



Political Communication in the South East Nigeria: An Analysis of sit-at-home communication Model

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Abstract

The study tries to critically analyze sit-at-home as a communication model developed by the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as innovation political communication strategy for the zone. The model emerged to balance the communication gap between the elite and the people, which hitherto has been communication from them to us, and not communication from us to them. Essay method was applied to allow experience-rich narrative in the analysis. Processes and obstacles in form of militating factors were observed with bitterness. Therefore, the study concludes that the communication model was ideal for the marginalized people though suppressed now, but can resurrect in the future as marginalization narratives continue.

Keywords: *Political Communication, South East, Sit-at-Home Communication model*

Introduction

Political Communication in the South East, Nigeria is a public taskforce communication designed to address the political issues of the people of South East. In fact, political communication cannot be unequivocal in that it diversifies as dictated by situational contexts in relation to era, social straits, geography, culture, and race, system of government, behaviour of the people, particularly leaders, and also, the opinion of communication scholars. So, the history of political communication in Nigeria, and by inclusion Igboland, is interwoven with the history of colonialism, Christian Missionary society, political development, socio-economic structure, ownership of the media, from newspapers to magazine, now broadcast media. Therefore, political communication has taken different forms and shapes in Nigeria and South East geopolitical zone in particular.

It has transited from dissemination of political views in terms of governments' positions on various issues; soliciting for people's support in political activities, to presentation of masses' grievances on certain government policies and programmes/actions. This type of public communication or call it strategic communication, has for a long time transmitted through various periods of human development in Nigeria. The intensity of the communication in every period of time in the development stage depends on the government systems within such period. So, political communication diminishes during military-authoritarian regime, and blossoms during democratic government with its relative press freedom.

Political Communication in South East Nigeria

The name South East, is the creation of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a fortified ploy to decentralize Nigeria, and weaken the Military Stronghold from striking at will to overthrow any government civilian or military. His government craftiness in splitting Nigeria into six geopolitical zones, three in the North and three in the South. Such imbalance dealt serious damaging blow on "Ndigbo nation." By that sledge hammer South East remains a region with five states only, while others, some of them have seven and the rest have six states each. So, such tactical blow heightened the tempo of political marginalization of the zone. Oputa,

cited in Obasi (2012), Marginalisation of Ndigbo in the Nigerian family has its root to the Nigerian civil war and subsequent Indigenization Policy.

Ojukwu, also cited in Obasi (2012), remarks "Ndigbo in Nigeria are not seen as people. They are seen as targets. All problems and darts are aimed at them. Deliberate policies are promulgated to subjugate and subdue the Igboman. Look at the indigenization and nationalization programmes, the Igbos were the target group."

Ikemba laments, Again, look at the unconstitutional split of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones, Igbos were targeted to be the only zone with five states. Chimaroke (2003) the word of Ndigbo evokes a lot of emotions, even if not of equal meanings to every Nigerian. Even though that Ndigbo are dynamic people, democratic, freedom loving and achievement-oriented; open for new ideas and initiatives, yet, they are hated by Nigeria, and many Nigerians. For this evidence-based reasons, political communication in the South East is a complex and omnibus term. Political communication model in South East may have defied all the existing communication models known to communication scholars. Politics and its associated inhuman activities perpetrated by our leaders at federal level, has tarnished all available communication models, and even theories and made them unfit to describe our political communication pattern.

From McQuail to Werner & James, to even Griffin, communication modelling and theorizing they propounded, none fitted into the marginalized zone political communication spectrum or space. South East has ever sought for innovative political communication model and theory that can adequately fit into her peculiar situation in the Nigeria family, where Igbos are brutally excluded from the scheme of things, politically and economically. It is this story of marginalization, properly captured in his book: "Ndigbo in Nigeria: The story of Marginalization" by this writer in 2012, that seriously re-captured and re-echoed lamentations of our past heroes in the manner Igbos are treated in the Nigeria project.

Various Igbo groups like Ohaneze, Igbo Politicians, Professional elites and agitationists, have tried but could not proffer situation communication model for Ndigbo. Movement for the actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) did her best but could not develop workable communication, until in 2021, exactly on Monday, August 9, 2021 when Mazi Nnamdi Kanu led agitationist-separatist group, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) introduced an innovative communication model—Sit-At-Home. That would have been the best political communication model for the marginalized people, who decided to sit at home on a date when their "modern" messiah was arrested in Kenya and subsequently hurtled to Nigeria into the custody of the Department of State Service (DSS) in Abuja.

Sit-at-home communication model, was apt, innovative and simple; speechless and non-violent. Simply "stay at home on Mondays", but the model spoke volumes in actions and impacts. It impacted on the governments at all levels, people of all categories, businesses of every kind and generally convened emotions to the leaders and the led across the region and Nigeria at large. Obasi (2021), sit-at-home communication model was a well-planned communication model designed to remind the marginalized people of their position in the Nigeria nation. The mode lists developed it to stay away from government and private activities for a whole day, or even a half-day. And to use such emotional state of mind to think and re-think about their social loneliness and political destitution in a blessed nation, Nigeria, where Igbos are rightful members.

