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The construction of tenor, identities and power relations in online discourses on indigenous people of Biafra (Ijob)

ABSTRACT. Previous studies on ethnic, religious and political expressions and activities in Nigeria have examined issues such as religious and political intolerance between and among groups. In particular, the activities of pro-Biafra groups such as that of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Biafra Independent Movement (BIM) among others in real life and in online forums have also been studied by scholars from different ideological and theoretical standpoints. However, none of these studies examined the deliberate expression of ethnic, religious and political identities and otherness in the discourses that emanate from the arrest, detention and trial of Nnamdi Kanu, the separatist founder of IPOB, by the government of Nigeria. This study aims at unearthing the deep sense of exclusion that underlies the reactions that trail his arrest and trial in online platforms. A total of twenty online comments were purposively selected and analysed within the tenets of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to unearth the ethnic, religious and political ideologies that underlie them. This study gives an insight into how individual and group ideologies in online discourses can threaten the autonomous face wants of others and also that of the corporate existence of the nation. The theoretical orientation adopted for the study leads to the understanding that ethnic, political and religious sentiments underlie the use of language in crisis/conflict situations in the Nigerian context. This study significantly espouses the notion that there is the need for equity, social justice and mutual trust between groups in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Ethnic, Religious and Political Identities, Exclusion, Equity, Social Justice

1. Introduction

Individual attitudes, beliefs, orientations, points of view and biases on something are referred to as ideology in critical studies. People can also manifest their ideology through their language, actions and inac-

tions. Consequently, every utterance is ideologically mediated or imbued. No utterance is ideologically neutral. People's comments and reactions to the trial of Nnamdi Kanu (the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB & founder of Radio Biafra) have also not been less of a product of ideology. The origin of the conflict that has so far led to the trial of Kanu did not just begin recently, as it dates back to 1967 when the Republic of Biafra originated as a secessionist state as a result of the economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among Nigerians. A military coup occurred in January 1966 which led to the death of top political and military leaders including the then prime minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, a northerner. Due to several reasons, the killings were alleged to be an Igbo coup and as a result, a counter-coup came in July of the same year which heightened the ethnic tensions in Nigeria. A lot of military officers and civilians of Igbo extraction resident in the North were targeted and killed and reprisal killings of Northerners in the East also followed suit. The counter-coup led to the death of the then military head of state, Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo. A civil war which lasted close to three years (1967–1970) broke out after Colonel Ojukwu, the military governor of eastern region, proclaimed the eastern region an independent and sovereign state to be known as "The Republic of Biafra". After the war came the process of reconciliation and reintegration of the Igbo into the Nigerian nationhood. However, a sizeable majority Igbo have never ceased to see themselves as not being part of Nigeria because of alleged or perceived instances of marginalization against them by their fellow compatriots. Kanu, like some other radical Igbo agitators, believe the realization of Biafra is the best way of ending the marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria. As a way of conscientizing the Igbo and other ethnic minorities in the southern part of Nigeria he opened a pirate radio station in London known as "Radio Biafra" from where he broadcasts series of anti-government and anti-President Buhari messages. He was however arrested by security operatives in Lagos in October 2015 when he attempted to enter the country surreptitiously under a new identity.

The arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kanu since October 14, 2015 by the federal government of Nigeria has fostered a crisis situation. Protests by members of IPOB and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) have occurred in the southeast and south-south zones of the nation to press for his release. The protests and riots have brought about loss of lives and property of not just the protesters

themselves but also that of innocent by-standers. Clashes have also occurred between the protesters and security operatives who have been accused of using excessive force to quell the protests. Both sides have traded blames on who ignited the confrontations and their fatal consequences. Again, several negotiations and round-table discussions have been held to find a possible political solution to the fast spreading crisis before it degenerates into another civil war.

The Internet, particularly the social media technology, has so far gone a long way in shaping identity construction/re-negotiation and establishment of individual and societal ideologies. Innocent Chiluya (2014) asserts that “the internet has been adapted as a medium to negotiate perceived endangered ethnic identities” (Chiluya, 2014, p. 81). The Biafran issue has also not been an exception as Chiluya also notes that “[...] the internet is a key site for social interaction, civil engagement and identity negotiation. The Biafra Campaign Group forms a virtual community for the purpose of asserting its ethnic identity and to seek political independence from Nigeria” (Chiluya, 2014, p. 81). Still on the issue of Biafran agitation, various online platforms and websites have been opened, such as “Voice of Biafra”, “Biafra Online”, “Biafra Forum” and others, through which members of the forums post information or comments pertinent to the agitation. Each of the comments/posts on the forums exhibits ideological content that represents both individual and collective identities.

