

## **Exposure to Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” Viral Video on Social Media and its Influence on Audience Perception of His Economic Policies**

By

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### **Abstract**

President Ahmed Bola Tinubu of All Progressives Congress (APC) while making his inaugural speech on May 29, 2023, as he was being sworn as the new president of Nigeria, said “Let the Poor Breathe”. The statement became a popular sound bite as this video went viral on various social media platforms. With the economic policies of President Tinubu, especially the removal of fuel subsidy and floating of Naira against the dollar which have led to inflation, there is a growing concern as to whether Tinubu actually wants to let the poor breathe. This research work, among other objectives, investigates audience perception of Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” comment which went viral on social media and how the comment influences people’s perception of his economic policies. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method was used to study 60 purposively selected participants among Anambra State civil servants at the State’s Secretariat, Awka. The study was anchored on the Reception and Perception theories. The result showed that respondents were well exposed to the “Let the Poor Breathe” video and their main sources of exposure were WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook. The study also found that respondents had negative perception of the comment, seeing it as a mockery of the poor after his economic policies of fuel subsidy removal and floating of the Naira which led to inflation in the country. The respondents see President Tinubu as being insincere towards the poor as his harsh economic policies have worsened the condition of the poor in Nigeria. The study recommends that President Tinubu should introduce short-term policies that will reduce the hardship faced by many Nigerians, including the poor, in addition to palliatives he has promised to give to the poor.

*Keywords:* “Let the Poor Breathe” viral video, exposure, social media, influence, perception, economic policies.

## **Introduction**

For most observers, the significance of the mass media for public policymaking arises from the fact that the media shape public opinion, thereby forcing political actors to respond to popular preferences (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2007). The mass media in the political process has changed fundamentally from playing the role of a rather passive conveyor of messages to discharging the duties of a political actor in its own right. As a large body of literature suggests, the media is now taking an active part in the public representation of politics by shaping the agenda of political discourse and by contributing their own preferences in political controversies (Bennett & Entman 2001; Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2007).

The mass media in every democratic society is established 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 the mass media or mass media without a government he would choose the latter (Akinfeleye, 2008). The above statement further emphasizes the vital role of the mass media in the 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 & Ogri (2016) summarize 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 educate the electorates during elections. Also, the media carry messages about events that reflect positively or negatively on government and other actors in the political arena (Agba & Ogri, 2016). These functions of the media make them bridge the yawning gap between the government and its citizens to facilitate growth and development of Nigeria's nascent democracy. In contemporary times, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to have a functional electoral process without the mass media.

The mass media plays a crucial role in creating development awareness through transferring information to the audience and exchanging thoughts. Through agenda-setting function, the media conditions society's vision and understanding of sports and provides a narrative that exerts a didactic influence on the concept of sports and physical education (Marín-Motín, 2008; Puertas-Molero, Marfil-Carmona, Zurita-Ortega & Gonzalez-Valero, 2019). It plays an effective, instructive and leading role in development, awakening public consciousness and raising public awareness by spreading novel ideas through information dissemination. This makes it possible for people to understand trend of events in their surroundings 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 messages are developed according to criteria of topicality, objectivity and simplicity, which aim to produce a message with the widest reach possible (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2017).

Studies show that mass media are promising channels for providing information that potentially influences behaviour of audiences on a large scale (Xavier *et. al.*, 2013; Liu, 2020). Social media are channels and messaging apps that are very effective in dissemination of information. Social media, as a concept, was first coined by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty (Beetseh, Olise & Tor-Akwer, 2021). Social media platforms have been described as places for adding or editing information or a web which allows people to make use of digital tools to create, change and publish dynamic content (Okike, Terna & Beetseh, 2019; Tor-Akwer, 2019).

