

COOU POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF MR. PETER OBI'S 'OPPOSITION COMMENTS' AT THE WORLD PRESS CONFERENCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

Obiakor Casmir Uchenna, PhD

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, Anambra State, Nigeria

Email: cu.obiakor@coou.edu.ng, casfranklin@ymail.com, 08069833048.

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Abstract: In the dynamic landscape of Nigerian politics, public perception plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding key political figures. Press conferences are an avenue of addressing salient issues bothering the economy, social welfare, and political dimension of society. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate for the Labour Party in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, responded to comments and gave a speech at the world press conference held at Abuja after the ruling of the Apex court that declared the All-Progressives Congress (APC) victorious in that election. The LP's Mr. Peter Obi was heard saying, "We in the Labour Party, and the 'Obidient' Movements will remain in the opposition". The study therefore aimed to investigate the interpretations of Mr. Peter Obi's world press conference 'Opposition comments' by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) Postgraduate students, examine their perception and attitude regarding the comments, and determine the implications of the comments on Nigerian democracy. Anchored on uses and gratifications as well as perception theories, the study employed the focus group discussion method, with the purposive sampling technique to select 72 discussants from six groups from the population of the Postgraduate students of COOU in Igbariam campus. It was found that a greater majority of the discussants interpreted the comments in a reflective and positive light; and that the attitude of the discussants was steadfast in their struggle for the democratic progress and growth of the country. The study recommends that the media should avoid misrepresenting facts about individuals because the frames attached to people's comments influence audience understanding of the issue. Again, politicians of high value and acute reputation should like Mr. Peter Obi, speak up in times of political turbulence anywhere in the world.

Keywords: Perception, 'Opposition' comments, World press conference (WPC), Implication, COOU Postgraduate students, Democracy.

Introduction

Press conference refers to the gathering of media personnel or media industries championed by an agency, organization, firm, entity, or governmental bodies to discuss important issues as it concerns the affairs of the above-mentioned body with the media and the public. Thus, it provides an avenue for interaction with the media, who, in turn, relay the discussed agenda to the public. Most press conferences are broadcast live. It is an indispensable tool for gaining media attention, sometimes organized by campaigners or advocates, to present issues related to the campaign to the media and the public. According to Olariu and Bogdan (2015), press conference is a public relation tool used in business situations, except in breakthroughs and emergencies. It is used when the press release does not cover all issues or when it is necessary to counter the possibility of negative impressions being formed.

Mass media in Nigeria have historically contributed to the quest for democratic consolidation. Indeed, their contribution dates back to the colonial times with the introduction of newspapers like Herbert Macaulay's *Lagos Daily News* and Nnamdi Azikiwe's *West African Pilot*, and this trend continued well into the post-colonial era as Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief M. K. O Abiola founded *The Nigerian Tribune* and *The Nigerian Concord* respectively (Santas & Ogoshi, 2016). Thus, in the post-independence period, the mass media did not rest on their oars, as there was often a strong desire to continue to strengthen the democratic credentials of the nation. There has been a proliferation in the number of newspaper houses and private television and radio stations. These media outlets challenged the authoritarian military regimes of the 1980s and 90s, and some of them had their operations clamped as they formed a coalition with civil society organizations (CSO) to say 'No' to military dictatorships (Osaghae, 2002; Santas & Ogoshi, 2016).

The degree to which media independence is protected is a global indicator used to assess the degree of democratic practice in a nation. This is necessary because the media are believed to be one of the most important vehicles for teaching and enlightening the public about democratic institutions and governments. In addition, it is essential to note that the media fulfill both conventional and constitutional duties by acting as a watchdog for the three branches of government. This approach promises a better democratic practice defined by accountability, openness, probity, and responsiveness in government (Zainawa, 2018).

Noting that good communication brings about informative democracy for societal transformation, Omotoso (2015) noted that "the message and the media make up the two contexts of the argument that political power is embedded in the power to communicate. Hence, political communication becomes essential to democratic theory. Meanwhile, political communication is unfortunately a latecomer within the study of Africa's democratic discourse; therefore, Popoola (2017) argues that the late evolution of political communication is a sign of the State's hostility to political science in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The essence of political communication is that it gives rise to political development, even with the history of colonialism, Christian missionary society, socio-economic structure, ownership of newspapers, and other mass media of communications (Rahman, 1991). Political communication, according to Osagioduwa, *et al.* (2017), commands the contexts in relation to era, societal traits, geography, culture, race, system of government, behavior of leaders and the led, and opinion of communication scholars..."

