



**Online news commenting platforms as space for democratic
deliberation: A study of selected Nigerian online news websites**

**Adeyanju Apejoye
School of Arts and Media
University of Salford
Greater Manchester
United Kingdom**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of Requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, June 2020**

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the almighty God for his mercy and unmerited favour in my life and making it possible for me to complete the PhD degree. At a point in the journey, I sustained an injury that slowed down the pace of my work for months, but God in his mercy saw me through.

My most profound appreciation goes to my principal supervisor, Professor Seamus Simpson, without whom the thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for your understanding, advice and painstakingly reading through the thesis. I also want to appreciate my co-supervisor, Dr Steven Ward, for his advice, especially at the early stage of the thesis, and for the journal articles and books, he lent to me. I also appreciate other academics in the university who during my internal assessment and internal evaluation presentations had access to my research and offered useful suggestions on the thesis. These include Dr Marek Bekerman, Dr Sharon Coen and Dr Carole O' Reilly.

I also appreciate Professor Gwen Bouvier, who read some part of the thesis at its earlier stage and gave critical and useful suggestions.

I remain forever grateful to my lovely wife, Mrs Juliet Apejoye and my children, Korede and Femi for their understanding, love and prayers. There are times I remained in one of the rooms at home for hours reading without interacting with them. Sometimes, I spent hours in the library, and by the time I was back, you had all gone to bed. Thank you once again for your love and support.

To my siblings, thank you for your prayers and support.

I want to thank the former Vice-Chancellor of Plateau State University, Professor Doknan D. Sheni, without whose kind and sincere approval, I would not have been in the University of Salford for PhD study. May the good Lord bless you.

To my mentor and friend, Professor David Jowitt, I say a big thank you. You have been a pillar of support from the day I met you as an undergraduate at Bayero University. Thank you very much, sir and may the almighty God bless you.

I am thankful to Mr Tunde Akolo, Plateau State University and Mr and Mrs Alafiatayo. I am grateful to Pastor Emmanuel Olatoye of Calvary Hephzibah Full Gospel Church, Manchester for making my

settling down to commence my study in 2016 a smooth one. I remain grateful, sir, forever. I also thank Idika for his assistance.

I wish to acknowledge Dr Godfrey Dannan, Dr Andrew Dewan Danjuma, Dr Taiye Obateru, Mrs Vashti Gbolagun, Mr Gilbert Yalmi, Mrs Oghomwen for access to your library, Mr Kayode Obe (Uncle Kay), for your hospitality each time I visited London. I also thank Mr Mutiu Oyedele and his family, Mr Taiwo and Mrs Kemi A. Taiwo, for your support.

During the period of my study, I lost three people who were very close to me and contributed in one way or another to the successful completion of the degree. An uncle, the late Mr Omotola Abidemi, your unceasing prayers each time we talked was reassuring. May your soul rest in peace. To Kayode Ogunwuyi and Lukman Mustapha, you were both my students at a point but became my friends and confidants. May your souls rest in peace.

Finally, I dedicate the thesis to the memories of my parents, Chief Clement and Mrs Victoria Apejoye.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of tables.....	x
List of figures	xi
Abstract.....	xiii
Chapter One	1
1.1 Introduction to the study	1
1.2 Rationale for the research.....	2
1.3 Research Questions.....	6
1.4 Aim of the study	6
1.5 Objectives of the study.....	6
1.6 Operational Definition of Terms	7
1.6.1 Mainstream media.....	7
1.6.2 Online news media.....	7
1.6.3 Online deliberation.....	7
1.7 Contributions to Knowledge	7
1.8 Thesis overview.....	8
Chapter Two.....	10
Nigeria and its Media System	10
2.1 Chapter overview.....	10
2.2 Brief history of Nigeria	10
2.3 The Nigerian Media System.....	13
2.4 Nigerian Diasporic media.....	19
2.5 The political economy of Nigeria and the media.....	23
2.6 Conclusion.....	25
Chapter Three.....	27

Assessing the Internet as a Platform for Promoting Deliberative Democracy	27
3.1. Chapter Overview.....	27
3.2. The Internet as a discursive sphere	27
3.3 Internet Usage in Nigeria	36
3.4 The concept of democracy	39
3.5 The practice of deliberation.....	46
3.6 Online deliberation	53
3.7 Conclusion.....	55
Chapter Four	56
Exploring the Online Newspaper Comment Section as a space for participatory and civil discourse	56
4.1 Chapter overview.....	56
4.2 Online news commenting.....	56
4.3 Polarisation in online news commenting	65
4.4 Moderation in online news commenting.....	68
4.5 Conclusion.....	70
Chapter Five.....	71
Theoretical Framework applied for the Research	71
5.1 Chapter Overview	71
5.2 Theoretical perspective used in the study	71
5.3 Public Sphere Theory.....	73
5.4 Public sphere in Nigeria.....	84
5.5 Critical Political Economy Theory	87
5.6 Conclusion.....	94
Chapter Six	95
Methodological Approach to the study.....	95
6.1 Chapter Overview	95
6.2 Research design map for the study	96

6.3 Research Paradigm and Philosophy.....	96
6.4 Research Strategy	101
6.5 Mixed method design for the study	102
6.5.1 Content Analysis Method.....	106
6.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview.....	109
6.5.3 Survey method.....	110
6.6 Sampling techniques and sample size used in the study	111
6.6.1 Sampling technique and sample size for the content analysis method.....	111
6.6.1.1 Background information on the topics used as stimuli for content analysis data collection...	112
6.6.1.2 Criteria for selecting the newspapers sampled for the content analysis conducted.....	114
6.6.1.3 Short profile of selected online media	114
6.6.2 Sample Technique and sample size for the semi-structured interview.....	117
6.6.3 Sampling technique and sample size for the survey.....	118
6.7 Method of Data Collection and Analysis	119
6.7.1 Method of data collection for content analysis	119
6.7.2 Method of data collection for the semi-structured interview	122
6.7.3 Method of data collection for the survey method	124
6.7.4 Methodological Triangulation	125
6.8 Ethical consideration for the study	127
6.9 Methodological Reflexivity.....	128
6.10 Conclusion.....	129
Chapter Seven	130
Presentation and Analysis of Data Collected for each of the Methods Used in the Study	130
7.1 Chapter overview.....	130
7.2 Presentation of Content Analysis data	130
7.2.1 Frequency distribution of online news headlines and comments sampled.....	131
7.2.2 Reasoning	132

7.2.3 Topic relevance.....	135
7.2.4 Inclusion.....	136
7.2.5 Discursive equality.....	137
7.2.6 Reciprocity	139
7.2.7 Reflexivity.....	141
7.2.8 Plurality	143
7.2.9 Flaming and non-flaming contents.....	146
7.2.1 Religion and ethnic dichotomy in comments.....	147
7.3 Conclusion.....	148
7.4 Presentation of the Semi-Structured Interview Data and analysis.....	149
7.5 Description of the Interview guide and its justification	150
7.6 Analysis	151
7.6.1 Perception of participants about online news platform comment section	152
7.6.1.1 Social engagement	153
7.6.1.2 A watchdog on the traditional news media.....	153
7.7 Research question 2: What motivates readers to post comments and participate in discussion within the commenting space of online news websites in Nigeria?	154
7.7.1 Theme 1: Expression of position on a public issue.....	154
7.7.2 Theme 2: Saliency of news story/ information	156
7.7.3 Theme 3: Impact	157
7.7.4 Theme 4: Trust in a news organisation.....	158
7.7.5 Theme 5: Anonymity	158
7.8 Research question 3: Do political economy factors influence online deliberation and the regulation of the commenting space by the news organisation?.....	159
7.8.1 Profit motive:.....	159
7.8.2 Ideological viewpoints	162
7.10 Conclusion.....	164
7.11 Presentation of Survey Data and Analysis	165

7.11.1 Structure of the Research Questionnaire	165
7.12 Analysis.....	166
7.13 Conclusion.....	185
Chapter Eight	187
Presentation and Explanation of Research Findings.....	187
8.1 Chapter Overview	187
8.2 Summary of key findings of the study	187
8.2.1 The comment section of the online newspapers in Nigeria, although it possesses some features of the public sphere is impoverished.....	188
8.2.2 Commenters are motivated to participate in online news commenting websites by the desire to express personal opinions and expert’s knowledge on public issues.....	194
8.2.3 Nigerian political-economic trajectories influence the online newspaper commenting space and conversation on it.....	196
8.2.4. Inequality of access to the online news commenting space in Nigeria	199
8.2.5 Majority of commenters in the online news websites read and post comments with smartphones in Nigeria.	200
8.3 Explanatory Framework.....	201
8.4 Conclusion.....	207
Chapter Nine	208
Conclusion: Understanding the online news commenting environment in Nigeria	208
9.1 Chapter overview.....	208
9.2 Research summary.....	208
9.3 Research contributions to Knowledge	211
9.4 Recommendations for improving online news commenting in Nigeria.....	213
9.5 Suggestion for future research.....	214
9.6 Conclusion.....	215
References.....	217
Appendix 1 Ethical Approval Letter	251
Appendix 2 Semi-Structured Interviewee Information Sheet	252

Appendix 3 Interview Guide.....	254
Appendix 4 Invitation Letter.....	256
Appendix 5 Survey questionnaire	257

List of tables

Table 3.1 Three models of democracy-----	42
Table 5.1 Explanatory frameworks of the theories applied in the study-----	93
Table 7.1a Total number of comments extracted on the President’s medical trips abroad-----	132
Table 7.1b Total number of comments extracted on herdsmen’s /farmers clash-----	132
Table 7.2a Rational and critical discussion on the President’s medical trips abroad-----	133
Table 7.2b Rational and critical discussion on Herdsmen /farmers clash-----	133
Table7.3a Topic relevance on President’s medical trips abroad-----	135
Table 7.3b Topic relevance on the herdsmen/farmers clash-----	136
Table 7.4a Discursive equality on the President’s medical trips abroad-----	138
Table 7.4b Discursive equality for herdsmen/farmers clash-----	138
Table 7.5a Reciprocity table on the President’s medical trip-----	139
Table 7.5b Reciprocity table on herdsmen/farmers clash-----	140
Table 7.6a Evidence of plurality in the comments on the President’s medical trips abroad-----	144
Table 7.6b evidence of plurality in the comments on herdsmen/farmers clash-----	144
Table 7.7 Profile of semi-structured interview participants-----	149-150

List of figures

Figure 4.4 Reputation metric from the sampled online news websites

Figure 6.1 Research design

Figure 6.2 Dewey model of enquiry

Figure 6.3 Creswell and Plano Mixed methods design

Figure 6.4 Procedural diagram of sequential exploratory design adopted for the research.