Nnamdi Kanu’s trial has been on for some months now and people have reacted to this through various means—online or print media. However, no researcher has studied how otherness or the ideology of exclusion is expressed in the discourses on Kanu by groups and individuals in online medium and the implications of such discourses on national cohesion. The obvious neglect of this area is therefore the major concern of this study. Language in online medium has performed various functions including the enactment of inclusion and exclusion/otherness. The aim of this study is to examine how crisis situations enable language users to implicitly and explicitly express the ideology of exclusion or otherness. One of the objectives of this study is to reveal how online discourses create a platform for the expression of individual and group identities and the implication of such expressions on national unity/integration. Another objective of this study is to examine how a crisis situation can generate diverse reactions that exude in-groupness and out-groupness. The study also unravels how people use language to

show resistance and dominance in crisis situation. This study is significant in that it shows the interconnectedness between discourse, ideology and identity especially in crisis situation. It shows that individuals and groups can take advantage of the liberty/freedom provided by the internet to produce discourse forms that can threaten fellowship face, autonomous face wants of the other, traditional bonds between groups, and thus weaken national unity. This study is restricted to the analysis of language use by selected online users/commentators in reaction to the arrest, detention and trial of Nnamdi Kanu. Consequently, it will examine how ideologies and identities are constructed by different individuals and groups in crisis situation such as the ongoing trial of Kanu.

2. Literature review and theoretical perspective

The first recorded use of the word “identity” appeared in 1570 as “identity”, meaning “the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 18). Identity is obviously a difficult concept to define because it is not a fixed notion. Omoniyi and White (2006) observe that “identity is a problematic concept inasmuch as we recognize it now as non-fixed, non-rigid and always being (co-)constructed by individuals of themselves (or ascribed by others), or by people who share certain core values or perceive another group as having such values” (Omoniyi & White, 2006, p. 1). McKinlay and McVittie (2011, p. 19) argue that identity, particularly in discourse, should rather be examined in terms of how it is produced and dealt with within the specific particularities of the interactional contexts in which it appears. They contend that people will construct identities for themselves and for others as they interact with others through discourse. This explains why Evans (2015, p. 49) observes that language is often used to claim group identity. Language enhances the enactment or expression of both individual and group identities.

Language enables its users to express their experience of the world and their relationship with others. Halliday (2003) views language as a resource for construing human experiences. Working within the Hallidayan view of language, Sonderling (2009, p. 86) observes:

In a fundamental way language makes it possible for us to understand and make sense of the world by providing us with words and meanings to name

things and interpret the world, to represent it to our mind, talk about it and exchange information with other people. Our knowledge and experience of the world are words and meaning mediated by language. The way we organise and articulate our experiences is an interpretative process that takes place mainly in, and through, language... language stands between us and our world; by using words to describe objects in our world we re-present the world to our mind and such representation influences, shapes and also distorts our view of the world.

Evans (2015) contends that language is more than words and phrases and disembodied sounds but rather the coming to life of social interaction where sentences may be incomplete, punctuated by voices of other or by gaps, silences, intonations, accents and accompanied by bodily gestures and facial movements. He points out that language is embodied and expresses ways of being in the world through the creation of meanings which relate to us in terms of identity (Evans, 2015, p. 3). Language therefore includes the spoken and written words, signs, semiotics, gestures and so on.