Citizens can only understand government's aims, actions, and inactions regarding democratic processes and governance when they are adequately informed and educated. The media serve as a bridge between the governed and the government, and for information dissemination between the two groups. For instance, although the government communicates its choices, policies, and actions to the public through the media, the media also educate the authorities on the public's views and reactions to these decisions, policies, and acts (Ojo,

2005). Similarly, the media set the agenda for discussions on critical national problems, compile public viewpoints on those topics, and inform the relevant authorities of whether or not such issues have received support. Hence, investigative journalism is likely to expose scandals and scams, waste, corruption, inefficiency, antisocial behavior, and authorities' carelessness, especially in democratic systems (Sawanti, 2000).

The philosophy of democracy, which is based on representation, participation and rule of law is connected with the ability of persons to freely express their interests through available media of communication. The basic social values of society, including the rule of law, human rights, freedom, wealth creation, liberty, and equality, are expected to be promoted by the media. The media are also expected to make the government accountable to the people. In essence, the media are crucial in any democratic setting because they serve as the watchdog of society. This is why it is more dangerous for the media to lose their heads in unconscionable partizanship (Ogbodo, 2016).

The mass media are agents of political communication that play vital roles in the growth of democracy, and the enemy of democracy since political system and the communication system parallel one another (Roskin, *et al*, 2015). Media operators traditionally come to terms on which issues to report and how to handle the elements in those stories (Janda, Berry & Goldman, 2005). Mass media are central to the institutionalization and survival of democracy anywhere in the world because they serve as a vital link between the government and the governed. Hence, the history of the media strife for democratization and democratic practice is filled with stories of courageous journalists and social critics who may have chosen to be jailed so as to ensure democratic practice and good governance than accepting undemocratic and dictatorial governments. This patriotic position has contributed immensely to democratic practices and good governance in Nigeria. After the 2023 presidential election, involving Mr. Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Bola Tinubu of the All-Progressives Congress (APC), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), erroneously declared APC as the winner of the election. This declaration was contested by many parties that took part in the election, including the PDP and the LP. At the end of the court proceedings, it was still maintained that APC won the election.

At this point, Mr. Peter Obi of the LP anchored a World Press Conference that occurred on Monday, 6th November, 2023. During the Press Conference, Mr. Peter Obi maintained that he has noted that the APC demanded that all should join hands in the development of Nigeria. Mr. Peter Obi stated that he was not going to participate in the leadership process of the APC but that he would remain in opposition. How this statement was perceived by the audience, especially the postgraduate students of COOU, remains to be studied. It is against this backdrop that this study is set to evaluate the perception of the audience about the 'opposition' comments of Mr. Peter Obi and its implication to Nigeria's democracy.

Statement of the Problem

In the dynamic landscape of Nigerian politics, public perception plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding key political figures. Mr. Peter Obi, a prominent political figure, who contested the 2023 presidential election under the Labour Party (LP), known for his outstanding contributions to Nigerian governance, starting with his days as governor of Anambra State, recently made an 'opposition' comment at the world press conference in Abuja. The comments that were born by the World Press Conference (WPC) came because of Peter Obi's non-acceptance of the 2023 presidential result as declared by the INEC and ratified by the Supreme Court. These comments have the potential to influence public opinion, but little is known about how the comments are viewed or perceived within academic circles, particularly among postgraduate students

