



**ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS
& PROFESSIONALS OF NIGERIA
BOOK SERIES**

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION, MEDIA AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Oludare Ebenezer OGUNYOMBO

To cite this article:

Oludare Ebenezer Ogunyombo (2032), Overview Of Communication, Media And Power Relations In A Multicultural Society in Communication, Media And Power Relations In A Multicultural Society: Context, Issues and Perspectives for Development ACSPN Book Series 8, pp. 1—8

Retrieved from <http://www.acspn.com.ng>

(Institutional or Subscribed access may be required)

Please note that this is an electronic, pre-print version of this article published by the Evan Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited for Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN).

The ACSPN Book Series is exclusive to the Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria.

ISBN: **978-978-798-550-1**

Copyright © 2023

Editor and Contributors

Layout/Design: Ashroph De Grafico Ventures.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form or any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.



OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION, MEDIA AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Oludare Ebenezer OGUNYOMBO



The relationship between media, communication, and power is largely a result of how these three concepts are employed to convey power. The multiplicity of communication and media tools has given rise to a multitude of interactive communication as people use them more frequently to develop power relations by attempting to dominate communication and media narratives in favour of their position. More than ever, the diversity of our society has been highlighted, with more emphasis on having a multicultural mindset in our approaches to how we relate and communicate our ideas for coexisting peacefully in a society where there are rapid cross-cultural exchanges. According to Takwa (2017), multiculturalism is “the coexistence of diverse cultures, where culture includes ethnic, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, *cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles*” (p. 8). Therefore, conceptually, multiculturalism should provide the impetus for an expanded perspective on issues.

Unfortunately, there are indications that much success has not been recorded in this area due to a perceived lack of trust among the players. Particularly sad is the role of the media

which has often been accused as an amplifier of the discordant tunes being played by the power actors. As a result, ethnically motivated power struggles have pervaded many societies across the world. Power diversity, a component that has been largely championed to sustain societal harmony to some extent, is still far-fetched as existing actors seem to have perpetuated themselves in power. The rise of right-wing commentators, groups, and ethnic nationalities that make the most of media and communication tools to create a new public sphere where power struggles can occur reflects fears and leads to new conflicts over influence and control in a multicultural society.

Again, the 'giant strides' of social media have put many editors on their toes as they cannot afford to blink while citizen journalists take the floor in providing 'timely' information to the people, albeit, largely unprofessionally done. This new public sphere found across the different social media platforms has, expectedly, been the conversation space for citizens in a multicultural society who would not go to sleep without satisfying their thirst for information that soothes their cultural divide. Thus, ethnic nationalities and interest groups are gaining strength by utilizing the many communication and media outlets available for the promotion and protection of ethnic, regional, religious, and other minority interests- a dangerous place to be by all ramifications.

If the foregoing overview is allowed to subsist, then what appears a lofty description of multiculturalism by Ravi and Pallavi (2017) may be lost in our thinking. Ravi and Pallavi described multiculturalism as,

The cultural diversity of communities where two or more community merges with each other for establishing a new community. In this, the various streams of world cultures combine to form new currents of human interactions, a global perspective and the development of a multicultural person. The perspective and worldview of a multicultural person transcend the indigenous culture developed from complex social, political, economic and educational interactions. Such a person had an international frame of reference rather than specific knowledge or interest in global affairs. Here, cultural diversity can be understood by knowing the term global culture. An ideal global culture is one where the voices of all cultures and people are heard with equal clarity, where no culture should over-shadow one another and where pride in one's own culture only increases respect for the cultures of others; and the diversity of cultures would express different visions of the world (p.2).

The conversation around creating a *multicultural person* has led to more concerns raised on how power relations play out in the quest for balance in relationships. Although power relations have been described by IAC (2020) as “the interactions between different groups in a society (and) the ability of one group or a person to control others, and they exist at all levels of society”, hope should not be lost on the desired state of multiculturalism as processed by Ravi et al (2017). What that means is that there must be a level playground where *adult conversations* can be held by parties in play to significantly address social, political, economic and cultural issues. Such a playground is that presented by the media.

