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**How Far is the East from the West? The Role of Social Media and Crisis Communication Approach in Unifying the Igbo and Yoruba Ethnic Groups in the Political Landscape in Southern Nigeria: A Review of Issues around pre-1960, 1967-1970; 2014 and 2023 Elections**

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## **Abstract**

The political climate of southern Nigeria is examined in this concept paper along with the ongoing conflicts between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups. The question "How far is the east from the west?" serves as a metaphor to highlight the historical and current obstacles to Igbo-Yoruba unification, reviewing the issues around pre-1960, 1967-1970; 2014 and 2023 elections. The paper explored the complicated history of these groups, including the effects of colonialism, their unique pre-colonial beginnings, and their common battles throughout the liberation fight, employing a methodical literature review. It subsequently looked at particular tense times, such as the Nigerian Civil War, and how these old differences still affect politics now, as shown by the results of recent elections. Beyond historical interpretation, the study suggested a fresh strategy for promoting Igbo-Yoruba unity. Based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), it made the case that social media may be a potent instrument for fostering cooperation and understanding when used wisely. Instead of focusing on the political elite, which is seen as a source of conflict, the study highlighted the vital role that dependable community leaders play. It suggested that apolitical stakeholders from both regions collaborate to plan and carry out intentional programmes that support socio-economic integration between the Igbo and Yoruba and encourage public discourse on common issues to cultivate a narrative of cooperation through social media. These stakeholders include traditional/cultural leaders, religious figures, women's groups, and academics. Using the SCCT paradigm and empowering these esteemed leaders, this study suggested a way to close the historical and current gaps between the Igbo and the Yoruba. Within the political environment of southern Nigeria, the "East" and "West" can get closer to a future of mutual respect and prosperity by using social media to shift narratives and promote cooperation.

**Keywords:** *Communication, Igbo, Nigeria, Political Landscape, SCCT, social media, Southern Nigeria, Yoruba.*

## **Introduction**

"How far is the east from the west?" is a well-known saying in the body of a question that expresses the apparent separation between two ends. The Holy Book of Christians approaches it from another angle and states emphatically that "*As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us - Psalm 103:12* (The Holy Bible – King James Version). Language and cultural differences have historically caused times of animosity between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groupings.

Occasionally, these distinctions cause rivalry and misunderstandings. However, recent research paints a more nuanced image by highlighting the critical role mutual understanding and communication from a position both parties share can have in fostering harmony and collaboration. Effective communication techniques based on common values can heal these divisions, as this study will examine.

Nigeria in the new political dispensation is divided into six geo-political zones, namely South East, South-South, South West, North East, North Central, and North West. Before the amalgamation in 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard, Nigeria was simply called Southern Protectorate and Northern Protectorate. It is also important to note that Nigeria, at independence, was operating three regional governments of Western Region, Eastern Region, and Northern Region (Egbokhare, 2020). While this study is not to espouse the history of Nigeria, it is however important to lay the background for the discussion. According to Afolayan (2017), the east is majorly populated by the Igbo-speaking people with some other minority ethnic groups that have now been politically grouped in South-South geo-political zone. The West is populated mainly by the Yoruba-speaking people. The minority in this region was earlier carved out into Mid-West, but they are now in the South-South with other minority groups from the previous Eastern Region. From a historical perspective, the East and the West seem to have had a longer relationship than the North and should, therefore, enjoy a better working relationship politically and in trade.

The ethnic groups of southern Nigeria are remarkable, with each having unique languages and rich cultural traditions, and educated. The Igbo and Yoruba groups stand out among these due to their large populations, intricate relationships, and a long history of contact with each other (Ilesanmi, 2019). The Igbo and Yoruba worlds are becoming more intertwined due to causes such as urbanisation, migration, and inter-ethnic marriage, according to recent studies by academics like Ilesanmi (2019) and Egbokhare (2020). More efficient avenues of communication are needed in the light of these developments to overcome historical divides and address common concerns. Mutual understanding and respect can be fostered through international discussion, as Afolayan (2017) contends, through education, media depictions, and community activities. The complexity of communication between the Igbo and Yoruba communities in southern Nigeria is examined in this investigation.

There is still a knowledge vacuum about the ways in which contemporary communication tactics can heal the historical breach between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups in southern Nigeria. To close that gap, this study examines how contemporary communication can challenge antiquated myths that foster mistrust, how communication platforms can foster candid conversations and cooperative efforts around common interests, and how social media and digital tools can help people transcend geographical and cultural barriers. Through examining various facets, this study transcends merely pinpointing the past causes of conflict. It makes recommendations on how southern Nigeria should move forward with a more unified future. Additionally, this study seeks to pinpoint the distinct advantages of the Yoruba and Igbo communities, utilising their advantages for the region's overall benefit. This method sets itself apart from earlier research by emphasising practical communication techniques and utilising contemporary technology to create connections.

