



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPOSURE TO AKPABIO'S "LET THEM PROTEST WHILE WE EAT" COMMENT ON FACEBOOK AND ITS INFLUENCE ON COOU STUDENTS' SUPPORT FOR THE END BAD GOVERNANCE PROTEST

¹Obiakor, Casmir Uchenna, PhD, ²Ikegbunam, Peter Chierike, Ph.D and ³Nnaemeka, Perpetual Ozioma

¹Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, COOU, Igbariam Campus; ²Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus; ³Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received 19th November, 2024
Received in revised form
17th December, 2024
Accepted 26th January, 2025
Published online 28th February, 2025

Keywords:

Exposure, Akpabio's "Let Them Protest While We Eat" Comment, Facebook, Influence, Support, *End Bad Governance* Protest.

*Corresponding author:
Obiakor, Casmir Uchenna, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) while addressing delegates of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in Rivers State said that those who wanted to protest against bad governance in the country could go ahead while he and his colleagues would be eating. This video went viral and caused outrage among Nigerians. This research investigates audience perception of Senator Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment which went viral on social media and how this statement influenced people's perception of the current Administration in Nigeria. The Survey research method was used to study 384 respondents derived using the Cozby's table. The study was anchored on the Perception theory. The objectives of study are to ascertain the frequency of exposure to "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook by COOU students, to ascertain their perception of the comment, to ascertain whether respondents reposted the comment to their friends and to ascertain whether exposure to the comment on Facebook influenced them to support the *End Bad Governance* protest in the country. The result showed that respondents were very highly exposed to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook and they had negative perception of the comment as they saw it as a mockery of the plight of Nigerians and insensitivity to the suffering of people in the country. The study recommended among others that Senator Akpabio and other elected officials should use the social media to promptly correct wrong impressions and apologize for insensitive comments as damage control in order not to incite the public into more protests. It is also recommended that Public Relations strategies should be effectively utilized by the current Administration so as to calm the nerves of the suffering Nigerians.

Copyright©2025, Obiakor, Casmir Uchenna et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Obiakor, C. U., Ikegbunam, P. C. & Nnaemeka, P. O. 2025. "Exposure to Akpabio's "Let Them Protest While We Eat" Comment on Facebook and Its Influence on COOU Students' Support for the End Bad Governance Protest", *International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research*, 12, (02) 10845-10854.

INTRODUCTION

The social media are channels and messaging apps that are very effective in dissemination of information. Social media is a concept that was first coined by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty (Beetseh, Olise & Tor-Akwer, 2021). These social media platforms have been described as avenues for adding or editing information or a web which allows individuals to make use of digital tools to create, change and publish dynamic contents (Okike, Terna & Beetseh, 2019; Tor-Akwer, 2019). For most observers, the importance of the mass media for public policymaking arises from the fact that the media shape public opinion, thereby forcing political actors to act in

response to popular preferences (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2007). The role of the mass media in the political process has changed fundamentally from a rather passive conveyor of messages to a political actor in its own right. The mass media in every democratic society are introduced as an important organ of information sourcing and dissemination, provision of electoral education, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization (Oshega, et al., 2017). Thomas Jefferson, former American president, avers that since the basis of Democracy was the opinion of the people, if it were left for him to decide whether his country should have a government without a mass media or a mass media without a government he would the latter (Akinfeleye, 2008; Obiakor &

Nwabueze, 2019)). The above statement further emphasizes the vital role of the mass media to a viral democratic process. The power of the new media, particularly, in the area of timely dissemination of information is a trend that has gained global acceptance and is now indispensable in every serious communication activity. Applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as user-generated content websites or blogs, provide new ways of disseminating political information (Heblich, 2016). Agba and Ogrí (2016) summarized the role of the mass media in a democratic process by stating that during political campaigns, the media are used extensively by competing candidates and political parties to canvass for the electorates' votes and supports. They further state that the electoral umpire and concerned government agencies also use the media platforms to teach the electorates during elections. Also, the media carry messages about programmes that reflect positively or negatively on government and other actors in the political arena (Agba & Ogrí, 2016). These roles of the media make them bridge the yawning gap between the government and the governed to facilitate growth and development of Nigeria's young democracy. In contemporary times, it is very difficult, if not impossible to have a functional electoral process without the mass media. Mass media play crucial role in creating development awareness through transferring information to the audience and exchanging thoughts. Through agenda-setting function, the media condition society's vision and understanding of sports, and provide a narrative that exerts a didactic influence on the concept of sports and physical education (Marín-Motín, 2008; Puertas-Moleroa, Marfil-Carmona, Zurita-Ortega & Gonzalez-Valero, 2019; Obiakor, 2023). They perform an effective, instructive and leading role in development, awakening public consciousness and promoting public awareness by spreading novel ideas through information dissemination. This makes it possible for persons to understand trend of events in their environments and premise decision making regarding personal and social issues, on clearer and more updated information (Kumari, 2019). This also helps individuals get familiar with their social responsibilities, especially for development. Furthermore, media contents are developed according to criteria of topicality, objectivity and simplicity, which aspire to produce a message with the widest reach possible (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2017). In this sense, what is determined as "newsworthy" content in sports is therefore governed by these criteria. Studies show that mass media are promising channels for providing information that potentially influences behavior of audiences on a large scale (Xavier *et. al.*, 2013; Liu, 2020). Senate President, Godswill Akpabio made a comment that enraged Nigerians as protests against bad governance in the country were about to be held. On Tuesday July 30, 2024, at an event organized by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in Rivers State, Akpabio, was reported to have mocked Nigerians who planned to take part in the nationwide protests against economic hardship, saying he and other members of the National Assembly would be "eating" while they (Nigerians) protest. The event which was aired live on Arise TV went viral especially the clips of the video were reposted on various social media platforms including Facebook. Whether the outrage caused by the comment influenced people's support or participation in the protest is not yet confirmed through empirical research. It is against this background that this study sought to analyze audience

perception of Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment which went viral on social media and how the comment influenced people's support for the *end bad governance* protests.

