

Assessment of peace journalism in the quest for harmony in Nigeria's pluralistic society

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Abstract

This work focused on the role peace journalism in achieving harmony in Nigeria's pluralistic society. It looked at the disparate tendencies that have created and fostered strife and conflicts between the various components and groups in Nigeria, the role journalism has played in fuelling and sustaining the situation and what journalism can do to temper the smouldering situation and create a pathway for achieving and sustaining harmony among the various peoples; for the sake of peace and development. The work was hinged on the Social Responsibility Theory and employed the instrument of in-depth interview to gather data. It involved 32 participants drawn from the highest level of journalism practitioners, journalism teachers as well as civil society activists across the six geopolitical zones of the country, the Federal Capital Territory, and the Diaspora. Findings confirmed that a significant number of Nigerians, especially the ordinary folks, have their views, perspectives and notions shaped by the offerings of journalists. However, journalism practice follows the path of vested interests and primordial considerations. To that extent, it is not truly or sufficiently detached from such divisive factors; and this affects the way media products are selected and presented. The implication is that Peace journalism remains a challenging concept. Given the agenda-setting propensity of the media, there is therefore an urgent need for value reorientation, for journalists to adopt the Peace journalism approach as there is a high probability that it could help to build consensus, national unity as well as redirect attention towards growth and development.

Key Words: Gatekeeping, Mass Media, News Framing, Nigeria, Peace journalism, Pluralistic society

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity with a very large and widely dispersed multi-cultural and multi-lingual population. These therefore qualify it as a pluralistic society, imbued with the usual tendencies of such societies. A pluralistic society is defined by *vocabulary.com* as a diverse entity where those who live in it do not only believe in different things but as much as possible tolerate each other's beliefs even when in conflict. For Nigeria, these tendencies have continued to influence every aspect of its social, political and economic trajectory. It has been severally noted that instead of the diversity being an asset, it has become a monumental liability, leaving in its wake disharmony, conflicts and strife (Olarenwaju, Loromeke & Asuelime, 2017).

The country has over a long period been buffeted by a myriad of conflicts such that instead

of the situation to improve as the country advances, it keeps mounting in mode and intensity. Various studies and reports have indicated that apart from the early wars that were aimed at territorial conquests and supremacy, the immediate pre-independence days witnessed an assortment of inter-tribal wars principally triggered by issues of assets and inheritance – conflicts over land boundaries, chieftaincy stools, derivation etc., (Salami, nd; Kpone-Tonwe, 1987; Ayuba, 2007; and Aminu, 2019). The immediate post-independence era introduced a new wave of violence which pitched politicians of partisan camps against each other; largely along religious and regional lines, with their followers going for each other's jugular. This development has been confirmed in the United Nations Development Programme *Strategic Conflict Assessment Report of Nigeria 2016*.

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The fallouts of the war of political supremacy among the political entities, which came with the now sustained trademarks of region and religion, led to military incursions into the country's body politic and changed the social dynamics of the people (Bouchat, 2013). As the various additions to the violence pyramid continued to pile, there was no let down in each of the originating tendencies; a situation that led to massive upheavals involving ethnic nationalities, religious cleavages and regional propensities (*New World Encyclopaedia*). It snowballed into a pogrom and eventually the civil war that lasted for about three years, with unprecedented loss of lives and livelihoods across the country (Kobo, 2020; Chukwuemeka, 2022). The entire country was on tenterhooks; some parts felt the rough edges of the conflict more while others suffered different levels of psychological trauma. Although there was a 'no victor no vanquished' declaration at the cessation of hostilities, the wounds from the conflict continued to fester, as forgiveness continues to remain more on the lips than in the hearts (Kobo, 2020). The scars of the war became a determining factor in the strength of political and ethnic relationships between the main groups that bore the pre and post war brunt. Accusing fingers are pointed in opposite directions describing them as the aggressor and oppressor, respectively with none accepting responsibility or liability. Based on this, distrust and disharmony have therefore become the regular state of affair.

Journalism is seen as a potent influence for either good or bad, depending on how it is deployed. The media are seen as a double-edged sword - they can build and can destroy. According to the Institute for Strategic Studies, Nairobi (2010), the media is clearly one of the most powerful tools of the modern age; it has the potential to escalate a conflict situation in the same way that it can also prevent and manage conflict. The media has been accused in some quarters of being part of the Nigerian problem, but they are also seen as instruments that can be used to influence and mobilise for peaceful co-existence, growth and development. Kuusik (2010) notes that the power and insight that information brings to public discourse can change perceptions and the media has the capacity to drive that process.