For instance, in an earlier work on new media, Chen (2012) stated that,

With its distinctive features, new media has brought human society to a highly interconnected and complex level, but at the same time, it challenges the very

existence of human communication in the traditional sense. New media not only influences the form and content of information/messages, but it also affects how people understand each other in the process of human communication, especially for those from different cultural or ethnic groups. (p.3)

Without a doubt, the media have wielded enough power in society and will continue to wield even more. If parties demonstrate a good understanding of culture as “a set of learnt or shared beliefs, traditions and customs which are common to a group of people living together for a long period” and “the total way of life of the people pinches majority on norms, values and the relationships they enter into the productions of their material existence”, they are more likely to use the media to communicate their issues responsibly because “the media have a significant impact on how culture is documented, serve as historical resources, give directions, and essentially act as socialization tools” (Aniekan, 2022).

In dealing with the media as a socialisation tool, Howarth (2011) explained that effective use of the media can endear social representation. In that context, social representation was defined as “a system of common values, ideas and practices that enable people to understand each other and communicate about similar issues. It also involves a degree of subjective interpretation that leads to differences in understanding, different readings of texts and therefore the motivation to communicate”.

However, perspectives on how the media plays this role leave more to be desired regarding people's expectations, particularly in a multicultural society. For example, Karikari (2022) reviewing the situation on the African continent observed that “though the mass media have generally been assumed to have contributed to social and political progress since their introduction into Africa, in most societies their function as institutions for community self-expression and cultural self-assertion appears to have been less than complementary”. Earlier, Owolabi (2017) advised that “the media, through its power of advocacy, can take the attention of the feuding parties away from issues that tend to divide them to those that bind them together and guarantee their joint future”.

One of the issues challenging the role of the media in a multicultural society as identified in some previous works like Curran (2002) is that of who and how the media is controlled. Curran in presenting a pluralist view of the media stated that,

The pluralists see society as a complex of competing groups and interests, none of them predominant all of the time. Media organizations are seen as bounded organizational systems, enjoying an important degree of autonomy from the state, political parties and institutionalized pressure groups. Control of the media is said to be in the hands of an autonomous managerial elite who allow a considerable degree of flexibility to media professionals...Audiences are seen as capable of manipulating the media in an infinite variety of ways according to their prior needs and dispositions and as a consequence of having access to what Halloran (1977) calls 'the plural values of society' enabling them to 'conform, accommodate or reject'. (p.108)

Suffice it to note that in the context of communication and messaging in a multicultural society, the intended meaning between the encoder and the decoder may suffer a significant loss in fidelity because individuals may have to interpret based on their cultural

inclination. These cultural inclinations are often entrenched and many have been sustained over the years thereby making a change sometimes difficult. Howarth (2011) noted that when messages are encoded in the symbols and nuances of one culture, such expressions may not be available in the culture of the receiver who is expected to decode and act on the message to satisfy the intention of the sender. This is because “when a message reaches the culture where it is to be decoded, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoding culture becomes a part of the message meaning. The meaning content of the original message becomes modified during the decoding phase of intercultural communication because the culturally different repertory of communicative behaviour and meanings possessed by the decoder does not contain the same cultural meanings possessed by the encoder”. (p.4) Such claims of cultural difference frequently elicit a variety of barriers to effective communication, including exaggerated claims of difference/similarity, anxious feelings regarding difference, and prejudiced views.

There must be some degree of knowledge and connection for communication to be effective. Understanding the intersubjective formation of cultural differences and how to use differences to forge common ground rather than create barriers to successful discussion and intracultural relationships are crucial skills in multicultural settings. We must familiarize ourselves with and respect the practices of other cultures if we are to accomplish this. Understanding what it's like to be in the position of another person and navigating the other person's emotional maze is a prerequisite for effective communication. Knowing others helps us understand ourselves better and lessens our tendency to denigrate other cultures. To reduce cultural generalizations, which are frequently problematic because all cultures are incredibly complex and diverse and because cultural identities are dynamic, longer interactions in multicultural settings have also been recommended. Therefore, effective communication requires a knowledge of the fundamentally intracultural nature of identity. (Howarth, 2011)

The fundamental knowledge needed for managing communication and power relations in a multicultural society cut across the activities of the media and it also includes that of individuals, government, non-governmental organisations, corporate and multinational organisations, civil society organisations, ethnic groups etc. This book has been sectioned into four thematic areas which address the context, issues and perspectives on the subject matter. Section one has two papers that treat how public relations has been deployed in managing power relations for private and public institutions in a multicultural setting. Section two has four papers that highlighted issues on social media, politics and governance within the context of national integration, government policies, power relations and media literacy in a multicultural society. Section three focuses on media, power and gender representation. The three papers in the section discuss harmful practices against women in power relations, perceptions of gender representation and communication cultural practices in a multicultural society. In section four, the focus is on media, ethics and cultural representation. The four papers under the section examine issues and perspectives on media ownership, media ethics, communicating separatist agitations, media acculturation and the dilemma of media and freedom of communication in a multicultural society.

