Parametric Assessment of Social media's role in IPOB Secessionist's Agitations in Nigeria

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Abstract

Improvement in internet capacity had led to the creation of various social media platforms. The various social media platforms influenced how individuals, groups and communities interacted with each other and events in their environment. Therefore, this study assessed the influence of social media on secessionist agitations in Nigeria. The study is anchored on the cultivation theory, and adopts the survey research as the suitable methodology. The study found out that consumers of Biafra social media contents, apart from interacting with the contents, also interrogate the contents. The study also found out that consumers of social media contents who were supporters of the secessionist group rely on perceived beliefs to argue in support of the veracity of the consumed-contents, even if there had been facts to argue against the authenticity of such contents. The study concluded that social media reinforce perceived beliefs through consumed contents. Given the above, it is recommended that government should regulate social media contents, especially, the ones that ginger and stimulate separatists' agitations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Southeast-Nigeria, homogenously, occupied by the Igbo, has continuous complained of marginalisation by the Nigerian government. This has led to several agitations on perceived denial of their rights in the manner at which national leadership positions were distributed in the country for several decades. Critically, when considered in line with other tribes, there seems to be a systematic denial of sense of belonging to the Igbo tribe, especially, in development, allocation and distribution of leadership positions. This can be found in what may be described as strategic exclusion of citizens from the five Igbo states of the Southeast, Nigeria, from certain position of authority in Nigeria, as well as location of major national industries and facilities in the area.

This perceived denial of supposed national rights over the years has placed the Igbos on the verge of constant complain of being marginalized. In this regard, some Igbo activists capitalize on this perceived marginalization and subjugation of the Igbos to form different secession groups to press home the Biafran agenda. Their major target is to make the younger generations imagine the pains of the Biafran war that ended in 1970 and see the need to support secession and establishment of a separate nation from Nigeria. In the views of these activists, the Igbos are subjected to different kinds of marginalization as a punishment for the Biafran war (Orji, 2001). Unfortunately, all the complaints from the region usually end in wishful thinking. This is because the government of Nigeria uses force to stop any form of orientation aimed at exposing the younger generations to the pains of the war.

The improvement of the internet capacity from Web 1.0 to 2.0 promotes the creation of different interactive applications known as social media applications. Heinonen and Halonen (2007) view social media as tools, spaces and operating modes for the people who interact with each other to create, share, change and comment on the contents of social networks. Social media allows people to interact, share information and opinions with ease (Apuke and Ezeah, 2018). In support, Chukwu (2022) posits that social media has the ability and capacity to engender interactions across all strata of the society.

Various social media applications are

changing the way people relate with each other, their environment, situations and happenings around them. Social media contribute to the intractable uprising, revolutions and toppling of governments, such as, the 'Arab Springs' of Syria, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Tunisia, and Egypt and which led to wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen (Flamini, 2011). Social media also contribute to the election outcome as seen in the election of Donald Trump, the 45th America president in 2016 (Gentzkow, 2017).

Distinguishing between fake and authentic content online remains a major challenge. For instance, contents targeting individuals, corporation, agencies and governments for financial gains have a medium through social media. Content on social media is also being used by governments to gain political controls not only of their citizens but other foreign governments (Sanovich, 2017). Social media is also a potent tool in the hands of radicals such as ISIS which has created social media application that can radicalize potential followers. The 'weaponisation' of social media as easy tools for individual, group, organisation and state to generate and distribute contents meant to influence, dissuade consumers is pervasive. Hence, agitators and revolutionary groups, employ social media as a major tool for contents dissemination.

The reason for the above is not far-fetched; there is a connection between social media as a tool of protest and the ability to attract attention to a cause. In addition, evidence abound that the employment of social media in revolutionary struggle favours the insurgent movement (Duncan, 2013). Hence, Udende (2019) opined that social media served as tool through which governments could be influenced. From the foregoing, social media supports mass communication.

Social media is being used to propagate beliefs, positions and agenda by individuals, groups, organisations and states because the tool allows for generation of contents free of any regulation or rules and reaches mass audiences. The freedom to use social media as a tool for communication and information sharing, and without ethical considerations, exposes the platforms to abuse. Hence, through social media, fake and genuine contents struggle for space. Individuals, groups and associations such as Indigenous People of Biafra IPOB employ the platforms to spread various messages. The IPOB contents are consumed (whether genuine or fake) by both its followers and non-followers.