Language is important in the construction and analysis of social identity. Omoniyi and White (2006, p. 2) note that language plays a central role in both interpreting and proclaiming identity. Language enables individuals to make sense of their own identities and that of others. Duszak (2002) puts it very succinctly when she argues that “no doubt language gives us a most powerful tool for conveying social identities, for telling (and making) friends and foes. The construction and the management of social identities are done through discourse and by means of various linguistic mechanisms and strategies” (Duszak, 2002, p. 1). The expression of ingroupness and outgroupness is the property of language. The expression of social proximity and distance is also discursive. How we perceive ourselves and others and how we would want others to perceive us are also discursive. According to Duszak (2002, p. 8):

Social identities are enacted in discourse. Analyzing what is said we make presumptions as to what is meant. In the course of such interpretation processes we also make inferences as to what social identities speakers (writers) construe of themselves and their listeners (readers). On the basis of such inferences we produce mental representations of people and develop attitudes of social solidarity and detachment. These are then consolidated, revised or redefined on the basis of further evidence.

For Evans (2015), identity, is the idea, sense and perception of self or self-concept which is constituted by the meaning of language and how it

is reflected in language, not just in small-scale social interactions but also in larger linguistic-political discourse. He maintains that the meanings that substantiate self-concept or identity are both created through language and expressed by language (Evans, 2015, p. 3). To Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 42), some scholars perceive identity as something that lies dormant, ready to be “switched on” in the presence of other people, and this can only be switched on through the use of language (which is a vital means for humans to express themselves). Therefore, people will construct identities for themselves and for others as they interact with others through discourse (McKinlay & McVittie, 2011, p. 14). One major fact about identity is that it is in two forms—personal and social—where “personal” refers to who an individual is, that is, the name of the person and characteristics while “social” means the groups and organizations the individual belongs to.

In Duszak’s (2002, p. 2) studies on social identities, “people construct their social identities on the basis of various socially and culturally relevant parameters. These include ethnicity, nationality, professional status and expertise, gender, age, as well as ideology and style of living”. The considerations above represent some of the ways scholars have perceived and considered the notion of identity.

3. Methodology

The primary data for this study is derived from some selected online comments in *e-Vanguard* news (the online version of *Vanguard Newspapers*) of December 2015–March 2016, on the arrest and trial of Nnamdi Kanu. A total number of forty (40) posts were sampled out of which twenty (20) were purposively selected for analysis. The twenty posts were selected as fair representations of the main focus/theme of the posts. The twenty posts are represented as follows: ethnic identity (12 posts—85%); religious identity (2 posts—3%); and political identity (6 posts—12%). It should also be noted that no attempt is made to correct grammatical and spelling errors in the posts. The posts convey some sociolinguistic information on the speakers. From the way language is used in the posts, we can infer the social and ethnic backgrounds of some of the commentators. Most of the posts bear the online identity of the commentators.

4. Data presentation and analysis

In this part of the study, focus shall be on the online comments on Nnamdi Kanu's arrest and trial as they convey a sense of ingroupness and outgroupness, that is, how individuals use language to display ethnic, religious and political identities. The twenty posts selected for analysis are presented and discussed below.

4.1. Ethnic otherness

The twelve (12) posts under consideration in this category (ethnic otherness) constitute 85% of the twenty posts selected for analysis. This shows that the ethnic dimension of the discourse is dominant or received the greatest attention. This is not surprising since the agitation for Biafra is essentially an ethnic one. This means that most of those who speak in favour and against the struggle do so mainly from ethnic prism or lenses. The concept of identity as discussed in 2.0 above has been identified as a multi-faceted one. An individual can have multi-identities, depending on the context involved. Ethnic identity is one of such identities as seen in the posts below.

Post 1

opy 13 days ago

Head or tale Kanu will rot in prison, he can't escape it. So the earlier you agitators of biafraud realizes that the better.

A common way to portray otherness is with the use of pronouns. In the above post, the ethnic group of the speaker is not clearly stated but one can easily notice that the speaker is anti-Biafra with the use of the words "...you agitators...", therefore excluding himself or emphasizing that he is not one of them. Also, by neologising the word Biafra to become "biafraud", the speaker does not only portray them as inferior to whatever ethnic group he may belong to but also labels them in the negative as fraudsters, hence the use of the word "...fraud". Again, the use of the word, "biafraud" depicts the whole concept of Biafran struggle as fraudulent—an opportunity for some privileged few to defraud or exploit the gullible majority. The phrase, "head or tail, Kanu will rot in prison" is intended to threaten the autonomous face wants of the other—the followers or sympathizers of Kanu and Biafra.