President Tinubu of All Progressives Congress (APC) while making his inaugural speech on May 29, 2023, as he was being sworn as president of Nigeria, said "Let the Poor Breathe". In his maiden speech on Democracy Day on June 12, 2023, President Tinubu made what sounded like two impressive sound-bites which tended to give the impression that he would be a people-friendly leader. He told Nigerians: "I share your pains" with regard to the harsh economic experience occasioned by the commencement of implementation of the petrol subsidy removal. President Tinubu was seen on a viral video saying: "Let the poor breathe, don't suffocate them". He made the statement on May 29, 2023, during his inauguration as the new president of Nigeria. He announced the final removal of petrol subsidy right there at the inauguration venue. His government also announced the floating of the naira – an exchange rate system that eliminates a fixed price for forex trading within the country, thereby introducing an exchange rate method where the local currency is

set by the forces of demand and supply within the forex market (Tijani, 2023). These two economic policies led to inflation and fall in standard of living, thereby giving the impression that the president was saying one thing while his government is walking a different, in fact opposite, road.

It is against this background that this study seeks to analyze audience perception of Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment which went viral on social media and how the comment influences people's perception of his economic policies. It provides an insight into how the citizens of Nigeria perceive the president's economic policies based on media exposure to his comments.

### **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 which the public have about them. If the comment about the poor as made by Tinubu is perceived in bad light, this could affect public support for his administration's policies and lead to lack of belief in his administration. This is why it is important to find out whether Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment is perceived in bad light by Nigerians, especially as it affects his economic policies.

Okoro and Nwafor (2013) observed that there is "social media war" taking place on the various social media platforms in Nigeria, which could make most members of the public to lose confidence in the social media and to raise questions about this media's viability as an important tool for public discussion and as a means of reaching government officials in the country. Therefore, it is important to look into the effectiveness and the role of social media outlets as platforms for political dialogue among Nigerians.

The effect of the social media on political participation has been studied, but whether comments in reaction to president Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" statement influenced people's perception of his economic policies, especially as it pertains to fuel subsidy removal and floating of the naira, has not received analytical attention. To fill this gap, this study investigated the audience exposure to the viral video on president Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment and its influence on perception of his economic policies. It is possible that the viral social media video may have influenced perception of his economic policies and a negative perception of government policy could discourage public support for such policies. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, no study has looked at president Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment and its influence on

perception of his economic policies. It is this gap in knowledge that this study intends to fill.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To ascertain the frequency of exposure to Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” video on social media by respondents in Awka.
- To ascertain the source of exposure to Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” video by respondents in Awka.
- To find out respondents’ perception of Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” comment.
- To ascertain respondents’ perception of Tinubu’s economic policies in relation to his “Let the Poor Breathe” comment.

### **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 favourable 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 would contribute to literature on social media influence and the effect of 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 influence public opinion on government policies among residents of Awka, Anamabra State, Nigeria. Most studies of this nature 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 perception of government policy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Reception Theory**

Reception theory presents media users as active interpreters of media contents. Also known as reception analysis, the theory was founded based

on the principles first put forward by the Birmingham School of Thought, led by Stuart Hall (Idakwo & Oloruntola, 2020). It stipulates that people interpret texts they are exposed to in different independent ways. McQuail (2010) explains that the essence of reception is the construction and negotiation of meaning between the message source and its receiver. Reception theory provides explanation on the existence of diverse groups in the society, with the dominant group mostly seeking to impose its interpretation of culture on all other groups.

Reception analysis is one standard for measuring media audiences, as this analysis attempts to offer a meaning for understanding media texts (print, electronic, internet) by first getting to understand how media text characters are read by audiences (Aminudin, 2018). People who analyze the media using the reception study pay attention to the experience of the audience members exposed to the media, including understanding how the experience shapes the meaning being created.

Morley (1992), one of the leading researchers that made use of Hall's model in an influential analysis of the television show "Nationwide" audience, summarizes the premises of Hall's encoding/decoding model thus:

- ✓ Individuals can encode the same story or event in more than one way.
- ✓ The message usually conveys more than one potential "reading". What this means is that messages propose or "prefer" a specific reading over others, but those messages can never become wholly closed around one reading: a television text remains polysemic (which means that it is capable of passing across a variety of interpretations).
- ✓ Decoding and understanding the message constitute a problematic practice, not minding how transparent and "natural" the act may look like. Messages that were encoded in a particular way can always be decoded in a different way (Morley, 1992).