Figure 6.5 Historical traffic trend

Figure 6.6 Diagrammatic process of semi-structured interview and analysis

Figure 6.7 Triangulation process applied for the study.

Figure 7.1 Ethnic distribution of the sample population

Figure 7.2 Religion distribution of the sample population

Figure 7.3 Sex distribution of respondents

Figure 7.4 Age distribution of respondents

Figure 7.5 Occupation of respondents

Figure 7.6 Education level of respondents

Figure 7.7 Accessing news on the internet

Figure 7.8 Type of device used for accessing news on the internet

Figure 7.9 Readers reaction to and comments on the headlines/ news stories on the online news websites

Figure 7.10 Frequency at which readers post comments and participate in online deliberation

Figure 7.11 Reason(s) for participating in the online news commenting space and deliberation

Figure 7.12 Type of newsreaders comment and deliberate on in the comment section of online news websites

Figure 7.13 Whether commenters go through identification or registration process before posting comments or participation in online discussion

Figure 7.14 System of identification by commenters in the online news comments section

Figure 7.15 Reasons for the way commenters identify themselves in an online commenting platform

Figure 7.16 Frequency of readers' participation in discussion between the moderated commenting platform and unmoderated commenting news sections of online news websites

Figure 7.17 Reader's preference between moderated and non-moderation comments sections

Figure 7.18 Reasons(s) for readers' preference between reduced and non-moderated comment sections

Figure 7.19 Whether commenters have participated in any discourse on issues relating to public issues and the government

Figure 7.20 Issues commenters have commented on the most

Figure 7.21 Knowledge of whether the direction of discussion in the online news website has at any time influence government policies and decision

Figure 7.22 Whether online news media comment section can enhance and increase democratic participation and deliberation among the citizens

Figure 8.1 Nigerian online news commenting model

Abstract

News commenting has become part of the features of online news sites in Nigeria, providing space for readers to express their views on news content and to engage with other readers in discussion. Over time, these commenting sections have become a space for the exchange of acerbic and, beyond that, extreme comments. On the one hand, online news commenting is seen as one of the democratic features the internet offers as well as making the audience active within the chain of news production (Trygg, 2012a). On the other hand, it is a source of concern because it sometimes serves as a platform for offensive and uncivil behaviours among the audience (Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011). In Nigeria, the popularity of comments sections of online news media is rising as people now have access to news on the move through their smartphones. A core question arising from this is: does the online comments' space contribute to the development of a democratic sphere for rational and critical discourse among readers?

This thesis investigates online news readers' comments in Nigeria, and in the process considers the extent to which they constitute an online public sphere based on the initial definition provided by Habermas (1991). The study applied a mixed-method research approach combining qualitative and quantitative content analysis, semi-structured interviews and a survey. The content analysis analysed news headlines and comments from four selected online newspaper platforms. Semi-structured interviews engaged participants, who include journalists, politicians, and ordinary citizens who read news online and participate in online deliberation. The survey method adopted an online survey which elicited 228 respondents.

Conceptually, to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of news commenting as a space for democratic discussion, the research combines public sphere and critical political-economic theories as to its analytical framework. The thesis argues based on the evidence of data collected and analysed that an online public sphere exists in Nigeria. However, it is dysfunctional because deliberations within the sphere are not rational and critical of the subject of discourse, most of the time. The deliberative space is restricted as participation requires literacy and technological skills and resources, thereby excluding many Nigerians who are not literate in the use of the gadgets and are illiterate in the use of English- the language of interaction. A key finding of the research is that the production of texts and meaning and conversation around them within the deliberative area is conditioned by ethnic and religious sentiments and grounded in the news content provided by the news platforms already influenced by specific political and economic imperatives.

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction to the study

Today, the online news media websites and readers' participatory practises in the form of reaction to news through the posting of comments and participating in debates have become salient and subject of academic research. Unlike the pre-internet era when audience participation in the news chain in the form of feedback and interaction with other members of the audience is low; the online news sites enable real-time access to information and active participation of audiences along the chain of news production and consumption. As one of the critical features of the online news websites, the online comment section allows readers to express their feelings about issues and also serves as a means of assessing opinions on a public issue (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010; Manosevitch & Walker, 2009).

In Nigeria, most of the mainstream media organisations have embraced the phenomenon of online news publishing and now publish news content on their websites and are actively present in other internet-enabled platforms like the Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram. The migration into the online space enhances their information dissemination process, increase readers participation, interactivity and engagement with a news story. Recent findings from a study conducted by Statista (2016) report that accessing news online is steadily rising among the citizens in Nigeria.

With cheap smart mobile handsets and an internet connection, citizens in Nigeria now have access to news on the go and also a platform for them to engage with the news in a deliberative format. Equally, the internet and its platforms like Facebook, Twitter and other various online news sites have transformed the audience into prosumers. Within the context under discussion, the concept of prosumer implies that a person can produce and consume news content.

Also, the online media organisations view the comment feature of their websites as a way of engaging with the audience as increase number of traffic on news websites indicate that users engage more with their content (Ksiazek et al., 2016). Practically, the comment section of online news websites has become a space where citizens argue with each other on public issues. Sometimes, the debates degenerate into incivility and trolls. With this development, scholars have raised several questions bothering on the rationality, civility and the democratic values of the online discursive sphere (Boxell et al., 2017; Johannessen, 2013; Papacharissi, 2004; Pariser, 2011). Also, Nielsen (2014) expresses criticism of the quality and trustworthiness of debates in the online news commenting space.

Nevertheless, citizens and media practitioners have highlighted the democratic values of online news commenting (Coe et al., 2014; Raphaël Kies, 2010b; Ksiazek, 2016; Santana, 2016). Studies have also raised concerns over online deliberative space tendency to promote polarisation and hostility (Miloni et al., 2012; Papacharissi, 2002; Pariser, 2011; Sparks, 2010). Within the Nigerian context, research has also been conducted on the chaotic state of online news commenting space (Jibril & Targema, 2017). Besides, the need for research into online news websites as a public sphere becomes more critical because research has pointed to the democratic deliberative features of the online news environment and its propensity to facilitate a platform for rational discourse and feedback among citizens (Kies, 2010a; Santana, 2016).

Therefore, this study focusses on the online news commenting platform in Nigeria, examining the comments and debates that pass through the discursive space and how it reflects a public sphere for democratic deliberation. In the process of the study, the researcher planned to close gaps in knowledge identified from the reviewed literature. Also, the study will contribute to knowledge by providing new knowledge on online commenting and create an explanatory model for online news commenting in Nigeria. Also, findings from the study will provide suggestions and practical recommendations on how to improve the state of online news commenting in Nigeria.

1.2 Rationale for the research

The online news platforms and its comment sections have become grounds where citizens debate on public issues and sometimes reflect their various ideological positions during the discourse. Similarly, the internet and its features such as the online news platforms, and by extension, social media websites increase citizens' opportunity to participate in government by being able to deliberate freely. It also opens up space for those whose opinions run contrary to the one held by the mainstream political class to be able to express their views and contest mainstream ideas (Benkler, 2006; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Jürgen Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010). Scholars have however pointed out the inadequacies of the online media to fulfilling these features due to issues like the low quality of deliberation which sometimes degenerates into trolls, cyberbullying, echo chambers (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Sustain, 2017) or what Quandt (2018) refers to as 'dark participation'. The democratic and participatory potentials of the online news media comment section have also attracted debate. Equally so with the partisan online news platforms and embedded algorithms that encourage fragmentation which influences citizens to seek information that is in congruence with their political or social orientation.

In Nigeria, the online media, whether online versions of the mainstream media or complete online news media whose presence are only on the internet have gradually become parts of daily lives. This phenomenon is expanding among citizens, especially with increased access to cheap smartphones and internet connection. The various features of the online news platforms such as the provision of real-time space for readers' response to news stories and space for democratic deliberations by readers on issues with little or no restraints mechanisms associated with the mainstream media have also begun to attract attention (Lee & Tandoc, 2017). Besides, Collins (2018) describes the trend as the migration of journalism from 'lecture' where citizens do not participate in the news production chain to a 'conversation' style where news production and distribution are participatory.

The internet provides a platform for people to converge in a virtual atmosphere and discuss issues freely. Furthermore, Ott and Rosser (2013) argue that electronic communication and, by extension, the internet, through free speech and unhindered flow of information can promote liberalisation and democracy. There is a general notion among the citizens in Nigeria that their expectations as a result of the country's return to democracy in 2009 remain a mirage as the political space became marred with money politics and personal aggrandisement (Ajobode, 2010). They believe the government is far from them as they are not carried along by the government on issues that may have a direct bearing on them and which negates the tenets of democracy (Kperogi, 2016). As a result, there is a lack of trust for the government as citizens believe their opinions only matter during elections. The press which is supposed to hold the government accountable and give the citizens a voice is an extension of the state so; they have no option than to look for alternative outlets. The internet and by extension, the new media readily provide the alternative space.

Consequently, reading the news and posting comments online is gradually becoming a common practice among Nigerians, and some hardly engage with traditional mainstream media as a consequence (Udanor et al., 2016). Besides, the easy access and affordability of the internet have challenged government hold and control of the press. It has also made it easier for citizens especially journalists, bloggers and other social media activists who have access to documents and information labelled as classified documents by the government to leak or post this information on the internet for deliberation. Access to such materials and information now promote transparency and accountability. However, there is a question of whether such comments reflect the expectation of democratic deliberation.

From the literature reviewed, there is a clear gap in knowledge regarding whether, and if so to what extent, online news commenting in Nigeria reflects any form of democratic deliberation. For instance, Oyero, Oyeyemi, Usaini, & Omole (2017) in their findings reveal that online news platform was laden with hate messages and comments were polarised sharply along ethnic, religious and political cleavages. By contrast, Albert (2008) investigates the online public discourse in Africa, and his findings conclude that the online news sites in Nigeria especially the Nigeria diaspora online news sites have helped in expanding democratic space in Nigeria. However, Alimi & Matiki (2017) applying ‘translanguaging’ technique in their method of inquiry found that the online news media platform in Nigeria contained aspersions and derogatory language. It is this lack of clarity on the matter that provokes this research project.