This work has therefore, intended to enquire whether a resort to the peace journalism approach by the media in Nigeria could, and has the capacity to help achieve harmony in the country's plural and patently fractured society. It was also to examine how peace journalism could contribute to the achievement of peaceful coexistence among the pluralistic entities that make up the Nigerian society. Depending on the outcome, it was to

emphasise the importance of harmony to the growth and development of society; including fostering an atmosphere conducive enough for journalism practice and the growth of the media industry. It also attempted to recommend ideas to the relevant bodies on how this could be achieved.

Research Questions

- 1) Does news framing have influence on peoples' thinking and attitude?
- 2) Does the way journalism is practiced in Nigeria contribute to the level of disharmony among the people?
- 3) Can focus on peace journalism help in enhancing peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic society like Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This work was anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory (SR Theory). Although the concept started from Europe in the mid-20th century and was further given impetus in the United States in 1949 when the issue of freedom of the press gained traction, it was formally developed by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1956). Two major features define the theory regarding the press: freedom and responsibility. The media must be given freedom to exercise their responsibilities but that freedom should be exercised with self-restraint. It is regarded as the best of the normative theories because, although it gives freedom to the press, the freedom is tethered with obligations to guarantee the overall wellbeing of the society. The media must be accountable for their actions and this must not compromise the peace of the society. There must be a balance between professional responsibility and societal stability.

This is important because even as the media has a responsibility to mirror the society, the society must enjoy reasonable peace for growth and development to take place. Journalists have a responsibility to balance their reporting roles with responsibility in the larger public interest, particularly the need to build consensus towards national peace and public harmony. This is in line with Adedokun's (2016) position that development would certainly be imperilled in a society 'where crises and insecurity take the place of peace and security.' The SR theory is therefore the most appropriate for this work.

The Nigerian State and Seeds of Disharmony

Given the level of distrust that the disparate entities in Nigeria have found themselves, scepticism defines relationships as every policy prescription or action from political and governmental institutions is interrogated, not

necessarily for its supposed benefits, but to spot elements of oppression, suppression or marginalisation; and the motives underpinning such actions. Interpretations are given through social screens which further fuel acrimony and conflicts at the slightest instigation. Those who used to co-exist within the same communities began to see themselves as indigenes and settlers; and it threw up a completely new chapter to the communal conflict narrative, a development which transcended habitation to livelihoods. Nsude & Elem (2020) citing Musa & Manu (2013) blamed the current state of affairs on the structure of the Nigerian state which they posit was cobbled together by the colonial masters based on ethnic and religious affiliations.

In the unfolding milieu, certain vocations became exclusively attached to certain groups of people, for instance cattle herding and the Fulani; and the slightest provocation from the occupational items would trigger large scale conflicts that often result in lives and property being destroyed wantonly (Ayuba, 2007). Farmers/herders, indigenes/settlers and clashes with religious undertones which have today become not just a national tragedy but a matter of deep security concern, are some of the fallouts of acrimony and distrust among the ethnic and religious groupings in the country. The militancy in the Niger Delta, the insurrection in the South East, and even the agitations in the South West, are all fallouts of distrust fired by a sense of deprivation and insecurity, real or contrived.

These have also become ready tools capitalised upon by vested interests, particularly politicians and ethnic chieftains, to advance and sustain their aspirations and ambitions. There is now also a very thin line between political and religious precepts, as these have been entangled in the power and supremacy web. The entanglement of all these tendencies tries to push the subject of identity politics; and it is most likely that the ethnic problem of Nigeria cannot be fundamentally tackled without seriously dealing with issues surrounding the subject of identity politics. The aspiration of the people is most critical as posited by Bamidele (2020). Although colonial legacies must have sowed the seed for the subject matter, a century of self-rule, as opposed to genuine independence, could have thrown up a new existence paradigm that would have taken reasonable care of the fault lines.

Instead, region and religion have become very potent sentimental and psychological weapons used in the fight for, and the capture of political power and relevance. The fallouts have also affected the economic lives of both the people and country, as these tendencies have been used to

follow economic decisions in terms of derivation, allocation and location. It adds to the violent trajectory as militancy and continued regional and communal conflicts, largely based on mundane perceptions, define the way things are seen particularly between host communities and operational and institutional stakeholders. In his national day broadcast on October 1, 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan painted a picture that brought to the fore the stark reality of the state of disharmony in the country and admitted that it was not the best of times for the country. He said the people are divided in many ways including ethnically, religiously, politically, and materially.

The Role of Journalism in Human Society

Simply put, journalism is the act of ferreting for, collating, filtering, and delivering information simultaneously through a medium of mass communication to widely dispersed heterogeneous audiences. It plays the role of a gatekeeper between the source and destination of information meant for the general public, through the mass media. A United Nations General Assembly 2012 report indicated that journalism must be seen as an activity and profession that constitutes a necessary service for any society since it provides individuals and society with the necessary information that allows them to develop their own thoughts and freely draw their own conclusions and opinions. By exercising the right to seek and receive information, it pointed out, individuals can make informed decisions and express their opinions freely and participate actively in a democratic system.