Statement of the Problem

The development of every nation is the peaceful coexistence of its population therefore, peace and social harmony is the desire of any nation state (Owuamalam, 2016). Breeding disharmony among the citizens of a state is what caused Rwanda the landmark genocide record around the world in 1993-94 which was motivated by Radio Rwanda. Actually, Nigeria is going through the rigorous challenges of agitation, hate speech and counter operations in a bid to secure a united Nigeria. The agitators have their reasons for their actions and believe that it is right to share their views through the radio Biafra for others to hear and understand their take. No doubt, agitations of all kinds are likely to introduce conflicts which may disrupt national peace and security. Agitations, especially the IPOB agitation for self-government in Nigeria had facilitated some bloody clashes most of which culminated in loss of lives and properties. Yet, social media had not ceased to propagate the ideas that encourage different kinds of agitations to different audience using heart-touching and marginalization inspiring rhetoric. This is a social problem that its influence on the recipients is worthy of investigation. Though studies on the Biafran agitation abound, little attention has been given to the influence of social media rhetoric of ethnic marginalization on the Igbo people of Nigeria, who forms the target of the message. Understanding the rhetoric of social media and its influence on the citizens of the South-Eastern Nigeria is very important given the wave of events resulting from the actions of IPOB and their supporters within and outside Nigeria. Providing the views held among old and young respondents on the ongoing Biafran agitation is the gap that this study is set to fill.

Objectives of the Study

i. To investigate the influence of IPOB social media contents on their consumers.

ii. To evaluate how IPOB contents affect the perspectives of the consumers of such contents about the association's agenda.

Research Question

i. What is the influence of IPOB social media contents on their consumers?

ii. How do IPOB contents affect the perspective of the consumers of such contents about the association's agenda?

Scope of the Study

The Nigerian society consists of over 500 tribes and over 371 major ethnic groups with each tribe/ethnic group continuously positioning itself for a larger share of the national treasures. Therefore, in a polarized Nigerian environment, civil strife, mistrusts and marginalisation are major problems. Successive governments have made efforts to ensure national cohesion and to assuage feelings of marginalisation, politically and economically. The successes or failures of successive governments in ensuring national cohesion are not within the focus of this study. It is therefore opined that the prevailing condition in the Nigerian society gave birth to the group known as

'Indigenous People of Biafra' (IPOB). IPOB is an Igbo ethnic secessionist group made up of young people seeking a separate state from Nigeria, because of their claim to have been socio-economically, culturally and politically disadvantaged. The strident publications by IPOB continue to polarize the Nigerian society, with those against and for canvassing their positions using newspaper, television, social media etc. The presence of IPOB is felt in the following social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. The above justifies the choice of select IPOB social media contents as study materials for this study. Also, the choice is also as a result of the heightened and widespread interests, reactions of IPOB members and non-IPOB members to the various activities and events of the organisation with their social media contents.

Theoretical Framework

In keeping with the scholarly importance of theories to social science research, this study was anchored on the cultivation theory of mass communication which explains how media cultivate attitudes to the people through repeated publication of a given content through rhetoric.

This theory was developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) in their study on the effects for extensive use of TV programs. The position of this theory according McQuail (2010) is that the more people are exposed to media contents, the more their ideas correspond to the communicated content. This theory becomes apt for this study as it explains how Biafra audience's exposure to the rhetoric of social media cultivates the realities of Biafra in their minds. It will be on the regular and seldom exposure to the rhetoric by the consumers and their reaction to the contents they have been exposed to overtime.

The basic assumption underlying the cultivation or enculturation approach is that repeated exposures to consistent Biafra portrayals and themes on social media as regards ethnic marginalization of the Igbos is likely to influence their audience perception of Nigeria and encourage their quest for the actualization of the Biafran state in the direction of social media portrayals. Some research studies indicated that media portrayals of certain topics could have an impact on audience perceptions, particularly if the media were the main information sources to the people on that particular issue (Ezeh, 2009). The monotony of social media communication of the Biafran agenda makes it one of the veritable sources of information on the Biafran state actualization among the South Easterners. This theory says that media cultivate or constructs a reality of the world that, although possibly inaccurate becomes accepted simply because we as a culture believe it to be true.