The researcher observed from the literature reviewed that various studies on the online news commenting in Nigeria did not take account of the fact that most of the online news platforms are extensions of the mainstream media. Therefore, the news contents read online to which commenters react to, may well be structurally very similar to their mainstream versions. Consequently, it is vital to ascertain whether the various economic imperatives and ideological underpinnings that influence mainstream media news production and distribution do exert any influence in online news readers’ comment threads.

Current research on the topic also under-emphasises in its investigation whether the influence of institutional structures reproduces and reinforce the hegemony and maintenance of the status quo within the deliberative space in Nigeria. The institutional structure includes the editorial board and managers who decide the editorial policy and direction for the media organisation, the owners of the media organisation and the revenue aspect. The editorial board and managers influenced by the drive to make a profit and ensure their media organisation enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the government often carry out their news operations in a way to reflect these. For example, in Nigeria, the government is one of the big spenders in advertising (OMD, 2019). Therefore, news organisations are conscious of this and careful in their report on government activities in order to enjoy the latter’s patronage. Also, the media owners, as part of the elite class, often ensure that their organisations respect the political and economic system of the state for them to benefit from the system(Dhakal, 2011). The media project the positions of their owners through a subtle reinforcement and amplification in their reportage (Gitlin, 2003). Therefore, the content of the media is not value-free but shaped by ideological positions.

Furthermore, the online world is not as free and participatory as some utopian apologists of the internet argue as studies have shown that the internet world and the activities around it are increasingly becoming monopolised in terms of ownership and control (Fenton, 2011). For instance, fewer news corporations control the multiple platforms that we think the new media technology offers society. For example, 40% of tweets are generated by robots, while 10% of tweets drive 90% of the traffic (Fenton, 2011). The multinational corporations within the information and communication sector have commodified the content on the internet so much that the audience has become vulnerable to the capital accumulation drives of the multinational corporations in the form of information exchange (Fuchs, 2017). This vulnerability manifests itself, for instance, in the form of audience data harvested and sold to advertisers (Fuchs, 2010; Mosco, 2005).

Although, the research findings of Coleman and Götze (2001); Dahlgren (2005); Dermont (2016); Kang, Lee, You, and Lee (2013) and Santana (2016) all argue that online news commenting space possesses the capacity to facilitate democratic deliberation. However, the literature reviewed concerning online news commenting platforms in Nigeria shows no empirical findings on whether online commenting and deliberation within the online media space has what it takes to facilitate a sphere that fulfils the essential features of the public sphere as argued by scholars like (Asen, 2015; Jürgen Habermas, 1992; Su, 2016; Taylor, 1993). Alimi and Matiki (2017), for example, in their study of online news commenting in Nigeria, focus on the use of language in the making of meaning. Oyedele (2015) investigates the relationship between news stories and the comments made by readers. Also, Jibril & Targema (2017) focus on how online news readers' comments in Nigeria facilitate national unity.

Equally significant in the discussion of online news platform in Nigeria is the online diaspora media, another strand of the online media that is established by the Nigerian migrants abroad to engage with their country and participate in democratic discourse (Olorunnisola, 2004). A significant relevance of diaspora media to any discourse on Nigerian online news platforms and readers' comments is its provision of space through which Nigerians in the diaspora connect with events in their homeland. The diaspora media platforms do not only provide digital space for Nigerians abroad to read the news but also offer templates for them to deliberate on national matters.

Recently, online news media platforms, including social media and blogs in Nigeria, have come under scrutiny and criticisms from the government, especially over their contents, including audience

comments and deliberation. The government equated some of the comments on online news platforms as hate speech and proposed to introduce a mechanism for controlling and regulating the online media space (Mohammed, 2018). Similarly, a member of the legislative house in Nigeria recently proposed a legislative bill that specifies a death penalty for anybody found guilty by the court of law in Nigeria for posting hate speech/comments on the internet. This research, therefore, will be concerned with providing answers to the questions raised from the gap in knowledge on online news commenting in Nigeria illuminated to this point and by so doing, meet the study's objectives.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What motivates readers to post comments and participate in discussion within the commenting space of online news websites in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does the commenting space of Nigerian online news websites reflect the criteria for the existence of a public sphere?
3. Do political economy factors influence online deliberation and the regulation of the commenting space by the news organisation?

1.4 Aim of the study

To examine the online news commenting space in Nigeria and to consider, and account for, the extent to which it bears a resemblance to the criteria of a public sphere.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the research are:

- to undertake a critical evaluation of the literature on news provision online and public deliberation;
- to develop a framework for the analysis of Nigerian online news commenting through critique and assimilation of work from the public sphere and critical political economy theories;
- through the application of ideas from the fields of the public sphere and political economy to the evidence generated in the project, to provide a conceptual model of Nigerian online news commenting;
- to provide practical recommendations to news providers and regulators on how more effective online news commenting might be developed in Nigeria.

1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Mainstream media

For this study, the term is used interchangeably with traditional media. Therefore, mainstream media/traditional media are newspapers, television and radio stations in Nigeria that have visible organisational and editorial structures. There are physical copies of their contents in the form of newspapers and magazines. At the same time, the radio and television components broadcast through terrestrial and satellite technology and accessed by viewers through television or radio sets.

1.6.2 Online news media

In this thesis, online news media are media platform that disseminates information on the internet and can be a website operated and owned by a mainstream media provider or an internet alone news platform without any physical presence.

1.6.3 Online deliberation

Online deliberation is discourses that take place on the communicative internet space between two or more people (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Scholl, 2013). In this study, the researcher operationalised the concept as a form of discussion or interaction that take place in the online newspaper comment section, which involves two or more people.

1.7 Contributions to Knowledge

The purpose of this study is to investigate the online news commenting space in Nigeria and ascertain, whether it has the criteria to enable democratic deliberation. It also intends through its analysis and the explanatory framework produced in the end provide a clear understanding of the online news environment in Nigeria. Most of the literature reviewed point to the existence of the public sphere in Nigeria. However, few have studied the online news commenting space to provide an understanding of the sphere and whether it meets the criteria to be referred to as an online public sphere. Most of the existing studies have not also considered the influence of the political economy of news production and the broader political economy of Nigeria on the online deliberative space. Accordingly, the contributions of this research to knowledge will:

1. Provide new knowledge on the online news commenting environment in Nigeria.
2. Develop through the evidence generated in the study, an explanatory model of online news commenting in Nigeria.
3. Make suggestions and recommendations on how to improve the state of online news commenting in Nigeria.

1.8 Thesis overview

Chapter One: This chapter starts with the introduction to the study, and it generally gives an overview of the study. It also states the objectives of the study, the research questions and the rationale for conducting the research.

Chapter Two: This chapter provides a historical background to Nigeria, her media system and including Nigerian online diasporic media and situates and how the media has evolved over the years up to the entrance of the online media. The chapter also highlights the political economy of Nigeria and how it influences the mass media sphere in Nigeria.

Chapter Three: It reviews the extant literature and discusses the concepts of the internet, democracy and deliberation extensively. The chapter explores and presents the arguments by the utopians on the internet features and potentials to promote deliberative democracy. It also reflects the dystopian views of other scholars who are sceptical about the democratic potentials of the internet. Also, it synthesises the diverse views and explains its connection to the research.

Chapter Four: discusses the various views on online news commenting space and through the review process, establish gaps not yet covered by previous researches. Therefore, the various themes reviewed in the chapter produced a clear picture of the online news environment and highlighted key issues which the researcher focussed on in the latter part of the thesis.

Chapter Five: explains the theoretical frameworks applied in the study. The chapter explained the public sphere and the critical political economy theories used in the study. It explained how each of the frameworks provides a critical analysis of the online news commenting platform. The chapter justified the adoption of the theories. It showed how the theories in a complementary pattern addressed the area that either of the two cannot interrogate due to its specific analytical capacity. Therefore, the application of the public sphere provided the theoretical basis to understand whether the conditions for democratic deliberation exist within the online commenting space. Also, the chapter through the application of the critical political economy explains how power differentials, contestation and commercial drive influence comment section of online newspapers.

Chapter Six: This chapter explains the chosen research method for the study. It justifies the adoption of the mixed method of research combining content analysis, semi-structured interview and the

survey. It explains the choice of the pragmatic paradigm and argues the reasons behind its selection as the appropriate paradigm for the study. The chapter also explained the mixed-method model adopted for the study and provide a detailed triangulation process for combining and comparing the data analysis and findings.

Chapter Seven: In the chapter, separate sections present qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher analysed the empirical data from the field in frequencies and themes and presented quantitative data in tables and graphs.

Chapter Eight: This chapter presents the research findings from the analysis of the three data sets collected in the study. In the chapter, the discussion of findings involves the comparison of the three data sets concerning research questions to see whether they converge, diverge or complement each other. The chapter includes the explanatory model developed from the application of the analytical framework into the analysis of the data collected and the results obtained.

Chapter Nine: This is the concluding chapter of the thesis. The chapter summarises the research procedure, presents the research conclusion and states the contribution of the research to knowledge. The research also proffers recommendation for the improvement of online news commenting in Nigeria and suggested areas for future research.

Chapter Two

Nigeria and its Media System

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter gives a brief history of Nigeria with a focus on her various epochal periods like her earlier contacts with the western world, colonialism, independence, and the various ferments that shaped the country up till the present time. The chapter also discusses the media system in Nigeria from the publication of the first newspaper to the moment, including the mainstream media online presence and the activities of the online diasporic media. The inclusion of Nigerian online diaspora media is justified based on its role as one of the media platform that facilitated a discursive sphere in Nigeria (Kperogi, 2013). Also, the chapter profiled the online news media sites from where comments were mined and analysed.