of COOU. The comments were regarded by some politicians and individuals as a derailed factor streaming from the ocean of failure to secure victory in the 2023 Presidential election. The diverse views of people about these comments, which are tagged in this study as “opposition comments” are essential advantages for the study to be carried out in an academic environment to, elicit the understanding and prominent perception of postgraduate students who are in the advanced level of education. The essence is to evaluate how the students perceive and interpret Mr. Peter Obi’s ‘opposition’ comments and, more critically, how these interpretations may impact their views on Nigerian democracy. This knowledge gap is substantial, given the influential role universities play as crucibles of intellectual discourse and their potential impact on shaping informed citizenry.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to establish respondents’ perception of the ‘opposition’ comments of Mr. Peter Obi at the world press conference and their implications for Nigerian democracy. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To determine respondents’ level of awareness of Mr. Peter Obi’s “opposition comments” at the world press conference.
- To investigate respondents’ interpretations of Mr. Peter Obi’s “opposition comments” at the world press conference.
- To examine respondents’ perceptions of Mr. Peter Obi’s “opposition comments” at the world press conference.
- To assess the attitude of COOU postgraduate students towards Mr. Peter Obi’s “opposition comments” at the world press conference.

The Significance of the Study

This study offers a nuanced understanding of how academics interpret political discourse, enriches academic discussion by showcasing diverse viewpoints within the educational environment, offers empirical insights into how political statements are received within academic circles, sheds light on the complex interplay between political figures’ statements and the perceptions of educated individuals, informs policymakers about the diversity of perspectives within academia regarding political discourse, contributes to fostering stability in Nigeria’s democratic framework, empowers students with a deeper understanding of political discourse and in turn fosters informed citizenry, and consequently, lays the groundwork for further studies exploring the role of academic environments in shaping political perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The theory was proposed by Blumler and Katz in the 70s. It posits that media users play an active role in the desire to use the media. They take an active part in the communication process and are goal-oriented in their use of the media. Wimmer and Dominick (2015) asserted that the uses and gratifications theory takes the view of a media consumer. It examines how people use the media and the gratifications they seek and derive from their media behaviors. The theory explains that users are not passive recipients of the effects of media but, active members of their partnership with technology, who intentionally seek out the effects that follow from media consumption.

The uses and gratifications theory has since been used to explain various diverse phenomena in human-media interactions. Papachariss (2002) documented avoiding face-to-face encounters. Leung (2013) used uses and gratifications theory to identify the reasons why caller ID increases cell phone use and Magsamen-Conrad

(2015) explained the ways in which older adults' motivations for using tablets differ from those of young people. The uses and gratifications theory is a communication theory that emphasizes the active role of media audiences in selecting and consuming contents to fulfill their specific needs and desires (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, in Asemah, 2011). The theory identifies several gratifications sought through media consumption, including information, entertainment, personal identity, social interaction, and escapism (Ruggiero, 2000). It has to be noted that gratifications sought may not always be gratifications obtained (Obiakor & Nwabueze, 2019). In the contemporary media landscape, especially with the rise of social media platforms, this theory continues to be relevant as users actively curate their contents and seek gratifications through personalized interactions (Murschetz *et al.*, 2019). For example, users turn to social media to stay informed about current events (Hobbs & Frost, 2003) or seek entertainment through video sharing platforms (Duffy *et al.*, 2021).

Social media platforms offer users the opportunity to shape and express their identities through content creation and curation (Seidman, 2013). Users seek social validation and feedback from their peers, contributing to their self-esteem and sense of belonging (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2021). The Uses and Gratifications Theory challenges the traditional notion of passive audiences and acknowledges that individuals actively select and interpret media content (Katz *et al.*, 1974). The theory helps us understand why people engage in such behaviors seeking various gratifications across different media platforms. The theory highlights that media can act as a coping mechanism during stressful times (Bartsch, 2019). Hence, in relation to this study, the theory becomes imperative in that this study can provide insights into how readers use and interact with media content, particularly, Mr. Peter Obi's 'opposition' comments at the WPC, and how their needs and gratifications influence their perception of political news coverage.

Perception Theory

Perception Theory was propounded by B. Berelson and G. A. Steiner in 1964. The theory assumes that mass communicators want audiences to pay attention to their messages, learn the contents of the messages, and make appropriate attitude or changes or even produce the desired behavioral responses. The theory states that the process of interpreting messages is a long and complex task which makes the goal of communicators not easily achievable. Berelson and Steiner (1964) in Anaeto *et al.* (2008) stated that "perception is the complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world".