Morley (1992) says that a negotiated reading refers to an audience member accepting the preferred reading but at the same time modifies it so that it will reflect his or her own interests, position, or experience. Oppositional reading is anti-hegemonic and has to do with the process whereby media users reject the existing frame of the preferred reading and provide an alternative frame of reference. Hall says that in this reading, the audience member "detotalises the message in the preferred code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference.

This is the case of the viewer who listens to a debate on the need to limit wages, but also 'reads' every mention of 'the national interest' as 'class interest'" (Hall in McQuail, 2002, p. 308). It is important to emphasize the fact that these three readings are moments of decoding that lie in the realm of pragmatics. In other words, the media users' interpretations of the television text are above the levels of semantics and syntactics. The media users understand the literal meanings and whether what they read are dominant, negotiated, or oppositional actually depends on the connoted meaning (and pragmatic codes) of the text.

Stuart Hall argues that the media offer the guiding myths that shape interpretations which individuals hold about the world (Griffin 2012; Aminudin, 2018). Hall further dismissed the claim of only one existing interpretation for media messages and emphasized that to achieve this interpretation an individual has to interface with different groups. Griffin (2012, p. 347) cited Stuart Hall who emphasized that culture is primarily concerned with the production and exchange of meanings. This presentation makes the reception theory apt for the current study which is premised on audience members' reception, interpretation and perception of social media video on Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" as it concerns how his policies on fuel subsidy and Naira floating against the dollar affect the lives of the poor in Nigeria.

### **Perception Theory**

In view of the fact that the subject matter of this work is basically focused on perception of President Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment and how it influences perception of his economic policies, it becomes essential to adopt the theory of perception for this study. There are two: 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 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). Research often emphasizes on the study of these selective process, 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. The concept of selective retention assumes 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 medium. Two people cannot have the same interest (Folarin, 1998; Baran, 2002; Agbanu, 2013). The concept of selective perception predicts that people will interpret messages in a manner consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. Finally, 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. Perception theory is very essential to this study because it has to do with the perception of the people about Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment and how his economic policies, especially fuel subsidy and naira-dollar exchange floating, have affected standard of living of the poor in Nigeria.

## **The Review**

### **Social Media and Public Opinion Formation**

Opinion dynamics is the study of how people's opinions evolve (Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022). People hold their own thoughts to issues they confront, and individual opinions change over time through communication among their peers. As mobile devices become necessities in people's modern daily lives, access to media is getting easier and easier. People can easily express and post their thoughts and emotions about social issues and freely interact with others (Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022). So, lots of contents that have various points of view about social issues arise and disappear constantly in a modern society. Considering that the echo chamber filter bubble appears in many platforms which serve contents tailored to individual tastes and preferences, opinion formation is greatly influenced by the contents that the media provide. Therefore, the portion of our opinions that are shaped by what we read or watch on media cannot be ignored (Dong et al., 2018; Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022).

Social media platforms have been used as powerful tools by politicians, marketers, brands, companies, and even individuals to achieve their goals. After the technological revolution dominated the world and changed our lifestyle and way of exchanging knowledge, social media became the most significant influence on public opinion. A person's awareness, personality, and thinking pattern are shaped by what they acquire from the behaviours and information present in their surrounding environment (Lee, Yang &



Kim, 2022). That environment includes: family, friends, school, places of worship, religious practices, and any other place or means where they can interact with and learn from others. That can happen through face-to-face communication or through any cultural or artistic forms, such as books, music or movies (Dong et al., 2018; Pinto, et al., 2019).

With the advent of the internet, the social media has become a major component of the environment that constitutes and affects human awareness, inclinations, opinions, and even behaviours (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 behaviour. 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, after that revolution, recognized that social media platforms are not just made for entertainment; they also have a crucial role in helping in the uprising of social movements, leading them to achieve their goals and changing political views (Dong et al., 2018). This has forced people with authority to also believe in the power of the double-edged sword which social media is.