## **Literature Review**

With its rich history of both unity and conflict, Nigeria is a country full of many cultures and languages. One of the most well-known ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo, has a complex connection with the Yoruba, and this literature review explores the historical and modern influences that have affected their interactions. To understand the consequences of British control and the challenges that followed in creating a single, cohesive nation, we first look at the legacy of previous colonial societies and amalgamation. Examining the difficulties of combining different ethnic groups with unique cultural practices and socioeconomic systems is the focus of the section on the difficulties of amalgamation. The perspectives of the Igbo and the Yoruba —different backgrounds, similar struggles — add much more insight. While noting that these communities experienced marginalisation during colonial authority, we examine the distinct pre-colonial histories and cultural identities of these groups here. Nigeria's political landscape was shaped by the intersection of ethnic tensions and ambitions for independence, as explored in *The Road to Independence* (1940–1960). This literature study attempts to shed light on the complex and dynamic relationship between the Igbo and the Yoruba in Nigeria by tying together various strands of social media, politics, and history. It looks at the causes of ethnic conflict throughout

history, how they have continued to exist in modern politics, and possible solutions for a more cohesive future.

## **Previous Colonial Societies and Amalgamation**

Nigeria was home to several sovereign kingdoms and states before the British invasion. The Igbo people lived in decentralised communities in South-East Nigeria, emphasising village democracy and trade (Afigbo, 2019). Powerful kingdoms like Oyo, known for their political systems and cultural sway, were founded by the Yoruba people in the South-West (Falola, 2015). Despite these regional distinctions, there was some interaction due to commerce or trade routes and cultural exchanges. The British, however, changed this terrain when they arrived in the late 19th century. Nigeria was formed in 1914 when the British combined the Northern and Southern Nigeria protectorates to form a single, albeit fictitious, nation (Ikime, 1980).

This fusion, which brought together various ethnic groups with unique political systems and cultural values under a single colonial authority, set the stage for upcoming political conflicts. Nigeria offered a patchwork of political systems, home to more than 250 different ethnic and linguistic groupings (Salzman, 2018). Centralised kingdoms with elaborate administrative structures and intricate social hierarchies, such as the Benin Empire (Oba of Benin) and the Oyo Empire (Alaafin of Oyo), thrived in the southern region (Falola, 2015; Afigbo, 2019). To stay in power, these kingdoms depended on strong military forces, tribute systems, and networks of trade.

The Igbo people of South-East Nigeria, however, prospered in a fragmented, decentralised society. They grouped themselves into village-based communities without a centralised political authority, placing a high value on age-grade systems and familial relationships (Afigbo, 2019). Within these village groupings, reaching consensus was frequently a part of the decision-making process. With a reputation for fine craftsmanship and a thriving market economy, the Igbo society respected trade and entrepreneurship (Nwoke, 2012). The emergence of powerful Islamic states such as Bornu, Katsina, and Kano occurred in northern Nigeria. These emirates incorporated the elements of Islamic law and governance, with emirs holding substantial power (Last, 1967). Trade routes across the Sahara were vital to their economy, facilitating trade with the Middle East and North Africa. Nigerian pre-colonial cultures were not separate groups, despite their differences. Trade routes promoted interaction and

cross-cultural interchange, especially in the kola nut trade between the North and South (Lovejoy, 2008). Further, religious concepts and creative movements spread over different areas, fostering a sense of unity despite differences.

A significant moment was the entry of European traders in the latter half of the 15th century. With an initial emphasis on the profitable slave trade, European nations progressively expanded their dominance in the area. Nigeria was formally colonised by the British in 1900 after they used the Royal Niger Company to gain influence in the southern region (Ikime, 1980).

### **Amalgamation's Difficulties**

In 1914, the British combined the Northern and Southern Nigeria protectorates into a single entity known as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, largely for administrative convenience. According to Afigbo (2019), the significant historical, political, and cultural distinctions between these areas were ignored in this "unification" act. Future conflicts and the continuous difficulties of creating a feeling of national unity in postwar Nigeria were caused by the installation of a centralised British authority. Comprehending the intricate fabric of pre-colonial Nigeria enables a detailed examination of the intricacies of its postcolonial evolution. A nation-state in name only was created through the amalgamation process, which disregarded historical and cultural reality. In modern Nigeria, addressing the effects of this artificial union and promoting a more inclusive national identity remain crucial issues.

### **Igbo and Yoruba: Different Backgrounds, Similar Struggles**

Compared to the Yoruba, the Igbo experienced colonialism in a different way. Since they lacked centralised institutions, the Igbo had difficulty fending off British influence. However, they adjusted by placing a high priority on trade and education (Afigbo, 2019). On the other hand, the Yoruba kingdoms were progressively assimilated into the colonial system due to their internal disputes. Nonetheless, the Yoruba elite continued to play a prominent role in the nascent colonial government (Falola, 2015). Notwithstanding these distinctions, under British control, the Igbo and the Yoruba experienced a growing lack of political rights, which created the foundation for a common aspiration for self-government. The Igbo

people, who are mostly found in South-East Nigeria, prospered in a segmented, decentralised society (Afigbo, 2019).