Statement of the Problem: The perception of government in power could affect public support for its policies. A negative perception could lead to lack of support or belief in the policy of a particular government in power. Comments of political leaders could influence perceptions the public have about them. If the comment about Nigerians who planned to embark on protest against hardship is perceived in bad light this could affect public support for the present Administration's policies and lack of belief in the Administration. This is why it is important to find out whether Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment is perceived in bad light by Nigerians especially as it affects support for the *end bad governance* protests. Whilst most of the studies have been carried out by students of public opinion and mass communication, policy research so far has largely sidelined the function of the media in the process of policy formation and decision making (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2007). In contrast, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) cited in Voltmer and Koch-Baumgarten (2007) employing extensive data on both media coverage and policy agenda in a broad range of public policy fields found that the media do influence the course of policymaking. The authors argue that due to the media's choice for sensational and controversial coverage they frequently advocate extreme and clear-cut positions making it difficult for moderate views to be heard. Consequently, policymakers are pushed towards fast and risky inventions that would have fewer chances of being implemented in a less media-saturated environment.

The effect of social media on political participation has been studied, but whether Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment influenced people's support of the protest against hardship in the country has not received attention. To fill this gap, this study examined the audience exposure to viral video on Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment and its influence on the nationwide demonstration against hardship in Nigeria which held from 1st to 10th August, 2024. It is possible that the viral video which was also seen on Facebook may have influenced the perception and support for the protest against hardship and discouraged public support for government at all levels. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, no study has looked at whether Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment influenced people's support for the protest against hardship in the country. It is this gap in knowledge that this study intended to fill.

Objectives of the Study

- To ascertain the frequency of exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook by COOU students.
- To find out respondents' perception of Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment.
- To ascertain whether respondents reposted Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment to friends after seeing it on Facebook.
- To ascertain whether exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook influenced

people's support for the protests against hardship in the country.

Significance of the Study: The findings of the study will provide insight to political parties on the role played by social media in shaping public opinion on government policies. The use of media to create a favorable image that influences public acceptance of government policies is very essential and political parties and politicians need to know how this strategy shapes public discourse on policy acceptance by the people.

This study is also very important to students, researchers and scholars in communication and related disciplines as the findings contribute literature on social media influence and public opinion on government policy acceptance. Evidence from available literature indicates a paucity of studies like this, especially how comments by political office holders disseminated through social media platforms the influence of public opinion among COOU students. Most studies on this issue were done in the Western world and given the obvious dissimilarities in the socio-political, environmental and cultural settings of Western societies and the Nigerian society, there is every need for literature from a local study like this one on assessment of exposure to social media and its influence on public opinion formation.

Theoretical Framework: The study was premised on the perception theory. There are two forms: the self-perception theory, and the cognitive dissonance theory. First, the theory of self-perception, inspired by B. F. Skinner's analyses, refers to when individuals come to "know" or have better understanding of their own attitudes, emotions, and other personal states largely by drawing conclusions from observing their own behavior and/or the situations in which this behavior occurs (Baran, 2002). The cognitive dissonance theory explains where an individual has two thoughts that contradict each other. A typical example is where an individual thinks eating red meat is bad but goes ahead to continue eating red meat because they believe that by not eating red meat, it would not change anything, so nothing will change the current health the individual is in. These are contradictory, almost hypocritical. The existence of dissonance makes the individual to be psychologically uncomfortable, which then allows the individual to try to remain constant in his/her thoughts. In the views of Folarin (1998), perception depends on a complexity of variables such as psychological disposition, past experiences, cultural expectations and social relationships. The process of media audience perception involves four stages of selective exposure, selective perception, selective attention and selective retention, which fall within the selective process, a postulation of Festinger Leon in 1957 while pioneering this line of thought (Festinger, 1957; Folarin, 1998; Baran, 2002; Agbanu, 2013; Nwabueze, 2014; Obiakor & Nwabueze, 2019). Research often emphasized on the study of these selective processes especially in dealing with media audience perception and attitudinal change. Selective exposure entails a process where Individuals expose themselves to selected messages and because of this it is difficult for other messages to have effect on them; selective attention says that because the eye processes information much faster than the brain can interpret, the human brain has to select which information to pay attention to at any given time; the concept of selective perception predicts that people will interpret messages in a manner consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs.

People tend to perceive and then decode communication messages in the light of their previous experiences and current dispositions, needs, moods and memories, and finally, selective retention predicts that people remember best" and longest, those messages that are consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. People tend to retain messages that are useful to them when they are exposed to a certain media (Folarin, 1998; Baran, 2002; Agbanu, 2013). Perception theory is very essential to this study because it has to do with the perception of the people about Akpabio's "let them protest while we eat" comment and how this perception affects people's support of the protest against hardship in the country. It is possible that negative perception of the comment may have made COOU students to support the protest.

