

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONAL SECURITY: INFLUENCE OF MEDIA INTERFACE ON COMMUNALITY AND RELIGIOUS CRISES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

BY

Dr Toki Olushola Tajudeen:
Department of Islamic Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences,
Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, Gmail:
tokitajudeenolushola@gmail.com

&

Kamal-deen Olawale Sulaiman (Ph.D):
Department of Religious Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria,
Gmail: kamaldeensulaiman@eksu.edu.ng

Abstract

The different tribal groups in Kwara State are characterized by multi-religious settings, yet, they relate together on social and political platforms. However, the trending activities in the modern world reveal information technology as a necessary cursor and determinant of the status of socio-religious behaviours in an interactive community. This is because of its persuasive capacity. Information technology involves electronic collation and dissemination of information regardless of geographical and time barriers. The nexus between information technology and the nation building is vital to national security and developments. The fast tempo of developments and peaceful co-existence in the modern world depend on the relevant application of information technology. However, the present unfolding turbulent socio-political and inter-religious interactions among the people of Nigeria are the necessary impetus for the assessments of the performances of information technology in the participatory nation building in Nigeria. The article unravels the roles of information technology in the religious conflicts and national security in Nigeria. The findings of the research reveal that Information and Communication Technology is the oases of solace for peaceful resolution during socio-political despair through its mediatory and reconciliatory expertise. However, the research concludes that the problems of the world revolve round communication gap and can be solved by better communication system. Some of the recommendations include the need to employ the Islamic model of conflict resolution and media practice to stabilize the multi-religious society of Nigeria.

Key words: Technology, Peace, Reportage, Interface, Media, Caption.

Introduction

The conventional application of the Information Technology in the dissemination of information is to inform, entertain and educate the masses. The media decide sensational and newsworthy events among the range of events covered.¹ By virtue of professional expertise, the newsmen determine the degree of social responsiveness of the audience through the quality of news fed to the public.² These critical and functional roles of the media in the society is corroborated by Oyovbaire through his analytical perspective of media's news captions and their capacity to generate desired attitudinal trends among the Nigerian citizens.³

The need to achieve popularity among the news consumers and the desire remain in the newsstand are some of the inevitable circumstances influencing news items to sway towards ethnic and religious affinity regardless of its adverse effects on national security and development.⁴ The media practice with particular reference to news reportage and social reactions of the citizens plays important impacts on the concept of unity and peaceful interaction in Nigeria.⁵ This is evident in the intermittent turbulent waves of crises with religious undertone in the North and South-West geo-political zones in Nigeria. Ethno-religious loyalty demonstrated through the use of information technology constitute menace to national development in Nigerian society.⁶

Bidmos⁷ expresses his opinion in collaboration with the views of Oyovbaire on the negative influence of religious loyalty in news reportage. According to him, the journalists write biased or prejudiced reportage in Nigeria on the grounds of religious sentiments. He calls for the re-orientation of media professionals for an ideal news dissemination. He justified his position as follows:

Experience has shown that the mass media reports, news analysis and features are capables of playing a positive or negative role in the relationship between Muslims and Christians depending on the intention and orientation of the journalist concerned. More often than not, the reactions of the Muslims to Christians' actions or vice-versa are determined by the mass media reports⁸.

Brief History of the People of Kwara State and Cultural Communalities

Kwara State of Nigeria was created in 1967. It consists of heterogeneous religious and tribal groups. The divergent cultural groups are found in the Local Government Areas of the State. The major tribes in Kwara State are Yoruba, Baruba and Nupe. The Yoruba occupies the highest frequency of the aboriginal settlers in the twelve Local Government Areas in Kwara State. These are: Ifelodun, Ilorin East, Ilorin South, Ilorin West, Oke-Ero, Asa, Oyun, Moro, Ekiti, Isin, Irepodun and Offa.² Although, Ilorin is predominantly a Yoruba ancient city yet had other tribes such as Fulani, Nupe and Hausa co-existing with Yoruba people. The Fulani and Hausa tribes are historically acknowledged along with Yoruba people as the founding citizens of Ilorin.³ Yoruba is more populous tribe in Kwara State. The densely populated areas by the Yoruba are Ilorin, Offa and Omu-Aran. In view of this, prominence will be given to the places mentioned above where media performances were observed.