Post 2

Obosi Warrior • 14 days ago

Oh no! Why stop the demon—Stration, a lot of biafraud e-rats are going to lose erection because of late the madness has become an opium that fans thier libidic fantasy. By the way who told you about any negotiation to release Nnamdi Kow-nu, you guys are just putting it up as a saving face (lame) withdrawal strategy. No government ever promised that, Kow-nu will go through the legal process and if found guilty will surely bear his cross. Abeg knw wey market don open, make I go buy garri for Ochanja market jare!

The above speaker, whose identity is revealed, is obviously an anti-Biafran. He labels the Igbo negatively as well as scapegoats them as he calls them names such as “biafraud”, “e-rats”, “demon-Stration” and also uses a distorted the coinage “Nnamdi Kow-nu” instead of “Nnamdi kanu”. One could describe the commentator as an Igbo who does not share in the Biafran dream. There are linguistic indicators that suggest that he/she is Igbo: his/her name—Obosi (an Igbo town) and the reference to Ochanja market (in Onitsha). This gives the impression that not all Igbo buy into the IPOB/MASSOB campaign or that one could be Igbo without being Biafran. The speaker further shows his/her disapproval of IPOB protesters by constructing them as being possessed by the demon hence the action of demonstration is graphologically distorted and foregrounded as a “demon-Stration.” However, the rhetorical purposes for the deliberate deployment of sexual images such as “erection”, “libidic”, “release” and “withdrawal strategy” in the context of the discussion is not certain.

Post 3

EvaNexy Dec 8, 2015

The yorobbers don't want biafra to go because they are so afraid that if biafra goes the hausa/fulani will take over their land cos they know that they are born cowards and betrayers.

The above speaker first begins by deliberately distorting the word “Yorubas” to “yorobbers” (yo-robbers) hence labelling the Yoruba ethnic group as robbers and also scapegoating them as betrayers for not supporting the Biafran cause. The speaker goes further to call the other cowards and betrayers who rely on the Igbo being part of the Nigerian nation to escape Hausa/Fulani occupation. The claim implicitly represents the Hausa/Fulani groups as land grabbers. The coinage “yo-robbers”

implies that the Yoruba are greedy thieves who reap where they did not sow. This is an obvious use of discourse of blackmail to represent the other in the most negative. Such discourse shows that the Igbo do not like or trust people of the Yoruba ethnic group when it comes to matters such as the one under consideration. The speaker carefully chooses words such as “yorobbers”, “born cowards” and “betrayers” that are purposely intended to offend the Yoruba and threaten the fellowship face between the Igbo and the Yoruba.

Post 4

@EvaNexy Dec 8, 2015

We're biafrans & not nigeria, our way and everything is different, so you can't intimidate us neither do buhari or army, when we finish with nigeria & buhari we will come after any politician who has conspired with nigeria harm us directly or indirectly. All hail biafra. #Free nnamdi KANU #Free biafra.

Unlike the two previous comments that attack the face of the other directly, the above comment asserts the Biafran ethno-national identity of the speaker in unmistakable terms, hence the continuous use of the pronouns “we” and “us”. We find the speaker reiterating his national/ethnic identity and what they stand for—“we're biafrans & not nigerians, our way and everything is different...” It is not certain, from the co-text, whether the pronominal “you” refers to other commentators, Buhari, the army or other perceived enemies of Biafra but what is certain about the discourse is the speaker's use of pronouns to assert and construct a self-image that negates the one being imposed on him/her by the Nigerian nation. Contextual clues however lead us to infer that the “you” refers to those the speaker believes are opposed to the realization of Biafra. The speaker uses the expression, “...our way and everything is different” as a way of persuading his/her audience to accept the fact that there are no commonalities or common grounds between Biafra and other parts of the Nigerian nation. Thus, the pronouns of inclusion (we, our, us) and exclusion (you) establish the ideology of dichotomy or difference between Biafra and others. The speaker ends his/her rhetoric with two hash tags as a way of drawing attention to and drumming support for the Biafran struggle. Hash tags have become very popular in contemporary discourses that have political and ideological orientations. They are mainly perceived as semiotic signs of resistance against social injustice, oppression and dominance.