Perception theory, also known as Selective Perception suggests that individuals selectively perceive information based on their existing attitudes, beliefs, and values (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955). This theory proposes that people tend to seek out information that confirms their preexisting beliefs and attitudes and ignore or discount information that contradicts them (Festinger, 1957). 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; Agbanu, 2013; Nwabueze, 2014; Obiakor & Nwabueze, 2019). The theory also suggests that individuals have limited capacity for processing information and therefore tend to selectively perceive and interpret information based on their existing cognitive frameworks (Miller, 1956). This limited capacity can lead to a simplification of complex information and a focus on information that is most consistent with existing beliefs and attitudes (Tversky & Kahneman, 1979). This theory is relevant to the study because it reveals how the postgraduate students of COOU perceive Mr. Peter Obi's 'opposition' comments at the WPC. Hence, this study

can provide insights into how media coverage influences public perceptions and attitudes and how individuals process and interpret information.

The Review

The Media, Democracy, and the Political Landscape in Nigeria

Democracy, either as a concept or a system of rule, has become excessively ambiguous in contemporary political analysis. This is because different people assign different meanings to the concept; and different countries practice the same concept differently, including Nigeria. In Nigeria, the main reason for military coups is generally considered to be widespread discontentment with the political and economic policies of the ousted regime. The usual claim is that democracy has been stifled, assaulted, brutalized and malnourished, while the economy has been recklessly mishandled to the detriment of the masses and to the selfish advantage of the small elite – the representatives of the people. Yet, government by all is neither possible nor practicable because, as Beasley (1999) pointed out, with vast numbers of people in the modern nation-state, direct participation in decision making by all is impossible.

Ironically, democracy flourishes when and where citizens enjoy basic freedoms, have a voice in how they are governed, and understand the workings of their governmental system. There is no world where democracy is a republic of equals. Thus, socioeconomic and political inequalities are prominent and permanent features of democracy, particularly in Nigeria, where democracy has increased the gap between politicians and electorates. Since democracy is said to be the government of the people by the people and for the people, it is therefore generally assumed that democracy is the most suitable form of government, at least as far as the delivery of Ronald's 'political goods' is concerned. It is therefore generally taken for granted that the pursuit of the welfare of the generality of the people is the epicenter of democracy wherever it is practiced. While this may be so in some democracies, the reverse is the case in others; while democracy is similar to holistic development and aggregated growth in some regions, it is the representation of betrayal and inhuman deprivation in others. Nigeria probably personifies the latter.

In most parts of Nigeria, power supply is almost exactly zero, potable water is a scarce commodity, healthcare facilities are either entirely nonexistent or in complete shambles, and hundreds of people die in motor accidents annually owing to extremely poor road networks. The implication is that the welfare of the masses is never in the hearts of the representatives of the masses. Unfortunately, a weak and ignorant citizenry can hardly serve as a wand for deepening democracy.

Although Nigeria has produced nine written constitutions; it is yet to institutionalize democracy. This is because the problem is not with the makers or matters of the constitution, but the men who have the responsibility of operating the constitutions. To institutionalize democracy is to develop and strengthen the legal rational structures that would invariably strengthen and solidify democracy and the rule of law.

Dissecting Mr. Peter Obi's "Opposition" Comments at the World Press Conference

Peter Gregory Obi, the Presidential Candidate of the Labour Party, held a press conference on November 6, 2023, in Abuja, FCT. The conference addressed the Supreme Court's decision regarding the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. During this exercise, Mr. Obi declared that his party and the "Obidient Movements" would effectively operate as part of the opposition. Mr. Peter Obi greeted the assembly and welcomed them and made some remarks about the ruling of the Supreme Court, which is the highest court in Nigeria. He announced that given the fact that the judgment of the Supreme Court had been delivered as scheduled, the Leadership of the Labour Party (LP) had already pronounced its position on the said judgment.

Peter Obi disagreed with the decision of both the Presidential Election Petitions Court (PEPC) and the Supreme Court on the result of the 25th February, 2023 Presidential election as declared by the INEC. He stated that he is a democrat and believes in the rule of law, and recognizes that the Supreme Court is the end stage of the quest for legal closure to the matter. He said that Labour Party has actually exhausted all legal and constitutional remedies available to them even though it is the beginning of the quest for the vindication of the hope of the common man for a better Nigeria. Mr. Peter Obi maintained that being in the opposition entails that the Party will expand the confines of their message of hope to the rest of the country by visiting the people in the marketplaces, motor parks, town halls, board rooms, universities, and college campuses to deliver the message of a new Nigeria, which is embedded in their manifesto.