African traditional religion had been the basis of cultural values and communalities among the ancient Yoruba people prior to the advent of imperialism. Ilorin and Offa had respective indigenous rich cultural heritage and beliefs which are in consonance with the Islamic principles of good neighbourhood and social intercourse. The Yoruba communities were consolidated on the platform of peaceful co-existence and hospitability.⁴

Islam came to Nigeria in the 11th century. Christianity was introduced along with Western civilization in the mid nineteenth century.⁵ However, despite the communalities and positive interactive level of the diverse groups, the presence of Islam and Christianity had ushered in an epoch of cultural transformation challenging the status quo. Undoubtedly, religions had been pretentiously used to pursue socio-political agenda. The situational trend in this regard is quite appalling in the new socio-religious interaction of the people of Nigeria.⁶ Thus, the new religious revolutionary trends and social dichotomy between the Muslims and Christians inevitably set the stage for rivalry and mistrust among Nigerian citizens. Both Islam and Christianity foster inter-religious peaceful interactions according to the orthodox teachings. The Holy Qur'an encourages peaceful interactive community as emphasized in the following verse:

“And if one of the idolaters seeks protection from you grant him protection till he hears the word of Allah, then make him attain his place of safety; this is because they are a people who do not know”.⁷

Disagreement and conflicts on varying degrees of issues are inevitable in a diverse and interactive community such as Kwara State. The two principal religious groups indispensably utilize media to project their identity and channel grievances. It is against this backdrop that the roles of mass media in the unification strategy cannot be down played in the modern competitive society.

Theoretical Framework

Mass media coverage of inter-religious news in relation to national development is based on Marxist and Cultural theories. The Marxian theory stipulates that the locus of power in a particular society has influence on the performance of mass media and other sensitive sectors of the political community. This refers to the ruling class and the capitalists⁸. They constitute the dominant group who control economic power and social order through the mass media outlets. The Marxian theory encapsulates the proprietorial influence on news stories to satisfy the yearnings of the ruling class. The theory is of the view that the mass media institutions produce captivating and saleable news in order to remain in the news stand among the competing and outrageous population of news producers.

On the other hand, the Cultural Hegemony theory was propounded by Antonio Gramsci. The theory postulates realistic or authentic reflection of news for the public consumption⁹. However, the Hegemony theory is aware of the existence of the ruling class and their dominance but believes their cultural influence on news items should be unconsciously felt by the news consumers. The hegemonic model is relevant to the criticisms on the sensational captions and sensitive news reportage observed in the article.

Inter-Religious Peaceful Co-existence and Communality in Kwara State

The concept of interface and peaceful co-existence are unambiguously contained in the positive scriptural teachings of the Qur'an and Bible. The teachings lay strong emphasis on the indispensable interactions among diverse religious groups, especially between Muslims and Christians.¹⁰ For instance, the Islamic precepts on tolerance and neighbourliness greatly influenced the acculturation pattern on the people of Ilorin in terms of hospitality, interface and peaceful co-existence with different tribal and religious groups.

The ancient Ilorin town in the mid nineteenth century granted audience to the powerful delegates of the Christian missionaries who were on several evangelization visits to the town in 1849, 1856, 1872, 1893, 1897 and 1899.¹¹ The successive Emirs of Ilorin such as Shitta, Aliyu, Moma and Suleman without compromising their religion (Islam) engaged the white men missionaries in scholarly inter-religious dialogues devoid of acrimony and conflicts. The missionaries who were hosted at different stages in sequence according to the royal succession were T.J., Bowen, Clarke, S.S. Farrow and Ajayi Crowther.¹²

Islam predated the existence of Christianity in Offa. Islam and Christianity were established in the town in 1850 and 1907 C.E respectively.¹³ In spite of religious differences, the people of Offa acknowledge and respect bond of blood relationship. The strong family affinity among the members of the community determines the high level of positive interaction with one another in religious issues, politics and other social affairs. For instance, the composition of Offa Traditional Council, Political parties, Offa Descendants Union (ODU) are made up of both Muslim and Christian members of the community.¹⁴

Roles of Mass Media on Peaceful Co-existence among Inter-Religious Groups in Kwara State

The media institutions set agenda for public discourse and collate news with a view to disseminating the information to the public to crave for responses. The media are expectedly indispensable institution for national intergration.¹⁵ In view of the attributive professionalism mentioned, the paper believes that good communality, unity and peaceful co-existence can be enhanced strategically within the purview of media mediations and reconciliatory approaches.