Given the character of its operation and the effect its products are capable of having in the life of its audiences, journalism thus becomes a critical instrument in the moulding of character of the society. The media have a traditional role of informing, educating and entertaining the people. It can interpret scenarios and help the people to make sense of a situation. The people thus surrender their consciousness to the media on the platter of trust - that the media is capable of providing credible information and direction. UNESCO's position is that the quality of information that consumers and users engage with has a lot to do with how their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes are defined. Adjin-Tettey (2022) in his work also held this position.

However, the extent of media's definition of society's consciousness is moderated by other factors. The Frame Theory postulation by Goffman (1974), while agreeing with the agenda setting disposition of the media, that they focus and draw attention to the issues they consider topical, emphasised that the modalities adopted

and the language such issues are presented are the major factors that influence the choices the audience make. Scheufele (1999) also wrote in line with this position, stating that the way a matter is presented to the audience influences the choices they make about that subject; which presupposes that people do not just swallow media products as presented but interpret them through their primary frameworks. These primary frames are made up of natural and social filters through which individuals or groups are able to interpret the communication stimuli around them.

Notwithstanding, the media globally are still seen as being imbued with the capacity and orientation to make useful choices on behalf of the people and the society. So, at different times in different climes, the media have enjoyed that trust and are also facing the potential danger of disappointing the public, especially with the advent of the new media (Guanah, Aizek & Ojo, 2019).

In Nigeria, the media have been a fundamental part of the country's history – from the nationalists' days to the present dispensation. Journalists therefore share in the glory and infamy of the Nigerian journey and would also take a sizeable chunk of blame for the escalation of conflicts that today define the landscape of the country. In the early days, journalists played the activists' role aimed at rescuing the people from the shackles of colonialism. The focus then was to see Nigeria emerge as an independent nation. But thereafter, journalists became as partisan and ethnocentric as their political counterparts. It was largely so because journalists and the owners of media institutions played dual roles – a good number of them were journalists and politicians. What they presented as news/analysis and how they reported them largely defined not just the perception of the people but subtly influenced their actions. The media became stratified along regional lines because of their leanings and reportage. They were roughly classified as the Lagos – Ibadan Press and the Arewa Press, etc. The situation is not different today as the dominant media still run largely on sectional lines even though presenting a national facade. This can be traced to ownership influence and editor bias. Media establishments are owned by the rich and influential members of the society; and they have vested interests ~~in~~ for going into such ventures. Most are not for profit-making but for protection and influence peddling. It would therefore be inconceivable to think that public interest would be the mission of such ventures, even if it is so indicated. McQuail (1987) and Scheufele (1999), noted that having such thoughts would be like believing that no primary impact would be felt on

editorial content should the entire media be owned by interest groups such as workers' unions, gender groups or civil society organizations. This seems to be the dominant position of researchers; and in fact, the reality on ground.

The sectional lines are therefore fallouts of the identity politics which have infiltrated all facets of the societal strata, including spiritual and temporal institutions. Although the media have a social responsibility to mirror the society and hold those in authority accountable, among other watchdog expectations, there is also the social responsibility aspect that seeks the stability of the society nonetheless (Uzuegbunam, 2013). Often, the issue of social responsibility is seen from a subjective perspective. Although professional ethics point to the direction of what is acceptable in practice, the question regarding social responsibility would sometimes be 'in whose interest?' While some see it as being in the interest and well-being of the larger society, others perceive it as an attempt at gagging the media and keeping out relevant information ~~just~~ in order to sustain narrow interests.

Not factoring in social responsibility into the gate keeping process itself is seen in some quarters as an act of irresponsibility. But then, within the context in view, who determines irresponsibility and what constitutes irresponsibility in an environment where practice is not determined or guided by law? Ethics is not law per se; and sanctions are not deterrent enough particularly where regulation is almost non-existent. To think, as noted by a number of studies, that the news media should behave responsibly and do objective reporting at all times, seems like a near impossibility, given the intervening tendencies and dispositions.

However, as posited by Bamidele (2020), the factors that give impetus to the push-and-pull tendencies in multi-sectional societies by the regional and religious forces, which also are the factors that threaten or enhance the interests and influence of media owners, are largely the ones that fuel the identity war. Consequently, they have the tendency of defining how media messages are packaged and how they are received and acted upon – positively or negatively. Media messages have a push effect in creating fundamental reactions in societies where such messages resonate with the dominant orientation and, or disposition of the people. A number of studies have shown that the way people accept and internalise messages have to do more with their cognitive map than the delivery in their ordinary form (Tyng, 2017).