Post 5*Obosi Warrior Chiemele • 14 days ago*

Reasoning with people whose brains has been washed with Omo and key soap becomes very exhaustive. I wonder who they claim is negotiating with them retards. Negotiate about what? Nnamdi Kow-nu a frustrated loafer in UK, who thinks he can buy himself into prominence through mischief and wayo. Listen to them talk here, you will see they all reason in one direction, like a herd directed towards abyss

The above speaker uses *omo* and key soap (which are kinds of detergent in Nigeria), to express how the referent has been brain-washed by pro-Biafra mind controllers and ideologies. The phrase, "...whose brains has been washed with omo and key soap..." as a metaphor, implies being brain-washed, ideologically. On the surface, one may not know who is being brain-washed and by who, until one goes further down the comment where the speaker makes use of the pronoun "they", thereby excluding himself and in the context of the discourse, it could probably be referring to pro-Biafra agitators in real life and in virtual communities. The speaker therefore, through his comment, reveals himself/herself as an anti-Biafran. Instead of him/her spelling Nnamdi Kanu correctly, the speaker deliberately distorts it to "Nnamdi Kow-nu", which by pronunciation sounds like the word "cow." The association of the name and personality of Kanu with cow is also seen in the phrase, "...like a herd directed towards abyss." Framing Kanu and other pro-Biafra agitators as cow or herd is intended to delegitimize kanu and justify the speaker's claim that Kanu is "a frustrated loafer in UK" who is leading the ignorant to destruction.

Post 6*Smancy Dec 9, 2015*

You mean Kanu I saw in one YouTube, who went to America to solicit for guns and ammunitions to kill hausas. Which means he is instigating war in the country, which is also a high treason, he thought hausas will just sit down and allow him and his cohorts to just kill them and go, what a Big fool.

The speaker carefully chooses his words, which depict him as none pro-Biafran (or a non-Igbo) because he represents Kanu as an insurgent "instigating war in the country". It is also clear that the speaker is not Hausa as a result of the third person plural pronoun "them", a pronoun of exclusion, which refers to the Hausa ethnic group. By also referring to

the Biafrans as Kanu's "cohorts", the speaker reveals his dislike for the Biafran movement as a whole. The speaker in trying to represent Kanu in the negative flouts one of the Grecian maxims—the maxim of quality. The speaker does not appear to have any evidence in support of his/her claim that Kanu was soliciting guns in America to kill the Hausa. Why would Kanu target just the Hausa and spare other ethnic groups such as the Yoruba, the Fulani, the Kanuri, and so on. It appears the speaker's intention is to depict the Hausa as innocent victims of Kanu's wicked and evil intentions and perhaps instigate an ethnic war between the Hausa and the Igbo ethnic groups. He also portrays his biases by declaring such an act "a high treason" when he lacks the powers of a judge to do so. By calling Kanu "a Big fool" he threatens the autonomous face wants of the other.

Post 7

KampalaKamptown 13 days ago

@Smancy u re mad who has been killing who in this zoo if i may remember it has been the hausa fulani killing the Biafrans many thunder fire u and ur generation 500 times

This speaker reacts to the previous post. He starts by abusing the previous speaker (which is a common phenomenon in crisis discourse). While the speaker in post 6 implies that Kanu and his ethnic group are the ones planning to eliminate the Hausa people, this speaker counters that by representing Biafrans as innocent victims of the Hausa/Fulani genocidal attacks. The speaker refers to Nigeria as a "zoo" which implies Nigeria is inhabited by wild animals where no rules obtain. The speaker uses the zoo metaphor to justify the alleged killings of Biafrans by the Hausa/Fulani group. The use of abusive language by the speaker is also a threat to the face of the other.

Post 8

HAROLD_WILSON_SYNDROME 13 days ago

@Nattifika @Ibiso

THEY will become Igbo again AFTER the movement succeeds.

The speaker here foregrounds the pronoun "THEY" in capital letters to show he is not one of those who are against the Biafran movement. The pronoun refers to those who are denying their Biafran identity because of the challenges IPOB and other pro-Biafra movements are facing in Nigeria. He is against those who will only want to become in-

group members after the realization of Biafra. The time deixis, after, is also foregrounded as a metaphor of hope for the eventual realization of the Biafran dream.

