CHAPTER ELEVEN

LIBRARY AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

Abstract

The moment Nigeria became an independent nation her national unity had already been compromised. This manifested shortly after independence with the Nigerian civil war and has continued in the various ethnic agitations for cessation parts of the country as well as clamors by others to restructure, strengthened today by what appears as sporadic ethnic cleansing of some ethnic groups by others each passing day. This appears to be loss on Nigeria with no end in sight or else is a deliberate ploy to overlook the inevitable, the taking over of the country by a particular ethnic group. In order to stem the festering lingering issue, the paper asserts that for Nigeria to continue to be a nationhood true national unity can be achieved if Nigerians go back to the drawing table to examine their faulty foundation as laid by the colonial masters. To do that the library is required to offer objective information they are known to provide on issues. This is through information service programmes on the various social media platforms. The aspects for which information can be provided among others include components of true nationhood, various ways of achieving and sustaining national unity among others. One of such ways is restructuring the various kingdoms or ethnic groups in the area into states or regions and appropriately renaming the area as United States of Nigeria or United Kingdom of Nigeria or United Regions of Nigeria. By so doing the diverse people's wishes and aspirations of an independent nation without any one group being marginalized and or trying to subjugate others will be reflected and captured. The paper conclude that true national unity is realistic and it is high time the library and social media are involved to achieve it by any government that is sincere and with the willingness of all the peoples involved without external and internal interferences from both within and outside Nigeria.

Key words: Library, social media, national unity, Nigeria

Introduction

Since the creation of Nigeria, the issue of national unity has been a major problem. This has been so because of the manner in which the areas around river Niger from which Nigeria derived her name were merged into a nation state without due consideration of the people's peculiarities. Though the people share a common geographical area, they are distinct by their different cultural identities and therefore it was and is a misnomer to call the area Nigeria. Nigeria is a name that refers to a common geographical area and not the inhabitants with different cultural heritage. Because of this faulty foundation, the corporate existence of Nigeria has been ever affected till date, beginning with the Nigerian civil war. Since then there has been growing suspicion and fears among the various ethnic groups (nations) of one another characterized by clashes and skirmishes in the area to undermine one another and have dominion. This is seen by the various ethnic agitations in different parts of the country. These agitations, disenchantments and subsequent happenings in Nigeria have strengthened and renewed the increased call from many quarters for the restructuring of Nigeria both openly and covertly. Others are at home with the total disintegration of the nation into smaller nations while others are for the restructuring whereby every group can have a sense of belonging with one united front. Because of all these true national unity appears to elude Nigeria.

In an attempt to address this phenomenon in the past and present, different government programs have led to the establishment of structures to allow different ethnic groups within Nigeria to develop and attain their full potentials unhindered. But unfortunately these has not helped much as dissenting voices continue to increase because of calculated activities of other ethnic groups suspected to finalized their agenda to take over control of others heightens. It is becoming certain by each passing moment and happenings in Nigeria that Nigerians need to return to the drawing table. This is in order to identify the root causes of agitations and clamors since independence to date. The success of this today however depends on the information provided by the library and the use of social media. It is unfortunate that both the library and the social media since their existence in Nigeria have not been maximally used in the area of social mobilization and sensitization. Scarcely are the state public and national libraries seen taking advantages of the social media to present people with objective information on national issues. This is not even when the issues threaten the corporate existence of the nation. Silence on the side of the library before now may be understood but not now with the social media. Continuous silence of the library is indicative of negligence and irresponsibility. Disintegration is therefore imminent and a matter of time if there is no intervention. History has it that libraries in developed countries contributed in no small way by availing their resources and services in the execution of national issues like war, legislation, governance and a lot more and are still doing so even today. A good example of one of such library is the Library of Congress in United States of America. The library is noted for supplying information in the execution of any national and legislative matter. The case of the library in Nigeria cannot be an exception given the threat to national unity and the time that is fast running out on the issue of national unity. For this reason the paper looks at the role of library in society, the nature and purpose of social media, the concept of national unity and the sustenance of library and the social media to enhance national unity in Nigeria.

Role of Library in Society

Traditionally, library is the store house of society's knowledge and information. It is a social institution created to conserve knowledge, preserve the cultural heritage and provide information; undergird and underpin education and research and serve as foundations of recreation (Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002). Equally collection of books and other forms of records, housed, organized and interpreted is to meet broad and varying needs of the people for information, knowledge, recreation and aesthetic enjoyments. In essence the library acquires and store information in different formats in anticipation to solely address the different information needs in society. Agber & Mngutyô (2013)further agrees that libraries provide information in print materials like journals, magazines, newspapers and so on; visuals such as posters, pictures, diagrams, drawing, and so on; audio such as radios, public address systems, tape recorders and the like and audiovisuals such as televisions, projectors, and so on and more recently, the internet. Affirming, Assoh (2014) succinctly admits that libraries all over the world are regarded as national infrastructure, repository of information and thus

act as catalyst for empowerment. Thus, by implication the library is an information reservoir for addressing society's information needs of whatever kind. The delivery of such information in society today is facilitated by Internet among others through social media. The emergence of Internet as a result of ICT has revolutionized how information is handled in totality (Wua & Tion, 2013). This include the way it is stored, processed, packaged and disseminated as well as how users seek and access information (Anunobi & Okoye, 2008). It has also offered more platforms for the library to share and provide information of varying kinds to many different categories of information users.

Traditional library today are therefore seen taking advantage of ICT to migrate their manual library routine practices to electronic and online environment through computerization and automation via digitizing their collection. Apparently, this is to enable libraries serve users efficiently and effectively in real time anywhere using vast information resources at their disposal at different platforms. In like manner, libraries can as well use the various platforms of social media to offer information services. These are services that provide pinpointed information to meet definite information needs including those on national unity. This is one among the several purposes the library has been created for. It is an information and communication system communicating stored information in a balance and objective manner. The various social media platforms can therefore be used to resolve national issues bothering on national unity. By so doing concerted action can be unanimously taken based on informed decision. If Nigeria ceded Bakassi to Cameroun on account of informed decision through international law court in peace, then there is nothing wrong for national issues to be resolved using peaceful means based on informed decision on the round table.

The Nature and purpose of Social Media

The social media is a recent phenomenon that evolved out of the Internet, the product of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The Internet generally has revolutionized the way people interact, share information and communicate thereby bridging the gap between people in the same geographical area and beyond. More people today take to the Internet than the library for their information needs, recreation, research and a lot more. This is not surprising because,the Internet offers more platforms for many things the library cannot offer. One of such is the social media. Apart from information which the social media offers through people just like the library through information materials, it is interactive, easily available and accessible through common electronic phones and devices owned and used by individuals. This is unlike the library that has been known to be a store house of knowledge/information whose content is limited and restricted to individuals, organizations, and institutions in a locality since her emergence (Assoh, 2014)to date in most libraries in Nigeria. Today however the library and Internet are seen complementing each other. Most libraries are becoming hybrid. They are combining both traditional manual library practices with electronic/Internet services. The library offers the society's stored past intellectual and political history, preserved cultural heritage and intellectual outputs, while

the social media offers the platform where such knowledge/information can be shared with a lot of people as regards political and national issues including national unity through communication and interaction. Quite a lot of misunderstandings have trailed the meaning of social media. However, ome of the meaning of social media by some scholars include: an interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (The free Encyclopedia, 2018). Nations (2018) agrees that social media are web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information. Collaborating further, Hudson (2018) assert that social media are the websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time. In addition, Hong (2018) admits that social media consists of online tools and websites that encourage people to interact with companies, brands, and people (including celebrities and journalists) and form communities by creating, publishing, and sharing content. Rouse (2018) sees social media as the collective online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. In 2016, Merriam-Webster defined social media as forms of electronic communication (such as Web sites) through which people create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, etc.

Social media is therefore a broad term for online information environments created on the Internet out of ICT where people interact, share and access information in real time quickly and easily. It is a two-way communication system unlike the traditional media where message is published through a one-way communication stream to the masses, e.g. radio, television and newspaper without feedback. It is also different from the library whose communication and feedback is limited to active users alone. For the social media the communication outreach is far wider so also the feedback. Wua & Tion (2013) admits that social networking platform is used by individuals, organizations and business outfits for the purposes of interacting and reaching out to clients, patrons and themselves. Generally, Ayiah & Kumah (2011) states that they are used by the library to announce programmes of the library, give users opportunity to ask questions pertaining the use of the library, paste new books on the wall to inform the patron community, send brief updates to patrons and ask a librarian. Obviously these platforms can equally be used to address issues of national unity by the government.

Concept of National Unity

The term national refers to connected with a particular nation (Hornby, 2000&Longman, 2001).That is, associated with a group of people. While unity means being in agreement and working together or the state of being joined together to form one unit, or a situation in which a group of people work together for a particular purpose (Hornby, 2000& Longman, 2001). National unity therefore is a state whereby a nation or groups of people agree to live and work together in peace towards a common goal or purpose. This invariably means all

parties concern despite their differences has agreed to work together to live in peace as one people. The underlining key word here is agreement which connotes willingness and not coercion or manipulation or skirmishes to overtake, dominate, suppress and impose identity on another. Collaborating Marshall (1998) aver that a society is one who shares a common culture, occupy a common territorial area and feel themselves to constitute a unified distinct unity. Hak (2007) asserts that the higher the level of integration between these intermediate groups, the more cohesive society will be as a whole. The absence of social cohesion can result in greater violence towards others and oneself. Nigeria is a classical example of a people with a common territorial area with diverse cultures that is yet to attain true national unity (that is cohesion).Curiously and unfortunately, the emphasis has always been on their cultural diversity rather than on their common territorial area to the detriment of national unity.

In spite of the cultural diversity in Nigeria, true national unity is still attainable through civilized means of dialogue as enlighten people by willingness and sincerity. The else while pretense that has characterized Nigerian society that all is well when it is not, does not show a people ready to achieve national unity soon. In such false sense of peaceful coexistence groups are seen attempting subtly and covertly to take over the territory with the intention to subjugate others and scheme them out of their right as an independent people which is contrary to the principle of multi ethnic group existence as far as national unity is concern. A continuous assumption and over look of such issues as ethnic agitations, clamors and ethnic cleansing can be likened to a time bomb waiting to go off. Today the people may pretend by burying their heads in the sand as the proverbial ostrich that all is well but it does not nullify the existence of the problem. It is evidenced that the issue of national unity in Nigeria cannot be addressed by pretense but by open confrontation of the issue through properdialogueby the various groups as well as revisiting the constitution. The library and social media are critical to this project as information reservoir and as interactive and communicative platform.

Library and Social Media as Catalysts for National Unity

The library stores, preserves and conserves knowledge/information for education, research, recreation and a lot more for the society. The social media on the other hand provide the free information environment through which stored information is shared with the society and through which the society can interact with other members of the society and access information on whatever need including national issues. As such they serve as catalysts for national unity as follows:

Provision of information non nationhood: The library naturally provides information to her users. This is through information services. This is the provision of definite or pinpointed information to users. Nigerian national unity is under threat by various ethnic agitations for complete cessation and restructuring for quite some time now. There is every need to revisit her foundation. The persistent threat to national unity in Nigeria is enough rationale for the

library (public, national and academic libraries)to set up information service programmes that can objectively provide information on national unity. This can effectively be carried out through social media platforms. Overlooking the issue as it has always been is toying with a time bomb that could detonate anytime soon. There are other nations from which Nigeria can learn from. One good example is the past Soviet Union that dissolved into smaller nations however long it existed. Rather than tow the path of violence and war which in any way may result to the same thing, peace at a great cost the issue can be resolved peacefully by library and social media in providing specific information in an objective manner that would allow Nigerians to judge by themselves whether to continue as a nation with modification or totally restructure and yet remain together. Or alternatively, go their separate ways as fragmented nations in place of one. By so doing they can choose the path so deem appropriate with every sense of responsibility of the attendant consequences.

Educating the people on the components of nationhood: Another basic responsibility of the library is to educate and enlighten users. Nigerians have a right to be aware of their history as a nation. Equally important, they have the right to also know what constitute a nation. This knowledge should help them judge whether they are qualified to be called a true nation or not. Similarly too, they should be able to answer the following pertinent questions: was the forging together of Nigeria based on any mutual agreement by each group involved? Were they merged with the understanding that each group should be allowed to grow and develop along her peculiar lines, respected by other groups with a common united front? Other questions Nigerians must answer are: is the name Nigeria appropriate for such diverse people? Did it reflect and capture their wishes and aspirations collectively as a people as well as take into account their diversity? Why Nigeria and not United states of Nigeria like United States of America and United Kingdom? It stands to reason that if it is Nigeria there would be tendencies by other groups to dominate others. This is exactly the situation in Nigeria today. But if it is United States of Nigeria, groups would be forced to respect one another. This is because each ethnic group would be given a chance as an independent state governed by laws peculiar to them among several other things. Other germane questions for Nigerians to answer are: how should national resources be ·shared, how should the issue of national security be addressed? These and many more questions can be posed and Nigerians should be allowed to answer after the library has furnished them with necessary information as well as its analysis as exemplified above. The answers to these and other pertinent issues when addressed sincerely should go a long way in drawing the people closer to one united nation they aspire to belong to and are proud of. These are the issues the library should be seen furnishing Nigerian society with information on; as it also encourages dialogue in the process that could lead to civilized reformation and restructuring that will truly represent the people's wishes with an equally appropriate name given to the entity. Again, library and social media can serve as catalyst for national unity by providing community of users with information as appropriate as possible. This is the provision of information to users in a manner that they want through information service using appropriate social media channels.

This could be on facts and figures of things in the past as they were. They could also interpret facts in a manner that make issues plain and easy for all to see, understand and judge. It could also be predictions and the consequences that may follow should a wrong path be towed and the benefits should a right path be considered and followed. Furthermore, library and social media can serve as catalyst to enhance national unity by providing diverse opinions on any subject. Public libraries are noted for that. In this context, they must be seen identifying several options of national unity open to the Nigerian society that could work for them as it worked for others and presenting same to the people on the social media. This involved pointing out the things that makes for peace, harmony and unity among them and presenting them to the law makers and executives as well. Workable strategies could be adapted bearing in mind the peculiarity of the people. United States of America and United Kingdom's are classical examples of nations forged together without lingering issues of national unity. These are nations and kingdoms forged together with mutual understanding between the peoples that agreed to live together with appropriate names and laws reflecting their wishes and aspirations. Their laws are distilled into rules and regulations, reviewed and changed from time to time as deem appropriate to reflect their aspirations and present realities from time to time.

Moreover, library and social media can equally serve as a catalyst for national unity by using effective information service delivery to disseminate information. The concern is libraries must be seen adopting the appropriate social media platforms to reach out to all categories of people. The public and national libraries by their mandate are the appropriate libraries saddled with the responsibility to propagate national issues because of their public and national outlook. Therefore it is incumbent on these libraries to integrate their activities in to the various social media platforms. By so doing, they can send messages on national issues. These libraries are owned and financed by public funds with the mandate and responsibility to provide information to the Nigerian society including the parent institutions that established them, the State and Federal governments. The option of the social media channel to be used by the libraries is an appropriate one so that the people could be reached with information in real time with necessary feedback.

Sustaining Library and the Social Media to Enhance National Unity in Nigeria

Generally, libraries and social media are social innovations created to meet the information needs of the society. They must therefore be constantly repositioned in a way and manner to meet the present needs of the people. Logically their sustenance should not constitute a problem. This is because of the important purpose they serve. Sustaining them however entail:

- A political will of the government. This is a situation whereby government is determined and resolved to fund and support the library and social media activities towards sustainable national unity. It involves setting up structures that coordinates and manages the project on national unity sincerely rather than paylip service just

like other projects in the past, enacting enabling laws to back up the project and making the library and social media a top priority.

- Adequate funding of libraries and Internet services by the government. This involves government at state and federal levels releasing funds to state public, national and academic libraries and their Internet service units. By this the social media can be accessed and utilized in achieving national unity. This would also mean that the libraries will be able to subscribe to Internet services as well as subscribe to databases and websites. To sustain the adequate funding, the library and social media can be placed on first line charge of state governments and the national library placed under standing directive to be funded directly by the Nigeria central bank. This should cover staff remunerations, state of the art facilities, motivation of staff, their training and retraining.

Again, the library and social media can be sustained to enhance national unity by an autonomous law, that is there should be a law backing up state, national and academic libraries joint activities in enhancing national unity. This should also cover their financing, provision of modern information technology facilities and staffing without interference and freedom to operate objectively all the time. Furthermore, state public, national and academic libraries must be bound by law towards definite national responsibility. There must be law authorizing them to instantly launch into information services (that provide specific information) on national issues that affect the nation. The law should also stipulate that they can as well be assigned to specific national responsibilities by both state and federal governments. By the same law too they can also be directed to furnish government, (that is the executives, members of house of assembly and the judiciary)with comprehensive, balance and objective information on important national issues within a time line without necessarily depending on those of people agitating and clamoring for whatever purpose.

Moreover, the best brains in librarianship in research must be engaged for library and social media to be sustained as catalyst for national unity, the government must be ready to engage the best brains in librarianship, in the areas of research in social, economic, political, and historical national matters as well as ICTs that is, the Internet. These can be men and women that believe in Nigeria, in fairness, justice and peace. Above all, they should be men and women that are good at research. Other things that are involved in sustaining library and social media to enhanced national unity include:

- **Planning,** that is necessary and involves the libraries to be active participant of conversation on social media platforms, where they can contribute content worth sharing, answering questions that people ask on national issues, knowing her audience that is her users and the platform, listening to conversation, providing excellent customer service and support with an abridge summary of other nations success stories on national unity.
- **Committing the project to specific libraries. Specific libraries must be appointed** for the task of providing information on ·national unity. This should be captured in

the law that clearly established the project involved with social media on enhancing national unity. In specific terms state public, national and academic libraries teams must be formed and assigned to the task so that the project do not suffer failure or is ineffective. The various teams should ensure that schedules on social media are followed, content posted and standards are met. The teams in each state must regularly meet as stipulated by law to harmonize their research findings on information on national issues. Moreover, the teams must have clearly defined and measurable goals. The teams should be able to set goals on all national issues and comprehensively attempt to provide information on them in a manner that is transparent, objective and easily understood by the people.

- **The concern libraries must be kept on their toes.** They must constantly provide information on sustaining national cohesion. The information provided must be balanced, objective and detail to states and national governments including the state house of assemblies and national house of assembly. Information officers engaged must be well motivated in terms of training and retraining as well as adequate to be able to understand the differences in the social media channels and clearly define the goal for each channel. This is to ensure that the channels are monitored for feedback and response. Equally important is that there must be promotion of library and social media channels on the traditional media for people to be aware of what they are doing in offering information on national issues that enhances national unity.

Conclusion

True national unity in Nigeria is realistic and can be attained and sustained through information. The library and social media provide the resource and platform for that through provision of information on nationhood, undertaking analysis as well as interpretation of information that can be delivered to the people through the social media. For its sustenance it requires the political will of government, adequate funding of state, public, national and academic libraries, good planning, and assigning competent officers in charge of the project with defined set goals and. All these are achievable through government sincerity and the people's cooperation without external and internal interferences.

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