The LP's 2023 presidential election candidate hinted that there was a need for strong political opposition because of the policies and the governance modalities that the Labour Party campaigned for, which were basically reducing the cost of governance, moving the nation from consumption to production, reducing inflation, ending insecurity, etc. Peter Obi concluded the following: "On a personal note, I take personal pride and express gratitude to those who share our vision; and who have also exhibited rare courage to challenge the nefarious system, the genuineness of individuals' identities and their defining and qualifying particulars up to the highest extent allowed by law..." He added that Nigeria has the hope of infinite possibilities for a new Nigeria built on character competence, capacity, compassion, integrity, and respect for the rule of law based on justice and fairness.

Political comments are essential attributes that build political spheres help highlight certain issues, events, and occurrence that ordinary citizens may not be able to understand. Morah and Uzochukwu (2020) asserted that citizens of every country have not only the potential but also the right to express their ideas and opinions worldwide through the media. Raji (2022) believed that Peter Obi's engagement on social media was a force to be reckoned with as he dominated the social media space. The comments of Peter Obi at the world press conference rapidly changed the narrative and trajectory of the Nigerian State. He applied courtesy, dignity, political strategy, as well as rational reasoning to the body of knowledge he attached to the delivery of his speech in line to boost the morale of the people and to keep their faith high. The way his presidential race changed the political space and changed the attitude of the youth toward political participation, so did his comments, which helped them to build their courage to envision a better future of proper democracy. The 'opposition' comments of Mr. Peter Obi at the world press conference were really defined, intellectually structured to capture the whole events of the presidential election, the petitions, and the Supreme Court, whereas not accepting defect but bowing to the declaration of the Supreme Court to allow peace be the order of the day. The buildup of the comments is a status that is well defined. According to Ebunuude, Ekharefo, and Asemah (2023), Peter Obi introduced a politics of standard, integrity, credibility, and intellectuality into the Nigerian political arena, which can erase the political trajectory of the country and lead to a shift from the old political itinerary of money bags, mediocrity, tribal, ethnic, and religion-focused politics. They further aptly asserted that embracing Mr. Peter Obi's brand of politicking is a step toward a new direction that has the capacity to usher Nigeria into an era of issue-based politics, result-oriented, and character-driven politicking where citizens can enjoy the best of governance and never settle for anything or anyone less than the best.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the focus group discussion method. A focus group is a research method that brings together a small group of people for discussion in a moderated setting. It brings individuals from the study's population

together in a specific setting to discuss an issue as a group. According to Nyunba, Wilson, Derrick, and Mukherjee (2018), the method's popularity is closely linked to the rise of participatory research. The study is limited to PG students of COOU, Igbariam Campus, whose population is 601. Nwodu (2017) asserted that a sample is part of the entire population that is selected for investigation. The purposive sampling technique was employed using 72 selected PG students of COOU who knew about Mr. Peter Obi's comments at the WPC, and the above figure was used as the sample size. Six (6) FGD sessions were held at a particular spot near the school of PG studies at Igbariam campus. The FGDs lasted for an average of 40 minutes per session, with a distribution of 12 participants each, and were conducted at free hours of the PG students when they could comply with the sessions. An interview guide was used to collect data during the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data are presented in accordance with the research objectives.

Research objective one: To determine respondents' level of awareness of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference, a discussant in group one, Mr. Chibueze, said:

"I streamed Mr. Peter Obi's world press conference gathering live on Facebook, the comments he made which I can't readily say it's an opposition comment, is a comment which was more in connection to the supreme court judgment and its place in this stage of our Nigerian democracy..."

This shows the level of knowledge and awareness of Mr. Peter Obi's comments at the WPC held in Abuja. Again, Mr. Kenneth in group three said:

"I could see the world press conference because of its videos shared with me by my friend on WhatsApp. I could know that it was Mr. Peter Obi who was speaking because he was a prominent figure. The main idea of the message is to portray his grievance over the failure of the Supreme Court to uphold the rule of law."