In Chapter 1, a case of how multinationals handle power relations using public relations as a tool was examined. The author investigated how power relations in the MTN Nigeria SIM registration crisis were handled by interviewing public relations professionals who

managed the crisis and thereby served as key informants in the study. The application of the PESO Integrated Media Model was identified as a major intervention used in stakeholders' management planning, and to discipline and curate narratives on the crisis in favour of MTN Nigeria and toned-down negative narratives which occurred as a result of intense power relations. Although issues such as fixed mindsets, poor media literacy, source credibility and the nature of the fine faced challenged how the PESO integrated media model was applied, the author concluded that the success recorded with the fine reduction to the satisfaction of all parties involved made the application of the model reasonable.

The author in Chapter 2 examined how the power play of *dominant coalitions* which represent groups of individuals and top management in an organization interferes with the activities of public relations professionals in ministries, departments and agencies in Nigeria. The study concluded that the dominant coalitions do not allow for diversity in their approach to public relations as well as how they engage public relations professionals. The dynamics of social media engagement as a tool for the promotion of national integration was the focus of the discussion in Chapter 3. The authors, using Nigeria as a case study, investigated the social media platforms that are frequently used for promoting national integration, the elements of national integration that are frequently discussed on social media platforms among Nigerians and the social media messages that are predominantly used in promoting national integration. The consumption pattern and feelings of the users were also examined. The study found that WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, in that order, are the top social media platforms used among Nigerians in the promotion of national integration. Political integration, followed by religious integration, ethnic integration, economic integration, and cultural integration are major aspects of national integration which are promoted on social media in Nigeria. However, the author's conclusion that the respondents do not find social media messages on national integration favourable and without positive influence in their view may be of interest to future studies.

In Chapter 4, the influence of social media on how people receive and perceive government policies was investigated. Objectives set out in the study include determining the level of audience exposure to social media content on government policies and activities, examining the nature of social media content on government policies and activities, evaluating audience perception of the influence of social media content on government policies and activities and examine the attitude of the audience towards the use of social media for building an inclusive and hate-free democratic society. The study concluded that social media platforms are popular means through which people are exposed to information about government policies and the platforms provide a veritable avenue for citizen-government engagement. Although it was noted in the study that often, information about government policies could be false vis-à-vis the seldom expression of hate speech by social media users, the platforms can be used to checkmate government excesses in terms of policy formulation and execution since the citizens are always kept abreast of the developments.

The authors in Chapter 5 carried out a critical discourse analysis of the relationship between social media and power relations using the Twitter ban in Nigeria as a case study. In their discourse, they were able to examine how some selected news sources use textual and linguistic clues to report the underlying debates regarding the Twitter ban in Nigeria and interrogate the discursive and social practices that influenced the news sources'

attitudes on the matter. The study found that both the local and international reports have been offered from some similar sociopolitical arguments, that the suspension was wrong and will have implications on political participation and freedom of expression. The discursive practice noted is that since the news sources are available online, it is not difficult to explain why all the analyzed news articles have been observed to have discursively described the Twitter suspension in Nigeria as somewhat excessive and authoritarian.

Given the challenges associated with social media as a tool for socialization, the author in Chapter 6 advocated for media literacy as a panacea for managing fake news online. The paper focused on media literacy for identifying fake pictures and other graphics that are often deployed by mischief makers to create doubts, ethnic bias and prejudice which sometimes lead to crises and conflicts in a multicultural society. The paper used the Bloom taxonomy to explain the levels of knowledge that can help social media users navigate the curve of fake pictorial representations, including the use of software.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 examined issues around power relations and gender representation in a multicultural society. Starting with harmful practices which expose female journalists to excessive dangers in their duty, the author in Chapter 7 was able to establish that many female journalists have demonstrated courage and diligently completed their tasks even in the face of serious issues such as covering the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria. The successes recorded in the opinion of the author should serve as a reference point in the argument that women can hardly survive dangerous terrain, particularly in a multicultural society. The author in Chapter 8 took the argument further by examining the extent to which media reports encourage general and gender stereotypes and discrimination. The paper also investigated if the macho-newsroom culture in journalism practice is the reason for biased media reports of females vis-à-vis the reason why fewer women practice journalism. Findings from the study showed that although the media partially accentuate stereotypes and discrimination against the female gender in society, the macho newsroom culture in journalism practice is not responsible for biased media reports against women. The paper also concluded that while the factors responsible for fewer women in journalism could differ among societies and cultures, the factors include culture, marriage, religion, career prospects, macho newsroom, interest, laziness, nature of work, stereotypes, poor remuneration, health issues, and internal politics. The case of widowhood communication which was explored in Chapter 9 gave insight into another class of gender representation that requires attention in a multicultural society like Nigeria.