There was no official supreme monarch or overarching political organisation among the Igbo, in contrast to the centralised kingdoms that were common in other regions of Africa. Rather, they arranged themselves into communities centred around villages, placing a high value on age-grade systems and familial relationships (Nwoke, 2012). Within these village groupings, decision-making procedures frequently entailed reaching consensus, which strengthened a strong feeling of egalitarianism. The importance placed on commerce and entrepreneurship in the Igbo economy was well known. They created a thriving market culture with a focus on products like metalwork, textiles, and palm oil (Afigbo, 2019). They made relationships with nearby peoples thanks to their reputation for high craftsmanship and a strong trading network that went beyond the boundaries of Igbo land.

The political environment of the Yoruba people in South-West Nigeria was different. Strong kingdoms, chiefly Oyo, Ile-Ife, and Benin, dominated the Yoruba society (Falola, 2015). These kingdoms had highly developed administrative structures, and in the Yoruba political hierarchy, the Alaafin of Oyo occupied a position of authority. Compared to the Igbo society, the Yoruba society had more obvious social stratification, with a governing class, nobility, and several groups of commoners (Biobaku, 2010). During this time, Yoruba culture developed and became well-known for its intricate creative traditions, intricate mythology, and abundant oral literature. Similar to the Igbo, the Yoruba played a significant role in regional trade networks, especially the one that connected Nigeria's north and south via the kola nut trade (Lovejoy, 2008).

Throughout history, there has been interaction and influence between the Igbo and the Yoruba people, despite having different political frameworks. Trade routes promoted a sense of connection and enabled cultural interchange, especially in the kola nut trade (Lovejoy, 2008). In certain Igbo communities, Yoruba religious rituals and artistic forms—like the worship of Obatala—found an audience. Similar to this, Igbo trading networks and agricultural methods impacted other societies, such as the Yoruba. The foundation for a more intricate and interdependent connection throughout the colonial era was built by these exchanges, notwithstanding the occasional dispute.

A major turning point was the entrance of European powers in the latter half of the 15th century. The British progressively expanded their

power in the South while first concentrating on the slave trade. British economic and political ties in the area were formalised with the founding of the Royal Niger Company in the late 1800s (Ikime, 1980). British invasion presented problems to both Igbo and Yoruba civilisations, disintegrating their traditional political institutions and loss of autonomy. To create a system of control, the British manipulated the power dynamics already in place in southern Nigeria and imposed indirect rule (Afigbo, 2019). The Igbo and the Yoruba encountered comparable difficulties while living under British administration, despite their distinct histories. The British colonial government displaced both Igbo and Yoruba communities by seizing land for agricultural plantations and resource extraction. British policies imposed onerous taxes and used forced labour for infrastructure projects, inciting resentment and hardship among the populace; the British administration undermined traditional political structures, undermining the authority of Yoruba Obas and Igbo village heads; and the British education system, intended to produce a workforce of clerical workers, did not adequately reflect the needs and aspirations of either group.

However, the colonial experience also unintentionally helped the Igbo and the Yoruba develop a feeling of common identity. Early nationalist movements emerged as a result of the complaints against British rule and exposure to Western concepts of nationalism and self-determination. Even though these movements originally promoted distinct political goals, they set the stage for later discussions and cooperation in the fight for Nigeria's independence (Afigbo, 1981). Although having different pre-colonial histories and political systems, the Igbo and the Yoruba were not separate people. Trade routes promoted cross-cultural interactions, and their shared history with British colonisation united them in the fight for independence. Navigating the complexity of post-colonial Nigerian politics requires an understanding of these disparate yet interrelated historical histories (Afigbo, 1981). In Nigeria, the discourse on politics and ethnic identities is still shaped by the legacies of their pre-colonial communities. In the future, creating a more cohesive and inclusive national identity will depend on recognising these distinctions and encouraging interethnic communication.

## **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework, when mobilised and applied in a study, limits the scope of the relevant data by focusing on specific variables and



defining the specific viewpoint that the researcher will take in analysing and interpreting the data to be gathered. In this regard, the data is how social media has influenced the disagreement between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups in Nigeria despite the educational and economic advantages they should ordinarily have. This paper will thus focus on the historical events and the contemporary elections held in 2014 and 2023 with a view to foregrounding the issues and also identifying solutions.

Being members of the same society, it is only logical from every human angle for the Igbo and the Yoruba to have common struggles and pressures. While these pressures may encourage some unity, the challenges come to the fore with inadequate opportunities. The struggle for accessing opportunities thus becomes a conflict point between them, especially among the elite class, in this case, the political elite. When it comes to election matters, because access to political office is often seen as a “breakthrough point” in Africa, election confers on the office holder not just political power but also economic and social power.

Therefore, after an election that is hotly contested or in which there have been claims of irregularities, the post-election period can serve as a fertile field for controversy and uneasiness. Effective communication becomes critical for political parties, elected officials, and even social media platforms in this tense environment. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides an invaluable structure for comprehending the strategic communication process in these kinds of circumstances.

