ourselves…this is often influenced by activities and beliefs which are grounded in and justified by cultural assumptions". In this definition, it is clear that identity also has something to do with culture. For instance, what may be a 'man thing to do' in one culture, may not be a 'man thing to do' in another culture, and this cultural identification may also help form an identity for the man. Similarly, Rutherford (1990) holds that identity is about belonging

"about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others." For Nigeria and Nigerians, the commonality may not be language or even culture (as virtually every ethnicity in the country has its own unique culture), but the defining or shared factor may be a sense of nationhood and belonging. Thus, when one group and/or ethnicity feels neglected or not belonging, agitations may begin to arise, and when agitations are not well handled, conflict may erupt.

Again, the power structure within Nigeria may also determine people's response to nationhood and peace within the country. If a section of the country perceives the structure to be lopsided, it may begin to stir up strife and ultimately conflict. Thus, identities, that is the sense of belongingness or perception that people hold of themselves in relation to a group or state, will go a long way in determining the level of peace and unity in that state. That is there is bound to be more peace when people have a sense of belonging and a healthy identity of themselves. In the same vein, a biased power structure in a diversified nation like Nigeria may breed discord and conflict if left unaddressed.

Mass media, group interests and conflictive agitations
The mass media are no doubt a powerful tool of influence (Graber, & Dunaway, 2017; Sampei, & Aoyagi-Usui, 2009). They can either be used to weaponize information and mind control the audience, particularly when language is used symbolically as codes for something else, or they can be used to engender peace and tranquility. The mass media covering a range of channels like television, radio, newspapers/magazines, books, and internet, can affect changes in societies in ways no other tool can. According to Derenne, and Beresin, (2006), the mass media currently are ubiquitous and powerful. The fact of being ubiquitous makes the mass media difficult to miss by anybody. They are usually very handy tools for the distribution/dissemination of information. Generally, the mass media have been said to serve various functions including education, entertainment, socialization and the prime function of information.

The mass media are also said to serve the all-time important function of watchdog. According to Coronel, (2008, P. 2), In both new and old democracies, the idea of the media as the public's eyes and ears and not merely a passive recorder of events is today widely accepted. On a routine basis, the watchdog press monitors the day -to-day workings of government, thereby helping citizens assess the efficacy of its performance. Investigative reporting, where journalists invest time and effort to ferret out and expose wrongdoing, warns citizens about those that are doing them harm and empowers them with the information they need to demand reforms.

Apparently, the media appear as one of the strong anchors of every functional democracy, especially in democracies where the freedom of the press thrives. They are constantly relied upon, not just by government and/or political actors, but by individual citizens in the state. In the first instance, citizens look up to the media for a form of direction and leadership while the government hopes that somehow the media would help maintain the peace in the state by engaging in peace journalism and not escalating

violent stories. However, they fail to ask themselves how this fits into the media's cardinal rules of truth and objectivity.

Also, in their functions of protecting cultures and social responsibility, the mass media act as the voice for the voiceless. This is why the Public Sphere Theory (Herbamas, 1994; Adut, 2012) is anchored on democratization of both mainstream media and the internet. One of the arguments for the public sphere holds that all citizens must be given access to media on the background of fair share and equitability. Thus, every citizen is expected to be equipped with the tool of the right media so as to be able to contribute to policies and governance.

In their function of social responsibility, the media are expected to protect the rights of minority groups and cover group interests fairly without bias. Because of the central position the media occupy in every society, imbalance in reporting may be easily fingered as a reason for conflicts. McQuail, (1992) advices that news should be fair and balanced always covering competing interests and opposing views. This way, conflictive agitations will not arise as a result of media shortcomings. The media therefore should be accountable, not just to themselves, but to all groups irrespective of their political orientation and views, bearing in mind the influence they exert on people in the long run.