The Review

Information-Seeking Motivations for Social Media Exposure: One of the most popular social networks amongst young people is Facebook. Its creation was ignited by the social need of Harvard students to interact with other persons who were staying at their homes (Steinfeld *et al.*, 2008). Facebook and other social networks have taken the position of the traditional means of communication, and especially among the youth. They form an important part of their everyday lives. Through social networks, young people communicate, are informed and create relationships. Facebook offers its users identity and a sense of freedom. It also helps shy and introvert people who struggle to take part into conversations, to build a social capital, because it lowers inhibitions, offering the chance to build healthy links and relationships (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Amichai-Hamburger, & Vinitzky, 2010). Even though social media are useful, a significant disadvantage arises from their frequent use; people who use them daily are at risk of sharing information that may harm their well-being. Also, people with low self-esteem use social networks to express themselves, considering that they are inside a safe environment (Forest & Wood, 2012). So in some cases they face understanding and support, whilst in other cases they may face social criticism and social comparisons that could lower their self-esteem. Social networks are correlated with communication and relationships and offer acceptance or rejections through "comments", "likes" and "friend requests". As a result anyone can receive positive or negative feedback or be affected by social comparisons or even face cyber bullying, therefore it is important to investigate how adolescents perceive its use or to what extent it affects their self-esteem. It is remarkable that a number of surveys have found out that the continuous use of the Internet is connected to several dimensions of loneliness, depression and stress. It is believed that this is due to the fact that the weaker relationships created online have replaced stronger relationships that used to exist, such as those with family and friends (Steinfeld *et al.*, 2008). Shaw & Gant (2002) claimed that, as the number of people using the Internet increases, so will the number of studies examining the effects of its use in their psychological health. The study of Kraut and his partners (1998) concluded that the use of the Internet is positively connected with depression, loneliness and stress, leading to the negative view of the public concerning the Internet. In their study, Shaw & Gant (2002) made the proposition that the use of the Internet may affect the users beneficially. The participants took part in five conversations with an anonymous

partner. At three different time points, measuring scales of depression, loneliness, self-esteem and social support were offered. The changes in their scores were observed along the years. The use of the Internet was found to decrease significantly loneliness and depression, while their social support and self-esteem increased remarkably (Shaw & Gant, 2002). Steinfield *et al.*, (2008) reviewed the studies regarding the implications of the Internet and social networks on people's mental health. They found out that there are studies showing that their use is neither connected with factors such as reduced communication or neglect of the family, nor with the extent of loneliness and depression. In fact, their finding that the implications of the Internet on a person's mental health differentiate according to the degree of the user's introversion or extroversion is particularly interesting. Extroverts are more likely to gain positive benefits from the use of the Internet and social networks than introverts. Generally, they verify that most researchers claim that the use of the Internet and social networks has positive effects on the users' mental well-being (Steinfield *et al.*, 2008). Barker's study (2009) is particularly interesting, as it assessed the motives for the use of social networks. The motives examined were those of group anonymity, collective self-esteem and impacts of gender on teenagers. Communication with members of the peer group was the most important motive for the use of social media. The participants with high self-esteem had strong incentives to communicate with their peers through social networks. It is worth mentioning that teenage girls were more likely to report higher positive self-esteem and broader use of social media in total, in order to interact with their peers. Negative self-esteem was correlated with social compensation, which implies that those who had negative feelings for their social group used social media as an alternative to communicate with other group members. Boys were more likely than girls to report negative self-esteem and use of the social media as a social compensation and social satisfaction of their identity (Barker, 2009).

The study of Kramer & Winter (2008) states that social media are popular means to communicate one's personality. It focuses on the factors that define this particular form of self-presentation and the extent of self-revelation in those media. A survey among 58 users of a German social network and a content analysis of the participants' profiles revealed that self-efficiency as for the management of appearances is closely attached with the number of virtual friends, the magnitude of the profile's details, and the style of the personal picture. The results show also a small impact of extroversion, whereas there was no significant impact on self-esteem (Kramer & Winter, 2008). The study of Wilcox & Stephen (2012) reports that social media are used by hundreds of millions of people daily, but little is known about their impact on behaviour. In five experiments, the authors manifest that the use of the social network boosts self-esteem on users who focus on close friends (i.e. strong bonds) while browsing their social network. However, while self-esteem is reinforced and temporarily boosted, the same does not apply for their self-control, which decreases, especially amongst the users which maintain strong bonds through a social network. Also, the authors present data suggesting that the more frequent use of the social network is connected with a higher body mass index and higher levels of credit card debts for people with stronger bonds with their social networks (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). Vogel *et al.*,

(2014) conducted a double research on social media, claiming that they offer numerous chances of social comparison. Aim of the surveys was to examine the impacts of chronic and temporary exposure to social information, in comparison with self-esteem. By using a correlating approach, the first survey examined to what extent self-esteem and the low or poor user profile is related with the frequency of the use of Facebook. Indeed, results showed that participants who were using Facebook more often had a lower self-esteem and that was due to the increased exposure to social comparisons in the social media. By using an experimental approach, the second survey studied the impact of temporary exposures to social networks' profiles, in relation to the degree of self-esteem and relevant self-assessments. The results revealed that the participants' degree of self-esteem and the relevant self-assessments were lower when the profile of the targeted person included comparison information upwards (e.g. a high activity social network, healthy habits) rather than when the profile of that particular person contained comparison information downwards (e.g. a low activity social network, unhealthy habits) (Vogel *et al.*, 2014). The study of Andreassen *et al.*, (2017) states that social networking sites have become an increasingly popular recreational activity over the last decade. Even though the use of social media is not problematical for most people, a small number of users appear to use them excessively or even obsessively. The main goal of their study was to examine the correlation between addictive use of social media, narcissism and self-esteem. In the survey, a sample of 23,532 Norwegians who completed three scales related with the dimensions examined was used. Even though most impact degrees were rather mediocre, findings supported the notion of the addictive use of social media, which reflect the need to feed the ego (i.e. narcissistic personality characteristics) combined with an effort to prevent a negative self-esteem (Andreassen *et al.*, 2017). The study of Woods & Scott (2016) examined to which extent the use of social media affects sleep quality, self-esteem, stress and depression, among 467 teenagers. The total use of social media, their use during the night, the emotional investments on social media, the sleep quality, the self-esteem and the levels of stress and depressions were measured. The teenagers who used more social media—in total and at night—and those who had invested more into them, presented poor sleep quality, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of stress and depression (Woods & Scott, 2016). Gonzales & Hancock (2011) made opposite propositions to control the impact of Facebook exposure on self-esteem. The objective self-consciousness from social psychology and the transpersonal model of communication through computers were used to support that Facebook would either lessen or boost self-esteem respectively. The findings demonstrated that, contrary to the previous studies on objective self-consciousness, the knowledge of one's self boosts self-esteem and does not lower it through the display of the personal profile on Facebook. The participants who updated their profiles and saw their profiles during the experiment reported also higher self-esteem, which offers extra support to the transpersonal model. Those findings show that selective self-projection on social media, leading in intensification of the relationship, also affect the impressions of the self (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). The study of Skues *et al.*, (2012), examined the relationship among particular characteristics (neuroticism, extroversion, tolerance, self-esteem, loneliness and narcissism) when using Facebook. The