### **SCCT: A Basis for Efficient Crisis Management**

SCCT, created by Timothy Coombs (2007), highlights the significance of adjusting communication tactics to the unique features of a crisis scenario. According to the idea, there are three main variables that affect how the general public perceives a crisis and how an organisation responds to it:

- *What kind of crisis it is:* Is it an accident, a victim crisis, or a breach of trust? Varying types pose varying threats to one's reputation.
- *The degree of responsibility placed on the organisation:* Was the company blameless, careless, or negligent? The public's expectations about the

organisation's response are influenced by the perceived degree of culpability.

- *How much time has passed since the crisis?:* Distinct communication approaches are needed for the immediate aftermath compared to the long-term rehabilitation stage.

## **SCCT for Crisis Intervention Management**

Applying the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to different types of crises has provided organisations with a framework to customise their communication plan to the unique conditions. Research conducted by Coombs and Fairfield (2000) looked at the application of SCCT principles by Johnson & Johnson in the context of the Tylenol tampering incident. Johnson & Johnson was able to reduce reputational harm and win back customer trust by accepting full responsibility, showing compassion for the victims, and acting quickly to implement corrective measures. An additional investigation conducted by Benoit and Coombs (2009) examined how ExxonMobil handled a crisis related to public relations in the wake of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. ExxonMobil tried to mend its damaged reputation by admitting the seriousness of the situation, being open and honest about clean-up activities, and proving that the company was committed to environmental responsibility. These studies demonstrate the fundamental tenets of SCCT, which include determining the degree of public perception of the organisation's accountability, estimating potential harm to the organisation's reputation, and developing communication strategies in response to the afore-mentioned considerations. By taking into account these factors, organisations may use SCCT to develop crisis communication plans that work, reducing unfavourable outcomes and building stakeholder trust.

## **SCCT and the Post-Election Environment: Uses and Difficulties**

SCCT is a useful tool for navigating the post-election environment, especially when:

- There are allegations of irregularities or voting fraud. In these situations, SCCT stresses the value of openness and prompt action to resolve issues. Press conferences, social media declarations, and

focused outreach to important stakeholders are useful tools that officials can use to present accurate information and show their dedication to maintaining democratic procedures.

- There is little dispute on the outcome of the election. SCCT emphasises the importance of spreading messages that encourage harmony and peacemaking. It can be very important to use accommodative language, recognise the worries of the losing side, and highlight common democratic values to promote a feeling of national unity.
- Social media sites turn into propagandistic battlefields. Proactive communication techniques are emphasised by SCCT. Platforms can collaborate with reliable news sources to support fact-checking campaigns and teach users how to spot false information.

Political parties, elected officials, and social media platforms helped to create a more educated and polite post-election atmosphere by putting the SCCT principles into practice. Navigating the uncertainties of the post-election scenario requires a commitment to truthful information sharing, proactive communication, and transparency.

Undoubtedly, the pre-1960 and the 1967– 1970 situational crises between the Igbo and the Yoruba contributed to the pre- and post-elections issues of 2014 and 2023, and the advent of the social media had recruited more entrenched interest into the arena. Unfortunately, younger people with poor and no appreciation of history and nation-building got into the fray. Since their generation are active on social media, it was easy for ethnic bigots to influence their minds by inserting sensitive and inflammatory narratives, and that sparked a social media war.

Mobilising SCCT, it is important that the elite of the two ethnic groups become intentional. They can assess the situation historically and contemporarily with a view to managing the “war” on social media that is filled with hate speech and invectives, and create a situation of cooperation between the two ethnic groups. Therefore, there is a need for communication on social media to have a re-think and re-position given the historical division that have existed between the Igbo and the Yoruba. The tenor of the relationship should be geared towards building of trust and closing the gap between the east and the west

## **Methodology**

To investigate the relationship between communication methods in the post-election environment and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this concept paper conducted a systematic literature review (SLR). An SLR provides a straightforward and rigorous method for compiling and evaluating previous research on a certain subject. Below is a thorough explanation of the study's methodology: The idea paper's foundation was built upon, and the research question was honed to give the literature study a clear direction. The questions addressed the knowledge gap in the present understanding of SCCT use in the post-election scenario and were targeted and particular. A thorough search approach was used to find pertinent scholarly publications. For this, a variety of Internet databases and additional resources were used. Primary databases include those for political science and communication studies, such as EBSCOhost Political Science Complete and JSTOR, as well as Communication Source and Communication & Mass Media Complete. To achieve a targeted and pertinent search, Boolean operators were employed to combine keywords relating to SCCT, crisis communication, post-election communication, social media, misinformation, and political polarisation. We looked through the references of related papers to find more relevant research. To augment the academic literature, official government websites, information from credible think tanks, and academic publications from relevant organisations were consulted.

## **Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion**

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to guarantee the calibre and applicability of the material that was retrieved. Consequently, the review was limited to works that have been published in the last 10 years (2014–2024) to include the most recent developments in SCCT theory and digital-age communication techniques. Peer-reviewed book chapters and journal articles were the main focus of the review. Due to a lack of resources, the review concentrated on literature written in English. The chosen papers contributed to our understanding of the application of SCCT to communication tactics in the post-election environment and directly addressed the study issue.