Citizen Journalism at a glance
The rise of the new media (Internet) particularly the social media have paved way for the advent of citizen journalism where former consumers of content have now become producers of content in what Cunningham, (2010) and Toffler (1981) called the pro-sumer era. With the number of people with smart phones, bloggers, Vbloggers, and website owners on the rise, the pro-sumer concept may just be well situated in the present context. Currently, the internet produces more content than the mainstream media. It might therefore be right to believe that we are indeed in the age of information overload, (Eppler, & Mengis, 2004; Jacoby, 1984).

Comor (2011) while discussing the concept of 'prosumption' in an article argues that this new reality has not just given power to former consumers, but has also created alienation – a never before seen gap – between producers and consumers as consumers can now act independently of producers, particularly as it now concerns decisions about what to consume, how to consume it and when to consume it. This concept very rightly situates citizen journalism, a situation where media audience produce content themselves independently of editors and newsrooms. Additionally, the overdependence on traditional mass media is quick paving way to peer-to-peer news networking and citizen journalism. In today's world, news coverage and distribution has become a partnership – between the producers of content and consumers of content.

Citizen journalism has been severally studied by a lot of scholars (Allan, & Thorsen, 2009; Rosenberry, & St John, 2009). Referring to a type of journalism that becomes evident when media audience produce content, package same for broadcast or publication mostly without third-party interference, citizen journalism is also called Public journalism or Mass self-communication, (Alan, 2007; Rosenberry, & St John, 2009). Third party interference here connotes the gatekeepers, that is the editors and publishers who

traditionally have the power to edit, modify or stop a news or story. Inherent in the lack of third party interference is also one of the numerous challenges of citizen journalism as some mainstream journalists/editors have noted that citizen journalism content lack professionalism and sometimes, merit, (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010).

Nonetheless, whatever shortfalls citizen journalism may possess, it is still a viable news gathering avenue in the world today. Big global news media houses like the BBC, Aljazeera and CNN rely on citizen journalists for contents. In sections called "Eye Witness Report", news audiences report firsthand, happenings around them. This may lack professionalism and/or finesse, but citizen journalism augments for traditional mainstream media as news happen every minute and nearly in every part of the world.

While arguing for a broad conception of citizen journalism which most times have been limited to online activities, Goode (2009) proposes that citizen journalism should not be exclusively an online phenomenon (as what easily comes to mind at the mention of citizen journalism is the social media, a successful case in point being the Arab Spring). Goode further posits that citizen journalism should "not [be] confined to explicitly 'alternative' news sources, [and] democratic implications should not simply [be perceived] in the horizontal or 'peer-to-peer' public sphere of citizen journalism networks, but also in the possibility of a more 'reflexive' culture of news consumption through citizen participation." This means that citizen journalism may as well be what the media industry has been waiting for to influence full engagement in the process of news creation and consumption.

Technological Determinism Theory
Technological determinism (TD) theory also called the Medium theory was propounded by Thorstein Veblen in the 1900s. Redefined by McLuhan in his popular assertion "The Medium is the message", technological determinism agrees that society's technology determines its history, development, culture and social structure. For this school of thought, technology is perceived as the driving force of culture and history in the society. No doubt, technology influences everyday life and activities of people in the way they engage with themselves, government, economy and the outside world, however technological changes are the most important factors that influence change in any given society. Again, methods/ways of handling peace and governance issues have changed drastically since the coming of the new media as technology practically determines the goings-on in the world right now.

Notably, technology is fast changing the ways of media practice every day as evidenced in the practice of citizen journalism discussed above. Everyday life is being affected by technology, one way or the other. This is why the public sphere has grown from open physical places like bars or work place to online media platforms where people come together to discuss the day's intelligence. The major proponent of the Technological determinism theory is therefore that social changes are controlled by technology. This means that society has to continually adjust to technological innovations and development. Applying the TD to this paper therefore suggests that changes like

peace and conflict resolution can be achieved through technology or technological innovations.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory:

The Diffusion of Innovation theory is one of the oldest social science theories. Developed by E. M Rogers in 1962, the theory explains how people adapt to change, or to a product or idea. In the long run, people adopt an idea or innovation in different stages. According to Rogers, these stages are: Innovators - These are the first set of people to try out innovations. They are often adventurous and passionate about new ideas. They are also risk takers, and require very little convincing in other to patronize and accept innovations. Early Adopters – These set of people fall under the category of opinion leaders who enjoy embracing change opportunities. Often gaining enlightenment about the need to change, they are comfortable adopting new ideas. They pride themselves in being looked up to by the larger population for new ideas. Just like the first group, they require little or no convincing for them to embrace change.