Post 9

Ibiso Dec 8, 2015

Although I am from the Niger delta and will not allow my region to be with Biafra, I think right now if Biafra is not allowed by Nigerians, People like the Oba of Lagos and other Hausa fools should be sent to jail anytime they carelessly utter rubbish. 2. Every Nigerian where ever the person finds himself or herself MUST have every right to live at that place. Every human right and benefit... If not THEN ALLOW BIAFRA to go.

@Ibiso

Fellow Biafrans, this can be a Yoruba imposter...be warned. He carefully chose his words to make you believe he is pro Biafra.

The first speaker here starts by establishing his/her regional identity as a non-Biafran and pledges not to allow his/her region to be with Biafra. He/she however argues that Biafrans should be allowed to go if social justice and rule of law are not allowed to flourish in Nigeria. A critical look at the comment therefore, will reveal the somewhat indifferent disposition of the speaker to the present issue. Meanwhile, the second speaker on the other hand, by using the expression "fellow Biafrans", identifies self as a Biafran before going further to antagonize the first speaker for the apparent contradictions in his/her identity. By warning his/her group members, Biafrans, to beware of the "Yoruba imposter" the second speaker seems not to believe that the first speaker is from the Niger Delta. It is however surprising that this speaker still feels comfortable to label the first speaker a "Yoruba imposter" even when he/she has clearly identified himself/herself as coming from the Niger Delta region and thus a non-Yoruba.

Post 10

Speaker A

Sting2000 kuli • 14 days ago

[...] but you have been raping and taking their resources for decades. You have even killed their leaders like Sarowiwa, Boro and the Ogonis. Igbos have never fought wars or killed their neighbors. So what about that? Next propaganda and lies, please!

Speaker B

kuli Sting2000 • 14 days ago

Us you mean. We are all Nigerians since Biafra is dead yet again. Lolz

Speaker A

Sting2000 kuli • 14 days ago

Chameleon, refute the issue in context and stop trying to divert attention to your Biafran nightmare. I never used the word “us or we”

Speaker B

kuli Sting2000 • 14 days ago

I am using the word US and WE intentionally. Since Biafra died a few minutes ago. Newsflash you are still Nigerian just like me. Join me in Yaba, make we go chop Amala and Gbegiri to celebrate our unity.

The above string of exchanges contains perfect examples of expression of otherness. The pronouns “we” and “us”, are used to express in-groupness while “you”, “their” and “your” are for out-groupness. In the first comment, we find speaker A exonerating Biafra (or the Igbo) from the atrocities committed against the people of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian nation. Meanwhile, speaker B quickly identifies the attempt by the Igbo to scapegoat others for the injustices committed against the Niger Delta people by insisting that the Igbo are still part and parcel of Nigeria. Speaker B uses the “we” and “us” in the discourse context to index what he believes to be their common identity—their oneness and Nigerianness. Speaker B perceives the whole idea of Biafra as an opportunity for some privileged few to exploit others hence the derogatory word, Biafra. Whereas speaker A speaks as a pro-Biafran and a supporter of the Biafran cause, speaker B believes Biafra will never be. He/she believes in the indivisibility of the Nigerian nation.

Post 11

Nattifika Dec 9, 2015

@Ibiso Although I come from the NigerDelta part of Nigerian, specifically from Warri, I am remain a staunch supporter of Biafra. Itsekiris should wake up now and not remain sitting on the fence to give their support to the movement. I think our cousins the Urhobos and the Ijaws should come out NOW not tomorrow to show their solidarity for the

drive to accomplish some tangible result. I will never understand Niger-Deltans that wishes to remain under the yoke of complete dominane from the central Government.

From the above, we can infer that some non-Igbo identify with the Biafran struggle as the speaker claims to hail from Warri. He also urges other ethnic groups in Delta State to identify with Biafra. However, the speaker's Warri identity claim is in doubt because he/she succeeds in mentioning the three major ethnic groups (Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw) that lay claim to Warri without identifying which one he/she belongs to. This text shows that virtual identities can, sometimes, be difficult to establish. It is easier for discourse participants to conceal their identities or lay claim to new ones.

Post 12

Paul Afam PolyGon2013 • 14 days ago

Oh yes, that's the reason a yaraba man is used for an example of a COWARD & awusa/F00Lani as an example of a TERRORIST.