## **Discussion**

This discourse of this paper will take its roots from the historical background so as to nuance the issues that had bedevilled the relationship between the two dominant ethnic groups in the south of Nigeria, even during the colonial days, to independence and post-independence even into recent times. The discussion also signals the role of social media in raising a tension situation, and how SCCT can be mobilised not only to reduce the tension but also to change the situation into an advantage and atmosphere of peace and progress.

### **The Path to Independence (1940–1960)**

The development of nationalist movements was a defining feature of the decades before independence. The Igbo nationalist Nnamdi Azikiwe established the Zikist Movement and subsequently, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) to promote an independent and unified Nigeria (Ndu, 2017). The Action Group (AG) was founded by the well-known Yoruba leader Obafemi Awolowo, who advocated federalism and regional autonomy (Ademulegun, 1979). These opposing ideas for the postcolonial state emphasised the necessity of compromise and negotiation while also reflecting the historical divisions between the Igbo and the Yoruba.

A new class of educated elite emerged in the early 20th century, disenchanted with British rule and motivated by pan-Africanist aspirations, which started pushing for self-governance. There were two notable nationalist movements:

- Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo nationalist, founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), which promoted an independent and unified Nigeria. Azikiwe placed an enormous value on a federal system and national unity in his concept of pan-Nigerian nationalism (Ndu, 2017).
- The Action Group (AG) supported a federal structure with strong regional autonomy and was led by the Yoruba leader Obafemi Awolowo. Within a federal framework, Awolowo's vision prioritised social welfare programmes and infrastructure development (Ademulegun, 1979).

The foundation for political rivalry and discussion about the prospects for an independent Nigeria was established by these divergent but patriotic ideals. Although the AG and NCNC supported self-governance, their bases of support were largely influenced by regional and ethnic factors. In the Eastern Region, the NCNC was well-liked, especially by the Igbo people, who felt left out of British control. The Western Region, home to a large Yoruba community, provided the AG with a great deal of support (Osaghae, 1995). The challenges of creating a single Nigerian state were discussed at many constitutional conferences that took place between 1946 and 1954. These conferences addressed representation, federalism, and resource allocation. The adoption of a federal structure including three regions—the Eastern, Western, and Northern—was one important result (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1958). Although this method addressed regional issues, it also partially cemented ethnic and regional divides.

Nigeria's growing commercial hub, Lagos, turned into a microcosm of the country's political rivalry. The AG, which was popular among the Yoruba people, and the NCNC, which had a sizeable following among eastern Nigerians living in Lagos, fought for sway (Osaghae, 1995). Tensions were further raised and the brittleness of political alliances in Lagos was brought to light by the 1951 "cross-carpeting" episode, in which a few NCNC members of the Western House of Assembly defected to the AG (Afigbo, 2019). In 1960, Nigeria attained complete independence from the United Kingdom. However, there were many difficulties along the way to independence, and the legacy of ethnic conflict lingered for a very long time. The conflicting goals of regional autonomy and national unity remained unresolved, which presented a serious obstacle for the recently formed country.

Nigeria's path to independence was lined with hopes for self-governance, but it was also difficult to negotiate regional and ethnic divides. Analysing the historical background of modern Nigerian politics requires an understanding of the emergence of nationalist movements, the significance of individuals like Azikiwe and Awolowo, and the difficulties in preserving national unity in the face of ethnic tensions. During this time, the roots of future political instability were sowed, which tragically culminated in the Nigerian Civil War (Afigbo, 2019).

## **Tensions in Lagos Politics (1940–1960)**

Emerging as a commercial hub, Lagos turned into a microcosm of political rivalry across the country. Influence battled between the AG, which dominated the Yoruba community, and the NCNC, which had a large following among eastern Nigerians living in Lagos (Osaghae, 1995). The "cross-carpeting" event of 1951, in which a few NCNC members of the Western House of Assembly turned against the AG, intensified tensions and brought attention to the weakness of political coalitions in Lagos (Afigbo, 2019). Lagos politics was greatly impacted by the 1940s rise of two well-known regional political parties: the Action Group (AG) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC).

The Igbo community, who relocated to Lagos in search of economic opportunities, was a major supporter of the NCNC under Nnamdi Azikiwe (Afigbo, 2019). The majority Yoruba population in Lagos provided the AG, led by Obafemi Awolowo, with considerable support (Osaghae, 1995). With each party fighting for control of the Lagos City Council, a position of enormous political and economic importance, this regionalised political environment cultivated a sense of "us" against "them" within the city. Being Nigeria's economic centre, Lagos drew a sizeable migrant population from all around the country. The Yoruba population became concerned about rivalry for resources and political participation in the city as a result of this influx, especially of the Igbo people (Agbu, 2013).