Senam, Udoakah & Udoh (2014) noted that the way the audience receives and reacts to media

messages depend largely on their perception and attitude and not necessary on the face value of the message, as delivered. In essence, new information is received and acted upon within the latitude of acceptance, which basically consists of information that are neither immediately accepted nor rejected but subjected to some social filters – some kind of social judgement (Senam, 2020).

In view of this, it could be said that ‘ethnic audiences’ prefer to use media platforms and outlets that are in agreement with their most salient or strongest cultural identity, especially when they seek out information related to their well-being and relevance; issues connected with political, social and economic matters that affect them. This may not be limited to the audiences but also influences selection and packaging of media contents.

From a purely observational point of view, a vast majority of the ordinary people in the northern part of Nigeria prefer the *BBC Hausa Service* to the local and national radio stations. The language resonates immediately and sends home the message in a frame that is easily understood and assimilated. The same applies in Abuja and environs where such demographic cadres prefer the *Human Rights Radio*, with Ordinary President Ahmed Isah, because the people can easily and readily associate with the issues raised and discussed. Commuters in Lagos are often hooked to *Traffic Radio*, because traffic is a major problem in Lagos. They see these channels as relating with and trying to seek solutions to their immediate challenges. In this circumstance, it could be said that such moderating factors determine the level of individual or group reaction. The medium, for them, is the message and not the other way round which emphasises the issue of responsibility of journalist in their gate-keeping role.

Status of Journalism and the Issue of Gatekeeping

Journalism as a profession has suffered serious adulteration. Journalism, as seen and defined today, is not situated under any standardized template. As Lynch (2015) noted, and particularly within the context of this work, professional journalism contends with "a multitude of other mediated forms of non-fictional communication in public spheres that are now more obviously layered and fragmented." The status of professional journalism has obviously been diminished, which may be a deliberate act by the powerful elite and political institutions that see journalism as a threat to their indulgences. For instance, the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), in its general comment No. 34,

described journalism as a duty carried out by a wide range of actors which it listed to include professional full-time reporters and analysts, bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication.

In fact, it listed those it classified within the category to include all media workers and support staff, community media workers and citizen journalists whenever they play the role. The same report emphasised development of professional abilities academically and in practice, including forming professional bodies that would ensure professionalism and insist on ethical standards. It sounded like a tongue-in-cheek position on professionalism. While suggesting the formation of professional structures to ensure standards on one hand, it was sceptical about restrictions on practice and practitioners, on the other; as it claimed that regulating the practice would impinge on freedom of expression, given that journalism can only deliver on its mandate if it has full guarantees of freedom and protection but this seems to be a contradiction in terms.

This diminishes the gatekeeping role of the media. That role is gradually disappearing as offerings, even in the conventional media, are often uncensored, unverified and largely unprocessed. Singer (2007), in Guanah, Aizek & Ojo (2019), had emphasized the widely used definition of a journalist in the role of a gatekeeper as a person who determines what information goes through the media gate for public consumption, but the seeming endorsement of all-comers by the UN removes the keeper from the gate. The gate is now left wide open for stray ruminants who wield all sorts of technological devices that can capture and transmit messages through the information superhighway.

Historically, journalism in Nigeria tends to be adversarial and aggressive; to keep the leadership on its toes, in line with the constitutional requirement of holding government accountable. That does not preclude the fact that some level of responsibility in promoting social harmony has always been part of the journey; for if there is no nation, journalism itself becomes challenging, if not imperilled. Even as conflicts are inevitable in every society and though journalism has a responsibility of reflecting happenings, critical segments of society (particularly those that have some influence on the mind and behaviour of society), are expected to find ways of resolving them. This is where Peace Journalism becomes absolutely necessary in achieving harmony in Nigeria’s plural society. Even though Peace Journalism does not possess the force of the bullet, it could employ the magic of logic to change the trajectory from antagonism to peaceful co-

existence among the various ethnic, religious and political divides, thus, gate keeping is at the core of it.

Critiquing the Concept of Peace Journalism

Peace journalism has to do with gatekeepers' choices about what to report and how to report it. Lynch (2017) said that it is when editors and reporters make choices about what to report, and how to report them in a way that creates opportunities for society to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict. In a book he co-authored earlier with McGoldrick in 2005, it was indicated that Peace Journalism not only explains how most coverage of conflict unwittingly fuels further violence, but proposes workable options to give peace a chance. In other words, it seeks to trace the trigger and how to sheath the sword; and act, not necessarily as an arbiter but a pathfinder.