The researcher bases the judgments about audience perception of Biafra on this cultivated reality provided by various social media platforms through its constant dissemination of issue relating to gross marginalization and ethnic hatred of the Igbos in Nigeria. Cultivation theory was adopted in this study as a result of the concern over the effects of social media contents on the need for the actualization of Biafran state. This theory has been applied to countless other media-cultivated realities such as beauty, sex roles, religion, the judicial process and marriage in television studies. In all cases the assumptions are the same, the radio, like the television cultivates realities among audience

Conceptual Review
Social Media

When we talk of social media, we mean those Internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. In other words, the social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise, as well as other things like job and career tips. They belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web. Chatora (2012) observes that "it is this interactive or collaborative nature of these tools that makes them social".

Mayfield (2008) describes these media as "online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness". Nation (2010) sees them as "social instruments of communication which are different from the conventional instruments like newspapers or magazines. Adibe and Odoemelam (2012) noted that they are online content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people. They support democratization of knowledge and information, thereby making the people both information producers/and consumers. Similarly, Chukwu (2022) posits that social media has the ability and capacity to engender interactions across all strata of the society.

Social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. They are usually associated with the term "web 2.0" which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message. Nwabueze (2012) observes that "Web 2.0" refers to the state of the web from 2004 till date; a period when interactive websites emerged as opposed to "web1.0" which

describes the state of the web prior to 2004. Web-based communities, social networking sites video-sharing sites, Wikis, and blogs, are among examples of web 2.0 sites (Allen, Ekwugha and Chukwulete, 2011).

The social media provide means for users to interact over the internet, most times through the use of email and instant messaging. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. Most of the information of the social networking sites can be retrieved by thousands who have access to the internet connection (Okunna and Omenugha, 2012:161)

The transformation in the technology of information and communication generation, processing, storage and dissemination witnessed in the 21st century unprecedentedly opened up new media platforms unmatched in history in terms of interconnectedness, interactivity, multiplicity and accessibility (McQuail, 2005)

Gevertz and Greenwood (2010) conceptualized social media as information that is disseminated through highly accessible publishing techniques (web and mobile), that transform people from content consumers into content producers. Social media is a change from a unidirectional model of communication to a multidirectional model of communication, where audience members are actively engaged in the communication and are not just receivers of information (Thackeray and Neiger, 2009). Those who access social media can be both consumers and producers of media, or what Bruns (2009) has termed "producers." This concept refers to "user-led", collaborative processes of content creation.

According to Spurgeon (2008), social media are considered the most interactive of all communication media, because it is engineered to support all modes of interpersonal, mass and computer-mediated communication. Spurgeon further notes that interactivity is a major criterion of comparison between "old" mass media and "new" digitally networked media and the more interactive a communication system is, the more flexible the system is in terms of the types of communication and exchange such a system can support.

Typical examples of social media platforms include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and the interactive options on these websites, such as the "retweeting" option on Twitter. These instruments are referred to as media because they are tools which can also be used for the storage and dissemination of information, however unlike the traditional media like television and radio, most of the social media tools allow their users to interact as "re–twitting" as it is on Twitter and "comment" as the options on Facebook.

Looking at social media from a more practical point of view, Sweetser and Lariscy (2008:179)

conceptualizes social media as a "read-write Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content". The internet is seen as tool for knowledge building through communication and information exchange, which has extended freedom to participate in economic, political and social process (Okunna and Omenugha, 2012).

Social media aim to use the collective and self-organizing intelligence present in a social network—a network which is open to new participants, and their specific experiences, knowledge, and ideas. Communication within these networks has an instant and many characters, due to the use of instant messaging devices (for example, Facebook, Twitter, and MSN). Moreover, communication is not restricted to text but also includes video and audio streaming (Stanyer, 2009).

As a matter of fact, social media introduced speed and interactivity that were lacking in the traditional mobilization techniques, which generally include the use of leaflets, posters, and faxes" (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). Perhaps one of the most striking features of this new method of communication is its ability to bypass the bias of official sources and the mass media, and give a voice to ordinary citizens in transforming the political landscape of their country (Clark 2012). "This is an argument for information abundance freed from the shackles of a mass communication system that broadcast from one to many" (Downey and Fenton 2003).