Sit-at-Home Communication Model

An analysis of sit-at-home communication model involves a whole lot of communication development strategies and practices devoid traditional media involvement and operations. It is more of innovation communication blended with Everett Rogers and Daniel Lerner opinion of diffusion of innovation typology. Rogers (1995) innovation Decision Process Theory states that diffusion is a process that occurs over time and can be seen as having five distinct stages. According to him, the stages include knowledge, persuasion,

decision, implementation and confirmation. So, the potential adopters of the innovation must learn about it, be persuaded to see the merit, decide whether to adopt it or not, implement the adopted innovation and confirm its benefit.

In fact, sit-at-home message simply follows diffusion of innovation processes. Social media ordinarily releases information, and the spread does not follow either the two-step flow theory argument or multi-step flow, that wait for the opinion leaders to drop the message to their followers and down the line. The sit-at-home information makes use of divergent model approach whereby the non-state actors become the opinion leaders that control information flow at their activities, including enforcement of the sit-at-home orders. Obviously, due to the pattern of sit-at-home information, it could be distorted resulting to information overlap that at times brings confusion. That model did not follow any established model in communication parlance, so, it suffered growth and development sustainability.

Factors that worked against Sit-at-Home Communication Model

A model is a simple description of a system or structure that is used to help people, especially audience, understand the similar system or structure. It helps to serve as a veritable tool for the construction of reality. It is a conceptual framework representing the process of exchanging information, or it can equally be defined as a symbolic representation designed to help people visualize the relationships among various elements in the communication processes. As an explanatory device by itself, it appears in various forms, types and also perform several communication functions. Some of the functions model performs include organizing information processes and flow, explaining and interpreting the complex nature of the system and predicting the factors likely to obstruct the communication flow. For sit-at-home communication model, functions included enforcement and persuasion, attack and alleged arson and killing.

1) High level Gang-up (conspiracy)

The age long hate narratives about Igbos naturally has ever persisted. The narratives which Chinua Achebe criticized in his book; *A Man of the People* that severely criticized the then government that was later toppled in the January 15, 1966 coup. Such ugly communication trend remains against the Igbo nation. Government after government since after the civil war would cast aspersions on Ndigbo, in order to exclude them from the scheme of things in Nigeria, especially political participation at the highest elective position.

No wonder, when IPOB developed Sit-at-home communication model widely accepted by the recognized marginalized people as their own, high level gang-up emerged. Federal government and her cronies swept in and infiltrated the whole communication processes and branded it separatist language aimed at destabilizing the acclaimed cohesive country. We are indeed doomed by this gang-up, anytime a force emerged to speak in one voice against marginalization and exclusiveness of the people from every political equation. Communication, especially, political communication is the people's political life, which includes the socio-economic and of course political education, participation and inclusiveness. Man is a communicating being, and anything that affects his communication mechanism seriously affects his survival—culturally, socially, economically and politically. As a people, we need to develop a home-grown communication model that can show our roadmap for better understanding of our problems. When you understand your problem, then you can be in a better position to solve it.

2) Internal Disagreement among our political elite

Many of our political gladiators, especially these in juicy political positions at both federal and state government levels, saw IPOB as threat to their political positions and even their lives. Even though, some of them overtly or covertly showed support for the agitational movement, many openly and vehemently opposed IPOB, and her communication model. In a political communication, politicians and by extension government would always want to lead the way that might be the reason why Igbo political elite disagreed among themselves. How could they allow even the non-state actors to lead in a sensitive political matter using the

agitator's communication model. Such communication development process did not go well with many of our politicians. They threw their weight against it, and got such beautiful communication journey truncated. Though as an ideology, it was temporarily killed, but it can resurface tomorrow with more diverse features that can confer it an enduring communication parlance for the marginalised people of Nigeria. Already, some sections of the country had copied it, though by wearing mourning clothes to register their grievances against the government or local leadership.

3) Sabotage among the agitators

Hidden interest, though a hallmark of human beings, played destructive role in stopping sit-at-home communication model from achieving its objectives. The agitators splitted among themselves. Although, careful observers noticed the external factors influence in such sabotage. It was alleged that splitter groups emerged after receiving something from the enemies of Ndigbo, whether federal or state government. Such anti-Mazi Nnamdi Kanu groups were sponsored to brand the ideology a bad name, and created hatred of the ideology among some feeble-minded people.

Those "foreign" elements infiltrated Igboland and started raging havocs that were both unprintable and unspeakable. They succeeded in creating fears in the minds of the Locale and caused or coerced them into hating the noble ideology of Kanu. In fact, with such fear, the table turned against the sit-at-home communication model agenda.