The final section of the book discussed how media ownership and ethics determine the nature of power relations in the media vis-à-vis perspectives on what is right or wrong in media representation within the context of the many voices and media freedom in a multicultural society. In Chapter 10, the author subjected the interplay between media ownership and power relations to a critical review and concluded that the interplay of media ownership with a power play in a multicultural setting has become a major complication in the course of media effective arbitration to engender unity and progress. To ameliorate this challenge, the author in Chapter 11 strongly advocated for operational conditioning that would enable journalists to abide by the ethics of the profession to effectively play their role in a multicultural society that relies heavily on fair and balanced reportage from the media to operate. For instance, the authors in Chapter 12 explored how the “sit-at-home” messages of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in South Eastern Nigeria have

gained traction in the media and compliance among people living in the region. The paper concluded that IPOB's call for people to stay home had a real influence on the people of Southeastern Nigeria. It is plausible to argue that the message, in a wider sense, accomplished its intended purpose and that the Southeast's targeted population largely complied. While this phenomenon lies in the space of communication and power relations, the role of the media cannot be jettisoned.

Such a role, particularly in the area of acculturation is what the authors in Chapter 13 explored. While the media play a major role in providing entertainment for the people, the authors examined how such entertainment can become a tool in communicating culture vis-à-vis acculturation in a multicultural environment using the "Dance-Africa-Dance" reality show as a case study. The authors found and concluded that three themes viz cultural harmony, entertainment value and projection of African culture defined the perceptions of the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show among the respondents. They noted that the media narratives surrounding the "Dance Africa Dance", are an attempt to use a fusion of Indian and African dance styles as entertainment and a way of promoting cultural diversity. The last chapter could be described as a compendium of issues that must be addressed particularly from the African perspective. The author created a trajectory of African media and communities building on past experiences to relate today's perspectives on how Africans should communicate for progress and build an endearing comity of nations. In this discourse, the role of the media cannot be discarded although the author noted that the media has often failed to live up to the expectation of the people, particularly in a pluralistic context. The challenge however is for Africans to define their being in the comity of nations, decipher what works and what does not in the context of culture and the peculiar nature of the continent with the hope that they will communicate better for their progress, well-being and welfare.

References

- Aniekan, J. (2022). Media, power relations and multiculturalism in Nigeria. *Innovative Journal of Mass Communication and Information Technology*, (8) 2. <https://www.bwjjournal.org/index.php/bsjournal/article/view/918/828>
- Chen, G. (2012). The impact of new media on intercultural communication in global context. *China Media Research*, 8 (2) pp. 1-10. [Http://www.wdw.chinamediaresearch.net/index.php/back-issues?id=54](http://www.wdw.chinamediaresearch.net/index.php/back-issues?id=54)
- Curran, J. (2002) *Media and Power*. Routledge
- Howarth, C. (2011). Representations, identity and resistance in communication. In: D. Hook; B. Franks & M. W. Bauer (eds.) *The social psychology of communication*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/35983/1/Representations,_identity_and_resistance_in_communication_\(LSERO\).pdf](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/35983/1/Representations,_identity_and_resistance_in_communication_(LSERO).pdf)
- IAC Publishing. (2020, April 11). *What are power relations and who is affected by them?* Reference. <https://www.reference.com/world-view/power-relations-8263a0ae182ff7c4>
- Karikari, K. (2022) Communication, media, and power relations in a multicultural society: One country, many voices, dilemmas of free expression. [Paper Presentation] 9th Annual International Conference of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), 2022.
- Rai, S. K. & Pallavi, K. (2017). Role of new media in enhancing multiculturalism and diversity in Assam and Bihar. *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field*, 3(7). <https://www.ijirmf.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/201707001.pdf>
- Takwa, Z. S. (2017). An overview on multi-culturalism, diversity and reporting conflict in Nigeria. In U. Pate & L. Oso (Eds.), *Multiculturalism, diversity and reporting conflict in Nigeria* (pp. 821). Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers).