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MEDIA FRAMING OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN NATIONAL INTEGRATION CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This study investigated the framing of national identity in selected national integration campaigns on the network service of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). The study was necessitated by a dearth of studies on the framing of national identity in the national integration campaigns. The study is anchored on Ervin Goffman's frame theory. The research utilized a qualitative content analysis. The qualitative content analysis is deductive. Three prominent national integration campaigns were utilized for the analysis. The categories of framing drawn from the literature are: the use of language and the selective appropriation pattern of prominence and omission in the rendering of national identity. Findings revealed that the language used in the portrayal of national identity is constructive. Labeling and titling were used to project a constructive image of the Nigerian nation. There was a copious use of pronouns as an inclusive device. The national identity is portrayed utilizing the model of Civic identity, with the cultural identities receiving a lower order selective appropriation. The integration campaign is framed in such a manner that it omits the salient issues that are influential in the grievances of subgroups in the Nigerian state. The study recommends that the producers of the integration campaigns address the diversity of the subgroups in the Nigerian state and issues of grievances as elements in the campaigns and work towards building a model of unity that recognizes such differences.

Keywords: Framing, national identity, integration campaigns, Nigerian Television Authority, Ervin Goffman, selective appropriation, language use, Civic identity

Introduction

National integration has been defined as a process of unifying a society, which tends to make it harmonious (Duverger, cited in Adamu & Etila, 2019). As a process, it is a series of actions geared towards a goal of cohesion and unity among a heterogeneous population. When national integration becomes a broadcast feature, it is a strategic attempt by the media to reach a wider audience with a persuasive message of cohesion. National integration campaigns have become a regular feature, especially on the network service of the Nigerian state-owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) in recent times (Kusugh, 2018). Messages of cohesion and unity are endeavors rooted in nationalism (Nefes, 2018; Zriba, 2019). It is an attempt to sustain and, where necessary, preserve the national identity, especially when there are existential threats to the nation (Glynos & Voutyras, 2016; Whitehead & Scheitle, 2018). They thus strive to build a national identity on which cohesion can be possible. Ahmed (2008) stated that the national identity is the basis for the sustenance of a nation after the nation is born. Without a national identity, no state can survive. Media messages fostering national integration serve the social function of state survival. In the words of Ahmed (2008, p. 47);

Deeper links in the larger society have to be cultivated so that a substantial number of people, a majority if not the whole population, identify with the state in an emotional sense. In order to achieve that, the state has to disseminate the national identity through the educational system, the mass media and the political system.

National identity is thus a product that is encoded in the national integration campaigns. Such a construction of national identity is the product of a process of selection and organization of persuasive content aimed at eliciting positive reactions from the public. It is the case that the integration campaign is a social product detailing claims about what constitutes the Nigerian identity; this claim is the substance of affinity and it is the substance of affinity that justifies cohesion.

The selective organization of elements in an integration campaign and the organization of the unifying symbols readily reveal a frame. A frame is a device employed in the production of communication content. Joris & DeCock (2019) defined frames as schemes of interpretation that may be used to organize information and to manage it efficiently. Entman (1993: 52) defined the frame as a process that involves the selection of aspects of some perceived reality in such a manner that reduces the prominence of such aspects in the context of communication. This selective approach allows for the promotion of a type of definition, a slanted moral evaluation, or the recommendation of treatment. What these definitions reveal is that information is managed and media messages are framed for a particular desired effect. Studies have shown that media framing of information on objects correlates with attitude to the object (Brader, Valentino and Suhay, 2008; Cho, Gil de Zuniga, Shah, & McLeod, 2006).

The production of persuasive national integration campaigns that can be influential on attitudes in Nigeria is subject to several challenges. Firstly, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with a very diverse ethnic and religious profile (Uchegbue, 2017). This situation has always translated to tensions in loyalties towards ethnic solidarities that are stronger than the loyalties to the sovereign state (Alex-Hart, 2016). Secondly, Nigerian leaders have been implicated as culprits in the mismanagement of diversity in the Nigerian state. Cries of marginalization and nepotism drive the wedge between ethnic groups as one group enjoys privileged access to resources to the detriment of other groups (Salawu & Hassan, 2011; Edewor, Aluko, & Folarin, 2014). Thirdly, there is a recurrent issue of grievances rooted in the factors mentioned above by groups that make up the Nigerian state. Such grievances have led to conflicts and the quest for secession from the Nigerian state (Ugwueze, 2019). Producing a persuasive media campaign for integration becomes very challenging in these circumstances. It is

therefore imperative to take a cursory look at the integration campaigns enjoying regular broadcast features to decode the framing of national identity that undergirds the campaigns.

Research problem

National integration remains a very challenging task for agents that seek to foster unity and cohesion in the Nigerian State. Inter-ethnic rivalries, identity politics, and deeply rooted sub-national solidarities problematize the quest for national cohesion. Media-based strategies designed to foster attitudinal and cognitive reception as well as other state-sponsored activities, have not produced the desired effects in the populace, as unity seems to be elusive (Wonah, 2017; Babatunde, 2018; Mbah, Nwagwu, Ugwu & Simons, 2019; Omamuyovwi, 2020). While there are several studies that have been carried out to investigate factors in the social structure and the political system that have causal efficacy for the state of affairs, there is a dearth of studies on the framing of national identity in the national integration campaigns. This is the gap that this study intends to fill.

Review of Literature

This study is anchored on frame theory by Ervin Goffman (1974). Framing theory explains that the media has the capacity of selective focus on a phenomenon of interest within a field of meaning (Hassan, Mathiasen & Lowry, 2019). Thus, the presentation of an issue to the audience can influence the response to the issue. The management of information is carried out to influence how the information is interpreted. From empirical studies, framing occurs in the imagination of national identity, it occurs in the selection of language used in presenting national identity and it is also evident that framing can occur in the selection of the model of national identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Wodak et al, 2009; Lou, 2015). In the communication context, the production of any text that encodes an idea of the national identity is a discourse act (Costelloe, 2014). It is dependent on certain imaginings and the selection of the models of identity which the producers of the content intend to emphasize. Wodak, Decillia, & Reisagl (2009) posited that the discourse of national identity is hinged on ways of imagining national identity; the identity may be defined as constructive, perpetuation of an idea, justification of a position, transformational, or dismantling/ destructive imagination of national identity.

National integration is a particularly constructive approach to the national identity as it seeks to establish an idea of national identity as a vehicle for the promotion of unification, identification and solidarity. In framing national identity, it can be deduced that such rendering is constructive, transformational, or destructive. For Benwell & Stokoe (2006), framing is at the level of language and language is the lexico-grammatical system from which the authors of text creatively choose what is included or excluded in a narrative. This is in line with Entman (1993), who sees language use as a very important tool of selection, as the rendering of the perceived reality can be anchored in the selective use of language. In an extensive study of news translation as the site for framing Chinese identity, Luo's (2015) focus was on the framing of national identity by a sports channel in China. The author found that sports broadcasts are a site for framing the national identity. The author utilized Goffman's (1956) frame theory and Baker's (2006) typology of framing, which includes selective appropriation, labeling, temporal and spatial framing and the repositioning of participants. Selective appropriation is the selection of specific texts as an instrument to emphasize a narrative. It reveals a pattern of omission as well as additions traceable to the originator of a speech. Labeling is a process in a discursive act in which a lexical term is used to identify a place, thing, or person. Temporal & Spatial framing refers to the embedding of texts in another time or space, while the repositioning of participants is the ability to emphasize location through closeness or distance to participants. The study by Luo (2015) found that the framing of national identity by the sport broadcaster utilized selective appropriation, labeling, repositioning of participants and temporal and spatial framing.