participants were 393 first year psychology students of a middle-sized University of Australia, who filled in an electronic questionnaire. The results indicated that students with higher tolerance levels spend more time on Facebook and have more friends. It is interesting that students with higher loneliness levels reported they have more friends on Facebook. Extroversion, neuroticism, self-esteem and narcissism had no important correlations with the use of Facebook. The conclusion was that students with greater socialization utilize Facebook to link with others so as to discuss a wide range of topics, whilst lonely students utilize same to offset the lack of realistic relations (Skues *et al.*, 2012). Finally, the survey of Burke *et al.*, (2011) examined how Facebook affects the social capital depending on individual differences among users, including social interaction and self-esteem skills. Longitudinal surveys which matched with the servers recording data of 415 Facebook users revealed that receiving messages from friends is related with the increase of the social capital, but it appears that other uses are not correlated. Nonetheless, the use of Facebook for the passive news consumption helps people with lower social flexibility to draw value through the communication with others (Burke *et al.*, 2011).

Social Media and Public Opinion Formation: Opinion dynamics is the study of how people's opinions evolve (Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022). Individuals hold their own thoughts to issues they confront, and personal opinions change over time through interaction among their peers. As mobile devices become necessities in the human's modern daily lives, they use it in different ways to avail and access certain information using the new media platforms. Social media have been used as a powerful tool by politicians, marketers, brands, companies, and even individuals to achieve their goals. After the technological revolution controlled the world and changed our lifestyle and way of exchanging knowledge, the new media became the most important influence on public opinion. A person's awareness, personality, and thinking pattern are molded by what they learn from the behaviors and information present in their environments (Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022). That environment includes; family, friends, school, places of worship, religious practices, and any other place or ways they can share ideas with others and learn from. That can happen through face-to-face communication or any cultural or artistic forms such as; books, music, or movies (Pinto, *et al.*, 2019; Dong *et al.*, 2018). With the advent of the internet and social media, they have become a major component of the environment that constitutes and affects human awareness, inclinations, opinions, and even behaviors (Pinto *et al.*, 2019). It has also become the easiest way to communicate with different people from all over the world, access information from various sources in the easiest and fastest way, and learn the diverse ideologies of different cultures. That is how social media influences public opinion and moves the audience towards the desired behavior. The role of social media in public opinion has been profound and evident since it started gaining attention and attracting interest years ago. In many countries, including Egypt, especially after the 2011 revolution, the understanding of the importance of social media has been increasing each day (Dong *et al.*, 2018). The new generation recognized that social media platforms are not just made for entertainment; they also have a crucial role in helping the up-rise of social movements, leading them to

achieve their goals and changing political views (Dong *et al.*, 2018). That made people with authority to also have faith in the power of the double-edged sword that is new media. Social networks are means of reaching the public sphere. A public sphere consists of a group of citizens who come together to discuss different matters. That can happen through various platforms, including; cafes, public places, clubs, etc. However, with the advent of social media, it has become an invaluable addition if not the perfect replacement for the traditional platforms. Social movements were always an effective weapon that people use on a national and international level all around the world to restructure the past, reshape the present, and change the future of society (Pinto, *et al.*, 2019). Through social media, communication among the public sphere has been a lot easier. Social media are also influential tools for the manipulation of international, regional, and local public opinion. Through them, cases are manipulated that one side become biased at the expense of the other, achieved through what is known as a "trend". Social media are used politically to disseminate both true and false information to help win victory for certain political parties (Abdelmalak, 2022). Social media have become beneficial in the up-rise of many social movements. They were utilized as channels for many organizations to float their own campaigns as a stand on social issues. Hence, the new media could affect the political views which the public adopted. Not only that but also the thought process through which they arrive at these conclusions (Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022). This represents a general orientation towards a topic on social media sites that is crystallized within the framework of a group of publications. People adopting such trends can be personally acquainted with each other or they can be distant from each other (Abdelmalak, 2022). But the problem of this method, which influences public opinion and leads it in certain directions, is ignorance of the producer of the topic raised, the identity of the participants in raising the topic, and of its aims. Social media sites are used by many as tools influencing public opinion to achieve different goals, including creating a collective mindset through which the public can be led to take up unified positions on social or political issues, which amounts to creating social movements (Abdelmalak, 2022).