2.2 Brief history of Nigeria

With an estimated population of over 200 million, Nigeria ranked as the most populous country in Africa and the most populous black nation in the world (National Communication Commission, 2016). She is also one of the most diverse countries regarding the number of ethnic groups and spoken languages with over 400 different ethnic groups and languages spoken within the country. The country practised a federal system of government with thirty-six states, and the administrative capital is in Abuja while Lagos unofficially remains the commercial capital of the country. Nigeria is an artificial creation of the United Kingdom as the territory initially consists of various kingdoms, empires and independent states. The various kingdoms and empires before contact with the outside world had robust, egalitarian and flourishing economies and societies based on agriculture (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The earlier contact between the various states, kingdoms, empires and the outside world most notably the Portuguese and the British came as a result of trading in commodities in the south especially around the coastal region while the empires in the North engaged in trading with the Arabs around what is known as the trans-Saharan trade route. This trading later metamorphosed into slave trade which led to the forceful capture and shipment of millions of non-disabled men from Nigeria across the Atlantic Ocean into America and the Caribbean for cheap labour on the sugarcane and the cotton fields. Apart from the shipment of slaves across the Atlantic, over 4 million Nigerians were also captured and taken into slavery in the Arab world through the trans-Saharan slave route and these two developments according to Nunn and Wantchekon (2008), Falola and Heaton (2008) and Nunn

(2008), had a significant impact on the African society including Nigeria, ruptured their economies and social system and sown seeds of mistrust.

The abolition of the slave trade because of the slave trade act of 1807 passed by the British parliament ushered in a new trade relationship between the British and the various areas of modern-day Nigeria. In the south, palm oil, cocoa and later rubber became commodities for trading while in the North, cotton, hides and skins were commodities for trading. Another landmark apart from the British colonisation of the various kingdoms and empires was the introduction of Christianity by the European missionaries and also the introduction of Islam in the North first through the earlier contact by the people of Kanem-Borno empire in the present-day North-east of Nigeria and later through the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of Sokoto caliphate. In the Northern part, for instance, the introduction of Islam helped in creating a territory with strong Islamic foundation and legal system (Falola & Heaton) and in the south, Christian proselytisation contributed to the region embracing western education system and social system before the North (Vaughan, 2016). Ever since, the two religions have continued to influence and dominate the political process, government decisions and deliberation on any national issues within the public sphere. In the same way, Vaughan (2016, p. 13) while explaining the roles of the two religions in Nigeria opines that ‘the critical foundation in the making of modern Nigeria was constructed on the convergence of two monumental world religious movements that transformed the Nigerian region, starting in the nineteenth century’.

One of the contributing factors that led to the colonisation of Nigeria by the British was the Berlin conference of 1884-5 tagged as the ‘Scramble and Partitioning of Africa’. During the period, various European powers sat and allocated different territories of Africa to each other based on existing treaties and trade by European companies with kingdoms and independent states in Africa. This partitioning was done primarily for economic gains and also, the spread of Christianity. For this purpose, the British government moved to secure the territories around the River Niger to protect the interest of the British merchants involved in palm oil trading especially the Royal Niger Company and ward off any influence from other European powers like France and Portugal (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Before this period, the British government, under the pretence of abolishing the slave trade and the encouragement of legitimate trade increased their interference in the domestic affairs of the natives. This interference led to conflicts between the natives and the British government.

Consequently, the British government bombarded Lagos in 1851 and finally annexed it as a crown colony in 1861 and by 1900; the whole of present-day Southern Nigeria has been annexed by the British and named the Southern Protectorate of Nigeria. With the conquest of the southern region, the British government shifted their attention to the North and in 1903 after a fierce battle with the Sultan of Sokoto in which the latter lost his life; the entire region was annexed and named the Northern protectorate of Nigeria (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Vaughan, 2016). Consequently, the colonial government amalgamated the Southern and Northern protectorates to become one country in 1914 (Philips, 2004; Isichei, 1983).

After the amalgamation, the colonial government introduced the indirect rule system as a system of administration for the new country. The indirect rule is a system of administration where the colonial government had minimal direct participation in the day-day administration of the territory. Instead, they used the existing local chiefs, kings and emirs to administer their areas but take instructions from the colonial government. The primary argument by the British for the adoption of indirect rule system was to allow the colonies to preserve their local culture and traditional method of administration (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Others have argued that the reason for the adoption of the system was for administrative convenience and effective taxation system (Gerring., Ziblatt., Van Gorp., & Arevalo, 2011; Scott, 2013). The system, however, had a low success rate in the southern part of Nigeria with specific reference to the South-East where the traditional method of administration is not as centralised unlike in the Northern part of Nigeria. Also, there is a correlation between the indirect rule system employed by the British colonial administration and the level of poverty and unhealthy contestation for power and resources among the people in the former British colonies including Nigeria (Richens, 2009).

After the Second World War, the initial resistance to colonial rule in Nigeria took a new shape with the coming on stream of well-organised nationalists' movements effectively using the print media to criticise the colonial government policies in Nigeria. The growing number of educated elites and the exposure of Nigerians who participated in the Second World War became energising factors for the nationalists' movements (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Ikime, 1980; Olasupo et al., 2017). However, the motives behind nationalist activities by the elites apart from self-government and replacing the British officials in government were divisive and ethnocentric (Onuoha, 2012). One of the reasons for this is the indirect rule system. The system was divisive and had an impression on the psyche of the average elite during this period. For example, the three major political parties in Nigeria during

this period and in the first republic were formed along the ethnic line. As a result, each of them had ethnic colouration. The Action Congress (AC) aligned itself with the Yoruba ethnic group, the National Council for Nigerian Citizens with the Ibos and the Nigerian People's Congress with the people of Northern Nigeria. Apart from the three major political parties, other political parties also reflect ethnic nationalities in their composition and objectives. For example, the United Middle Belt Congress represents the interests of the people that live around the middle belt region.

Accordingly, the public sphere became dominated with debates heavily influenced by ethnicity and religious issues and hegemonic contestations among the elites from the various ethnic groups (Ekeh, 1975; Shittu, 2013). Nigeria gained her independence on October 1st, 1960 and modelled her system of government after the British parliamentary system of government. However, and after independence, the country, her political system and the politicians became sharply divided along ethnic lines that achieving national cohesion and objectives became difficult. As a result, the country became regularly embroiled in civil unrest until 1966 when the first military coup was staged that overthrew the elected government. Aside from the coup, the state also experienced a civil war from 1967-1970. In the area of administration, out of her 60 years of experience as a nation, the military governed for 29 years.

2.3 The Nigerian Media System

The emergence of the press in Nigeria has a connection with the activities of the missionaries. The first newspaper in Nigeria was founded in Abeokuta in 1859 by the Reverend Henry Townsend of the Anglican missionary society with the name *Iwe Iroyin fun awon Egba ati Yoruba* (Daramola, 2006; Omu, 1978). The newspaper was published in the vernacular language of Yoruba and circulated within Abeokuta and Lagos.

According to Daramola (2006), the development of the Nigerian media aligned with the different historical epochs of Nigeria as a nation. Ogunsiji (1989) identifies four eras: missionary journalism (1846-1863), alien- dominated press (1863-1914), indigenous press (1914-1960) and the contemporary era (1960 onwards). This description is debatable as specific features of a previous period can be found in another. For example, there are hundreds of religious newspapers still thriving in the country. Another question is, how do we distinguish the indigenous press from the contemporary era?

Similarly, does it mean that the nationalities of owners of media organisations between indigenous and the contemporary era are different? Another classification of the development of the media system in Nigeria identified three epochs: the early press, nationalist press and the contemporary press (Tador, 1996). The early media consists of religious newspapers, and most prominent of the papers around this period was the *Iwe Iroyin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* which also was the first newspaper published in Nigeria. Also, other scholars focus their discourse on the emergence of the mass media in Nigeria from the nationalists' struggle for self-determination and independence (Golding & Murdock, 1978; Oso, 2012). This account looks at the period when the press asserts its existence as a veritable tool for criticising and challenging the colonial system and failed to consider what laid the foundation of the system even if it was for missionary purposes.

Equally important is the editorial policies and contents of the first press in Nigeria, which were mostly reflective of missionary activities and some commercial elements regarding advertisements. Similarly, Townsend argues that the motive behind his establishment of the newspaper was to promote literacy and the reading culture (Omu, 1978). Furthermore, the publication also served other purposes, such as being Townsend's tool for political influence and power in Egba land (Omu, 1978). Overall, the early newspapers, apart from being used for Christian proselytisation activities, set the tone for political discussion and nationalism. It also contributes to the emergence of a discursive public sphere, although the space was restrictive and comprised of the few educated elites. The nationalist phase of the advent of the press in Nigeria was solely involved in nationalism and the struggle for independence (Duyile, 1987; Omu, 1978). Also, the editorial contents of the newspapers during the period were highly stimulating, patriotic, and a formidable tool against colonialism (Nwosu, 1996). This era had its foundation in the entrance of the Anglo-African newspaper published in 1863 by Robert Campbell, a Jamaican businessman (Omu, 1978). Similarly, the second phase witnessed the establishments of several papers within the Nigerian space such as Lagos Times (1880), Lagos Weekly Record (1894), Lagos Standard (1814), The Eagle and Lagos Critic (1883), West African Pilot (1937), Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo (1939), Sunday Express (1958), Daily Telegraph (1959), and most of them took a radical posture in their news reporting.

However, there were fewer publications supported by the colonial government to counter the influence of those criticising the colonial government. Also, few of the newspapers due to profit motives and patronage by the colonial government and British firms chose to sit on the fence. Nevertheless, the papers with nationalist fervour had a strong influence on the citizens and shaped

the emerging public sphere that played significant roles towards the actualisation of independence. The electronic media was at its formative stage during the period and played little part in the press anti-colonial agenda in the emerging public sphere. It was solely under the control of the colonial government and what was in existence was a radio broadcast service which started as a re-diffusion service of the BBC in 1932 (Okoro, 2012).

As might be expected, the media configuration in Nigeria changed after independence. Various regional governments became interested in running media organisations, and most of them set up media outfits. Although, before independence, media organisation, particularly broadcasting (radio and television) ownership, were limited to a few regional governments. For instance, the first television station in Nigeria and incidentally the first in Africa commenced broadcasting in 1959 and owned by the western region of Nigeria. Besides, the nationalistic preoccupation of the pre-independence era media paved the way for today's press that wants to hold the government accountable and serves as an intermediary between the government and the governed. As Okoro (2012, p,7) puts it, "The post-independence government and politics produced a more vibrant press which moved from the turf of pugnacious journalism to assume a fourth estate position to accomplish the watchdog goal".