In the exploration of the components of national identity, Grotenhuis (2016) utilized Shulman's (2002) model of national identity, which identified national identity as a multi-layered identity. There

are several layers, such as the Civic identity, which relies on political ideologies and institutions that draw from the ideas of the sovereign states as popularized in Europe. Civic identity comprises elements such as citizenship, territory, will and consent, political ideology and political institutions and laws. The second layer is the cultural identity, which is comprised of religion, language, and traditions. A nation-state that is multicultural and multi-religious will rely heavily on civic identity to foster nationalism, while a mono-cultural state with a particular religion can foster nationalism on that identity (for example, Pakistan). Civic identity is a more common basis for national identity and integration messages usually portray belongingness of citizenship, geographical territory claim and the positive expression of consent and will. In examining the framing of national identity in integration messages, it is important to unravel what identity is emphasized and which identity is displayed in national integration campaigns in Nigeria.

Research Method

This research study utilized a qualitative content analysis. As a research method, it is an objective means of describing phenomena (Schreier, 2012). Its potency lies in the ability of the researcher to reduce data into concepts, which is useful for the description of the research phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This qualitative content analysis is deductive. The deductive approach requires the review of data for content, which is coded in correspondence to identified categories (Polit & Beck, 2012). The deductive approach helps to improve the validity of the instruments as the categories for the concepts are made available to the audience. Three prominent national integration campaigns that still enjoy regular broadcast are the following: *“Nigeria, one nation one people,”* A minute long audio visual presentation with pictorial studies as a voice-over detailing an integration message. There is a Glo-sponsored integration message of a rendition of the national anthem. This integration campaign is a performance by a young girl draped in the national flag.

The third integration campaign is titled. *“A great nation with a great people,”* this is largely a voiceless presentation depicting past leaders of Nigeria as well as cultural elements of the Nigerian State. These three aforementioned integration campaigns are regular features on the Nigerian television authority Network broadcasts. These integration messages are also available on the video sharing platform YouTube and can be accessed at any time. The categories drawn from the literature on framing are operationalized as the use of language in the portrayal of national identity and the emphasis on the model of national identity. Language use is implicated in the lexico-grammatical rendering of national identity as exemplified in the use of pronouns and labeling as well as constructive/destructive adjectives and the selective appropriation pattern of prominence and omission in the rendering of national identity (Baker, 2006; Wodak et al, 2009; Costelloe, 2014; Luo, 2015). Shulman’s (2002) model of national identity serves as the basis for determining the framing device of selective appropriation. The text of the integration campaigns is analyzed using the aforementioned categories.

Research Findings

The findings are presented here. Framing of national identity includes the use of inclusive pronouns, labeling and titling and selective appropriation

The use of Inclusive Pronouns

The language used in the portrayal of national identity is constructive. The text reveals a unification goal as the choice of words clearly depicts the prominence given to unification. The use of the pronouns “we”/ “us” is an inclusion device in the text of integration. In the campaign message titled “Nigeria, One Nation, One People,” The following statements are reproduced below:

“God has put us together here so that we can build a community that will be an example to the entire world.”

The national identity is embedded in the use of the inclusive pronouns “we” and “us” to denote a sense of togetherness among the public. Another excerpt in the campaign is reproduced here:

Although some may say Nigeria is a mistake, we all know that the Almighty never makes mistakes.

The use of the pronouns here is illustrative of the constructive language employed by the producers of the integration campaigns. The identification of those who are of the view that Nigeria is a mistake, with the pronoun “some” qualifying them, is a device used to indicate that the view is not a widely shared one. The statement went further to be inclusive in the use of the pronoun “we” to buttress the argument of the divine origins of the Nigerian State. It is the deliberate use of a shared common belief in God to put forward an argument for the existence of the Nigerian nation and to engineer a positive reception to the integration message. The national identity is thus portrayed as a civic identity relying on Will and consent.