Brief on Senator Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" Comment and its Controversy: Nigerians were enraged after the Senate President Godwill Akpabio made a comment as protests against bad governance in the country were about to be held. On Tuesday July 30, at an event organized by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in Rivers State, Akpabio, was reported to have mocked Nigerians who planned to take part in the nationwide protest against economic hardship, saying he and other members of the National Assembly would be "eating" while they (Nigerians) protest. Speaking shortly after, Mr. Akpabio said Nigerians should exercise patience over the current economic hardship in Nigeria which he said would soon be over. The Senate president said everyone felt the impact of what was happening but they were aware it will be for a short while. The Senate president then added; "Managing Director, I want to thank you for what you said. You said we are not interested in regime change; let us own this government. Those who wish to protest can go on, but let us be here eating," (Ugwu, 2024, p.2). Akpabio, a former governor of Akwa Ibom State, is known for

often making controversial remarks over serious national issues but this particular comment enraged many Nigerians. The event which was aired live on Arise TV went viral especially of clips of the video were reposted on various social media platforms including Facebook. Whether the outrage caused by the comment influenced people’s support or participation in the protest is not yet confirmed through empirical research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study made use of the survey method in eliciting responses from COOU students who were exposed to Akpabio’s “let them protest while we eat” comment mocking people who wanted to protest against hardship in Nigeria. Only COOU students who were exposed to the comment on Facebook were studied. Survey method was used because the researcher had to identify a manageable number of COOU students to be part of this exploratory study. Thus, survey was used to get the opinions of the selected COOU students from the entire population of study. The population of this study was made up of students of COOU, Igbariam campus which is 14,322 (Academic Planning Unit, 2024). Sample as a concept refers to a representative unit of a population (Nwodu, 2017). According to Owuamalam (2012) it is a faithful representation of a specific population. Sampling is primarily done to obtain external validity (Osuala, 2005).

Because the population is large, a sample size of 381 respondents was used. It was determined using Cozby’s (2004) table of sample size determination which states that at +/- .05 error margin, a population of 50,000 or less) will have a sample of 381. Thus, the sample size for this study is 381 respondents. The purposive sampling technique, otherwise known as judgmental sampling was used in identifying the respondents that were studied. This was done first, by ensuring that respondents are students of Igbariam campus of COOU. Next was to ensure that these selected respondents saw Akpabio’s “let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook which was used for this study. Then the researcher ensured that only the respondents that saw the comment on Facebook were studied. The researcher made use of a structured questionnaire to get responses from students of COOU on Igbariam campus. This was done in order to ascertain their psychographic variables.

Data Presentation and Analysis: This study set out to ascertain the influence of exposure to Akpabio’s “let them protest while we eat” comment on COOU students’ support for the protest against bad governance in Nigeria. A total of 381 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Out of the 381 that were distributed, 372 copies were returned and found usable. This represents 97% return rate. Result of the field work is presented here in this chapter.

Answers to Research Questions: Four research questions were formulated for this study. The findings are presented below.

Research Question 1: What is the frequency of exposure to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook by COOU students?

Table 1. Responses on Level of level of exposure to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	109	29
Often	157	42
Sometimes	70	19
Rarely	14	4
Very Rarely	22	6
Total	372	

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 1 shows 29 percent of respondents (n=109) were exposed to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook very often, 42 percent (n=157) did so often, that means that majority of them are well exposed to the comment.

Research Question Two: What is the respondents’ perception of Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment?

Table 2 shows the mean score for respondents’ perception of Akpabio’s “let them protest while we eat” comment they were exposed to on Facebook. The table shows that dominant mean scores of 3.6 which indicates that respondents had a negative perception of the comment as a mockery of the plight of Nigerians and 3.7 showing that respondents had a negative perception of the comment as insensitive to the plight of Nigerians.

Research Question 3: Did respondents repost Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment to friends after seeing it on Facebook?

Table 3 shows 71 percent of respondents (n=266) shared the comment on Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” which they saw on Facebook; 6 percent (n=22) did not share the post while 23 percent (n=84) could not remember whether they shared the post or not. These findings show that most respondents shared the post to other social media platforms.

Research Question Four: Did exposure to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook influence people’s support of the protest against hardship in the country? Table 4 shows 84 percent of respondents (n=314) supported the protest after exposure to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment which they saw on Facebook; 16 percent (n=58) did not support the protest. This means Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment influenced respondents to support the protest against bad governance in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective sought to ascertain the frequency of exposure to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook by COOU students. The findings show that most respondents were well exposed to Akpabio’s “Let them protest while we eat” comment on Facebook. Majority of them did so very often. This means than Facebook users that

Table 2. Mean Distribution of Responses on perception of Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment?

S/N	What was your perception of the Let them protest while we eat Comment by Akpabio?	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total	Mean
1.	I think the comment was meant Calm people down in a jovial way	21 (105)	70 (280)	70 (210)	91 (182)	132 (132)	372 (909)	2.4
2.	I had a negative perception of the comment as a mockery of plight of Nigerians	98 (490)	96 (384)	115 (345)	51 (102)	24 (24)	372 (1345)	3.6
3.	I had a negative perception of the Comment as very insensitive	86 (430)	127 (508)	96 (288)	57 (114)	18 (18)	372 (1358)	3.7
4.	I think the comment is okay	30 (150)	27 (108)	113 (339)	118 (236)	96 (96)	372 (929)	2.5

Source: Field survey, 2024

are students of COOU were well exposed to Akpabio's comment. This exposure is enough for anyone to change or re-enforce opinion on the planned nationwide protest against bad governance in the country. This agrees with studies that suggest that social media are one of the major sources of information on politics for users (Duru, 2019; Idid & Apuke, 2020; Aslan, *et al.*, 2021). After a study, Aslan, *et al.*, (2021) observed that social networking is used for effectively and efficiently interacting with electorates, especially during election processes, through campaign activities.

