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COMPLIANCE TO IPOB'S "SIT-AT-HOME ORDER"
IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA**

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MEDIA AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE AWARENESS AND COMPLIANCE TO IPOB'S "SIT-AT-HOME ORDER" IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

Theophilus OKO, Samuel Ifeanyi EZEMA



Introduction

The essence of any communication is the achievement of the communicator's intended effect on the receiver no matter who the message is targeted at. The goal is to influence the audience to behave in a particular manner or believe in a specific course intended by the communicator. Roberts (1977 p. 349) succinctly states that the purpose of mass communication is the "structuring of a situation for someone else, of influencing him to act, or believe, or feel in a certain way." Thus, communication is said to have some measure of effect on the audience to the extent that the message elicits a noticeable response from the receivers.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) had in recent times, communicated sit-at-home messages to the people of South-Eastern Nigeria through Radio Biafra. It is believed that such messages are part of the group's strategies to prosecute its agenda for self-determination. The group's sit-at-home order entered a new phase when it was announced that it was going to be observed every Monday starting from August 9, 2021. Given that the

South-Eastern people are known for their merchandise and entrepreneurship; and appreciate the fact that not all indigenes of the South-East had access to Radio Biafra's message or understood the English Language, the level of compliance recorded on Monday, August 9, 2021, was amazing. IPOB's messages to the South-Eastern people are usually relayed in the English Language which is not the language of the people to whom the messages are targeted. Again, not all the educated residents accessed the group's message from the media. Consequently, the researchers' interest was aroused. It presented a condition necessary for a study on communication effects.

The object was to utilize the order by the group and its concomitant compliance by the people to re-evaluate two archaic, albeit, extant, communication theories, namely, the Hypodermic Needle and the Klapper's Phenomenistic theories of mass communication.

Statement of the Problem

Communication indeed has effects in one way or another on audiences who have been exposed to such media messages. Where media scholars differed significantly is on the level of effects the media have on the audience. Some scholars have demonstrated that the effects of mass media contents or messages are enormous (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984; Combs, 1985; Noelle-Neumann, 1973). Some other scholars have proved that the mass media have minimal, if not no effects, on the audience who are exposed to them (Hovland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield, 1949; Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968).

Apparently, in support of the latter school of thought, Severin and Tankard (1992) categorically stated that the powerful effect theory has been discarded by mass communication researchers. In the communication milieu, this seems to be the dominant and seemingly unassailable view.

The IPOB's sit-at-home order and its consequent compliance presented a good research condition for interrogating the postulations of powerful and minimal effects schools of thought on communication effects. Therefore, the study utilized the IPOB's media messages on sit-at-home and its effects on the people of the South-East to determine why South-Eastern Nigerians were swayed by IPOB's media propaganda.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which South-Eastern Nigerians attach credibility to IPOB's messages on sit-at-home.
- ii. Determine the sources through which South-Eastern Nigerians received IPOB's sit-at-home messages.
- iii. Evaluate the level to which South-Eastern Nigerians complied with IPOB's sit-at-home messages.
- iv. Investigate the factors that influenced South-Eastern Nigerians' decision to comply with IPOB's sit-at-home messages.

Communication and Media Effects

Communication effects are the notion that mass media messages have effects on members of society who are exposed to such media. Early communication theorists who are proponents of behaviourism considered the mass media as providing external stimuli

that trigger immediate responses from the audience (Baran & Davis, 2009). Typical of any scientific experimentation, research into the effects of communication on the audience must comply with certain acceptable and clear procedures. Wright (1959) opines that any evaluation of the impact of mass media must take into cognizance the overall complex social relationships within which the audience members function before, during and after their exposure to the medium.

Given the successful use of the media by propagandists and demagogues in the World War I era, some people were convinced that "the media could be immensely powerful" (McQuail, 2010, p. 456). It is perhaps the potency of the mass media for propaganda exploited during the First World War that prompted Baran and Davis (2009, p. 80) to define the Magic Bullet Theory of mass communication as "the idea that propaganda can be powerful enough to penetrate most people's defences and condition them to act in ways useful to the propagandist."

Furthermore, Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube (1984) indicated that after being exposed to a single half-hour television programme, a significant number of American television viewers stated that their attitudes, ranking of basic values and willingness to engage in political behaviour changed. In a more recent study, Nwokeafor (2015) found out that during the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, mass media messages influenced 60% of respondents in their decision to vote for either Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) or All Progressives Congress (APC). It also revealed that 25% of the respondents also indicated that media messages influenced them to a lesser extent whereas 15% opined that media messages did not influence their voting decisions.