The Federal Government of Nigeria explores the Media facilities to sustain peaceful co-existence of the different groups of people in the country. The Government made restrictive control on electronic media to pre-empt inter-religious crises emanating from blasphemous broadcasting.¹⁶ For instance, the staff of the Nigerian Television Authority must effect editorial review on religious documentaries before transmission or broadcast.¹⁷ The mass media indispensably performs the following socio-religious functions:

- Dissemination of information around us to enhance responsiveness.
- Political socialization of the citizenry to give them awareness about government and their obligations.
- Acts as platform for expressions of opinions by the public.¹⁸

The interface roles of the Kwara State Publishing Corporation, the publisher of *The Herald* in inter-religious affairs in Kwara State is a milestone in the development of inter-religious dialogue. This has been a viable platform designed for peaceful co-existence by the Kwara State Government since 1973.

The then state Governor; Colonel David Bamigboye (rtd) mentioned in strong terms that *The Herald* would enjoy all the constitutional freedom in order to function as the mouth-piece of the people He added, the newspaper would project the diverse cultural heritage and the belief system of the people of Kwara State.²⁰ The Kwara State Government meticulously maintained the supervisory role on the Herald towards publications of ecumenical strategies on regular basis to harmonise the Muslims and Christians of the State on the common grounds of peaceful co-existence and share collective responsibility on resource development.²¹

In view of the objective prioritised by the State Military government, *The Herald* publishes religious articles and news items capable of synthesising diverse religious group on the platform of tolerance. Thus the newspaper has severally featured topical religious issue denoting confluence between religions for proper

orientation of the citizenry. *The Herald* accommodates religious publications (Islam and Christianity) devoid of antagonistic sectarian views with equal columns on Fridays and Sundays.²²

The Islamic column captioned *The Qiblah* is with the range of issues affecting the Muslims. The Islamic columnist on regular basis intends to equip the Muslim readers with the required knowledge on how to practice their religion with non-violent intellectual approaches to combat modern challenges confronting the Muslims. Such challenges include: terrorism, Islam and scientific organ transplantation, Muslim's political participation in Nigeria, etc. Within periscope of the *Qiblah* section, there is another caption; Friday Discourse. The subsection reflects orientation of the Muslim readers on the practice of their religion such as the performance of *Zakat* (compulsory alm), *Sawm* (fasting), etc.²³

There are many Muslim columnists in the Herald who have brilliantly expressed the Islamic position on such topical issues: Islam and Community: Resource Control in Islam and Good Neighborliness' 'Muslim Women and Nation Building in Africa, etc. Some of the versatile scholars are: Professor Lanre Badmas, Hon. Justice S.O Muhammad (rtd) Safi Jimba, M.A Ambali and many others.

Kwara Arise is also a contemporary weekly newspaper in the Nigeria news-stand in Kwara State. It was founded in 2015 by the Nigeria news International Limited, Nasarawa State.²⁴ The newspaper, in addition to the coverage of the socio-political issues in Kwara State gives prominence to ideal inter-faith relations through its publication of articles on Islam and Christianity on Fridays and Sundays respectively. The usual columnist have been Pastor Sam Jaiyeola and Alhaji AbdulQudir Abiola Apaokagi for Christianity and Islam respectively. However, there are some religious articles advocating for national unity of the inter-religious groups in Nigeria.

Assessment of the Roles of Media in the Coverage and Reportage of Inter-Religious Events in Kwara State

The functional interventions of the Information and Communication institutions in Kwara State in some social crises had described the mass media as either reconciling the warring groups or aggravating civil unrest. Some of these scenarios included media intervention in the 1985 inter-religious wrangling over Palm Sunday procession in Ilorin, controversy over Imamship selection in Offa in 2004 and crises over location of Moremi Shrine adjacent to the Central Mosque in Offa.²⁵

Without mincing words, this has put mass media in a critical position in view of their news reportage. This is vital to national integration and peaceful co-existence in Kwara State. The media, apart from the entertainment function, through their professional expertise, orientate the public on a range of public issues on the basis of their news worthiness. The attitudinal responses in form of negative or positive reaction depend on the magnification or triviality of the news story fed to the public.²⁶ Some scholars shared the views that the media control information and determine the range of opinion generated from the consumers of news story. This is a corroborative position shared by Oyoibvaire. He submits that the type of news headline influences people's reactionary psyche.²⁷

Oyoibvaire's discursive approach to the deregulation policy of the media industry in 1990 was the catalyst for new media climate in Nigeria. There were proliferation of competitive media industries and this led to inflammatory news reportage or sensationalism by the competing media institutions to remain in the news-stand. These atrocities were perpetuated to catch glimpse of the prospective news consumers who had to choose from range of newspapers and magazines at a news stand.²⁸

The above analyses are the contemporary strong factors responsible for news reportage in favour of or against ethnic chauvinism or religious affinity. These have been responsible for the various turbulent political scenarios and inter-religious crises in Nigeria. Bidmos,²⁹ asserts that:

Experience has shown that the mass media report, news analysis and features are capable of playing a positive or negative role in the relationship between Muslims and Christians depending on the intention and orientation of the journalist concerned. More often than not, the reactions of the Muslims to Christians actions or vice-versa are determined by the mass media reports.