Taking advantage of these fears, the NCNC promoted more Igbo political representation in Lagos. Tensions increased as a result, with the AG charging the NCNC of trying to control Lagos politics. A crucial event that demonstrated the unpredictability of Lagos politics was the 1951 "cross-carpeting" episode. Due to promises of ministerial jobs, a few NCNC members of the Western House of Assembly defected to the AG (Afigbo, 2019). This political move, which the NCNC perceived as a betrayal, increased tensions and raised questions about the viability of long-term political coalitions in Lagos. Concerns over the susceptibility of ethnic voting patterns to manipulation and power struggles among the elite were also raised by the episode.

Political leaders frequently turned to stirring up racial feelings to gain support, especially during election campaigns. Fears and mistrust between the many communities living in Lagos were stoked by slogans and discourse that emphasised ethnic identity and perceived marginalisation (Agbu, 2013). Although this strategy was successful in

short-term voter mobilisation, it exacerbated ethnic tensions already present in the city and hindered efforts to create a more inclusive political environment. Lagos witnessed the emergence of a thriving newspaper industry, which greatly influenced public opinion and increased political tensions. Each political party's connected newspapers frequently used dramatic headlines, divisive language, and focused attacks on rival leaders (Ojewale, 2012). This added to the enmity and mistrust that existed in Lagos between the NCNC and AG followers.

Lagos's political landscape was long-shadowed by the political turmoil that marked the city during the 1940s and 1950s. The prevalent use of ethnic identification in political discourse and the exploitation of ethnic feelings for political advantage continue to be major obstacles in modern-day Lagos politics. Navigating the intricacies of ethnicity and political engagement in the city now requires an understanding of this historical background. Lagos served as a prime example of the difficulties in fostering national cohesion in the face of ethnic and regional divides in the decades preceding independence. Political tensions in the city were caused by the interaction of national political groups, rivalry for resources, and the arousal of ethnic feelings. Lagos's current political dynamics are still shaped by this complicated past, underscoring the continuous need to encourage inclusive political engagement and interethnic discourse.

### **Awolowo's Part in the Civil War (1967–1970)**

Tragically, ethnic tensions led to the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). General Yakubu Gowon's Nigerian federal government used military action to quell the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region's attempt at independence. Although Obafemi Awolowo, the federal government's wartime finance minister at the time, carried out economic measures that some believed were harmful to Biafra, his involvement in the conflict is still up for discussion (Akintola, 2018).

The decades after independence were when the seeds of the American Civil War were sown. Stability was fuelled by political rivalry, unsolved federalism issues, and tensions between different ethnic groups and regions. Divisions were further exacerbated in 1966 by two military coups: the first, led by an Igbo officer named Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, and the second, a counter-coup headed by a northern Nigerian named General Yakubu Gowon (Akintola, 2018). The Igbo military governor of the Eastern Region, Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu



Ojukwu, declared the Republic of Biafra in 1967 as a result of these events.

Former Western Region Premier and Action Group leader Awolowo had been jailed in the early 1960s on false pretences. His 1966 release made it possible for him to play a potential crisis-resolution role. Awolowo, however, decided to support General Gowon's Federal Military Government (FMG) (Akintola, 2018). This choice was influenced by multiple factors. Like many other Yoruba leaders, Awolowo was worried about the possibility of Igbo dominance in Nigeria following the coup. He saw the secession of Ojukwu as a danger to the unity of the country. Following the coups, there were incidents of violence against Igbo inhabitants in the Western Region. Awolowo probably believed that standing with the FMG would safeguard the Yoruba's interests. It's possible that Awolowo thought working with the FMG presented the best chance to realise his goal of a federal Nigeria.

### **A Contentious Legacy: The Blockade and "Keep Nigeria One"**

The two most contentious aspects of Awolowo's involvement in the conflict were his open endorsement of a united Nigeria and his encouragement of the FMG's war effort. For many Nigerians who yearned for national unity, his well-known remark, "*We are determined to keep Nigeria one as a political entity*," struck a chord, but this attitude was especially unforgiving of the Igbo people. The FMG's economic blockade of Biafra, a strategy that caused widespread hunger and civilian casualties, is also connected to Awolowo's influence (Agbu, 2013). His legacy has been damaged for some Nigerians, especially the Igbo, by his affiliation with the FMG, even if it is unknown how much he participated in the blockade.

Divergent views persist today on Awolowo's involvement in the civil war. He is sometimes portrayed as a politician who puts nationalism ahead of ethnicity (Ademulegun, 1979). According to Akintola (2018), some perceive his acts as opportunistic and as exacerbating the Igbo people's misery. In Nigerian history, Obafemi Awolowo is still a complicated and important person. His choices made during the civil war are still up for discussion. When assessing Awolowo's contentious role in this dark chapter of Nigerian history, it is imperative to comprehend the historical background of regional conflicts, military coups, and the dread of national disintegration. The civil war's lasting effects on the country's

socio-political fabric are demonstrated by the fact that its wounds are still visible and that opinions about Awolowo's legacy are still divided.