Labeling and Titling

The choice of nouns used to title and label the campaigns, as well as past leaders, respectively, reveals a selective appropriation. The integration messages are titled “*Nigeria, one nation, one people*,” which seeks to create a homogenous identity for the constituent groups in the Nigerian State. The other campaign message is titled “*A great nation, with a great people*.” This title attaches an adjective to the Nigerian nation, suggesting that the nation has the property of greatness. Here again, the national identity is given a constructive title that can evoke a positive reception. There is the labeling of past leaders in the integration messages. This labeling serves to qualify the national leaders as icons who embody the valued attributes of the Nigerian nation. There is also the exclusion of leaders who clamored for secession from the republic, such as the late Col. Emeka Ojukwu, in the roll call of past leaders. The excerpt of the text in the integration campaign “Nigerian, one nation, one people” is reproduced here;

Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, DrNnamdiAzikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, ChiefObafemi Awolowo. These patriots worked together to achieve independence for a United Nigeria.

The stated text reveals a labeling of the iconic leaders as patriots and the accompanying statement reflects their qualification as they are assumed to have worked to achieve independence aimed at a United Nigerian State. Labeling is also revealed in the anthem recitation performance in the Glo-sponsored integration message, as the line reproduced here shows;

The labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain

The use of the term heroes and patriots constitutes a framing device where the desired goal of unity is woven into the projected identity. Hence, the usage of labeling and titling was a common device in the integration message, as the national identity projected showed positive and constructive leanings as well as the use of inclusive language in the projection of the national identity.

Selective appropriation in the integration campaigns

Civic identity received a higher selective appropriation than cultural identity. The elements of civic identity in the integration messages are the egalitarian principles exemplified in the closing text of two integration campaigns, “one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity.” This egalitarian principle reflects republican ideals. The campaigns projected the Nigerian state as a creation based on the political ideology espoused by past leaders. The United Nigeria is steeped in a narrative of a set of ideals, principles, and doctrines of a free, independent state built and sustained on the ideas of past leaders. Two of the three integration messages exclusively utilized civic identity in their narratives, while the third, “A Great Nation with Great People,” reflected the civic identity mostly. The cultural identities of the different subgroups were referred to as subsumed in the civic identity of the nation-state. There is thus a higher selective appropriation of elements of Civic identity and a lower appropriation of the cultural identity in the integration campaigns.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed the strategic use of language in inclusive pronouns, labeling and titling in the construction of national identity in the integration campaigns. This is similar to the findings in the

study by Lou (2015), who found that the national identity in his study was framed with the use of pronouns, positive constructions of the national image and the selective usage of terms to promote an ideal of national identity. In this study, it is also evident that the national identity is evoked in arguments for cohesion. The findings also revealed that the civic identity received a higher order of selective appropriation than the cultural identity. This can be understood as a strategy to push egalitarian narratives about the Nigerian State. However, this pattern of omission leads easily to misgivings as the civic identity and its attendant political ideology may not address the grievances on grounds that are driving interethnic conflicts in the Nigerian state.

Conclusion

The framing of the national identity in the integration campaigns prominently denies differences that exist within the nation-state of Nigeria. The integration campaigns studied projected a national identity built on a positive construction of the national image, an inclusive framing device and a higher selective appropriation of the model of Civic identity. This portrayal of the Nigerian identity readily suggests that there are omissions in the construction of the national identity on the facts of the heterogeneity of the subgroups that make up the nation-state. The selective appropriation obscures the realities on the ground, which drives grievances among the groups, as the emphasis is on the denial of differences. The study therefore recommends that the producers of the integration campaigns address the diversity of the subgroups in the Nigerian state as elements in the campaigns and work towards building a model of unity that recognizes such differences. There is a need for depictions of the current issues of agitation in the Nigerian state in the integration campaigns. Such reflections on the issues of agitation will go a long way in pacifying the tensions that are generated in the course of intergroup interactions in the Nigerian state.

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