Table 3. Responses on whether respondents shared the Facebook post on Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	266	71
No	22	6
Can't remember	84	23
Total	372	100

Table 4. Responses on whether respondents supported the protest after exposure to Akpabio's comment on Facebook

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	314	84
No	58	16
Total	372	100

Source: Field survey 2024

Table 4. Responses on whether respondents supported the protest after exposure to Akpabio's comment on Facebook

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	314	84
No	58	16
Total	372	100

Source: Field survey 2024

This finding also supports the assertion by Shadrach (2017) that social media are gaining attention among the people because they pass information freely without restraints from government, powerful politicians and advertisers as well as free from administrative bottlenecks like gate-keeping. Furthermore, the finding is also in line with the findings of

earlier studies, that social media platforms provide direct access to contents to an unprecedented number of people (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2021, in Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeumenwa, 2024; Obiakor, Onwuka & Chinedu, 2024), that social media is one of the most vibrant means of disseminating information to the masses ((Obiakor, & Ikegbunam, 2021; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeja, 2024; Obiakor, Okereke & Agbachukwu, 2024; Obiakor, Obiora & Okafor, 2025), that social media are one of the major sources of information on politics for users (Duru, 2019, in Obiakor & Adikuru, 2024), about a demonstration of the universality of the internet and its permeation ability (Obiakor, Adikuru & Agbakaj, 2022), that WhatsApp is one of the social networking sites where political issues are being discussed everyday by users (Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeaso, 2023) and that the role of the social media in projecting public information to the people is hereby acknowledged (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2023). The high exposure to the video may be attributed to the fact that "When audience members in the society distrust the mainstream media, they have a tendency to withdraw from it and turn towards alternative sources (Müller & Schulz, 2021, in Obiakor, 2024). This high level of exposure to the news reports under study depicts an agreement to the fact that vibrant and active media are indispensable tools for the execution of any election (Ezinwa, 2015, in Obiakor, Okelue & Okeke, 2024), in the sense that without access to the full range of information about their world, citizens cannot fulfill their roles, and democracy will wither (Kurfi, 2010, in Obiakor, Okelue & Okeke, 2024). The second objective sought to find out respondents' perception of Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment. The findings showed that respondents had a negative perception of the comment by Akpabio as they saw it as insensitive and a mockery of Nigerians. This agreed with the Cognitive dissonance theory which says that people visit an information source with specific perception, opinion or belief about something but when they get exposed to the information, it either disagrees with their prior held perception or helps them pass through the process of reinforcing their initial perception (Festinger, 1957 & 1962; Fu, *et al.*, 2020). According to the cognitive dissonance theory, when two actions or ideas are not psychologically consistent with each other, people do all in their power to change them until they become consistent (Festinger, 1962; Dawson, 1999). Furthermore, when contending information becomes unavoidable, individuals tend to unlock certain psychological processes to reduce or eliminate the state of dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Sun & Guo, 2013). In this case, COOU students' exposure to Akpabio's

comment helped in reinforcing their support of the nationwide protest against bad governance in Nigeria. The result of this finding is similar to the finding of Obiakor, Ikegbunam and Ezeumenwa (2024), who after a study on Governor Soludo's "There will be consequence" threat, found that the audience had a negative perception of that comment; the respondents in that study felt that the Governor should have used conviction rather than threat to get the will of the people. It is also similar to the finding of Obiakor and Adikuru (2024) who found in their study, that Tinubu's "Let the poor breathe" comment was meant to mock the people of Nigeria. Hence, Senator Akpabio should have used Public Relations strategy to calm the nerves of the people down rather than insulting them. These go to show how this Administration takes Nigerians and the way Nigerians perceive the officials of the Administration. The third objective of study sought to find out whether respondents reposted Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment to friends after seeing it on Facebook. Results showed that respondents shared the posts to other social media platforms. This shows they were influenced by the negative perception they had about the comment by Akpabio. This is in line with the cognitive dissonance theory which states that when an individual is exposed to new information the person experiences a process of ensuring that the information reinforces the prior perceptions (Festinger, 1957 & 1962; Fu, et al., 2020).

The fourth objective of study sought to ascertain whether exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook influenced people's support of the protest against hardship in the country. The results show that exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment influenced people to support the protest against bad governance in Nigeria. According to Asla et al., (2021), social networking is used for effectively and efficiently interacting with people, and can influence them greatly to make decisions. Eze and Adah (2018) further note that the social media have always played significant role in public opinion formation. Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) found after a study of social media use for political participation by the youth in Oyo, that the youth use the new media to partake in political advocacy, political campaigns, interacting with politicians, political discussions, monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices, public consultations, joining interest groups that engage in lobbying, blogging about political issues, and writing letters to public officials respectively. It is therefore clear that exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook influenced respondents to support the planned nationwide protest against bad governance.