From the above post, it appears the speaker is from the south-east region of Nigeria and because in-group members always see others as inferior, so the speaker labels members of the other two major ethnic groups in the negative. He/she uses coinages as well as capitalization to communicate his message. The Yoruba are the carriers of the attribution "COWARD" while the "awusa/F00Lani" are the carriers of the negative attribution, "TERRORIST". Meanwhile, the speaker carefully neologises Fulani as "F00Lani", where the supposedly /u:/ vowel sound is realized in cardinal numbers and foregrounded in capital letters. This is a deliberate act which reveals his/her perception of the Fulani ethnic groups as "fools" and he/she also deliberately misspells Hausa as "awusa" and Yoruba as "yaraba". This is a way of doing linguistic violence to the identity of those ethnic groups.

4.2. Religious otherness

Posts that are religious in orientation received the least attention. Only 3% of the posts express a sense of religious otherness. This shows that discourse participants privilege ethnicity and politics over religion, as far the discourse on Nnamdi Kanu is concerned.

Post 13

Smancy Dec 9, 2015

Do you allow hausas to build their place of worship? Go to North in every local government, there is a church, when I served in anambra five local governments have to come together to pray at rented store. Pls be wise

Using the second person pronoun “you”, the above speaker exempts himself/herself from the rhetorical question. The speaker appears not to be of Igbo ethnic group and accuses the Igbo of ethno-religious bias or discrimination against Hausa Muslims. The speaker evokes a historical knowledge frame in support of his/her argument that the north are more religious tolerant than east. With the use of the third person pronoun “their” in the first sentence, it becomes difficult to specifically say the speaker’s religion. However, with the presence of the pronominal “you” in the first sentence, it can be inferred that the speaker may not be a Christian and as such could be a Muslim or a Muslim sympathizer.

Post 14

KampalaKamptown 13 days ago

@opy u re useless and uneducated idiot that's y this ur Islamic British nigeria zoo must fall and Biafra must be restored

From the speaker’s words above, though the religion of the speaker is not directly mentioned, the speaker paints himself/herself as an out-group member of Islam or one who does not identify with the Islamic religion, hence the use of “...this ur Islamic...” The speaker may therefore be a Christian, a traditionalist or one who belongs to some other religious groups who obviously see Nigeria as a British-Islamic configuration that is anti-Christian in the main. Again, the speaker metaphorizes Nigeria as a zoo and predicts its downfall. The use of impolite expressions such as “useless” and “uneducated idiot” by the speaker is a face threatening act.

4.3. Political otherness

In this category, six (6) posts (which make up 12% of the twenty posts) will be analysed to reveal their ideo-political orientation. The comments in themselves evince a sense of political otherness and give

the discourse on Kanu a political colouration. This shows how people who are ideationally different perceive or react to the same phenomenon.

Post 15

kofuche PlayMyPart • 14 days ago

That is where the Nigerian money is going into. APC and Buhari is using every money in this country to bribe the international media to look the other way. Well, that is the man fighting corruption. Don't worry, we will tell our story by ourselves. That is what radio Biafra is doing the entire world is listening to it. They are eager to know what we are doing, but they will not tell you. Do you think we care?

Social actions are generally perceived and constructed from ideological and political perspectives. The arrest, detention and trial of Nnamdi Kanu have not escaped being viewed from the perspective of partisan politics as can be seen in post 15 above. The post does not just reveal the speaker as a Biafran, but also as a non-APC (All Progressives Congress) supporter. Besides, he/she also shows in his/her comment that he/she is against Buhari's government and all that it stands for. The speaker satirizes Buhari's anti-corruption crusade as double standards. He/she also accuses the Buhari led regime and APC of trying to use politics to stifle the discourse on Biafra and prevent it from reaching the global public.

Post 16

EduMainMan1/Stuttsgat • 14 days ago

APC and Demented Mumuhari are Demon Possessed. They Need Deliverance by Fire by Force

The speaker in post 16 above, labels both Buhari and APC as demented and demon possessed. By the negative portrayal of Buhari and APC, it is therefore a given that the speaker is an out-group member, though he makes this obvious in the second sentence with the use of the pronoun "they". The speaker also creates a coinage from Muhammadu and Buhari to form "Mumuhari". The coinage which has "mumu" (imbecile), as its root word, represents a direct threat to the face of the referent. By referring to President Buhari as "mumu" the speaker intends to communicate the impression that the president is stupid and unintelligent. The post negatively represents APC and Buhari as evil and mentally unstable.