Nwafor and Onwubere (2019) made additional input to the studies on the influence of the mass media. Their study ascertained that communication from Radio Biafra, an IPOB radio station, induces sympathy and enthusiasm for Biafra's cause among the Ibo people. Edogoh and Ezeh (2016) revealed that advertising campaigns had a positive influence on voters in Anambra State as they influenced up to 292 (73%) respondents. The findings indicated that the campaign made the respondents take great interest in the advertised candidate and the party.

However, there emerged a new set of communication scholars who did not concur with the postulations that the media have an exceeding influence on the decisions of people. This group not only expressed reservations about powerful effect theories but also proved, through a plethora of studies, that such effects were rather minimal. Hoveland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949) in their studies which used films as stimulus material illustrated that films were "effective in presenting factual information materially improving men's knowledge of events concerning the air war over Britain" (p.53), but noted that "appreciable effects on the ultimate target of the orientation programme increasing soldiers' motivation." (p.54) was minimal if not zero as it failed to influence soldiers' attitude motivation.

In a longitudinal panel research by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1968), findings showed that the mass media played an inconsiderable role in respondents' election decisions compared with personal and interpersonal influences (Severin & Tankard, 1992). An earlier study, (Katz, 1957, p. 63) found out that (1) the voters who decided late in the campaign or changed their minds during the campaign are more likely than others to cite personal influence as having figured in the decisions. (2) Opinion leaders at every

social level have the same reasoning as the people they intend to influence, and (3) opinion leaders were found to be more exposed to the mass media than people who were not designated opinion leaders.

Similarly, Klapper (1963, p. 70) asserted that the influence of mass communication is mediated by such factors as “predispositions; selective processes, group membership and the like... and these factors usually render mass communication an agent of reinforcement.” The scholar expounded that before and during exposure to any mass media messages; the audience members already have their predispositions. In addition to such predisposition, members also indulge in selective attention (exposure), perception (interpretation) and retention of mass media messages. Furthermore, as a social being, each audience member belongs to a group and imbibes the norms of the groups to which they belong. Finally, he or she is likely to be under certain interpersonal influences. A confluence of all these factors goes a long way in affecting the influence of mass communication on the audience which ultimately makes mass media reinforcement rather than a change agent.

Nonetheless, Klapper did not outrightly foreclose the possibility of the mass media causing a change in opinion or attitude in the audience. He emphasized that “it occurs when the audience member is predisposed toward change,” (p. 69). He, therefore, reiterated that “the social effect of mass communication depends primarily on how the society-in-particularly such institutions as the family, schools and churches-fashion out the audience members who mass communication serves” (p. 75). The position of Klapper was corroborated by Pool (1963) who submitted that the main effect of mass media in an election is to draw people's attention to the election. Once people's interests are aroused by the mass media, “their decision in the short run is more highly influenced by personal stimuli than by the mass media” (p. 134). At this level, personal influence by family, friends, and neighbours is the key factor that can bring about change in voting decisions.

Pool (1963) argued that the mass media are incapable of causing a change in voting behaviour, rather such media messages result in reinforcement of already-held opinions. This, according to him is because voters expose themselves to media content that favours the candidates they already support. This lends credence to Klapper's stance on the factors of predisposition and selective process alluded to above. Owuamalam and Obi (2020) in their study found that there is no significant relationship between political information provided by the media and voters' interest to vote in the election (p.29). The findings revealed that a greater majority of the respondents (98 or 29.7%) indicated that the received political information from the mass media did not influence them to vote.

It is discerning from the relevant studies on communication effects that have been reviewed that a preponderance of studies aligned with minimal or no effect school of thought to the detriment of powerful effect models. Does it suggest that the powerful effect models have been eclipsed? If the answer is yes, then Severin and Tankard's prediction should be appreciated. They observed that as communication research advances, “some of the theories on effects of mass communication will not survive the test of empirical research and will be winnowed out while others survive” (Severin and Tankard, 1992, p. 265). Can we safely include powerful effect models among those to be discarded? Not yet. It will be unhealthy for knowledge and scholarship to reach such an arbitrary conclusion. Situations in the present society can compel one to revisit and make certain knowledge

which could otherwise be deemed anachronistic relevant.