SUMMARY

This study investigated exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook and its influence on COOU students' support for the planned nationwide protest against bad governance. The study focused on COOU students on Igbariam campus of the university who saw Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat comment" on Facebook. The researcher chose to focus on COOU students based on discretion and convenience. Four objectives were formulated for the study. The Survey method was adopted for the study. Data revealed that exposure to Akpabio's "Let them protest

while we eat" comment on Facebook influenced COOU students' decision to support the nationwide protest against hardship in Nigeria. It was also found that respondents were exposed to the comment on Facebook very often and reposted the comment to other social media platforms. They also had negative perception of the comment as they saw it as insensitive and a mockery of Nigerians passing through hardship. These findings were analyzed showing how they supported the perception theories, including their relationship to other researches done in this area of study.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

COOU students were exposed to Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook very often; COOU students had a negative perception of Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook; COOU students reposted Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook to other social media platforms; COOU students were influenced by Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment on Facebook to support the nationwide protest against hardship in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are put forward: That political office holders in Nigeria should be mindful of their words and make sure what they say would not incite the public if such words as seen as insensitive especially when people see such comments on social media; that political office holders should utilize the social media via in advocating for public support for their policies since these media play essential roles in shaping public perception of government policy acceptance by the people; that government Administrations at State and Federal levels should combine both mainstream and social media in projecting policies and programmes to the public with a view to gaining support for such policies. This also includes use of both private and government owned media in terms of using Public Relations strategies to propagate their policies; the researcher recommends further studies in this area of study especially in other States in the country to check the perception of people in other States regarding Akpabio's "Let them protest while we eat" comment and its influence on support for the nationwide protest against hardship in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Abdelmalak, K. (2022, June 14). Social media and public opinion. *Ahram online*. Retrieved 27-06-2023 from; <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1209/467966/A1Ahram-Weekly/Focus/Social-media-and-public-opinion.aspx>
- Agba, U. J. & Ogri, E. U. (2016). Media, globalization and democracy practices in Africa: A study of 2016 democratic transitions in Nigeria and Burkina-Faso. *Journal of Theatre & Media Studies*, 1(2), 366-390.

- Agbanu, V.N. (2013). *Mass Communication Introduction, Techniques, issues*. Enugu: RhyceKerex Publishers.
- Akinfeleye, R. (2008). Media policy: Tool for national development. In Akinfeleye, R. (Ed.). *Contemporary issues in mass media for development and national security*. (126-139). Lagos, Jesuoboh & Associate.
- Amadi, S. (2023, July, 8). Letting the Poor Breathe. *This Day*. Retrieved 23-06-2023 from; <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/07/12/letting-the-poor-breathe>
- Aslan, A., Karakoc, E., & Bekirolu, O. (2021). Effect of social media on voter behavior: Sample of Kayseri province. *Revista Argentina de clinica psicologica*, 30(1), 828-840. DOI: 10.24205/03276716.2020.2079
- Baker, C. E. (2002). *Media, markets, and democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baran, S. J. (2004). *Introduction to Mass Communication; Media Literacy and Culture*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hillin.
- Baran, S. J. & Davis, D. K. (2009). *Mass communication theory (5th ed.)*. Boston: Wardsworth Cengage Learning.
- Burgeon, M. & Ruffner, M. (1974). *Human Communication*. New York: Rinehart and Winston
- Duru, C. W. (2019). Exposure to social media political campaigns and their influence on the choice of candidates during the 2019 governorship election in Imo State, Nigeria. *SAU journal of management and social sciences*, 4(1&2), 241-248.
- Dong, Y., Zhan, M., Kou, G., Ding, Z. & Liang, H. (2018). A survey on the fusion process in opinion dynamics. *Information Fusion*, 43: 57-65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.inffus.2017.11.009>.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Maryland: Stanford University Press.
- Folarin, B. (1998). *Theories of mass communication: An introduction*. Stirling Horden Publishers Ltd.
- Forest, A. L., & Wood, J. V. (2012). When Social Networking Is Not Working: Individuals with Low Self-Esteem Recognize But Do Not Reap the Benefits of Self-Disclosure on Facebook. *Psychological Science*, 23, 295-302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611429709>
- Gavin N. T. (2010). Closing the circle: A case study in the role of spin in the policy cycle. In Voltmer K., Koch-Baumgarten S. (Eds.), *Public policy and mass media: The interplay of mass communication and political decision making* (pp. 65-85). New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Gonzales, A. L. & Hancock, J. T. (2011). Mirror, Mirror on My Facebook Wall: Effects of Exposure to Facebook on Self-Esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 14, 79-83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0411>
- Green-Pedersen, C. (2019). *The Reshaping of West European Party Politics: Agenda-Setting and Party Competition in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford/New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Heblich, S. (2016). The effect of the internet on voting behavior. *IZA World of Labor*, 10: 294- 301.
- Ikegbunam, P. C. & Obiakor, C. U. (2021). Encouraging popular political participation and effective election monitoring through WhatsApp social media platforms. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Human Research*, 4(4) 698-709.
- Ikegbunam, P. C. & Obiakor, C. U. (2023). Exposure to social media videos of yahooplus victims and its influence on attitude changes among young ladies in Nigeria. *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 10(1), 101 – 117.
- Kumari, H. (2019). *International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health*. 6(1): 97-99.
- Lee, W., Yang, S. & Kim, B. (2022). The effect of media on opinion formation. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 595:234-251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2022.127075>.
- Liu, P.L. (2020). COVID-19 information seeking on digital media and preventive behaviors: The mediation role of worry. *Cyberpsychology, behavior, and social networking*, 23(10): 677-682. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2020.0250.
- Marín-Motín, J. (2008). Educar a través de la TV. *Comunicar*, 31, 517–521.
- McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass Communication Theory*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (6th Edition)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Nwodu, L.C. (2017) *Research in Communication and other Behavioural Sciences. Principles, Methods and Issues*. Enugu: RhyceKerex Publisher.
- Obiakor, C. & Nwabueze, C. (2019). Influence of uses and gratifications on television news recall among non-teaching staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. *Annals of Journalism and Mass Communication*; 1(3), December, 2019, 17-30.
- Obiakor, C. U. & Ikegbunam, P. C. (2021). Social media shared video-clips on Covid-19 and undergraduates perception of health realities of the virus. *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 57 – 72.
- Obiakor, C. U., Adikuru, C. C. & Agbakaj, B. C. (2022). Digital broadcasting network and the emerging democratic culture in Nigeria: the 2021 Anambra guber debate experience. *International Journal of International Relations, Media & Mass Communication Studies*, 8(3), 1-21.
- Obiakor, C. U., Ikegbunam, P. C. & Ezeaso, V. C. (2023). Interrogating the relationship between whatsapp political use and active political participants among Nigerians: Implication for online democracy. *Journal of Education, Humanities, Management and Social Sciences (JEHMSS)*, 4(1), 58-77.
- Obiakor, C. U. & Adikuru, C. C. (2024). Exposure to Tinubu's "Let the poor breathe" viral video on social media and its influence on audience perception of his economic policies. *Global Online Journal of Academic Research (GOJAR)*, 3(2); April, 2024.
- Obiakor, C. U., Ikegbunam, P. C. & Ezeumenwa, F. (2024). Exposure to Governor Soludo's threatening video and its influence on voting decision among voters in Anambra State House of Assembly polls. *ISRG Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies (ISRGJMS)*, 2(6), 17-23, 2024.
- Obiakor, C. U., Okelue, C. E., & Okeke, C. C. (2024). Audience perception of Tinubu's petition letter to NBC over Datti's "End of democracy" comment on Channels TV. *SADI Journal of Economics and Social Sciences (SJESS)*, 11(2), 1-17.
- Obiakor, C. U., Onwuka, H. E., & Chinedu, S. C. (2024). Exposure to WhatsApp videos of Governor Soludo's ARTMA activities and audience perception of the