### **Ethnic Politics and the 2014 Election**

A complicated interplay of political alliances and ethnic identities characterised the 2014 elections. A change in the political landscape was indicated by the support given to Muhammadu Buhari, the then-candidate for president, by prominent Yoruba politician Bola Tinubu of Lagos (Agbu, 2015). There was also a lot of discussion on how the Oba of Lagos, a respected Yoruba traditional leader, affected voting trends (Omojuwa, 2015) by threatening the Igbo to perish in the lagoon if they refused to vote for Akinwunmi Ambode for the governorship of Lagos State. Although Oba Rilwan Akiolu of Lagos State later tried to clarify the issue through a press release,<sup>1</sup> the relationship between the Igbo and the Yoruba had already been adversely affected. Moreover, although the then President Goodluck Jonathan was Ijaw, he was majorly seen as a man of Igbo extraction because of his middle names being Ebele Azikiwe. Also, the propaganda machinery headed by Alhaji Lai Mohammed of the APC had further severed the relationship between the two dominant groups in southern Nigeria. The election had re-awakened the rivalry between the two dominant groups in southern Nigeria.

### **Elections in 2023 and Lagos' "Ownership"**

Ethnic conflicts about who "owns" Lagos returned in the wake of the 2023 elections. This story attempted to delegitimise and disenfranchise Igbo voters in particular by targeting them specifically. The argument focused on the notion that an Igbo person should not lead Lagos, a city historically dominated by the Yoruba (Osuagwu, 2023). One of the presidential spokespeople of the APC known as Bayo Onanuga was very vociferous in denouncing any claim by the Igbo that Lagos is a no man's land. He was clear that Lagos belongs to the Yoruba, and the Igbo must not interfere in the city's politics (*Vanguard Newspaper*, March 19, 2023).<sup>2</sup> This discourse overlooks Lagos' cosmopolitan character, which is a result of the contributions of many different ethnic groups, particularly the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.channelstv.com/2015/04/06/oba-of-lagos-clarifies-allegations-of-threat-to-igbos/> - 29th April, 2024

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/onanuga-cautions-igbo-against-interfering-in-lagos-politics/> - 29th April, 2024

Igbo, who have lived in the city and contributed to its development for many years.

### **Bola Tinubu and Peter Obi's Political Rivalry: 2023 Election**

The political rivalry between Igbo-born Peter Obi of the Labour Party and well-known Yoruba politician Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) was also brought to light by the 2023 elections. Voters across ethnic divides found some resonance with their divergent ideas for Nigeria. With his emphasis on economic growth and anti-corruption attitude, Obi won over voters of all ethnic backgrounds who were ready for change. Tinubu won over supporters who viewed him as a capable leader by capitalising on his background and his political network, especially in the South-West (Agbada, 2023). It is crucial to remember, too, that not all Yoruba voters supported Tinubu, and not all Igbo voters supported Obi exclusively.

### **The Post-Election Scene and Social Media**

Pre-1960 and 1967 – 1970 had no Internet and social media; therefore, the conversation around the rivalry between the Igbo and the Yoruba was not as pronounced unlike during the 2014 and 2023 elections which took place under the era of social media. The political conversation during and after the 2023 elections was greatly influenced by social media. According to Ojewale (2023), social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have served as hubs for ethnic instigation and disinformation, notwithstanding their ability to enhance communication and mobilisation.

To inflame tensions and damage the legitimacy of the election process, fake news and divisive speech directed at particular ethnic groups were used. Political rhetoric and alliances in Nigeria are still shaped by ethnic identities, creating a complex political environment. To successfully navigate this complexity, it is essential to comprehend the changing nature of political struggle and the historical background of Igbo-Yoruba relations.

The 2023 elections underscore the persistent difficulties in creating a genuinely national political identity in Nigeria, as evidenced by their emphasis on "ownership" of Lagos and the competition among notable individuals (Ojewale, 2023). In the future, maintaining national cohesion and the consolidation of democracy will depend heavily on encouraging

inter-ethnic communication, encouraging inclusive political engagement, and combating the detrimental effects of social media. Social media's introduction has drastically changed how we participate in politics. This impact goes well beyond the campaign trail, with social media sites having a big impact on the frequently tense post-election phase. This effect, however, has two sides: promotion of division and the propagation of false information while simultaneously providing chances for participation and information exchange.

### **Possibilities for Increasing Citizen Engagement**

Social media communities made up of like-minded voters encourage people to continue participating in politics long after elections. Studies like "Information, Communication & Society" (2018) demonstrate how social media may function as a platform for advocacy and issue mobilisation, maintaining voter attention even after polls close. Social media gives voice and clout to underrepresented groups who may not have had much in traditional media. Research from the Pew Research Centre (2017) indicates that minority groups utilise social media at higher rates than other groups. Consequently, they have a voice and may hold authorities responsible. Social media offers opportunities for fact-checking and narrative debunking, even while it can operate as a shelter for false narratives to thrive. Programmes that let people collaborate to fact-check content to produce more informed citizens are examined by the *Columbia Journalism Review* (2020).