This section explains the nature and rate at which the discussants are knowledgeable of Mr. Peter Obi's comments at the WPC in Abuja, as Mrs. Chika in group four, said:

"You will find out that the video clips of Mr. Peter Obi's comment at the WPC, which some might regard as opposition comments or reaction, has become viral sensation blowing the internet space and making the "Obidient" movements believe and accept the ideology of their role model and leader, Mr. Obi."

The above demonstrates the extent of knowledge/awareness of the 'opposition' comments of Mr. Peter Obi at the world press conference. A greater majority of the discussants agreed that the message at the WPC went viral and was exposed to by almost all of them.

Research objective two: Investigating respondents' interpretations of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference, the opinions of the discussants differed in many respects; while some interpreted the comments as opposition-related, others flagged it as an audacious comment with the intent to improve the face of democracy in the nation. It brings about true democracy and portrays the example of a potential leader with an ambience of ideas that will improve the faith of the masses whose dreams of a good Nigeria were robbed from them in the daylight.

Hence, Mr. Michael in group two shared his thoughts:

"Yes, from all indications, the comments of Mr. Peter Obi at the world press conference spurred out of the defect he suffered both at the polls and also at the different judicial proceedings (Appeal and Supreme Court). I feel he is really embittered that the opposition secured the win, not minding his party securing a superb number of votes in various States, including the Federal Capital Territory. Therefore, I aver that this comment is an

opposition comment with reaction or retention of intent”; though there is truth in some of his statements, I feel he’s just disappointed in the whole processes.

Miss Ada in the same group expressed the following reaction:

“Mr. Peter Obi’s comment is highly opposition-related; the ingredients of the word that birthed it sprang from the iota of individual perception and personal ideology. Thus, his comment does not necessarily speak for the general population but, it is a sure call that the democratic system in Nigeria needs purging; APC would do the same if they lost the election”.

However, Sir Peter in group five had a very different interpretation to the comments of Mr. Peter Obi at the World Press Conference:

“Mr. Peter Obi highlighted the sickening aspect of the Nigerian democracy and failure of the INEC to fulfill their promises to Nigerians with regards to electronic transmission of election results as well as the failure on the part of the judiciary for using technicalities and allowing bribery to steal the people’s mandate from them. The 2023 presidential election, which ushered in a new phase of youth leadership into the Nigerian political system and the pursuit for a credible democracy, will go down the history as posterity will never forget the fight for change in the usual Nigerian system of “It’s my turn”.

The above shows that the majority of the discussants aligned themselves with the opinion of Sir Peter which shows that their aggregate interpretation is that all hope is not lost.

Research objective three: examining the respondents’ perception of Mr. Peter Obi’s “opposition comments” at the world press conference and its implications to Nigerian democracy, some of the discussants believed that the ‘opposition’ comment is an awakening bell to Nigerian democracy, bidding farewell to the dead part of the old and welcoming the new change; the comment clarified Nigerians on a lot of abnormalities that have taken place in the past and the quest to correct all these faults will be the clamor of the greater population of Nigerians, mostly the youth in the future elections.

Consequently, Mr. Okafor in group six had to say the following:

“I believe that Mr. Peter’s Obi’s ‘opposition’ comments did not just handle the defect he suffered, it also buttressed the pain, agony and sorrows of the poorest of the poorest Nigerians who placed their hope on a peaceful democracy, which they were not able to achieve. It highlighted the bare minimum of the deficiency in the political and judicial systems of Nigeria in as much as the fact that most political analysts and opportunists who still party in favoritism will not agree to this defected justice; I understand that this ‘opposition’ comment is a thorn in the flesh of our weeping democracy”.

The above represents the perception of a greater percentage of respondents who harbor their grief but still maintain objective claims to the acclaimed implication of Mr. Peter Obi on the democratic development in Nigeria; Ebele in group 3 rightly commented:

“As a woman, I saw great deal of belief in Nigerian youths who ascribed the mandate of the people as the ultimate ideology and the vision of a good leader with immense potential which will save the economy and state of the Nigerian people”.