On the contrary, Dare (2010) argues that the editorial contents of the media took a colouration of ethnic, religious and party affiliation patterns, and reportorial objectives of media organisations were tilted to reflect, defend and support such cleavages. As a public sphere, therefore, the primordial sentiments exhibited through its contents have effects in the way people deliberate and form opinions. Besides, the intermittent truncation of civilian rule in Nigeria before 1999 by the military affected the media and the public sphere. Repressive decrees were often promulgated after a coup to restrict the press from publishing specific stories or even outright proscription (Okoro, 2012). Rather than serving as a deterrent factor, the various repressive actions of the military spurred the press to become formidable agents in fighting against the army and were at the forefront of the campaign for the return to democracy (Kperogi, 2013).

The mass media play a significant role in the social cohesion and citizens' inclusion within the democratic space. Similarly, and as Akinfeleye (2003) argues, the mass media is an essential institution for the achievement of good governance in a state. Therefore, the citizens rely on the mass media to get informed, discuss and participate in discourse concerning their environment. Thus, the

mass media perform these roles by providing timely information and acting as a watchdog on the activities of the various organs of the Nigerian democratic system. In Nigeria, the 1999 constitution affirms the relevance of the mass media and its social responsibilities towards the achievement of an egalitarian society and deepening the culture of democracy by empowering the media to source and disseminate information.

To this end, the mass media in Nigeria has become an analogy of democracy and a means of sustaining democratic traditions. For example, during general elections in the country, citizens see the mass media as a platform for confirming election results through their news reports, and they also create space for people to debate and give their opinions on public issues (Olukoyun, 2004). Also, Fenton (2011), in describing the role of the news media in society, argues, it is an essential institution in the sustenance and survival of a democracy. The connection between the mass media and democracy is a historical one which predates Nigeria's independence and traces its foundation to the establishment of the first newspaper at Abeokuta in the present Ogun State, Nigeria in 1856.

In Nigeria, before the emergence and application of the internet for news dissemination, the mainstream media played an active role in the political discourse. They set agenda and acted as a platform for galvanising opinions and deliberation on national issues. For instance, the mass media during the colonial era in Nigeria provided a platform through which citizens - particularly the educated elites and nationalists - criticised the repressive policies of the British colonial government and provided space for public discourse on colonialism (Oso, 2012). Furthermore, the struggle for independence of Nigeria and the political infrastructure that emerged after the independence had connection around the activities of the mass media, especially the printing press (Kperogi, 2016; Olayiwola, 2014; Seng & Hunt, 1986). In a like manner, the relevance of the mass media as watchdog even in the post-colonial period has not eroded as they continued to play a critical role during the first republic by facilitating public debates and discussion of socio-political issues (Nwosu, 1996).

The successive military regimes in Nigeria before the return of the country to democracy recognised the power of the media. During the period of military rule in Nigeria, the media house is always the first institution targeted during any military coup. The citizens also rely on the same mass media institution for information on the takeover and any other information that may follow from the coup planners later. Therefore, this shows how important the mass media is to the entire system in Nigeria. Studies have also shown that the mass media played a vital role in the emergence of Nigeria as a

nation and constitutionally seen as the fourth estate of the realm that provides information to the people (Nwosu, 1996, Oso, 2003). However, the contemporary realities have shown that the mass media in Nigeria has become an extension of the ruling class and reflects their hegemonic ideology in their editorial and news reports. As a result, one of their functions of serving as a public sphere for debates has become compromised (Oso, 2012).

Consequently, the close relationship between the elite, the press and the ruling class does continuously impinge on the press attempt to be unbiased in their reportage and provide space for citizens' discussion and debates. The relationship between the press and the government oscillates between pro-government or anti-government in their contents. Furthermore, this divide between pro-government and anti-government media often reflect in the editorials of news media. Also, the ideological leaning of the owner of a media organisation does reflect in news content. As a result, this often accounts for the slanted direction of editorials and news contents along the divides mentioned in the preceding sentence.

An example that will suffice here is the cancellation of the June 12 Presidential elections results in 1993 by the then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida. The election was the freest and fairest election in the country's history (Omotola, 2010). According to the prevailing opinion in the country during the period, the late Chief M.K.O Abiola who was one of the wealthiest men in the country during the period, from the southwest region of Nigeria and also a media mogul won the polls (Omotola, 2010). A section of the Nigerian press known as the Lagos-Ibadan axis press which arguably is the most influential used their various news media organisations to condemn the government and through their activities helped place the election saga within the international system public space. Also, the struggle for the return to democracy and the validation of June 12 election of 1993 influenced the press especially the Lagos-Ibadan axis press to rise above board and report actual stories and also give access, especially to the opposition group to explain their positions on public issues.

Consequently, the activities of the mass media and their pro-democracy stance during this period incurred the wrath of the military government which embarked on various clampdown policies such as the ban of news organisation through obnoxious laws, seizure of news publications and the arrest without trial of journalists (Ajobode, 2010; Olukoyun, 2004). Consequently, this explains the argument that the "guerrilla press" pattern of the mass media in Nigeria during the struggle for

democracy in the 1990s is a reaction to the experience of June 12 election impasse and the various repressive policies of the government during the period (Dare, 2007). The guerrilla journalism from a historical prism was as an offshoot of the brand of journalism that characterises the colonial and post-colonial period in Nigeria (Kperogi, 2016).

However, Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 has its attendant problems on the media as one of its primary features of providing a space for deliberation became gradually dissipated. The reason for this was because, most of the owners of the media organisations (mainly print media) that were actively involved in pro-democracy struggle benefited immensely from the new democratic dispensation regarding appointments, contracts and elections into political offices (Kperogi, 2016). Consequently, this reduced the vibrancy and zeal with which the media cover and report issues, as balanced and objective reporting of news, especially those that concern their proprietors, became rare (Kperogi, 2016). Similarly, the notion that democracy will bring about a mass media that has as some of its function the accommodation of opinions of ordinary citizens and allows for deliberation becomes a debatable issue in Nigeria as the investigative reporting reputation of the Nigerian Press went into a comatose state. At a point, it was easy for any person to see news content, whether print or electronic, as primarily influenced by the politicians and news organisations owners.

Similarly, the urge for a profitable news organisation and the urge to stay afloat encourages commodification and commercialisation of news by media organisations in Nigeria. These have a severe effect on their output, quality, objectivity, and above all, the question of news credibility. The press failure or reluctance to report issues like mass corruption, impunity, electoral fraud and other vices that characterised the civilian administration on an impartial and objective scale, the citizens expect created a vacuum and reduces the quality of news report (Kperogi,2016).

The space for debate or feedback in the mainstream media is however limited, and sometimes, these opinions get drowned in editorial policies, newspaper's philosophical standpoint and other regulatory and restrictive mechanisms. Recently, there has been an emphasis on the entrance of the internet and its potentials for providing additional space for news especially those ignored by the legacy media, and the rejuvenation of the public sphere (Curran & Witschge, 2010; Redden & Witschge, 2010). argues the internet made the 'proliferation' of news outlets possible and had transformed the public sphere from a single space to multiplicity of spheres where various views and opinions are allowed. Similarly, in a democratic society, people need to make choices during elections and be engaged

continuously in discourses that affect their existence as humans, their society, and decisions of their government. It is imperative, therefore that, for a nation to achieve stable democracy, accountability to the citizens on the part of the government and high level of political education; there is a need for constant deliberations. Healthy democracy does not emerge from the mere provision of information during elections on which candidate electorates are to vote. Instead, it arises from the quality of talks or deliberation on various issues in society (Dryzek, 2000).

The introduction of the mobile telephone and the internet in Nigeria has opened a new vista in the media industry in Nigeria. The internet has altered the dynamics of information processing and dissemination in Nigeria, providing alternative platforms for people to access information and react to issues apart from the mainstream media. Also, the internet expands public participation and makes those who were hitherto on the fringe and voiceless within the communicative space to become visible (Obadare, 2016). Today, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Instagram, WhatsApp are some of the platforms through which citizens access news and information and engage in debates on public issues. One prominent feature of the new media in Nigeria is the online diaspora media websites (Obadare, 2016; Kperogi, 2011). In contrast to the mainstream media, the online diasporic media do not follow the conventional ways of newsgathering and dissemination but are however popular among the populace. Kperogi (2011, p,25) however argues that their acceptability by citizens draws from the ‘...comparative richness and reliability of their sources of information, which has been made possible by the willingness of privileged, but disgruntled or conscientious Nigeria based sources to confide in the citizen's reporters of the diaspora media.

2.4 Nigerian Diasporic media

The interconnectedness of human beings irrespective of geographical location and the need for survival necessitates the movement of human beings from one place to another. This movement takes place from one country to another within a continent, and can also be intercontinental. Dontsov and Zotova (2013) identify security, economical, self- realisation and family reasons as the factors that fuel migration from one area to another. For instance, in Africa, some of the factors responsible for the migration of Africans to other continents, according to Ekwo (2012) and Wobst (2010) are slave trade and colonialism. It is challenging to give a precise definition to the concept of ‘diaspora’ considering the fluidity of the concept as its meaning criss-cross the ambit of scholarship within ‘globalisation, transnational mobility, and expansion of new communication technology’ (Beciu et

al., 2018). Morley (2001) and Hall (2012), however, argue that the concept of diaspora relates to human displacement and the various experiences in the new place of settlement.

Similarly, the concept is also a way of describing the process of brotherhood, integration and creating an identity within a host community (Aksoy & Robins, 2003). Irrespective of what constitutes the concept of 'diaspora', there are specific characteristics that map out the idea and (Cohen, 1996, p.8) identifies eight features of identifying a diaspora community as:

- Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions
- The expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of a trade or to further colonial ambitions
- The collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements.
- An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a joint commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation
- The development of a return movement which gains mutual approbation
- A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a shared history and the belief in a common fate
- A troubled relationship with host societies suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group
- A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
- The possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

As people migrate from their homeland or country to a new society; there is often a yearning for information on the political, economic and social issues about their home country. As a result, information and communication take a central place in the lives and activities of migrants (Ciumasu, 2010). Apart from their desires to have knowledge of happenings in their homeland, the growing need for information is informed by the seeming under-reporting of the migrant's communities within the mainstream media of their new hosts (Ekwo, 2012). The mainstream media, especially in the western world like the United States of America and the United Kingdom due to economic imperatives, profit motives and the dynamics of news values and selection, rarely focus attention on the migrant communities and their issues. Often, the media reports about the diaspora communities are stereotypical and on crimes (Ekwo, 2012). Because of these, most migrant communities set up

their media outlets to disseminate information about their activities within their new communities and their homeland (Kessler & Rother, 2016).