Social networks are tools used to reach and influence the public sphere. 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 used 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 the social media, communication among the public sphere has been a lot easier. Also, considering the billions of people browsing the internet and including social media in their lifestyle, those social movements became able to reach larger audiences. This has changed the idea behind a public sphere, as it wasn't exclusive to the citizens of a specific country. Now, social movements can reach everyone through Facebook, Twitter, or any other platform, making social movements an international matter in which everyone can participate (Lee, Yang & Kim, 2022).

Social media is one of the most influential contemporary tools for the manipulation of international, regional, and local public opinion. Through it, cases are made and one side can be biased at the expense of another,

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). The social media has been significant in the springing up of many social movements. It was used as a channel by many social groups to launch their own brand of campaigns on social issues.

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 danger of this method, which affects public opinion and leads it in certain directions, is ignorance of the source of the topic raised, ignorance of the identity of the participants raising the topic, and ignorance of the topic’s objectives. Social media sites are used by many as tools for 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 President Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” Comment and Its Controversy**

President Tinubu made the “Let the Poor Breathe” comment during his inaugural speech, after being sworn in as president, on May 29, 2023. This statement became what sounded like an impressive sound-bite which tended to give the impression that he would be a people-friendly leader. President Tinubu was seen on a viral video saying: “Let the poor breathe, don’t suffocate them” (Odeleke, 2023). He announced the final removal of petrol subsidy right there at the inauguration venue. His government also announced the floating of the naira, an exchange rate mechanism that eliminates the practice of fixing naira’s exchange rate, thereby allowing the forces of demand and supply to determine the local currency’s rate within the forex market (Tijani, 2023). These two economic policies led to inflation and fall in standard of living, thereby giving the impression that the president was saying one thing while his government was doing a different thing.

Analysts were of the opinion that Tinubu was not sincere with his comment about the poor as his policies were in no way helping the poor to breathe. Some analysts felt he did not understand who the poor in Nigeria are. According to Amadi (2023),

when we discuss about the poor in Nigeria, we are not just discussing about the more than 93million citizens who are formally

captured as living below official poverty lines. We are not talking only about the 134million citizens who do not have access to the barest basics of health, education, and recreational facilities in rural and urban Nigeria, or the additional 7.1million Nigerians that the World Bank predicts will fall into deeper poverty because of government's removal of subsidy and spikes in energy costs. When we discuss about the poor in Nigeria, it includes the millions who, though officially not poor, are continually exposed to plenty risks of such nature that if any of them crystallizes, they are flung into deep poverty. Poverty in Nigeria is not just numbers; it is pervasive vulnerabilities and incapacities.

Analysts argue that successive Nigerian governments have paid lip service to the question of acute poverty and inequality because, in the eyes of an irresponsible State, poverty is basically a personal problem for millions left behind (Odeleke, 2023). Even the poor themselves do not seem to begrudge society as is done in other societies where increasing poverty often leads to violent conflicts. It seems that the Nigerian poor are a more charitable lot. But despite the social psychology of poverty in Nigeria, it remains a real threat to national prosperity and survival. Nigeria's future is partly tied to her ability to drastically reduce poverty (Odeleke, 2023; Amadi, 2023).

For decades, the elite have held Nigeria down and sabotaged every reform effort. It is to their credit that the poor in the country are going through the worst moment of their lives (Odeleke, 2023). Among the downtrodden, things have fallen apart and it has become increasingly difficult for the poor to earn a living. Every right-thinking Nigerian, including President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, agrees that it is time the poor breathed (Odeleke, 2023).

Analysts suggest that the president should go beyond mere words to put other things in place for the poor to truly breathe as he said. For the poor to breathe, the fuel subsidy must go as the president told the nation during his inauguration. This is because fuel subsidy is the channel through which the corrupt elite enriched themselves, claiming subsidies on products they never supplied, or inflated or directed to neighbouring Benin Republic, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. For the poor to breathe, the education system needs surgery (Odeleke, 2023). For the poor to breathe, Nigeria's security situations have to change. Farmlands from Owo to Mubi to Eket to Okigwe have to be safe for the farmers. Kidnappings and banditry have to stop. For the poor to breathe, the nation's health system must begin to work, among other suggestions by analysts (Odeleke, 2023). It is based on the effects of the policies of Tinubu's government and the hardship that Nigerians are passing through that this study seeks to ascertain the

perception of residents of Awka on whether the president is truly keeping to his words which went viral in the social media that he wants the poor to breathe.