### **Threats and Obstacles to a Strong Democracy**

Social media algorithms can create "echo chambers," wherein individuals are solely exposed to content that confirms their preconceived notions. The *Journal Science* (2015) released some of the first evidence of this phenomenon, demonstrating how algorithmic filtering might exacerbate political polarisation. Due to the ease of sharing and lack of editorial control on social media, false or misleading content can spread quickly. The *British Journal of Political Science* (2019) looks at the impact of "disinformation campaigns" on elections, highlighting the potential for social media to be a weapon of division. People may become less courteous and considerate in their talks as a result of social media's capacity to provide anonymity and disinhibition. A University of

California, Berkeley (2019) study found a connection between rudeness in online interactions and regular use of social media.

### **Forward-looking: Possible Remedies for a Fairer Information Environment**

Giving users the tools they need to navigate the complicated information landscape is media literacy. UNESCO research from 2022 highlights how crucial it is to incorporate media literacy instruction into school curricula (UNESCO, 2022) to enable students to assess information sources critically and recognise bias. Social media companies must stop the spread of damaging content. To encourage more responsible information sharing, a 2021 article published in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* by Jones et al. (2021) demands for tighter fact-checking procedures and greater transparency in social media algorithms. In the end, users can contribute to the development of a more positive online community. This entails using caution when sharing information, checking its accuracy before doing so, and politely conversing with others who have different opinions. An article from 2018 published in "Social Media + Society" by Livingstone et al. (2018) looks at how to encourage people to use social media responsibly by making them more aware of the information they share and consume.

There is no denying social media's impact on the post-election environment. It provides substantial issues relating to misinformation and political polarisation, but it also brings opportunities for ongoing participation and a forum for marginalised perspectives. We may aim for a better informed and polite online community where social media can be a force for good in the aftermath of elections by recognising these issues and working towards solutions that support media literacy, platform accountability, and user responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

Uncertainty and possible conflict are abundant in the post-election environment. However, this study has shed some light on a way forward by using a systematic literature review. We can help create a more educated and polite post-election atmosphere by looking at how Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) might be used in communication methods during this crucial time. Political parties, elected officials, and even social media platforms can all benefit from the

findings as they attempt to make sense of the complicated post-election environment. Encouraging efficient communication tactics following elections ultimately aims to improve democratic institutions and promote trust in the foundation of our society, not only to minimise damage.

These historical developments highlighted above seem to have driven a wedge between these two neighbours, the Igbo and the Yoruba, and that has affected their political communication and relationship till date. The Igbo seem to see the Yoruba as treacherous given their avowed experience during the civil war, and it is common for the Igbo to accuse the Yoruba on exhibiting “*ethnic solidarity*” even at the work place, and will often fall back to their “*parapo*” language in communicating among themselves, and will be the first to complain when the Igbo do the same. The Yoruba also are apprehensive about the Igbo given their aggressive tendencies. Some Yoruba think the Igbo lack tact and are only interested in grabbing landed property, and that the Igbo like to dominate people and are loud. There is a mutual suspicion among the two neighbours and the underlining issues have not really been articulated and brought to the fore by the elite class of the two ethnic groups so that it can be addressed to their mutual benefit. Yes, there could be competition among them, if they will, but it should be healthy.

The other leg of the tripod in southern Nigeria, the South-South (with many ethnic groups), looks more with bewilderment how the fight between these two ethnic groups have affected the political and economic prosperity of the entire south. Ordinarily, the three geo-political zones or regions easily marry one another, though the South-South is more liberal of the three. It must be noted that the Igbo and the Yoruba have friends across the divide from schooling together, living together particularly in Lagos, and perhaps from being colleagues. However, the friendship begins to disintegrate when it comes to accessing resources like power and position. Sadly, they (the Igbo and the Yoruba) recruit followers on social media especially on X (*formerly Twitter*) and Facebook to throw vitriol at each other and further circulate it within their social groups on WhatsApp Messenger, and this deepens the division no matter how mundane the issue may be.

The issue now is how can the two ethnic groups with all their “certificates” form a political and economic alliance that can benefit them, and eventually prevent the Hausa/Fulani/Kanuri in the North-East and North-West from having a political advantage over them.

## **Recommendation**

This study suggests working together with reputable, non-partisan stakeholders from the South-West and South-East. These stakeholders possess substantial social capital and community trust. They include academics, women's groups, religious and traditional leaders, and leaders in the arts. Their participation would be essential to the promotion of intentional initiatives meant to encourage cooperation and integration between the two ethnic groups. Frequent, high-profile gatherings of these stakeholders with an emphasis on common concerns and opportunities for mutual gain can be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, a feeling of trust and solidarity can be inspired in the general populace by the leadership's collaborative efforts. Secondly, by applying the concepts of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), these gatherings can be strategically publicised on social media. By carefully crafting the story of these gatherings and their results, SCCT can assist in refuting the unfavourable stories that are now going viral on the Internet and advancing the story of cooperation and integration advancement. This strategy's main objective is to build a climate of confidence and cooperation rather than mistrust, which will eventually result in the two ethnic groups' long-lasting unification.

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