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical frameworks that underpin this work are the Hypodermic Needle and the Phenomenistic theories of mass communication.

The Hypodermic Needle theory

The name that is given to this theory depends on the convenience of the scholar. Therefore, the nomenclature of this theory changes as scholars that explained them vary. It is "Hypodermic or Bullet theory" (Bittner, 1989); "Hypodermic Needle theory or Transmission Belt theory" (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982); "StimulusResponse theory" (Lasswell, 1927); "Hypodermic Needle theory" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009) and "Magic Bullet Theory" (Wilson, 1993).

The theory emanated from the works of behavioural scientists known as the behaviourist notions (Baran & Davis, 2009 p.80). It "suggests the direct and uniform influence of the mass media on an audience by shooting or injecting it with appropriate messages directed to trigger a desired response" (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1990, p. 344).

Bittner (1989) observed that the theory was premised on two basic assumptions which were (i) that people receive information directly from the mass media and not through an intermediary; and (ii) that reaction is individual, not based on how other people might influence them.

Essentially, the proponents of the theory are convinced that the mass media is powerful and that the media audience is defenceless. It is on the notion of defenselessness or susceptibility of media audiences that up till this day, advertising messages and public information campaigns are used to persuade, influence or mobilize members of the public through the mass media. IPOB's message on sit-at-home targeted at South-Eastern Nigerians could be seen in that light.

The Phenomenistic Theory

Joseph Klapper propounded the theory in 1960. The theory states that the mass media do not have a direct effect on their audience and that the media are powerless or ineffective in influencing the media audience as the power to effect changes in the people is attributed to certain social and psychological variables.

Klapper (1960, p 8) synthesised the tenets of the theory in these five points:

1. Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects but rather, functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences.
2. These mediating factors are such that they typically render mass communication a contributing agent, but not the sole cause in the process of reinforcing the existing conditions.
3. On those occasions that mass communication does function to cause change, one of two conditions is/are likely to exist:
 - a. The mediating factors will be found to be inoperative and the effect of the media will be found to be direct:- and
 - b. The mediating factors, which normally favour reinforcement, will be found to be

themselves impelling toward change.

4. These are certain residual situations in which mass communication seems to produce direct effects, or directly, and of itself to serve certain psychophysical functions.
5. The efficacy of mass communication, as either a contributory agent or as an agent of direct effect is affected by various aspects of the media and communications themselves or of the communication situation.

Klapper (1963) identified the factors that mediate the power of mass communication on the audience to include predisposition, selective processes, group norms and opinion leadership. When interpreted to the core, the nexus of mediating variables would include but not be limited to, families, age groups, schools, churches, and other social groups.

As earlier argued, in the case of IPOB's media communication viz-a-viz the sit-at-home order, it is most unlikely that all residents of South-East directly got the message from the media. Assuming that there were people that depended on other people to take decisions on the messages, it is of interest to the researchers to unravel whether Klapper's theory applied to the situation.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the survey research method in generating data used for analysis. The research approach was deemed apposite for the study owing to the need to elicit the opinions of South-Eastern respondents on the various factors that influenced their decision to comply with IPOB's sit-at-home order. The research instruments were questionnaires and an interview guide. They were used for generating quantitative and qualitative data respectively.

The population of the five South-Eastern States (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) which is 22,565, 414 as of 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016) was used for the study. The National Bureau of Statistics had projected the population of States in Nigeria from the 2006 census figures as provided by National Population Commission. The projected population for the South-East stood at Abia (3,727,347), Anambra (5,527,809), Ebonyi (3,490,383), Enugu (4,411,119), and Imo (5,408,756). A sample of 384 was drawn from the population with the aid of the Wimmer and Dominick Online Sample Size Calculator.

Respondents included in the study were selected through a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. First, all the South-Eastern States were selected. The selection of all the states in the South-East was necessary to include the States where there is heightened agitation for Biafra like Abia and Anambra, and states where the activities and agitations for Biafra are less pronounced like Enugu, Imo and Ebonyi. Stage 2 involved the selection of towns/communities from the states. The areas purposively selected were Umunneato/Ariaria in Aba North L.G.A. Abia State; Awka, the capital city of Anambra State; Ngbo in Ohaukwu L.G.A. of Ebonyi State; Abakpa Nike in Enugu East L.G.A. of Enugu State and Owerri the capital city of Imo State. Two criteria informed the choice of the selected areas, they include either that they are the commercial hub of the selected states or the hotbed of IPOB's activities aimed at actualizing Biafra.