Research objective four: assessing the attitude (change) of COOU postgraduate students regarding Mr. Peter Obi’s “opposition comments” at the world press conference; the discussants projected their hopeful resolutions about the comments and how it will build the future of democracy and keep the country in a promising light. Okolo from group four said:

“My attitude toward this comment is positive because I believe that this ‘opposition’ comment has a strong foundation to boost the strength and energy of voters to come out again en-masse to vote in future elections because of the integrity of Mr. Peter Obi. Though most people will say that the people’s mandate was taken away from them, I still believe that the mandate can be recovered in the future to build our young democracy that is still taking shape”.

Consequently, most of the discussants believed in the zeal and impact on democracy by this comment of Mr. Peter Obi; thus, their aggregate attitude was tilted toward the direction of hope and belief in the state in which democracy is forming. All agreed that their attitudes and perceptions changed because of the speech, which provided them with a greater hope for a greater future and improved democracy guided by an honest judiciary. Again, Mr. Eze in group two added that democracy would definitely take a new shape in Nigeria, with the political system, facilitators, and actors practically driving a new force of a renowned method of politicking to build the nation in a way that will have the people inclusive in their political decisions. Invariably, the supposed ‘opposition’ comments of Mr. Peter Obi have succeeded in changing the attitude of the respondents generally in a way that their belief in better democracy is prompted and promoted.

Discussion of Findings

This study set out to determine COOU postgraduate students’ perceptions of Mr. Peter Obi’s “Opposition Comments” at the world press conference and their implications for Nigerian democracy. Determining the level of awareness of comments under review, it was found that a great percentage of the respondents were well aware of Mr. Peter Obi’s ‘opposition’ comments because he was a political sensation everyone followed up till date. One of the respondents pointed out that “Obidient Movement” provided platform for inclusive and participatory political activities; thus, “we were following up the Labour Party’s presidential flag bearer because of the belief we have in him; I do not see anything opposition in his speech, it is a clear speech of truth”. This agrees with Nwaoboli and Asemah (2021) who found in a study that the media prompt people to consider issues, situations, and events that are prominent in their minds. It must be noted that the “opposition comments” of Mr. Peter Obi went agog on the internet. Thus, it gave more people the opportunity to learn about the comments and the reasons for such comments. This 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).

Investigating the interpretation of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference, while some of the respondents interpreted the comment in a negative light, as an intentional or deliberate act to cause discord and havoc to the current government, inciting the youth for violence..., greater majority of the respondents interpreted the comments in a positive light as a standing light that will help propagate the birth of new democracy. The summary of the respondents' interpretations of Mr. Peter Obi's 'opposition' comments at the world press conference was in affirmative. The fact that different respondents have different interpretations of the comment under study is the ideal position of perception theory, that is, people interpret ideas based on their perception and past experiences (Gibson, 1966; Gregory, 1970).

On the respondents' perception of Mr. Peter Obi's 'opposition' comments at the world press conference, it was discovered that the majority of the respondents believed that the comment was curled to aptly change the facets of Nigerian democracy, build a new political system, and change politicking in general. It is believed that the comment has a great influence as it propels the youth to be fully active in the process of selecting their leaders, not because of the money bag, fake promises, bribes, or ethnicity, but as a result of their integrity, intellectual ability, and political strategy. The aggregate perception of respondents about the "opposition comments" of LP's Mr. Peter Obi is positive. This positivity stems from the fact that most respondents perceive the comment as being able to create new energy in the hearts of well-meaning Nigerians. This finding is in line with the findings of Obiakor, Adikuru and Agbakaj (2022), whose research investigated the perception of digital broadcasting network in the 2021 Anambra guber election debate and found that the audience perception of the new technology is positive. This positive perception of the audience demonstrates that good things are worthy of praise, especially ones that lift the faith of the citizenry for a better Nigeria in the future.

However, the finding negates the result from the study of Obiakor, Ikegbumam and Ezeumenwa (2024), who after a study on Governor Soludo's "There will be consequence" threat, found that the people of Anambra State had a negative perception of the comment because the respondents felt that the Governor should have used conviction rather than threats to get the votes of the people during the House of Assembly election in the State. It is also not in line with the finding of Obiakor and Adikuru (2024) that Tinubu's "Let the poor breathe" comment was negatively perceived because it was meant to mock the people of Nigeria. Again, this finding on audience perception is not in consonance with the finding of Obiakor, Okelue, and Okeke (2024) in a study about Tinubu's petition letter to NBC against Datti's 'End of democracy' comment. The respondents in that study feel that NBC takes a position with the ruling party in the country, which should not be so.