### **Brief Look at Two Economic Policies: Fuel Subsidy Removal and Floating of Naira**

**Floating of Naira:** Nigeria floated the Naira on June 14, 2023; this weakened the currency by over 70 percent compared to the N460 per USD level it traded before the reform. The currency now trades at almost N850 per USD in the parallel (black) market though in a fluctuating manner. Floating the naira presents a complex decision for the Nigerian government though this policy can enhance export competitiveness, attract investment, and signal economic reforms but also carries risks such as increased exchange rate volatility and potential inflationary pressures.

Over the years, the Nigerian government has employed various measures to manage its currency, the naira, including pegging it at a specific exchange rate. This naturally created two exchange rates, the official and the black market (Tijani, 2023; Eromosele, 2023). The disparity between the two provided an avenue for people with access to dollars to buy at the official rate and resell at the black market. Many millionaires and a few billionaires were created through this distorted system. Floating the exchange rate is meant to solve this problem. The idea of floating the naira has, however, remained a subject of debate as it is viewed by experts to have both potential advantages and risks which can affect the standard of living (Eromosele, 2023).

Floating a country's currency, also known as a floating exchange rate, refers to a monetary system where the value of a nation's currency is determined by market forces such as supply and demand. In this system, the currency's exchange rate fluctuates freely in response to various economic factors, including inflation, interest rates, trade balances, and capital flows (Tijani, 2023). This means that the naira's value would fluctuate in response to economic factors, including inflation, interest rates, and foreign investment. While this volatility can be unsettling in the short term, it can also help promote economic adjustments and improve competitiveness in the long run. The Central Bank of Nigeria would need to implement effective monetary policies, such as interest rate adjustments and tight fiscal measures to manage inflation and maintain price stability (Eromosele, 2023).

**Removal of Fuel Subsidy:** On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, in his inaugural speech, President Bola Tinubu said that Nigeria's fuel subsidies would be

scrapped, citing budgetary concerns. The decision led to a steep rise in fuel prices and widespread panic-buying of fuel. Some bus companies have been unable to refuel their vehicles, leaving many people stranded. Barely two days after the announcement, the state oil company, NNPC Limited, reviewed the pump price of petrol from N189 per litre to between N480 and N570 per litre – more than 200 per cent increase (Yusuf, 2023). Officials of NNPC argued that the adjustment in petrol prices with market rates will promote competition and efficiency in the oil market and drop prices naturally as prices would continue to fluctuate to reflect market dynamics (Yusuf, 2023). This policy has led to price increase of various products in the country and is adversely affecting the people. Businesses were eventually affected as this policy led to rise in the prices of goods and services across the country. It has to be noted that the price of fuel is still on continuous rise even to the tune of N670.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method. The population of this study was made up of civil servants working for Anambra State. The study focused on civil servants working in Ministries at the State's secretariat. The total population is 3162 (Source: Office of the Head of Service of the State). The ministries are Information, Health, Housing and Urban Development, Judiciary, Education and Science and Technology. Since this is an exploratory study, the researcher randomly selected 72 civil servants from the six State's Ministries. The selection was based on the researcher's discretion and convenience. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the 72 civil servants who agreed to be part of the study. This figure was then used as the sample size. Six (6) FGD sessions were held altogether, one each for the six (6) ministries that were randomly selected from the State ministries. Only those who saw the "Let the Poor Breathe" videos circulated on social media which showed President Tinubu making the comment during his inauguration in Abuja were selected for the study. The FGD sessions lasted for an average of 50 minutes per session with a distribution of 12 participants in each session. The FGD sessions took place between the hours of 12noon and 4pm on week days within the period of research. The choice of timing was so designed to fit into the break periods of the workers and the time they said they could take excuse from their offices to be part of the study. An interview question guide was used for the study.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Research Question One: What is the frequency of exposure to Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" video on social media by**

### **respondents in Awka?**

During this session, all the respondents agreed that they watched the video very often on their social media platforms. They also said that they shared the video to friends on social media. According to Madam Chinwe, one of the participants from Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, “I watched the video several times because I found it very funny. Just that I started feeling that Tinubu was not sincere with the comment when he removed subsidy and things got worse.” Her position was corroborated by other participants in the various FGD sessions who said they were frequently exposed to the video on Let the Poor Breathe’ which was said by President Tinubu. Majority of the participants said they were exposed to the video frequently as several friends shared the video on social media where you could see it more than once.