The third stage involved the selection of respondents from the selected areas of study. This was accomplished by convenient and purposive sampling methods. Respondents who were met in their places of abode, offices, shops or roadsides by the researchers and their two research assistants and who were willing to cooperate with the team, were selected for questionnaire administration and in-depth interviews.

A quota sampling approach was used to determine the number of copies of the questionnaire allotted to each state. This was derived by obtaining the proportion of each state's population from the grand population of the South-East. The quotient for each state was Abia (63 copies), Anambra (94 copies), Ebonyi (60 copies), Enugu (75 copies), and Imo (92 copies), making a total of 384 copies. Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents, a total of 350 copies were useful for analysis as the other 34 copies were wrongly filled and therefore not useable.

For the in-depth interview, five respondents were purposively selected per state making a total of 25 respondents. What qualified the respondents for inclusion in the interview sections was their awareness of IPOB's media propaganda; their access to the group's information media, and their willingness to be interviewed. The analysis was done with the aid of the Likert Scale format for the quantitative data while the qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Findings

Table 1: Showing the age distribution of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 33	126	36
34 - 49	114	33
50 - 65	73	21
65 and above	37	10
Total	350	100

Data in Table 1 showed that the respondents were predominantly youths. The aged respondents were relatively few.

Table 2: Showing the respondents' educational levels

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	36	10
F.S.L.C	50	14
WASC/SSC	113	32
OND/B.Sc.	97	28
HND/M.Sc.	48	14
PhD	6	2
Total	350	100

Data in Table 2 above indicated that the majority of the respondents were averagely educated as the highly educated respondents were in the minority.

Table 3: Showing the extent to which respondents attach credibility to IPOB's message

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	146	41
Large extent	122	35
Minimal extent	55	16
No extent	27	8
Total	350	100

Data in Table 3 showed that the extent to which respondents attach credibility to IPOB's message on sit-at-home was very high.

Table 4: Showing the various sources through which respondents received IPOB's messages

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Newspaper	43	12
Radio	54	15
Television	28	9
Social media	42	12
People	183	52
Total	350	100

As shown in Table 4, a greater number of the respondents indicated that they got IPOB's messages about sit-at-home from individuals as against those that got it through the media.

Table 5: Showing the extent of compliance with IPOB's message by the respondents

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very great extent	177	51
Great extent	58	17
Minimal extent	75	21
No extent	40	11
Total	350	100

Data in Table 5 above showed that respondents indicated that they greatly complied with IPOB's sit-at-home messages. Only 11% of the respondents did not comply.

Table 6: Showing factors that influenced respondents to comply with IPOB's order

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Support for IPOB	125	35
Fear of attack	62	18
People's influence	133	38
Impact of the message	30	9
Total	350	100

Table 6 contained data which showed that the majority of the respondents were influenced by people into complying with the order. While a significant number of the respondents complied for fear of attack, an infinitesimal number of them complied because of the impact of the message.

Discussion

The findings of the study in line with the research questions were as follows:

Research question 1: To what extent did South-Eastern Nigerians attach credibility to IPOB's messages on sit-at-home?

From the data shown in Table 3, it could be discerned that a greater majority of South-Eastern Nigerians believed the messages from IPOB on sit-at-home to be credible. This could be a result of the source of information which is known to them and had been consistent in churning out orders which were obeyed in the past.

This was corroborated by an interviewee who opined that even though there were splinter groups in IPOB's camp who occasionally issued counter information, they believed in the one from one Emma Powerful, the spokesperson of the group.

Research question 2: What are the sources through which South-Eastern Nigerians received IPOB's sit-at-home messages?

Data in Table 4 depicted that whereas the people of the South-East got the messages from various media, a preponderance of the respondents (183 or 52%) got the messages from people. The agitation for succession seems to have awakened the interest of the people on radio, especially Radio Biafra and this could be the reason 54 respondents (15%) received it from the Radio.

Similarly, agitation for Biafra rekindled a reading culture among the people as they buy and read the numerous "newspapers" on the activities of IPOB. Thus, the 43(12%) respondents who got the messages from newspapers might have gotten it from *The Biafran Times, Real News, Best in Freedom, Freedom Time, Radio Biafra (Print), Voice of Biafra, Global Star, Vesymnews, Heros Impact, Biafra Heroes* among other such newspapers that luxuriate in the region. In recent times, conventional newspapers also publish news about IPOB's activities.