Early Majority - Although this group does not fall under the opinion leaders, they try to adopt new ideas before the average person. This also means that they prefer to see evidence of the innovation working before they are willing to try it. They often require strategic advertisements and testimonials to appeal and convince them to try out new innovations. Late Majority–This group are nervous about change. They will only adopt an innovation if they see that it has been tried by the majority. Laggards–This group is mostly traditionalists and very conservative people. They are uncomfortable about change and difficult to bend. Sometimes, to get them is to use fear appeals in the information containing the innovation.

Thus, since technology is at the heart of change and innovations are, most times, driven by technological advancements, it is pertinent that the people – in this case Nigerians – be given access to the right innovations and technologies that can enable them contribute qualitatively to governance and peace in the polity.

The new media innovation should be mainstreamed to rural people too so that the nation can build more citizen journalists who would manage information to suit the needs of their local communities.

Resolving conflicts in Nigeria: Is Peace with the people?

Recently, the Fulani herdsmen attacked Benue state again, killing 14 people in the most gruesome manner. For so long now, this menace has been consistent and nagging. The Nigerian government has severally condemned previous attacks preceding the recent ones. Police men have been reportedly deployed to some of these affected areas. However, peace still appears to be elusive. More so, managing crisis should usually require a concerted effort which is why this paper is recommending that attention should be shifted to the governed – particularly citizen journalists in the nation are bid to broker peace with warring factions. Below are some of the ways the government can employ the governed in the advancement and promotion of peace and unity in the country.

- **Access to Technology**

The government should provide access to technology (new media) for citizens. Technologies like smart phones and computers should be mainstreamed so that citizens who are interested can be armed with the technical know-how of these technologies and then employ the same for the common good.

- **Media Literacy**

Media literacy should be taught to all citizen journalists to avoid the spread of fake news or hate speech. Media Literacy according to Koltay, (2011)is the process of understanding the way the media works; sifting through what is true and untrue, understanding media context and contextualization and being able to build resistance against untruths. Media literacy is thus a very important step in the bid towards attaining sustainable peace and resolving conflicts. The media have already been established as powerful and highly influential, therefore, a wrong message framed ignorantly may ignite more conflicts or escalate existing ones.

- **Education and Enabling Environment**

Those with access to new media technologies should be educated on their proper usage and application. Again this education should cover those who are pessimistic about adopting the new media technologies in the first place. Moreover, the government must provide an enabling environment for a peaceful public journalism to thrive.

- **Community Press**

By establishing community presses and media outlets, the government would be opening the frontiers of cohesion and integration for people – particularly rural people.

- **Peace Cohorts**

The government should also establish peace cohorts online managed by people who understand the country's need for peace and unity. These cohorts should be of different social groups with similar demographics and their works should be target specific to people within their own social group and demographic.

- **Regional Summits for Citizen Journalists**

Regional summits should be held every quarter for citizen journalists within a region to remind them of the need to stay committed to the Nigerian project and report only stories that will foster peace and not strife. Even while reporting conflict stories, balance and fairness should be the watchword for citizen journalists.

Conclusion

In every human society, conflicts are bound to arise. It is however the way it is handled that determines whether or not peace or compromise can be reached. Nigeria can exploit the rising number of citizen journalists in the country in its quest to attain sustainable peace in all areas of the country. However, the Nigerian government must stay committed to press freedom and to protecting the lives of all journalists. Citizen journalists should also show patriotism to the Nigerian project and verify news before publishing. They should also be at the forefront of campaigning against hate speech and divisive comments and/or posts.

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