The social media offer vast opportunity to enjoy user-to-user interaction which distinguishes it from the traditional media which is characterized by top-down news dissemination arrangement (Clark and Aufderheide 2009). Another attribute of the social media which distinguishes it from the traditional media is that it allows its users "free choice". Choice enables people to access the information they like to learn about through the social media, eliminating the gatekeeper role of traditional media. On one hand, the choice offered by social media reduces the shared experience that viewers of particular traditional media channels usually have; on the other hand, it creates a network of individuals with like interests and similar preferences (PLAC, 2012).

Facebook: History and Functionalities

Facebook is a social networking site that was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 while he was still a student at Harvard University. It was initially restricted to Harvard students only but was later extended to include other Universities/Colleges and then later high schools in the U.S. (www.wikipedia/en/history_of_Facebook).

The popularity of Facebook became worldwide

and it was eventually opened up to anyone with an email address to join and create a profile.

Facebook has grown at an astronomical rate from its humble beginning as a Harvard campus networking site to a global internet giant boasting of a whopping 1.5 billion active users, making it the biggest social networking site in the world. To put it in other words, if Facebook were a country, it would be the most populous country in the world (www.statista.com/264810).

Facebook can be accessed through www.facebook.com and all a prospective user needs' to open an account and create a profile is a valid email address or cell phone number. He or she provides some basic information about himself /herself such as name, sex, date of birth, and town of residence. A picture of the user is optional but encouraged by Facebook. A profile page is created for each user that registers and it contains all the information about the user as provided by the user.

Some of the functionalities of Facebook available to users are Walls (where information can be posted for friends to see), Messages (for private emails), Status (to post any kind of information for the public to view), Pictures & Videos uploading links, groups of political, social, religious or whatever leaning can be created for followers to join. Chat which is an instant messaging application is one of the major features on the website. It also comes with inbuilt search capabilities which are used to search for long lost or new friends on the social networking site by inputting their names. Online games like Scrabble, Farmville, Mafia wars etc have proved to be major attraction for users of Facebook as it is free of charge (www.facebook.com).

Needless to say, with all the aforementioned applications and features, Facebook has become a very popular "hot spot" where the youth especially "hang out" to socialize and get informed, entertained and even educated.

Twitter: History and Functionalities

Twitter is a free micro-blogging, social messaging service that allows people to communicate brief message (140 words) called "tweets" in real time. (Dominick, 2011).

When you sign up with twitter on www.twitter.com you can use the service to post and receive messages to a network of contacts. Instead of sending a dozen emails or text messages, you send one message to your twitter account, and the service distributes it to all friends or "followers". Members use twitter to organize impromptu gatherings, carry on a group conversation or just send a quick update to let people know what's going on. (Strickland, 2011).

Twitter was founded in 2006 by the trio of Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz Stone who were all programmers that were interested in creating a micro-blogging social network that could be updated via short message service (SMS).

Despite the fact that a "tweet" is limited to a maximum of 140 words, Twitter has grown at an astronomical rate since its inception. Exact numbers are hard to pin down but according to Picard (2011) there are between 200-250 million users on twitter while about 460,000 new accounts are opened daily, with about 140 million tweets sent daily.

Some of the reasons why Twitter has become a huge hit among internet users is because of its simplicity and easy- to- use format. Twitter is also accessible both from laptops with internet connection and mobile devices like mobile phones, PDA's, smart phones, ipad, etc Twitter has really proven to be the mobile social media.

Many well-known personalities have Twitter accounts that they use for political, social, informational, educational, mobilizing, canvassing purposes.

Upon opening an account on Twitter, a user will be allotted a profile page which will contain basic information like names of the user, the city or country where he/she is based; users are also encouraged to upload at least one of their pictures as a profile picture. Favorite quotes or sayings can also be included in the profile page.

The next step' after setting up a profile page is to invite or search for friends/contacts (called "followers") to "follow". To do this there is an inbuilt 'search' application which is used to search for followers on Twitter. Those not on twitter already can also be invited to join via emails. There is no limit to the number of followers a 'tweeter' can follow and some prominent personalities like.

The 'Timeline' is similar to the Wall application on Facebook, where Tweets (messages) from all of one's followers are displayed to be read. These tweets from followers can also be "Retweeted" by an individual so that the tweet is seen by other tweeters on the individual's network of followers.

Even though twitter is meant to be a micro-blogging site it nonetheless can be used to upload and post picture and also links to videos or pod casts. Many tweeters tweet and back such tweets with pictures to lend credence to it. There is also a section called Trends where the top ten most tweeted issues on Twitter are listed. Usually, current events taking place in the world dominate this list. Some other times it may be about natural disasters happening somewhere, while at other times celebrities in the news make the trending list. Twitter can be used to keep up with news by 'following' any of the several media houses that now tweet most of their stories - usually the Headlines and Leads.