Post 17

Emy Maria • 14 days ago

The cowards are those calling for dialogue...Guess who, Buhari and APC false government.

Post 17 is another comment that connects Kanu's ordeal with partisan politics in Nigeria. Like post 16 above, the speaker depicts the Buhari led APC in the negative. This speaker does not just call APC and Buhari cowards but also calls their government a false one. It is not certain what he/she means by the phrase "...false government" or why he/she assumes that the regime is "false." However, it could be inferred from the historical context of the discourse that the speaker believes that the regime is either unpopular with the masses or lacks some form of legitimacy. He/she sees their alleged calling for dialogue as an act of cowardice.

Post 18

opy 13 days ago

@brownymorris1 @THE LION OF BIAFRA God bless you, it's has donned on their PDP sponsors that the security agents are closing in on them, hence the need to retreat. Bloody PDP fraudsters! Power has changed hands!! Live with it!!!

The speaker in post 18 above is obviously a sympathizer of the ruling APC government. By "power has changed hands!", the speaker refers to the fact that APC is now the ruling party, which has taken over the reins of government from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which had been in power for sixteen years. Since he/she is an APC supporter, which can be gleaned from the expression "...their PDP sponsors", in reference to the critics of the APC government, it could be said that the speaker is excited about the ruling party and believes that things will change for the better following the end of the PDP regime of corruption. It can also be inferred from the post that the speaker perceives pro-Biafra agitators as PDP sponsored miscreants who want to destabilize the APC government. He/she also commends the security operatives for clamping down on the protesters.

Post 19

opy 13 days ago

@Ikem Onuoha Another PDP agent sighted, We've all seen through your deceits, Power has changed hands! Live with it!!

This speaker in post 19 above labels his/her addressee as a “PDP” member and describes the actions of some perceived PDP members as “deceitful”. The speaker appears to be happy that power has changed hands. Post 19, just the post 18 before it seems to perceive those who criticize the arrest and trial of Nnamdi Kanu as PDP agents. The speakers could be Igbo but appear to privilege party ideology and interest over that of ethnicity. This implies that political ideology and interest could be a binding force as well as a force of division.

Post 20

opy 13 days ago

@Mgbajala @EvaNexy The truth is that you an an agent of the PDP, and sooner than later, you will all be exposed. Power has changed hands! Live with it!!

The above speaker, like the speakers in posts 18 and 19, shows sympathy for the actions of the ruling APC regime. Thus, all other posts that criticize the actions and policies of the APC led administration; particularly its continued detention and trail of Nnamdi Kanu are perceived as being sponsored by PDP agents. From this therefore, it can be said that the speaker has confidence in the ruling party to both uncover and execute justice to past criminal actions and to leave a positive mark in the society. This also implies that the speaker believes the actions of the government against Kanu are justified.

5. Conclusion

The study reveals that real life social actions such as politics, football and religion can generate debates in online forums and platforms. The internet is populated by several virtual communities in which discourse participants engage issues members consider to be of importance to them. This goes to explain that some issues that have impact and effect in real life situations also receive the attention of online participants in diverse online forums and platforms. This gives the impression that online communities are extensions of real life communities (see Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This challenges the boundaries between real life and online social experiences. In contemporary politics, political parties and social actors have extended their campaign and persuasion strategies to online platforms. Separatist groups as well as human rights activists

have also taken their struggle to the internet world. The explicit expression of otherness in the primary data reflects the mood of the nation. It shows that Nigerians do not see themselves as one because commentators in the study did not view the trial of Nnamdi Kanu from the perspective of patriotism or nationalism; rather, each took different ideological stance or position. Ethnic, political and religious considerations appeared to dominate other considerations such as national cohesion. This portends danger to Nigeria's nationhood. However, arising from the discussion is the need for political leadership in Nigeria to address the fears of marginalized groups by giving them a greater sense of inclusion and oneness. The government can also harness the positive side of the internet by posting messages that give hope to all its citizens; present a positive future for the youth; and security to all. Interactive forums that encourage bonds across ethnic, social, political and religious divides should be encouraged by the federal and state governments.

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