Roberts (2018) describes Peace Journalism as that which offers a more balanced perspective of war and conflict than that provided by the dominant mainstream media. According to him, Peace Journalism aims to construct realities from all sides, and to reveal less visible causes and effects of war and violence, such as their cost in terms of the dead and disabled, and of the destruction of social order and institutions, while refraining from dehumanising the enemy.

Peace Journalism on its own cannot guarantee peace or cessation of hostilities, but the choice of the issues promoted, how the narratives are couched, and how they are highlighted can help in a fundamental way to douse tension and calm frayed nerves; otherwise, the situation might fester and deteriorate. It plays down on the issues that are capable of escalating the situation, while reporting the situation nonetheless. Maintaining or bringing peace is at the core of the presentation. Peace itself is not necessarily the absence of strife, but the absence of violence in a dispensation.

Galtung (1996) in Lynch (2017) noted two types of peace in this context: 'negative peace' and 'positive peace.' He propounded the concept of Peace Journalism. The essence was to create a pathway for the avoidance of value bias towards violence when covering conflict situations; indicating that peace "means the absence of violence in all forms and the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way. According to him, it is seen as an atmosphere of freedom and well being devoid of violence or hostile aggression. Some characteristics of a positive (peace) mindset are 'optimism, acceptance, resilience, gratitude, mindfulness and integrity'. In contrast with War Journalism which is inclined towards elite conspiracy, tendentious narratives, acrimony and supremacy, Otiz dos Santos (2021) viewed Peace

Journalism as an attempt to explore both the circumstances and the parties involved with the aim of fostering no 'victor no vanquished' situations - presenting conflicts in a transparent manner and aiming at preventing violence.

McGoldrick & Lynch (2005) explained that peace-orientated journalism explores 'conflict formation, parties, goals and issues towards a win-win outcome; open space, open time - causes and outcomes anywhere, in history or culture; making conflicts transparent; giving voice to all parties, empathy, understanding; seeing conflict/war as problem, focusing on conflict creativity; humanization of all sides; being proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs; and focus on invisible effects such as trauma, damage to structure/culture etc.'

Peace Journalism has become an angle of interest in Nigeria today because of the series of challenges the people are facing, particularly the level of discontent among the various entities and the resultant crisis ranging from social upheavals, militancy, insurrection, banditry to terrorism. Journalism is viewed as one of the catalysts fuelling the discontents through the way events and situations are selected and reported. Journalism practice in Nigeria, like elsewhere, does not function in a vacuum; the practitioners are locals from ethnicities that make up the society. They have political, ethnic, tribal, business interests and preferences. All these come into play and influence their reportage.

Peace Journalism has the capacity to help create a new value orientation towards building consensus, national unity and in the process enhancing national development. It requires diligence and exercise of social responsibility. Ortiz dos Santos (2021), quoting a number of studies, was of the view that communication may become a decisive determinant in a conflict scenario. Pointing to the experimentation with German and Austrian audiences using conflicts that did not directly affect them, the study showed that "de-escalation-oriented news were accepted by audiences and resulted in less polarised mental models of the events." Peleq (2005) had earlier indicated that "Peace Journalism has the characteristics and capabilities of encouraging constructive communication."

However, there are challenges in Nigeria as far as the concept is concerned. This is so, given the general low level of journalism education and knowledge of Peace Journalism in particular by most journalists. This can be traced largely to ignorance, unattractive professional environment and the invasion of the media space by the social media and the ubiquitous drive for breaking news by internet-enabled platforms. By far the most

potent challenge is the fact that Nigeria's media space reflects the same contradictions which have made it difficult to harness the country's diversity.

Going through the trajectory of journalism in Nigeria, its antecedence and disposition, it became obvious that journalists in the country have always been flowing with the tide of events, focusing attention more on the issues of the time than the faith of the future. In the early days, it was nationalism that drove the vehicle of journalism. It later gave way to partisan political interests. As the journey progressed and professional fatigue set in, sectional interests became the driver and it has progressed to the point where region, religion, partisan politics and the economic realities of the time have become the more visible drivers of journalism in the country with the accompanying tendencies of each of these categorisations. To some, bad news sells; it drives more traffic and brings more revenue. Media products are now packaged according to manufacturer's specifications and not according to ethical or social responsibility prescriptions. It is obvious that conflicts are inevitable in every society, but all segments of society are expected to find ways of resolving them. The mass media are expected to contribute immensely to the resolution of conflicts in the society because of their pre-eminent position in disseminating information to the people, and because they have capacity to elevate or de-emphasise potentially acrimonious issues depending on the way they deploy their gatekeeping function.