- activities of the group. *International Journal of Development Research (IJDR)*. 14(12), 67127-67133.
- Obiakor, C. U., Ikegbunam, P. C. & Ezeja, P. C. (2024). Exposure to social media shared video-clips on irregularities from the 2023 election in Nigeria and audience perception of the outcome. *ISRG Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies (ISRGJAHSS)* 2(5), 352-361.
- Obiakor, C. U. (2024). Prevalence of traditional news media distrust in Anambra State, Nigeria. *ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)*, 2(6), 68-76.
- Obiakor, C. U., Okereke, B. N., & Agbachukwu, P. I. (2024). Audience perception of WhatsApp videos of jungle justice in Onitsha and its influence on attitude change. *International Journal of Current Research*; 16(12), 30937-30943.
- Obiakor, C. U., Obiora, A. V., & Okafor, G. U. (2025). Audience exposure to news reports on Bobrisky's arrest for Naira abuse and their perception of money spraying: A study of Emeka-Offor plaza. *ISRG Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies; Current Research*; 2(1), 1-10.
- Oboh, G. E. (2017). Influence of ethnicity and religion in Nigerian elections and the imperative of media intervention. *Sociological International Journal*, 1(3), 79-84. [10.15406/sij.2017.01.00013](https://doi.org/10.15406/sij.2017.01.00013)
- Oshega, A., Henshaw, A. A., Ogri, E. U. & Arekong M. D. (2017). Audience Perception, Reality and Objectivity in Media Reportage: An Analysis of Broadcast Media Coverage of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. *The Leajon*, 8(2), 42-65.
- Owuamalam, E.O. (2012). *Data analysis and research project writing: A practical approach* Owerri: Top-Class Agencies Ltd.
- Pinto, S., Albanese, F., Dorso, C. O. & Balenzuela, P. (2019). Quantifying time-dependent Media Agenda and public opinion by topic modeling. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 524, 189-203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2019.04.108>.
- Puertas-Moleroa, P., Marfil-Carmona, R., Zurita-Ortega, F. & Gonzalez-Valero, G. (2019). Impact of Sports Mass Media on the Behavior and Health of Society: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16, 486, doi:10.3390/ijerph16030486
- Shadrach, I. & Apuke, O. D. (2020). Investigating the Effectiveness of Social Media Usage for Political Dialogue in Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 3942-3951. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/3942>
- Sherwood, M., & Nicholson, M. (2017). Who Controls Sport News? Media Relations And Information Subsidies in Australian sport media. *Media International Australia*, 165, 146-156.
- Steinfeld, C., Ellison, N. B. & Lampe, C. (2008). Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 434-445, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.07.002>.
- Tijani, M. (2023, June 14). Explainer: What does the Naira float mean to you, your business? *The Cable NG*, Retrieved 12-05, 2023, from; <https://www.thecable.ng/explainer-what-does-the-naira-float-mean-for-you-your-business>
- Ugwu, C. (2024, July 31). TRENDING: 'You can protest, but we'll be eating' – Akpabio mocks Nigerians. *Premium Times*, accessed 12-06-2024 from; <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/719311-trending-you-can-protest-but-well-be-eating-akpabio-mocks-nigerians.html>
- Voltmer, K. & Koch-Baumgarten, S. (2007). Public Policy and the Mass Media: Influences and Interactions. Workshop proposal for the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Helsinki. Retrieved 23-06-2023 from; <https://ecpr.eu/filestore/workshopoutline/7dec5157-b73b-497b-8098-4a10877f0ba8.pdf>
- Xavier, A. J., d'Orsi, E., Wardle J, Demakakos, P., Smith, S. G. & von Wagner, C. (2013). Internet use and cancer-preventive behaviors in older adults: findings from a longitudinal cohort study. *Cancer epidemiology bio-markers & prevention*; 22(11): 2066-2074.