Moreover, the proprietorial influence of the government on some mass media has also been attributed to denial of the public to put across constructive criticisms on public issues affecting the welfare of the citizenry.³⁰

The media coverage and reportage of the following inter-religious wrangling in Kwara State brought turbulent interpretative reactions by the diverse religious elements in Kwara State. Some of the inter-religious crises in focus attracted sympathy in form of violence from other places.

The media were alleged for the escalatory tendencies surrounding the 1986 Palm Sunday festivity in Ilorin.³¹ The Christian procession carried out in the city during the celebration generated hot controversies between the Muslims and Christians. The pages of the newspapers were filled with reportage of what occasioned the crisis. No significant focus was given to rehabilitation, mediatory and reconciliatory strategies. The in expertise handling of such religious tensions promoted misconceptions about the two religions.³² The adherents of Islam and Christianity went into fierce encounter and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed while some people were displaced.

The international evangelical visit of Reinhard Bonnke in 2004 was another milestone in the history of media integration strategies for interreligious interaction in Kwara State. The proposed grand Ilorin city crusade by Reinhard Bonnke was vehemently repelled by the Ilorin Youth Muslims on the basis of speculative mammoth population intending to attend the grand city crusade. In view of this, there was anxiety over infiltration of Christianity in the ancient Islamic city of Ilorin. On the other hand, the Christians agitated for the need to protect their constitutional right to freedom of religion.

The episode of the inter-religious clash was exacerbated by the series of media announcements in August 2004. The announcements attributed to the Chief Imam of Ilorin condemned the repulsive attempts on the crusade by the Muslim Youths of Ilorin and thus disassociated the Council of Imams from the purported unruly behavior demonstrated by the alleged Muslims Youths.³³ The interpretation of the contents on the announcements by the electronic media by the public, resorted to fracas among the Muslims in Ilorin as a result of the alleged position of the Chief Imam on the sensitive issue.

The media reportage of the intra and inter-religious controversies over the demolition of "Moremi Shrine at Offa by *The Sunday Tribune* put the radical Muslims and Olofa of Offa at critical position. A clash ensued between the cult members and the Muslim Youths in 1997 at Offa.³⁴ This led to the demolition of the Moremi Shrine in 1997 by the Muslim Youth revolutionists. The said traditional sanctuary was said to have been reconstructed by the Olofa of Offa who was a practising Muslim in 1999.³⁵ The caption of the conflict in *The Sunday Tribune*: "Moremi Shrine tears Offa ruling house" generated a renewed hostility and violence.

Consequently, the traditional Chiefs such as Professor Oyawoye, Alhaji Sanni Aba and some other who were stalwart supporters of the Muslim youths against the continuity of Moremi cultural practice were relieved of their traditional chieftaincy titles by the Olofa of Offa.³⁶

It is worthy of note that the roles of media careless contents on the episode of Moremi and Offa Muslim Youths led to more adversarial relationship among the divergent members of the community.

The recent unfolding media coverage and reportage of the clamour for *Isese* national day festival in Nigeria, especially in Ilorin has put media industries in a sensitive position of criticisms. *Isese* are the practice of the Yoruba traditional events to resuscitate beliefs in the practice of African Traditional Religion. The media reflections and public discourses on *Isese* in Nigeria and diaspora have severed the concept of national security and developments. Conversely, the trending issues on the sacrilegious attack on Islam by one AbdulAzeez (an African Religious adherent) popularly known as *Tani Olohun* provoked the public peace and unity when he publicly burnt the Qur'an and rained assaults on some eminent Islamic Scholars. The social media featured the admiration of his mammoth supports who continuously lauded him for his bravery and approaches against Islam.