Method of Study

The qualitative research method was adopted for this work using in-depth interview techniques as instruments of data collection. The primary data collection technique was augmented with follow-up phone calls to obtain more information and clarify certain issues raised during the interview. Given the nature of the subject involved, only knowledgeable persons were approached so that quality responses would be gathered for the work, especially given the size of the sample population. It was therefore targeted, for the best possible and related responses, from those who not only understand the practice of journalism but have hands-on experience in dealing with a wide range of issues related to the profession and practice. Therefore, participants were drawn from among the highest level of journalism practitioners, journalism teachers, civil society activists and bureaucrats with profound journalism background, between the age brackets of 40 and 70. Also, that range of age was considered for the sake of necessary maturity, both in practice and historical perspectives. Formal requests were sent to 42 proposed participants domiciled in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, the federal capital territory and one in the Diaspora. The exercise was carried out within a space of one month, spanning from January 26 – February 26, 2022. Thirty-two (32) of the targeted participants responded to the request and participated in the exercise while 10 did not.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Status		
Journalism practitioners (title editors and Editors-in-Chief)	14	43.5
Retired Senior Journalists	4	12.5
Journalism teachers	5	15.6
Bureaucrats with profound journalism background	4	12.5
Civil Society activists	5	15.6
Total	32	100
Gender		
Male	28	87.5
Female	4	12.5
Total	32	100
Age		
40-45	1	3.12
46-50	3	9.38
50-55	9	28.13
56-60	12	37.5
61-65	4	12.5
66 and above	3	9.37
Total	32	100

Regional Spread

FCT, Abuja	8	25
South West	10	31.25
South East	1	3.12
South South	7	21.88
North Central	2	6.25
North West	2	6.25
North East	1	3.12
Diaspora	1	3.12
Total	32	100

Source: Field Study, 2022

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of the respondents in terms of status, gender, age and regional spread. In terms of categorization, it shows that among the 32 respondents, 14 were journalism practitioners who made up 43.5% of the population, five retired senior journalists (15.6%), five journalism teachers (15.6%), four bureaucrats with profound journalism background (12.5), and four civil society activists (12.5%).

In terms of gender distribution, the table shows that 28 participants representing 87.5% were male while 4 (12.5%) were female. The males were more available for participation than the females targeted. Also, 12 participants were between the ages of 56 and 60 (37.5%) and formed the bulk of the sample population; those between 50 and 55 (28.13%) followed; those between 61 and 65

(12.5) came third; those between 46 and 50 (9.38%) came fourth, followed by 65 and above (9.37%) and then one participant whose age fell within the 40 to 45 age bracket.

In the area of geographical spread, the South West had the highest number of participants 10 (31.25%), followed by the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) with eight (25%), then South South with seven (21.88%). North Central and North West had two (6.25%) each; just as South East, North East and the Diaspora had one (3.12%) participant each. Although efforts were made to balance the number of participants across regions, some regions obviously had a concentration of those in the target population more than others. Even those contacted in some of the lean regions eventually did not participate.

Table 2: Definite Response Pattern

No.	Issues	Yes	No	Not sure	Total
1.	Aware of the concept of Peace Journalism	28 (87.5%)	4 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	32 (100%)
2.	Been interested in the concept	28 (87.5%)	3 (9.37%)	1 (3.125%)	32 (100%)
3.	Concept given serious attention in Nigeria	2 (6.25%)	26 (81.25%)	4 (12.5%)	32 (100%)
4.	Are there challenges?	32 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	32 (100%)
5.	Selection and presentation have significant effect on how people think and react	32 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	32 (100%)
6.	Journalism practice in Nigeria contributes to disharmony	31 (96.87%)	1 (3.125%)	0 (0%)	32 (100%)
7.	Report intensity of conflict notwithstanding the implications	3 (9.37%)	28 (87.5%)	1 (3.125%)	32 (100%)
8.	Can reporting responsibly lead to peaceful coexistence	31 (96.87%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.125%)	32 (100%)
9.	Can Peace Journalism enhance harmony in Nigeria's pluralistic society?	28 (87.5%)	4 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	32 (100%)

Source: Field Study, 2022

Table Two above depicts the perception of respondents on various sundry issues that border on the concept and practice of Peace Journalism in Nigeria.

Discussion

As earlier indicated, participants were high level journalists, journalism teachers, heads of government institutions and civil society activists with journalism background sourced across the six

geopolitical zones of the country, the Federal Capital Territory and in the Diaspora. There was absolute unanimity on two very fundamental issues, that: (i) the way journalists select and report news has significant impact on the way people think and react, (ii) that there are challenges confronting the pursuit of peace journalism in Nigeria. Both positions are in conformity with the positions of Goffman (1974), Scheufele (1999), Senam, Udoakah & Udoh (2014), Bamidele (2020) and Adjin-Tettey (2022), on the agenda setting propensity of the media. While (i) is more aligned with the agenda setting concept; (ii) tilts more to the concept of social judgement (Senam: 2020) and identity politics (Bamidele: 2020), which regard the dominant disposition of the target audience as the more defining factor; and a potential challenge to the effective dispensation of peace journalism.

Except for three of the participants who practiced between 1960 and the early 1980s, and one who currently serves in a government agency, the rest of the 28 participants (87.5%) are aware of the concept of peace journalism and are actually interested in it. There was a near unanimity on the issue of attention. A significant number of the participants (87.25%) indicated that the concept of peace journalism has not been given, and has also not received the desired attention in Nigeria. Majority of the few with divergent views were of the opinion that in every field of human existence, nothing is given; that it is the practitioners or those interested in a field that should create attention for it, attract interest and grow it.

Thirty-one (approximately 96.8%) of the participants indicated that the way journalism is practiced in Nigeria, in actual fact, fosters and sustains strife and disharmony among the people. The only dissenting voice said it was not a Nigerian thing, because journalism, like anywhere else, does not function in a vacuum. The practitioners are locals, from ethnicities that make up Nigeria; and are thus influenced and affected by the social nuances of their origins in the packaging and presentation of their messages. This agrees with the views of both McQuail (1987) and Scheufele (1999) on ownership influence on editorial content; and Bamidele (2020) on the influence of identity politics on journalists' outings and output.

Twenty-eight (87.5%) of the participants were of the view that focus on Peace Journalism as opposed to Impact Journalism could help in enhancing peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic entity like Nigeria, while four of them (12.5%) were of the view that a conscious balance between peace and impact journalism will do a better job than focusing largely on one. Nonetheless, about

96.8% indicated that there is a very high probability that if journalism practitioners display a reasonable level of sensitivity in the way they select and present reports, it could lead to peace and harmony in a society, even if pluralistic in constitution. This is in tune with Peleq (2005) and Robert (2018) postulations on Peace Journalism as well as the larger contemplation of Galtung's Peace Theory.

Similarly, 28 (87.5%) believe that it is neither in the interest of the well-being of society nor the furtherance of journalism practice if journalists engage in extensive reporting of conflicts without minding the implications; but four (12.5%) held that so long as there is balance, the depth of reportage is not the issue. It was their position that a tilt in balance would have more implications on the peace of a plural society than the depth of the reports.

One of the fundamental issues that the study sought to unravel was why would, or do journalists prefer controversial news to those that foster peace and development. During discussions, selected participants were almost unanimous on two points: that conflict and controversy (i) are strong determinants of news; and (ii) attract commercial gains.

Another question was how far can journalists go in publishing materials especially in conflict situations? There was an almost unanimous position that there must be social responsibility to preserve the society, no matter the challenges; that the greatest good of society should be the defining factor. The issue of balance and objectivity was also generally pointed out: that the twin pillars of balance and objectivity can be achieved principally if practitioners go the extra mile in (i) getting and presenting the relevant details on all sides and; (ii) detaching themselves from the issues and the actors.

This work set out to find out whether news framing has influence on peoples' thinking and attitude; whether the way journalism is practiced in Nigeria contributes to the level of disharmony among the people; and whether focus on peace journalism could help in enhancing peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic society like Nigeria.

Even though there was a common agreement of a high probability that it can; during follow-up discussions it was pointed out, in most cases, that it is the focus and application by practitioners that matters and not journalism as a concept. Although they pointed out that if journalism is focused on issues that bring people together instead of issues that cause strife and division, there is more likelihood of building peace and stabilising the society; they nonetheless also added that achieving peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic entity or any

other entity for that matter, is not the direct function of journalism.

To the main question: Can focus on Peace Journalism as opposed to Impact Journalism help in enhancing peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic entity like Nigeria? 87.5% of the participants affirmed it could help because of its inherent capacity to reduce tensions and enhance peace through balanced and objective reporting. This position aligns with the views of Robert (2018) about peace journalism which emphasises balance and objectivity and downplaying causes, effects and intensity of violence; and Peleq (2005) on the capacity of peace journalism to encourage constructive communication.

However, during follow-up discussions, a significant number also were of the opinion that if other societal variables within the society do not act in concert with the intents of peace journalism, there was no guarantee that the effect would be significant; which was the point emphasised by Senam, Udoakah & Udoh (2014) in their 'latitude of acceptance' presentation.

There was a general agreement that something was wrong with the way journalism is practiced in Nigeria, from a professional perspective; even though it was also indicated that this was not a peculiar case, since journalists globally are also not immune to the afflictions of identity politics within the society in which they operate, as posited by Bamidele (2020); or proprietary influence (McQuail, 1987 and Scheufele, 1999).