Karim (2003) opines that most of the diaspora media news content and discussion on their platforms centred around their homelands' politics. Furthermore, the diaspora media wields influence over the political process in their homeland. Sometimes, this influence translates into setting agenda and also alternative media space providing information to citizens in their home countries, especially under repressive or dictatorial regimes (Mallet, 2011). Similarly, diaspora media as a form of a public sphere creates platforms for communities with a similar historical and cultural identity outside their homeland not only to discuss issues affecting them in their new cities but also of their countries of origin (Cunningham, 2001; Gewertz et al., 1998). Also, Parham (2005) on Haitian diaspora community situates diasporic media within Nancy Fraiser's 'subaltern counter-publics' and argues that they are parallel discursive spheres responsible for countering any contrary views or interpretation of their community by the mainstream media. However, and Gitlin (1998) argues that the type of public spheres portrayed by diasporic media is a fragmented one and therefore 'sphericules' because diasporic media to no small extent serves a section of a community.

The diasporic media, like other smaller media, are not insulated from the influence of the mainstream media and therefore, are sometimes influenced by the market imperatives and model. Sometimes, this affects their contents in terms of consolidating influence and power in a particular figure (Dayan, 2002). For instance, one of the Nigerian diasporic media, Sahara Reporters campaigned and vigorously promoted the candidacy of the opposition party in the 2015 General elections. The online media outfit exposed the various corrupt activities of the government so much so that the promoter of the media organisation claimed his media outfit brought the oppositional Presidential candidate to power in 2015. The Nigerians in the diaspora also explore the internet and its various possibilities for social relations and monitoring activities in their homeland. Apart from the discussion on their homeland social and economic issues, some Nigerian migrants abroad now engaged in an interactive broadcast on Facebook and other social media platforms where participants engage in deliberation on topics ranging from gossips, immigration matters, and religious matters.

The emergence of this form of online diaspora media, as argued by Kperogi (2016) is explainable in three dimensions. The first dimension has to do with the waning popularity of the press, especially their failure to sustain the integrity and professionalism they exhibited during the pro-democracy

struggle. The media became complacent and rarely showed any form of reporting that put the government in the spotlight before the public. For example, most of the cases of corruption concerning government officials or administrative infractions were burst by the online diasporic media like Sahara Reporters, Elendu, and others while the mainstream media in Nigeria struggle to follow the story or are reluctant to report about it.

The second reason relates to the slow pace of the mainstream media migration to the internet and having a recognisable presence. However, this has changed as almost all the mainstream media now have a robust online presence. The third reason bothers the investigative reporting function of the mass media. Studies have established the dismal performance of the mainstream media in Nigeria in the area of investigative journalism particularly their inability to put in the public domain news about the government activities that are shrouded in secrecy, but which are vital to the growth of the society and make the government accountable (Kperogi, 2013; Ntibinyane, 2018). However, the rise and popularity of the online news media especially those who are only present on the internet and the diaspora media in Nigeria is anchored on its ability to report issues labelled as classified matters or which the government intends to shield away from the citizens. Although, Karim, (2003) argues that there is little empirical evidence to show whether the diaspora media and the public sphere it provides for democratic deliberation have any influence on government policies (Karim, 2003). However, this assertion is inadequate and not sustainable, especially within the context of Nigeria diasporic media. The diaspora media in Nigeria facilitates an alternative deliberative space for civil deliberation on public issues. Furthermore, and through the diasporic discursive sphere, sensitive and privileged information about the government often leak to the citizens. Kperogi (2011) for instance cites an example of a story reported by Sahara Reporters in 2009 concerning the Federal Government of Nigeria plan to embark on a capacity building training for the 36 states governors of states in the federation which generated public outcry that prevailed on the governors to cancel the plan.

In other words, the Nigerian online diaspora media have become a critical component of the media and political space in Nigeria. At times, they set agendas through their news contents and provide a discursive space devoid of government regulatory mechanisms for citizens to deliberate on public issues.

2.5 The political economy of Nigeria and the media

It is also essential to explain the political economy of the Nigerian state, including her media system. Nigeria political economy is one that reflects the ideological idiosyncrasy of the elite and the ruling class, and this has led to a gap between the political class and the citizens (Amuwo, 2010). Since independence in 1960, contestations within the social space revolve around the control of resources and the consolidation of power by the political /elite class. The effort for the control of resources and political power is not without external influence. Amuwo (2010, p.424) argues that ‘In its bid to use the state as an instrument for resource and power accumulation, the ruling elite has had to deal with salient external and internal forces such as the imperatives of transnational capitalism...’ Subsequently, the understanding of the political economy of Nigeria requires an understanding or knowledge of the various epochs in the development of the country. These epochal periods consist of the pre-colonial, colonial and independence era. The pre-colonial period of the entity known as Nigeria today consists of various empires, kingdoms and independent states who manage their affairs and economies independent of each other. Each of these separate entities has a varying type of economic activities peculiar to their environmental realities. In the south, for instance, kingdoms and states that are close to the coastal areas engage in the fishery and other coastal area business-related activities while those in the hinterland engaged mainly in agricultural practices.

These kingdoms and states also played an active role during the slave trade era serving as exit points in the shipment of slaves to the New World (Falola and Heaton, 2008). In the northern part, the people practised agriculture, animal husbandry and engaged in cloth dying. The area served as routes for trade within the region and the middle east, including the slave trade or what is known as the trans-Saharan slave route (Gaudio, 2014). Within these various states and kingdoms are class structures divided between the elites who are the ruling class (Kings and chiefs), businessmen (slave merchants and wealthy farmers) and the ordinary peasants. The class structure and relations in these pre-colonial societies in Nigeria are one of exploitation of one group by another (Olutayo, 1999). For example, the middlemen who served as negotiators between the slave merchants and slave owners are the elites in the society and the commodities, they collected from the slave merchants in exchange for slaves became means of exerting control and influence in the community.

The abolition of slavery coincided with the British annexation of various parts of Nigeria and subsequently, the full colonisation of Nigeria. Around the same time, the foundation for class structure in Nigeria was laid owing to the activities of the trading firms (Amuwo, 2010). These

trading firms deal in palm kernel and other agricultural products shipped to the west as raw materials for industrial productions. In return, the companies imported finished products into their colonies such as soaps, textiles and other household items. Within this chain of business are indigenous traders who served as middlemen and enjoyed some level of economic surplus which placed them above the ordinary people in the colonies. Amuwo (2010); Edozie (2017); Onimode (1985); Salami (2009) identify two major class characters within Nigerian state: the dominant class which consists of the British officials, the business community, educated Nigerian elites including those who worked for the colonial government and the second class comprising of ordinary citizens. The dominant class consisting of the British officials, were effectively in charge of affairs and exercised control over the economy and the political sphere of the country. The economic and political structure was authoritarian, and the class struggle was between dominant class and the dominated class which consists of the nationalists and ordinary citizens that evinced everything anti-colonial and imperial power exploitation of the country's natural and human resources.

The political economy structure of post-colonial Nigeria has not changed or gone through any transformation regarding structure or class relations. The only noticeable change is that a critical component within the dominant class (The British colonial officers) left and became replaced by the indigenous elite and political class who before the exit of the British colonial officers were nationalists fighting for the independence of the country. Consequently, the struggle for power and economic domination took a central stage within the political and commercial space, and this struggle results in a class conflict coated in ethnic and religious contestations. Besides, Suberu (1998, p.292) explains that this struggle has risen to a level of '... ethnic, regional and communal tensions over the beneficiaries and modalities of territorial restructuring; the stimulation of neo-ethnicity of new forms of parochial, divisive and exclusionary identities.' The discovery of crude oil and the continuous staging of military coup and change of regimes in the country created a new class of elites who enriched themselves by embezzling public funds.

Furthermore, this class of people controls the reign of power and through their actions established a connection between private capital accumulation and access to the corridor of power (Ogbeidi, 2012). Arguably, the political economy of Nigeria revolves around ethnic and religious tension and capital accumulation on the part of the elite and the ruling class and a means of capital accumulation by the transnational companies. Correspondingly, the Nigerian state provides an environment for capital accumulation by multinationals and the local elites and through this exerts domineering influence on

the citizens (Amuwo, 2010), and foster on them ethnicity and divisive narratives to distract and keep the citizens busy within the public space.

In line with the arguments of Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White (2009) that the media system of a society reflects the political and cultural system of that society, Udoakah (1990) argues that the political and economic system in society dictates the type of media system in such a society. As a result, the political economy of the Nigerian media system does not stand in a vacuum but a colouration of the broader political economy of Nigeria which dwells on power contestation, elite domination, ethnicity, religious tension, alienation of the masses and the use of the media for propaganda. Udoakah (2017) argues that the government at both the state and federal level own the largest concentration of media organisation (Udoakah, 2017). This assertion is especially true of the broadcast (radio and television) where all the states government and the federal government have their television and radio stations. However, the private ownership structure dominates the print media space in Nigeria, and huge percentages of these owners are wealthy politicians or cronies of the government. With this, patronage of mass media by the government at various levels is critical to the survival of mass media in Nigeria.

Consequently, this relationship between the government and the mass media has a significant influence on the nature of news and information disseminated to the citizens by the later (Oso, 2013). The government and the ruling class see the media as an ideological apparatus for reinforcing and maintaining their hegemony.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the historical development of Nigeria briefly from the earliest contact of the people of Nigeria with the outside world down to independence and post-independence period. From the various literature reviewed, the researcher concludes that the historical relationship between the outside world and Nigeria has an impact on the later from her political system to her deliberative space. The legacy of colonialism and indirect rule system created divisive among the various ethnic groups. It brought about the narratives of ethnicity and religious polarisation that drives any public deliberation in Nigeria. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the historical emergence of the Nigerian media from when the first newspaper was published in 1859 up till the present time, including the new media and diasporic media. It also highlighted its editorial content and pattern, revealing a system that regularly adjusts to societal realities and serves as a public sphere for opinion formation.