It should also be noted that Twitter was later sold to Elon Musk. The deal was initiated on April 14, 2022 and finally concluded on October 27, 2022. Since after the sale, a lot of transformational changes have taken place, inclusive of the change of Twitter's name to X.

The Igbos and the Concept of Marginalization in Nigeria

After the civil war in 1970, to create enabling conditions for the unity of all Nigerians and facilitate the reintegration of Biafrans, the then military head of state of Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, declared "no victor, no vanquished but victory for common sense and the unity of Nigeria." Included in this declaration was a transitional justice program popularly known as the "3Rs" - Reconciliation (Reintegration), Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. Unfortunately, the genocide committed against the Igbos during the war was not addressed by any court neither did any government did anything to perpetrators of the genocide (Odoemene, 2012; Ugorji, 2017). As noted by Morgen (2016), in reality, the recurring secession attempt is the result of a buildup of the various illogicalities within the Nigerian state. Various constitutions had been negotiated and adopted prior to 1966, but none addressed the fundamental social differences, ethnic imbalances, economic competition and political tensions that the Nigerian state struggled with.

Because the postwar transitional justice program was inefficient, and failed to address the human rights abuses and genocidal crimes committed against the Igbos during the war, the painful memories of the war remain green in the minds of many Biafrans even sixty years after. According to Ugorji (2017), war survivors and their families are still suffering from intergenerational trauma of the war till date. In addition to trauma and yearning for justice, the Igbos in the southeast of Nigeria feel completely marginalized by the federal government of Nigeria. Since the end of the war, there has not been an Igbo president in Nigeria neither had an Igbo man held a sensitive position in the political equation of the country where they were said to have been reintegrated after the war. Integration in Nigeria is very hard as each ethnic group struggle to dominate the others, no trust and no sense of unity among them (Ekanola, 2006; Heywood, 2007; Udebunu, 2011). Nigeria has been ruled for over forty years by the Hausa-Fulani from the north and the Yoruba from the southwest. And this fact makes the Igbos feel they are still being punished because of the aborted session of Biafra (Folarin et al., 2014).

In the light of the discrimination that characterizes the inhabitants of the country, people vote along ethnic lines making it highly unlikely for the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba ethnic groups to elect an Igbo as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The implication of this is that an Igbo man had no hope of becoming the president, because, even he contests, the voting strength is against him and he will lose. This makes the Igbos feel frustrated and completely deprived of what they consider very important to ensure their wellbeing in the country. Because of these issues, and given that the federal government has failed to address the issues of development in the Southeast, new waves of agitation and a renewed call for another Biafran independence have emerged both from the region and within the Diaspora communities abroad (Ugorji, 2017).

In terms of development, there is no seaport in the South East and the one in Port Harcourt that may be closer by is not working optimally owing to policy of strangulation orchestrated and implemented by the federal government of Nigeria. There is only one international airport and no functional railway line in the entire region. These and many other kinds of infrastructural decay in the area point to the suspicion among many proponents of the Biafran agenda that the country did not want the progress of the Igbo man. Dredging the river-Niger to serve as a link to encourage sea transportation will help the Igbos who are mostly merchants to deliver their merchandize from abroad, but that has formed a political bait to lure the people in the area into voting for a presidential candidate year in year out.

Methodology

The research design of this study was survey. A descriptive survey was a desideratum because as Wimmer and Dominick, (2000) explain that "a survey design attempts to picture or document conditions or attitudes that exists at the moment". The survey method in research has equally been known to be an effective tool in the description and explanation of relationships between and among phenomena. Although the survey method in its individual capacity is not devoid of weakness, it is believed that its deficiency is subsumed in its efficient and potent approach in concretizing and validating research findings and conclusions.

The population of this study is residents of Abakaliki. The numerical strength of this population is estimated to be 1,179,280. A sample size of 400 were chosen for the purpose of this study. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaires that were distributed for the purpose of this study, 20 were considered invalid.

Research Question 1: What is the influence of IPOB social media contents on their consumers?

Table 1: Are you on any social media platform?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	380	100
No	0	0
Total	380	100

The data on Table 1 shows that all the respondents answered in the affirmative that they are on a social media platform.