In assessing the attitude (change) of the respondents toward Mr. Peter Obi's "Opposition Comments" at the world press conference, their attitude was found to be steadfast, as there is a shift in political discourse and democratic principle as well as the way they perceive the government in power as a manipulation entity but also a struggle in progress for future democratic salvation. It was discovered that the 'opposition' comments of Mr. Peter Obi rather boosted the respondents' zeal for future support of the "obedient movement" in the coming 2027 election because of his vision. The implication is that many Nigerians lacked political will at the end of the Supreme Court verdict that confirmed the INEC's declaration that the 2023 presidential election was won by the APC's Bola Tinubu. Most of them saw the verdict as a noonday robbery of the country's democracy. However, with the "opposition comments" of the LP's Mr. Peter Obi, there was a resurrection of the faith of many Nigerians, and hope remained for Nigeria. This is the true position of the uses and gratifications theory

(Blumler, Katz & Gurevitch, 1974) that the audience may use media content to satisfy their needs. In this case, the world press conference of Mr. Peter Obi was a resurrection statement for the Nigerians who had lost hope in the workability of the country.

Summary

This study examined COOU postgraduate students' perceptions of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference and its implication to Nigerian democracy. It made use of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus as its area of study and focused on postgraduate students of the institution who were aware and knowledgeable of Mr. Peter Obi's comments at the world press conference held in Abuja. The study was based on perception and uses and gratification theories.

The FGD method of research was employed, purposively selecting 72 participants from the 601-population figure of postgraduate students of COOU at Igbariam Campus. The discussants were divided into six groups of 12 participants in each group for the focus groups. An interview guide was developed to help the researcher conduct the discussion. Data presentation and analysis were thematically performed and it was found that a greater percentage of the discussants are well aware of the comments of Mr. Peter Obi at the world press conference. It was observed that a greater majority of the discussants interpreted the comments in a positive way, negating the opposition claim content of the comments; this positive interpretation influenced their positive perception of the comments. It was then concluded that there is an attitude change prompted by Mr. Peter Obi's comments, and this will promote the future of democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

With the comments of Mr. Peter Obi on the events that transpired in Nigeria during the 2023 presidential election and the Supreme Court judgment, this study concludes that the different comments by Mr. Peter Obi at the world press conference are outstanding in the spirit of true democracy; they encapsulated the different ways in which the democratic system in Nigeria can be improved. It noted that the comment at the World Press Conference was a paradigm shift from a subsidiary to a functional aspect of politicking and an ideological background. The integrity at which the disposition of the comments made bare the issues that needed to be addressed in the young democracy of Nigeria. These comments highlighted the loopholes in the facets of the political domain and further created an avenue of hope in the minds and hearts of the citizenry who believe in the exclusive plans of the young generation to take up the full mantle of leadership in Nigeria.

Hence, there is a high level of awareness of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference; there is an aggregate positive interpretation of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference; there is also an aggregate positive perception of Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference; and there is a positive attitude change from Mr. Peter Obi's "opposition comments" at the world press conference, that there is still hope for Nigeria and that 2027 will be a good future for the country.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Individuals and other political facilitators should pay attention to the main issues in the political space rather than chasing air in the name of politics; issue-based and character-worthy politics should be employed to facilitate good governance.

- Electoral and judicial bodies should always follow the rules, laws and regulations guiding the process of elections and also adhere strictly to them so as not to cause confusion, disorderliness and lack of discipline, which may lead to comments of this nature in the political future of the country.
- The court of law should avoid technicalities in political cases; rather, facts, rules, and laws should be followed for the benefit of the public.
- The media on their own part should also avoid misrepresentation and misinterpretation of individuals' comments, mostly public figures in their analysis and writings because the frames assigned to such comments influence the public's understanding, as it is believed that the media set agenda.
- Further studies should explore the press coverage of the comments by Mr. Peter Obi to determine the framing of the issue under discussion.

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