4) Abuse of power by the enforcers of sit-at-home

Overzealousness of some disgruntled members of the sit-at-home agitators constituted serious setback to the communication model. The ways and manner some of them in both verbal and non-verbal communication approaches show-up power sent signs of threat. Village women, local farmers, some innocent youths, constituted authorities in the society, and indeed, governments at all levels, especially federal government personnel and facilities became targets of attack. In some cases, such gorilla attacks resulted to loss of human lives, burning of private and public infrastructures, like police stations, Local Government secretariats and markets.

All of these, as a result of abuse of power, turned people's mind against the whole genuinely agitational process. The end point of every communication is feedback; when they sent such bad information messages, the people's responses in form of feedback would be dislike. Condemnation and strong alliance with the federal government to put to an end, of what some called "madness". Although killings, arsons, destructions of properties are all forms of violent communication because they pass messages, yet, that was not the intention of sit-at-home communication model or ideology.

5) Economic Loss in the zone

It is on record that trillions of naira was lost in the five states of South East between 2021 and 2025, even part of 2026, when sit-at-home enforcement raged. Local farmers lost huge quantities of farm yields and harvest unsold, artisans lost their livelihood due to Monday-Monday No work, commuters, transporters, traders, hospital owners, and governments lossing heavily on Monday-Monday. Revenue lost was huge, indeed. Yes, freedom is never easy to achieve. But some approaches to achieving freedom could be difficult and avoidable.

Chinua Achebe in his personal history of Biafra (2012) "There was a Country", recounted how he saw the Nigeria-Biafra Civil war and lamented that really, Ndigbo has lost a country of their own. The people lost the war but the ideology is not yet dead. Biafra ideology lives and must continue to resonate from generation to generation until the issue of evidence-based marginalization is completely addressed, especially, politically.

6) Quest for Political inclusion at the center

Whether overtly or covertly, politicians from the zone vehemently fought the communication ideology which they saw as threatening their quest for inclusiveness at the center political equation. It was their

erroneous opinion that destroying the model would launch them at the center, so allowing the idea to survive and sustain would alienate them further from central government operations. Political inclusion remains the utmost goal of our zonal politicians who saw sit-at-home communication model as their greatest threat to political upward movement to grabbing federal power.

In fact, what makes communication political is not the source, but the purpose and contents of such communication. So, politicians in the zone saw the model as working against the purposes of their own communication strategies, which has always been wooing the people to embrace the central government regardless of the political and economic marginalization of their people, by the same federal government, at all time. There is evidence divergency in such communication processes; one for the people by the people; the other, for the government by the few.

Conclusion

The story of marginalization of Igbos in the Nigerian poli-economic equation is an on-going narrative. It has occupied huge space in the history and literary books, and more is yet to come, until the nexus of the problem is adequately addressed. Recall that Igbos are scattered across all the Nigerian states, predominantly, South-South and North Central. Igbo communities are located in Ibibio, Efik, Annang, Bahumono, Ogoni, Isebo, Idoma, Ijaw, Ogoja, Bamileke, Igala, Idoma, Edo, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Bonny and Ekwere. In the North Central, we have Igbos in Ibaji and Igalamela, Akpanya, Odolu and Ana in Kogi State. In Benue, they are found in Ado, Oju, Obi, Okpokwu Local Government Areas with particular clusters like Umuezeokoha, Umuezeoka, Oriuzor, Umuoghara, Amoeka, etc. Also in clusters in Kaduna, Plateau and Kano.

Outside Nigeria, Igbos formed villages and communities in Bioko Island (Equatorial Guinea), Cuba, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Israel, London, Houston, Atlanta, Washington, Virginia (with visible and viable Igbo village). In India, we have Igbos in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kanpur, Hyderabad and Lucknow. Also in China, we have Igbo settlement particularly in Guangzhou. This tribe is all over the world, and the second largest tribe in Nigeria before 2002 when Olusegun Obasanjo further compressed it into only five states.

So, any communication not for the wellbeing of this ever marginalized group of hardworking individuals is not a political communication. Political communication used to influence public knowledge, beliefs and actions of the people's political matters. Therefore, the study concludes that Sit-at-home communication model was the only and most appropriate communication strategy ever formulated to address our position in the Nigeria family space. Though, it has been "killed", but hopefully, shall resonate sometime, with "Purified model."

Martin Luther King, August 28, 1963 in his great political speech, "I have a Dream" sent prophetic message to the American government that one day, blacks would cast their votes in American elective contests. His dream later came true, therefore, IPOB sit-at-home prophetic political communication model, shall one day come to actualization, when the marginalization narratives naturally die. The temporary stoppage of that thoughtful, vital, strategic communication model is only a while, as communication scholars from the zone will be working on how to purify it into a theory.

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