Table 2: Do you follow IPOB on any social media platform?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	380	100
No	0	0
Total	380	100

The data on Table 2 shows that all the respondents answered in the affirmative that they follow IPOB on social media.

Research Question 2: How do IPOB contents affect the perspective of the consumers of such contents about the association's agenda?

Table 3: Do IPOB social media contents influence your opinion(s) about its activities?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	294	77
No	86	23
Total	380	100

The data on Table 3 shows that 294 respondents (77%) answered in the affirmative that IPOB social media contents influence their opinions about the activities of the group while 86 respondents (23%) answered in the negative.

Table 4: Do IPOB contents influence you to believe in the organisation's agenda?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	288	76
No	92	24
Total	380	100

The data on Table 4 shows that 288 respondents (76%) answered in the affirmative that IPOB contents influence them to believe in the organisation's agenda while 92 respondents (24%) answered in the negative.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the data collated for the purpose of this study will be discussed here;

Research Question 1: What is the influence of IPOB social media contents on their consumers?

The objective of this research question is to investigate the influence of IPOB social media contents on their consumers. The data on Table 1 and 2 were used to answer this research question. The data on

Table 1 shows that all the respondents answered in the affirmative that they are on a social media platform. The data on Table 2 shows that all the respondents answered in the affirmative that they follow IPOB on social media.

Based on the above, IPOB members take active role in seeking information relating to IPOB in social media and participants are eager to share or spread information within and outside their circle to show that they have not been wrong in their perception. Since they are not relying on conventional news sources, their sources remain mostly online contents sympathetic to IPOB cause and hence use the same online platforms to share their findings. None of the IPOB members rely on any other source to verify the information gathered online. IPOB is an illegal organization in Nigeria, hence, it has no officially registered news outlet and therefore rely on social media as its medium of information dissemination.

Research Question 2: How do IPOB contents affect the perspective of the consumers of such contents about the association's agenda?

The objective of this research question is to investigate how IPOB contents affect the perspectives of the consumers of such contents about the association's agenda. The data on Table 3 and 4 were used to answer this research question. The data on Table 3 shows that 294 respondents (77%) answered in the affirmative that IPOB social media contents influence their opinions about the activities of the group while 86 respondents (23%) answered in the negative. The data on Table 4 shows that 288 respondents (76%) answered in the affirmative that IPOB contents influence them to believe in the organization's agenda while 92 respondents (24%) answered in the negative.

Based on the above, the reluctance of IPOB members to interrogate online contents of IPOB, in view of glaring facts presented before them can be attributed to the fact that they do not have direct knowledge of the information being peddle by IPOB that would enable them critically interrogate such information. Hence, they rely more on IPOB friendly social media contents as their source of information. This position agrees with the study of Happer and Philo, (2013) who proposition that in the absence of direct knowledge of event, audience become particularly reliant on the media to inform them. However, in the case with IPOB members, they rely only on media favourable to IPOB which continually reinforced their beliefs.

Conclusion

Consumers of social media contents identify with stereotypes agreeing with their perceived beliefs and avoid contents that will not support their beliefs. The creation of comforts zones beliefs using social media

contents that agree with their perception enables them to shut out any contrary views, even if such contrary views are the correct realities. The reinforcement and acceptance of social media contents whether fake or genuine news arose not because of the primary emotion but as a result of the combination of both 'primary (perceived beliefs) and secondary (independent of the perceived beliefs) emotions influence(s)'. This theoretical thread for this study is being supported with the proposition that IPOB members rely on perceived beliefs to argue in support of the veracity of IPOB contents. It shows clearly, even when there has been a rebuttal to the content posted on line that IPOB members will still relate to the contents as being true in the face of confirmed contrary facts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, there is therefore the need for further study to interrogate the position of social media content as being capable of influencing behaviour(s) without underlying beliefs. Also, there is need to further research into other factors that could reinforce beliefs of social media content consumers. The researcher faced the challenge of securing the trust and cooperation of self-acclaimed IPOB members to participate in the study for fear of being set-up or arrested by the Nigerian security apparatus. However, with the assistance of one of the research assistants who were deliberately recruited for the purpose because of similar ethnic affinities, their cooperation and willingness were secured. Also, none of the participants was referred to by name. The study identifies the need to interrogate the ability of social media content to influence behaviour(s) without underlying beliefs

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