### **Research Question Two: What is the source of exposure to Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” video by respondents in Awka?**

Most of the participants, during this session, said they mostly saw Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” video on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp platforms. These were the top three platforms through which the participants saw the video. Very few mentioned TikTok as the platform they first saw the video. According to Nnamdi, one of the participants from Ministry of Information, “I saw it several times on Facebook. A lot of my friends on Facebook posted it on their walls.” Another participant, Grace from the Ministry of Education said she saw it on Twitter and a lot of her friends watched it on Twitter with her. She said, “I saw it on Twitter and my friends watched it with me on Twitter. At a point that video was trending on Twitter”. Many other participants said they saw it on WhatsApp and shared it to friends on WhatsApp. From the discussions it was clear that most participants saw the video of Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” comment on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.

### **Research question three: What is the respondents’ perception of Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” comment?**

Most of the participants saw it as a mockery of the poor in Nigeria. Though some of them said initially they thought Tinubu was being sincere with the comment, but immediately he announced the removal of subsidy and the effects started biting hard on the country they knew he was not sincere about letting the poor breathe. One participant identified as Alex, with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, said, “I had always known that he was not serious with the comment because of his antecedents as a politician who made promises in the past, especially

during his party's campaign for ex-president Buhari's election, but they never fulfilled their promises. So I knew he was joking; in fact, he was mocking the poor". Another participant from the Ministry of Education said, "How could anyone have believed what Tinubu said about the poor? Well, you can see for yourself that it was an insincere comment". Other participants corroborated this view by saying that Tinubu's comment was insincere and the usual rhetoric of politicians.

**Research question four: What is the respondents' perception of Tinubu's economic policies in relation to his 'Let the Poor Breathe' comment?**

During this session, participants said that they were not confident about the seriousness of President Tinubu as regards his economic policies, especially fuel subsidy removal and floating of the Naira which had led to untold hardship on Nigerians. There was a consensus among participants on a negative perception of Tinubu's economic policies, especially as it has to do with his sincerity of purpose. They said that a man who removed subsidy and floated the naira without first putting in place measures to address the hardship is not really serious about letting the poor breathe, as he said in the viral video. One of the participants from the Ministry of Justice, Emmanuel, said, "I don't believe he is serious about letting the poor breathe. His economic policies do not show that he has the poor at heart." Another participant from the Ministry of Science and Technology, Madam Ifunanya said, "His policies are against the people. It does not show he has any feeling for what the people are suffering. His policies do not show he has the interest to let the poor breathe." Other participants corroborated the view that Tinubu's economic policies are not favourable to Nigerians and that he does not have the interest of the poor at heart, although very few participants also mentioned that it might be too early to condemn the president's economic policies as it was necessary to give him time to see whether the policies would yield positive results. In summary, the participants had a negative perception of President Tinubu's economic policies, especially in relation to his "Let the Poor Breathe" comment.

**Discussion of Findings**

The first research objective which is to ascertain the frequency of exposure to Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" video on social media by respondents in Awka. Data revealed that respondents were well exposed to Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" video on social media. Most of the respondents watched the video very often. From the findings, it could be seen that most of the respondents watched or heard the messages very often. This agrees with the findings of Shadrack & Apuke (2020) which states that the mass

media are the primary sources of information for voters, enabling them to monitor politicians and to use this information in their voting decisions. The study also agrees with studies that suggest that social media are one of the major sources of information on politics for users (Duru, 2019; Aslan, et al., 2021, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2021; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeaso, 2023). After a study, Aslan, et al. (2021) observed that social networking is used for effectively and efficiently interacting with the electorate, especially during election processes, through campaign activities.