It could be because of the newly established culture of reading the newspapers that excite secessionist sentiment in the people of Igbo extraction that its percentage slightly outweighed that from the social media (12%). Television ranked the lowest among the sources through which the messages were accessed.

Three respondents from the in-depth interview section who are highly educated gave an insight into why the educated also had to receive the message on sit-at-home through people rather than directly through the media. They stated that the highly educated class do not demonstrate much enthusiasm or belief in the Biafran struggle to expose themselves to the group's media messages. Another interviewee opined that television did not count among the media the people rely on for information because most television stations are owned by the government and individuals who are not sympathetic to the

separatist's demands.

Research question 3: How far did the South Eastern Nigerians comply with IPOB's sit-at-home messages?

Data in Table 5 revealed that there was substantial compliance with the IPOB's sit-at-home order by residents of the South-East. This is substantiated by the fact that 310 (89%) out of the 350 people sampled complied. Nevertheless, a paltry number of them (40 or 11%) did not comply. Details of evidence and level of compliance with the order were provided by respondents during in-depth interview sections. Some respondents explained that on that day, despite media messages from the state government countering the order, roads were deserted, markets closed; banks, schools, secretariats and even government houses did not open for business.

When asked whether there was observed non-compliance anywhere, a respondent who said that he utilized the opportunity to go to the village said that, though the rural residents were conscious of the order, some of the residents went to farms, meetings, village markets, and carried out their routine activities while shelving the ones that would lead them to the town. It can thus, be deduced from this explanation that the compliance level in the rural areas was different from the urban areas.

Research question 4: What factors influenced South Eastern Nigerians' decision to comply with IPOB's sit-at-home messages?

Table 6 presented data which depicted why South-Eastern residents complied with IPOB's order. It did demonstrate that support for IPOB's secession agenda by the residents was high as 125(35%) attributed their compliance to it. However, what is startling from the data is the fact that the majority of the respondents 133(38%) indicated that their compliance stemmed from people's influence.

A respondent in an interview session expatiated that although there had been sit-at-home orders by the group in the past, that of Mondays and for an indefinite period agitated many of the residents as to whether that too would be complied with. This, she said aroused a lot of discussions, questions, and clarifications from people. The outcome of such interactions influenced people to comply. It goes to prove, as some other empirical studies have shown, that interpersonal influence is key to causing a change in the opinion, belief and behaviours of people rather than mass communication, (Hoveland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield 1949; Klapper, 1963; Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968; Pool, 1963). It, therefore, means that the Phenomenistic theory was supported by this finding.

Data also revealed that 62(18%) of the respondents complied out of fear of attack. Some respondents said that the spate of killing, burning, maiming, and other levels of violence recorded on sit-at-home days was usually high. Consequently, they complied because they did not want to be victims. An insignificant number of respondents (30 or 9%) stated that they complied with the order because of the impact of the message. It is proof of the powerful effect of the media as demonstrated by previous findings (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984; Edogoh & Ezech, 2016; Mendelson, 1973, Nwafor & Onwubere, 2019; Nwokefor, 2015). This is also an index that the Hypodermic Needle theory is still relevant in the communication milieu.

Conclusion

Communication at all levels will amount to a wasted endeavour if, in the short or long run, it fails to achieve the goal of having effects on the audience. Just as feedback completes a communication process, the impact is the *raison d'être* of communication. The impact of IPOB's sit-at-home message on the Southeastern people of Nigeria was palpable. It is reasonable to submit that the message, in a greater way, achieved its predetermined goal. There was substantial compliance by the targeted people of the Southeast. Whereas the impact of the media on the audience is not in doubt, it is instructive to note, as this study has revealed, that interpersonal influence is key to decision-making in society.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Communicators and media managers should employ integrated media channels to reach their target audience. No one source is adequate.
2. Advertising agencies and other governmental and non-governmental advocacy groups should leverage the advantages of interpersonal communication as complements to media campaigns for desired results.
3. Communication and media scholars should not disregard or jettison any of the archaic communication theories on the ground that they have outlived their relevance. Time and circumstance can reinvent them.
4. Opinion leaders in every stratum of society should be conscious of the influential powers they wield. They should ensure that their opinions on any topical issue serve the general interest of society.

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