Islamic Recipe for National Security and National Development

From the forerun, the mass media practice and their destructive impact on society are inevitably influenced by many factors. These include manifestations of inexpertise quality which encapsulate the following:

patriotism, societal control, monopolistic tendencies, sponsor or advertiser's influence and proprietorial pressure.³⁷ Walter Cronkite a staff of America's Columbian Broadcasting Company expressed the inevitable natural instincts in journalism as follows:

I do not want to leave you with the impression that I think we are perfect. Far from it We make many errors. We do things we ought not to do, and we leave undone things we ought to do. We are not always fair and just. There is not a man who can truthfully say that he does not harbor in his breast prejudice, bias, strong sentiments, pros and con on some if not all the issues of the day.³⁸

However, despite the fallible nature of man in the coverage and circulation of news, the link between Islam and the Mass Media is founded on the Islamic injunctions on dissemination of viable information in the society to sustain communality, growth and development. The principle of information in Islam is to employ veritable investigative approach in consonance with the Qur'anic declaration:

O ye who believe! If a sinner comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest yet harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.³⁹

Nigeria majorly operates western influenced journalism. The highly competitive nature of the media industries in Nigeria is entangled in the need for survival in order remain in the news-stand.⁴⁰ This is further compounded by the syndrome of poor readership and listenership attitude of Nigerians. Thus, the profilerated media institutions scramble for limited information consumers through unique sensitization strategies.

As revealed in the preceding section, the onslaught of the media in the contemporary society is perpetuated through exaggerated information, institutional aggrandizement, celebration of the beloved personalities with deceptive toga of heroism and vilification of the hated celebrities.

Excessive praise of beloved personality and criticisms on the grounds of hatred are attributes of incorrigible liars. They are unreliable informants. The Qur'an therefore, equip the Muslims with investigative approaches to check the reliability of the propagator of information and the verosity of any news story.⁴¹ The Qur'an states:

Have you not seen those who claim sanctity for themselves. Only Allah sanctifies whom He pleases but they will never fail to receive justice and shall not receive even a very little injustice. Behold how they invent a lie against Allah. But that by itself is a manifest sin.⁴²

Those who love (to see) scandal circulates among the believers, will have a grievous chastisement in this life and in the hereafter: Allah knows, and ye know not.⁴³

And those who annoy believing men and women undeservedly, bear (on themselves) a calumny and a glaring sin.⁴⁴

Verifications of the authenticity of information were referred to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) during his life⁴⁵ The Islamic scholars relied on the Qur'an and Hadith for scrutinization of historical analysis. The theories can be usefully applied in the media profession. However, Islamic scholars are of consensus opinion on the assessment of the following qualities to sustain ideal information coverage and dissemination process: There should be data evidence provided by the informant. This should be free from forgery and suspicion.⁴⁶ This should be substantiated with *Tawatur* (consensus information of eye witnesses).

Witnesses in the collation of news items are vital to the reliability of the source. This can be likened to verification of Hadith through the assessment of the science of *Isnad* as explored by Islamic scholars. Witnesses serve as complimentary secondary sources of confirmation of news events and reliability of the personality involved in the circulation of news.⁴⁷

In the contemporary era, in the bid to meet the enormous financial needs of the media institutions, there have been instances of abnormal sensitization of the public through stories created out of context. Some of the episodes had instigated crises. Media information in relation to contextual application to the current issues in public is vital to sustainability of ideal media relation.

The establishment of the Muslim Media Watch Group (MMWG) in Kwara State in 2006⁴⁸ has been a contributory institution to the resuscitation of ideal media practice in the state. The association also

incorporates its branches in various States of Nigeria to project ideal Islamic concept of journalism. MMWG supervises media organizations to ensure equal air space for the two principal religions (Islam and Christianity) on Mass Media.⁴⁹ The Muslim Media Watch Group has been a media forum for clarifications of Islamic position on the issues affecting the welfare of the Muslims.

Recommendations

In view of the indispensable interactive roles of the mass media in the socio-religious society such as Kwara State, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- Media experts should subject news items to editorial review before publication and release for public consumption. This is believed would reduce the misuse of captions capable of instigating violence in the society.
- The Mass Media in their public relation capacity indispensably requires desired religious orientation for the journalists and members of public. The regular orientations of such will enhance better interface and tolerance.
- Member of the public, especially the Muslims should develop veritable intellectual attitude to address religious grievances. This will educate non-Muslims about Islam as a religion and the position of the religion on certain sensitive public issue. This enhances better communality devoid of violence.
- Finally, the Media experts need to employ diplomatic approach in riot reportage rites. The correspondences gathered during reportage which are influenced by emotion should be expertly reported to calm down public tension.

Conclusion

The paper has revealed that communality can be positively effected with ideal media functionalism. The Kwara State Government through the conventional newspaper (*The Herald*) sustains inter-religious peaceful co-existence. However, such conventional newspaper has limited space for vital inter-religious affairs. The absence of Ministry of Religion and inter-religious mass media institution to be sustained by religious experts of proven integrity contributed to the eruption of media miscarriage of information.

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