The second research objective is to ascertain the source of exposure to Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" video by respondents in Awka. The result showed that most of the participants saw the video on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. These are the three social media platforms which came tops as the platforms that the participants exposed themselves to "Let the Poor Breathe" video by Tinubu. This finding also supports the assertion by Ahad & Lim (2014) that there is anecdotal evidence of social media platforms such as WhatsApp playing a central role in civic as well as political engagement. Similarly, Shadrach (2017) says that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are gaining popularity among citizens because they pass information freely without control of government, powerful politicians and advertisers as well as free of conventional professional bottlenecks like gate-keeping. Popular platforms, according to Ahad & Lim (2014), are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp, in that order. WhatsApp users, for instance, get news outside the domain of family and friends and from a variety of topics, which enables them to meet their different information needs (Ahmadi, & Wohn, 2018). Some studies have demonstrated how the sense of collective or social identity motivate the use of WhatsApp and other instant messaging platforms for activism (Treré, 2018). Similarly, Obiakor (2022) discovered after a study that Twitter platform is more preferred and enjoyed by the users than the WhatsApp platform especially for exposure to security information; the study concluded that more people get exposed to such information basically through the new media platforms than through the traditional media.

The third research objective seeks to ascertain the respondents' perception of Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment. Result shows that many participants had a negative perception of the comment as they saw it as a mockery of the poor and an insincere comment from Tinubu who has a political background that is not credible. This is supported by studies which established that the media's coverage on politics influences people's political attitudes, and this includes university students (Hamad, Ichtat & Zulham, 2001). Similarly, Kraus & Davis (1978) had found that the media



played a significant role in shaping the political attitude of voters. McNair (1995) also shows that the media do mould the audience's political knowledge and attitudes. This also supports the perception theory which says the audiences engage in selective exposure, interpretation and retention of information they are exposed to in the media (Folarin, 1998; Baran, 2002). The participants in this study were exposed to the Tinubu's video on "Let the Poor Breathe" and interpreted it based on their experiences.

The fourth research objective sought to discover the respondents' perception of Tinubu's economic policies in relation to his "Let the Poor Breathe" comment. This result showed a negative perception of his economic policies which the participants said did not show that he was sincere about his comment that the poor should breathe. This is supported by studies which establish that the media play significant role in the public perception of government policies (Green-Pedersen 2019; Grossman, 2022). As Agbanu (2013) pointed out, the media set the public agenda and act as the gatekeeper of public issues. The findings also support the reception theory which stipulates that audiences interpret information they are exposed to in the media according to existing trends in the society (Idakwo & Oloruntola, 2020). People who analyze the media using the reception theory pay attention to the experience of the audience members exposed to the media, including understanding how the experience shapes the meaning being created (Aminudin, 2018). In relation to this study, participants interpreted the "Let the Poor Breathe" comment of Tinubu in relation to his economic policies which are causing hardship to the poor he was referring to.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated the exposure to Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" viral video on social media and its influence on perception of his economic policies. The study focused on civil servants working for Anambra State government, especially those in the State secretariat located in Awka, the capital city. The researcher chose to focus on civil servants in Awka based on discretion and convenience. Four objectives were formulated for the study. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method was adopted for the study. Data revealed that participants were exposed to Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" viral video on social media. It was also found that respondents saw the video on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp more often than on other social media platforms. The participants had negative perception of Tinubu's "Let the Poor Breathe" comment as they saw it as a mockery of the poor and an insincere comment from the president. The participants also had a negative perception of Tinubu's economic policies

in relation to his comment on “Let the Poor Breathe”. These findings were analyzed showing how they supported the Reception and Perception theories, including their relationship to other researches done in this area of study.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Political office holders in Nigeria should stand true to their words and make sure their actions and policies are a reflection of the comments they make in the media as this affects public support for their policies.
2. Political office holders should utilize the social media 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.
3. 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.
4. The researcher recommends further studies in this area of study, especially in other States in the country to check the perception of the people in other states regarding Tinubu’s “Let the Poor Breathe” comment and its relationship to his economic policies.

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