Another noticeable trend was the overwhelming response to lack of attention to the concept of Peace Journalism in Nigeria in terms of both the specific response which gave an indication of about 81% and the discussion sessions which also threw up the issue of lack of attention by both the authorities and practitioners. According to some of the discussants, this state of affair is sustained because it suits the players who benefit from the fallouts of sentimental and adversarial reporting, and helps the perpetuation of the status quo which suits vested interests within the system.

Findings

Part of the challenges which was identified in all the responses was that Nigeria's media space reflects the same contradictions which have made it difficult to harness the country's diversity. There are divisions which connote that some sections of the media domiciled in certain areas and owned by certain persons or groups, in the main, pursue narrow agenda, which does not reflect the collective interests of the country. It became obvious that the Nigerian media emerged from a

context of division; as such, it has generally contributed to the inability of the people to realize the goal of deploying the country's diversity in a positive way. It was deduced from the responses that a great number of people, particularly in rural and suburban areas, as well as the less literate and less discerning, largely believe in media offerings. This pushes further the position that news framing has influence on peoples' thinking and attitude.

Media reporting in many instances is driven by perception problems, which tend to widen the ethnic and sectarian divisions that undermine Nigeria's unity and harmony. The media often presents a battalion in every war, shooting their own arrows with their instruments of trade either on the side or from the camps of vested interests. For example, in reporting issues such as rotation of presidential power, restructuring of the country, ranching and derivation, media reports feed off the emotional narratives deployed by the political elite and religious leaders who only find relevance in ensuring that the people are divided and hypnotised. They adopt appellations that glorify stigmatisation, profiling, labelling etc., against one group, to propel the pursued agenda. There is little attempt at ensuring a nuanced projection of the issues, which border on the country's diversity. As such, the media itself is bogged down by such meta-narratives as North versus South, Muslim versus Christian and other constructed divides which make it impossible to build national consensus and solve problems which affect everyone across the country.

Media reporting in many instances is driven by perception problems, which tend to widen the ethnic and sectarian divisions that undermine Nigeria's unity and harmony. It depends on who is reporting where; and, where their interests lie, what their perceptions are, and what ultimate goal they wish to pursue. Peace Journalism therefore becomes very challenging in this context because the mindset of the media is wired to disseminate information, which unintentionally, in some cases, becomes sources of conflict. Often, journalists allow mundane sentiments to guide their reportage. The reports presented to the public are capable of inflaming passion among undiscerning readers especially in plural societies; and so journalists must rise above the primordial sentiments which politicians pander to in fuelling crisis.

It was however evident that though achieving peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic entity, or any other entity for that matter, is not the direct function of journalism (when other potent and influential factors within the society are considered), it could deploy its agenda-setting potential to redefine the trend of thoughts and

redirect energies into more beneficial activities capable of growing peace and enhancing the well-being of society.

Going by the trend of responses, there is a possibility that this can be achieved particularly since the ordinary people have their views, perspectives and notions shaped by the output of journalists. Regularly across the town and cities, scores of newspaper readers, also known as “free readers” gather at newsstands to debate the state of the country. The headlines put out by the newspapers and magazines become the basis on which they exchange ideas. Those who watch TV and listen to the radio take whatever information is passed to them seriously. Despite the scourge of misinformation, especially with the pervasiveness of the social media, the work of journalists is hardly discounted, and this impacts the ways in which people think and react. This provides a strong basis for an assumption that focus on peace journalism could help in enhancing peaceful co-existence in a pluralistic society like Nigeria.

Conclusion

A pluralistic society conjures a picture of divergence in all material particular. It presupposes that there will always be conflicts because of the different socio-political and economic interests. Ordinarily, Peace Journalism looks good to temper the tension; but given the diverse scenario in such environments, focusing exclusively on Peace Journalism might still be an uphill task. Nonetheless, media practitioners must be made to appreciate the importance of the concept to guide their news gathering, processing and gatekeeping roles in society.

Reporters must try to be professional in their conduct. Reports must not be coloured by ethnic, religious, political and other self-serving considerations. It should also be the deliberate decision of editors and reporters to seek resolution of conflicts through objective reporting. In a conflict or a potential conflict situation, when issues from both sides are objectively presented, policy makers would be properly guided because the media still represent the voice of the people.

Since journalism is viewed as constituting a necessary service to any society, and just as it is also perceived in some ways as giving impetus to the acrimony in some societies through sensational and biased reporting and analysis, the perception can also play out. Similarly, there should be a conscious change in direction from laying emphasis on tendentious issues to focusing on balanced, conciliatory and development-oriented perspectives.

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