Also, the section mentioned the entrance of the new media into the public space and its capacity towards expanding the scope of information production and sharing to include those who were initially not within the range of mainstream media coverage

The chapter concluded that the mass media had played a crucial role in the various stages of development in Nigeria. However, the media served the elites more since the country's independence. They reflected the ideology of the ruling class due to economic and political structure of the country, which placed ownership of the media in the hands of the few wealthy elites. Although, the online news websites provide more platforms for citizens to engage in civil discussion, nevertheless, large numbers of these online platforms are a mere extension of the mainstream media. The diasporic press, however, is showing some level of independence and ability to expose stories and events that the mainstream media would ordinarily not publish.

Chapter Three

Assessing the Internet as a Platform for Promoting Deliberative Democracy

3.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter assesses the internet and its affordances which promote deliberative democracy. To do this, the researcher reviews the literature on the concepts of the internet, democracy and deliberation. The chapter reflects on the various arguments by scholars on the internet as a platform for interaction and the features of participation and engagement it provides towards the enhancement of deliberative democracy. Furthermore, the section on democracy discusses the concept from a broader context reflecting on its relative meaning from different society. It critically explained the various forms of democracy such as deliberative democracy including online discussion, the place of the media, and how it reflects the democratic system of the society where it operates. Accordingly, the chapter seeks to establish from the diverse positions maintained by scholars about the internet's potential to enhance deliberative democracy.

3.2. The Internet as a discursive sphere

One significant invention that has revolutionised and is still changing the pattern of communication in the 21st century is the internet. It is gradually becoming the driving force of the modern global economy and within the few decades of its existence has changed human relations and the information system at national and global levels. The emergence of the internet and its communicative features into the social space came with expectations. Some of these expectations include the argument that it will revolutionalise the communication space by giving voice to those who did not have access to the media due to its elitist structure and market-driven model. At the same time, the utopians envisaged the internet in its early diffusion stage as possessing the potential to bring about the multiplicity of media platforms, less control from government and free deliberative space (Gillmor, 2004; Hindman, 2009). These utopian descriptions of the internet potentials have influenced several studies by scholars about its significant impact on politics (Morozov, 2011), culture and commerce (Bolaño & Vieira, 2015). For instance, some scholars argued that the internet could help facilitate electronic participation by increasing access to political debate and civic engagement (Albrecht, 2006; Coe et al., 2014)

Historically, the United States developed the internet during the cold war period around 1969 as a means of providing an uninterrupted communication platform in the event of any nuclear attack from

the enemy (Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2012). The anticipated war remains imaginary and never occurred. Notwithstanding, the technology remained in the confines of the United States. It continued to expand with various innovations, such as the electronic mail component added in 1972 and the word 'internet' coined in 1974 to connect differently constituted networks. The international application of the technology started in 1985 when the European Council for Nuclear Research (ECRN), began the usage of the technology for its research activities (Curran et al., 2012). As a result, the commercial application of the internet and the invention of the World Wide Web in 1991 by Tim Berners-Lee effectively placed the technology in the public domain. The internet, since its commercialisation on a global scale with its various applications and platforms, has a significant effect on the world both positively and negatively.

At its onset for commercial application, scholars and entrepreneurs argued that the internet was capable of increasing prosperity and bringing about a new democratic culture where people have control and participate more on issues that concern their welfare (Gates, 1995; Negroponete, 2010). Similarly, an assertion has also been made of the internet capability to change existing power relations (Gilder, 1994). Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward (2005) argue that the internet does enable some users who are not involved in politics offline to discuss politics in one form or the other online. Similarly, the internet possesses the capability to make people better informed about politics, and by this, make information readily available at the click of a computer keyboard, so that people can make informed decision and ultimately making the world more democratised (Hindman, 2009). In the same fashion, the internet will help democratise news and give more power to the citizens (Hindman, 2009; Gillmor, 2004).

Another quality of the internet worthy of mentioning according to Freedman (2016) is its applicability to almost everything (the Internet of Things - IoT) from household appliances to anything human beings interact with daily with an internet connection. The IoT, according to Madakam, Ramaswamy, & Tripathi (2015), is '...an open and comprehensive network of intelligent objects that have the capacity to auto-organise, share information, data and resources, reacting and acting in (the) face of situation and changes in the environment.' With this, therefore, the internet has the potential to alter the contemporary form of human relations, rewrite history and change the traditional ways of getting things done in society. For instance, email and chat messenger remind people of a faster means of getting information across, unlike the pre-internet postage system that takes a long time to deliver messages.

Furthermore, the internet is also changing the political landscape. In Nigeria, for example, the internet now provides a platform for citizens who hitherto do not have access to the media to participate in deliberation with other citizens on the platforms enabled by the internet. Also, the level of participation and interactivity by the citizens on public and democratic discourse is on the increase.

In the area of data management, the world has witnessed a transformation in data processing and application so much that it has improved the process of decision making in organisations and other endeavours such as marketing and advertising. Through different algorithms embedded into networks, people's data are now mined based on critical characteristics and used for improving service delivery (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). As good and promising these descriptions of the internet may sound, a plethora of evidence has shown that the technology is vulnerable and not detached from the complexities of society. For instance, the last Presidential elections in the US have demonstrated how the internet with all the various arguments already advanced about it as possessing the capacity for deepening democracy can be a force against democratic principles. Platforms like social media bots and fake websites have become tools for manipulating opinions and distorting facts during elections (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016; Howard et al., 2018). Persily (2017) explains further that in the 2016 US Presidential elections, websites, advertisement produced to appear like a news publication and the use of psychographic-profiling method through the scrapping of personal data from social media websites were tools used to manipulate voters.

Interestingly, the internet rather than erode nationalism is reinforcing it through the various technologies readily available within the public space (Morozov, 2011). In other words, the internet instead of forging unity and understanding among nations, ethnic groups and the religious organisation have become a space for reigniting these cleavages. It explains why under the 'pressure of religious, nationalist, and cultural forces reignited by the internet, global politics is poised to become even more complex, contentious, and fragmented' (Morozov, 2011,p, 247). One of the reasons the internet is yet to fulfil its potential as envisioned by the utopians is the complicated relationship and the tensions between the internet and the capitalist powers (McChesney, 2013). By explanation, the big corporations have invested in the internet infrastructure and expect to make a profit from their investment at the expense of public utility (Curran, 2016). According to his line of thought, an attempt to bring to fruition the promises of the internet will mean challenging the hegemonic influence of the 'capitalist powers' in society.

However, challenging these multinational corporations operations is difficult because the diffusion and commercialisation of the internet were made possible by capitalists (Curran et al., 2013). The idea is that the internet needs to conform to the structure of capitalism, which is driven by profit maximisation. However, the commodification of the internet, as argued by capitalists, will hurt the democratic features of the internet, which include the diversity of opinions and free access to information (Fuchs, 2017).

According to Grusky & Piketty (2018) and Stone, Trisi, Sherman, & Chen (2014), the internet rather than bridge the gap between the rich and poor has widened it, and this assertion invariably indicates that the internet works in favour of those who can effectively exploit it. Fuchs (2010), employing a Marxist approach to the study of the internet, argues that it promotes capital accumulation and uses the people. He further explained that the idea of prosumers in the equation of internet capital accumulation is mere commodities to advertisers. Toffler (1980) coined the concept of prosumer and described it as a person who produces a product and consumes it as well. Prosumer as a concept is a form of the cyclical interrelationship between production and consumption activities in which a person assumes and switches between the two roles. Within the terrain of the digital world, including the online media, the concept of the prosumer describes the complex production interrelationship on the internet between the production and consumption of content (Ritzer, 2015). Relating to Fuchs (2010) argument on how the internet promotes capital accumulation and exploitation, Ritzer (2015) maintains a pessimistic view of the digital world and asserts that prosumers are exploited unconsciously through the manipulation of the forces of demand and supply including advertising which creates a false consciousness of needs.

In line with this, Andrejevic (2010) argues that the exploitation of people is at the very heart of the internet and thus developed a coinage called 'exploitation 2.0'. The real economy, as we know it, is gradually giving way to a virtual economy which is hinged on information exchange and has a global perspective where various countries are linked together. However, the linking of countries within the so-called information superhighway, according to Adomi (2005) has its complexities and asymmetric relationship. For instance, the third world countries, due to their poor communication infrastructure and lack of requisite technical skills are lagging and therefore could not tap from the opportunities offered by the internet. Thus, these countries' economies, socio-cultural dynamics, including their education system,

Likewise, the new economy sometimes referred to as the information economy buoyed by the internet and its various features and capabilities, reveal a global economy that is imbalanced between the South and the North. More specifically, the global economy dynamics indicates that the old paradigm of the “centre and the periphery” is still very much relevant. Borcuch, Piłat-Borcuch, and Świerczyńska-Kaczor (2014) argue that the internet will expand the gap of inequality beyond the confines of countries boundaries to the global stage. They explain further that the issue of the digital divide will also affect the standard of living in the impoverished countries and further widen the gap between the prosperous nations and the less developed countries. Ultimately, this will have a significant impact on the global economy, global information flow and governance. For instance, the digital divide threatens the industrialisation drive of the developing countries as most cannot and do not have the automation capability that drives the 21st-century economy and production system. The relationship between the developed and developing countries remains asymmetric, and this fuels the over-reliance of the latter on foreign aid and donations. Regarding global information flow, there is an imbalance in the flow of information between the developed and the developing country. Hongladarom (2007) explains that the present system indicates more flow of information from the global south to the global north and entrenchment of global south information hegemony.

Today, cultural imperialism reinforces itself on the internet through a subtle way aided by the multinational corporations in the west, the urge to commodify activity at the expense of public interests and the vulnerability of the third world countries due to poor infrastructure and education. Simpson (2004) position on the internet and its development from Neo-Gramscian perspective, observes that consensus and hegemony, rather than being oppositional forces, have been, somewhat paradoxically, intrinsic to its commercial development. As much as this statement is right especially in the early development of the internet, contemporary realities of the internet as it permeates the whole gamut of the society transforming the economy and human relations have teased out an entirely new scenario. In recent time, the internet has witnessed the emergence of big, superpower, multinational corporations that now dominate every sphere of life and influence government policies.

On the plane of commerce, the internet possesses the power to transform the existing notion of customers as passive to active participants where they are effectively involved in decision- making (Shirky, 2011). However, this argument is relational and is tenable in a society where internet penetration and knowledge are high. The assertion may, however, be untenable in a nation like Nigeria where essential infrastructure like electricity supply is still unstable, and internet penetration is low. Early enthusiasts and writers assumed without many empirical facts that the internet has

enormous potentials to transform the global economy and usher in a new economic order where efficiency, innovation, job creation and increased productivity will be experienced (Atkinson et al., 2012; OECD, 2014). This claim is not sustainable judging from ‘...the dotcom bubble burst in 2001’ (Curran, 2016: p.3). During this period, several investors who have invested heavily in the information and communication sector, especially in the United States due to the promises and the features highlighted by the technology gurus lost their investments

Furthermore, the internet explosion and the ease within which there is global interconnectivity of computers has its negative impact in that it increased and brought a new dimension to crime in a form never experienced before (Sandywell, 2015). Criminals are using the internet due to the nature of its configuration and open-source system to perpetrate fraud such as spreading malware to alter database base of unsuspecting victims and steal their information. A reference point is the 419 scam where fraudsters defraud unsuspecting people of their monies. The label ‘419’ actually came from a section of the Nigerian law that addresses the offence of advanced fee fraud. The crime involves sending unsolicited e-mails to people requesting for advanced payment on business deals and promising a significant return on investment. Also, the crime sometimes takes the dimension of online dating where an unsuspecting innocent person gullibly got engaged in a relationship believed to be real and, in the process, lost his/her money to the supposed lover through spurious and hoodwinking messages.

Also, insurgents and terrorist groups have identified the internet as a veritable tool and now use the space for the recruitment of new members and indoctrination. Insurgents’ websites or what Seib & Janbek (2010) refer to as “Dark Web” deploy strategies such as user-friendly features and applications and also disseminate information that portrays the rationale for their actions positively to win the hearts of potential sympathisers and future recruits. The anonymous function offered by the internet is one of the reasons that made it attractive to insurgency group (Seib & Janbek, 2010). They also use a free e-mail account, public libraries sites, encrypted messages and steganography (hiding a message within an image) in achieving their aims (Weimann, 2004; Sorriano, 2012).

Scholars have highlighted the positive aspects of the internet. Vromen (2008) asserts that based on the pattern of demography usage of the internet which tilts more to the young people; the internet has the potential to bring aboard those who are outside the traditional political system. Therefore, it is contrary to the pre-internet period, where information is restricted and elitist. Similarly, Castells (2012) explains that the internet has placed in the hands of ordinary citizens the power to overthrow a dictatorial government. An example of this put forward is the Arab spring. This civil uprising started

in Tunisia in 2010 and later spread to most of the Arab nations challenging the aristocratic ruling class and eventually leading to the removal of some leaders. However, Zaid (2016) points out that the seeming poor economic condition, corruption and social injustice which has made people live in a pitiable condition are some of the motivating factors responsible for the protest, rather than the internet, per se. Nevertheless, the internet, mainly through social media, can serve as a useful tool through which physical repression mechanisms of the state like the security agencies, state media and censorship can be bypassed. It also can provide a coordinated platform of resistance to challenge dominant power structure (Downey and Fenton, 2003). The Occupy movement protest, which started on wall street and later spread to other parts of the world to protest social and economic inequality, was made productive and highly successful using the internet. Also, Stratton (1997) argues that the internet possesses the capability to break boundaries and bring a new global culture that encourages worldwide peace and dialogue irrespective of the diversity of colour, language or race.

In contrast to these assertions, the internet creates delusion and leads to estrangement and reduced interpersonal relationships (Morozov, 2011). Also, another argument sees the internet as responsible for the degrading of culture, the promotion of pornography, and the dissemination of extreme religious and fanatical political viewpoints (Creeber & Martin, 2009). On the one hand, other social problems recognised by O'Reilly (1996) in his study as internet addiction disorder are social isolation, craving and withdrawal symptoms, loss of control and marital discord. On the other hand, looking at the positive side of the internet in the United States of America, Grossman, (1995) in his study predicts that Americans would become more engaged with their government thanks to the participatory features of the internet. Scholars have also talked about the potential capability of the internet to bring an end to the monopoly of information by dictatorial regimes (Castells, 2012; Downey & Fenton, 2003). In reality, however, and rather than using the internet for citizens' engagement and inclusivity, states like Iran, China and Saudi Arabia use the internet to reinforce their positions, use the platform for propaganda tools and censored what type of information their citizens have access to (Glen & Royston, 2009; Kalathil & Boas, 2019).

The argument on the positive sides of the internet extends to the mass media. Gunter (2015), for instance, argues that the internet, due to its capacity for multimedia will allow media content such as news to be presented more creatively. In the same way, the internet now makes it possible to disseminate a news report at a higher speed and is also reshaping the whole process of news gathering and writing. As it is, the audience is now involved in the news process and have an instant platform

to respond to a story (Napoli, 2008; Pavlik, 2016). According to Benkler (2006), the internet will break the monopoly of the big media corporation on news chain and media product. Accordingly, the internet will pave the way for a pluralistic media system at the level of the individual or as an organised entity, and the emerging model will not be solely for profit. The power of web 2.0 has re-invigorated and instituted online a collaborative process between the mainstream news producer and the audience (Ahearn, 2009). Furthermore, the internet is as argued by the utopians is the awaiting saviour that will democratise communication and empower citizens with the ability to challenge the political status quo and in the long run usher in the era of ‘mass self-communication’ (Castell, 2012).

For instance, it is now possible on Facebook and other platforms like blogs, twitter, youtube to broadcast to many people. This form of broadcasting is an example of ‘Mass self-communication’. In contrast, however, contemporary realities have shown that the mainstream media are nowhere near extinction as they have adapted to the new technologies, registering their presence within the online environment and using the various features of the internet to sustain their influence within the media space. Interestingly, studies have also pointed to the reliance of the new media, including blog sites on the mainstream media for (Lewis et al., 2008). The internet through online deliberation has created a means of meeting one of the principles of democracy, which is debating and contesting public policies. Stromer-Galley (2007) explains that citizens engage in a political discussion online to express their reservations about policy and share such frustrations with others who have similar positions.

Moreover, democracy is not only about citizens’ expression of their choice of a candidate through elections but being able to debate on issues and accommodating conflicting views and opinions within such space of discourse. Purcell et al. (2010) in their findings conclude that the rate of people accessing information and news on the internet is higher than that of newspaper and radio and only surpassed by television in popularity. The internet possesses various features such as a platform for enabling commerce, education, information and deliberation. In Nigeria, online news websites like the Premium Times, Sahara Reporters, Nigerian village Square, Daily Trust newspaper, Vanguard newspaper, including the social media sites like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook offer alternative news space to the mainstream media for citizens to access information.

The online media platforms do not only provide digital space for people to read the news and discuss issues but also offer templates for citizens to share their concerns on issues that may not be

accommodated by the mainstream media controlled by the government. It provides an entrance into the public space of democratic discussion for that section of the populace who before the proliferation of online media and access to the internet through cheap smart mobile handsets hardly had a say on issues affecting them. Similarly, the mainstream media rarely focus their coverage on matters concerning the ordinary people in Nigeria, except if the subject has a connection with the government or the elite class. Most citizens view the online media with the hope that it can provide them with space to freely express themselves coupled with the anonymity component of the online media space which ensures commenters comment freely and interact with other commenters without fear of reprimand or victimisation (Johnson, 2011).

The space for debate or feedback in the mainstream media is however limited, and sometimes, these opinions get drowned in editorial policies, newspaper's philosophical standpoint. Recently, there has been an emphasis on the entrance of the internet and its potentials for providing additional space for news especially those ignored by the legacy media, and the rejuvenation of the public sphere (Curran & Witschge, 2010; Redden & Witschge, 2010). McNair (2017) argues the internet made the 'proliferation' of news outlets possible and transformed the public sphere from a single space to multiplicity of spheres where various views and opinions are allowed. Similarly, in a democratic society, people need to make choices during elections and be engaged continuously in discourses that affect their existence as humans, their society, and decisions of their government. It is imperative, therefore, that for a nation to achieve stable democracy, accountability to the citizens on the part of the government and high level of political education, there is a need for constant deliberation. Healthy democracy does not emerge from the mere provision of information during elections on which candidate electorates are to vote. Instead, it arises from the quality of talks or deliberation on various issues in society (Dryzek, 2002).

Furthermore, the internet allows for and converges the various forms of mass media at one point and creates new ways and platforms for information delivery such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs. (Ekwo, 2012; Latzer, 2013). Burgess (2017, p.47) describes convergence as '... the tendency of separate media technologies, cultural forms, and social practices to come together to perform similar functions and make new hybrid media systems. In the discussion of media convergence as an offshoot of digitalisation, James and Couldry (2011) and Jenkins (2006) point out the participatory potential of the digital platform by converging both the producer and consumer of media content under one platform and providing the space for them to interact. However, Jenkins (2006) expresses reservation

on the potential participatory culture of convergence, arguing that the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the few is capable of truncating the promises.

The internet offers a space for public deliberation, and it possesses some features that can enhance democratic culture (Coe et al., 2014; Lupia, 2011; McDermott, 2018a). There is an assumption that the various outlets offered by the internet for news dissemination will have a positive impact on - and increase - democratic culture in society, including facilitating a public sphere. As Shirazi (2008), in his study of the effects of ICT in Arab countries, argues, the internet possesses the potential to facilitate freedom of expression and advance democratic principles. Studies have, however, shown that multiplicity of news outlets, especially with the internet, does not translate to a vibrant public sphere (Aalberg, van Aelst, and Curran, 2010). Additionally, the system of government in place in a country also affects whether the democratic principles and freedom of speech features of the internet, according to Shirazi (2008) are achievable or not. Also, arguments are raised by scholars that the internet, in essence, will create a new problem such as the internet meme, fake news and the notion of ‘solutionism’ which gives a wrong perception of the internet’s ability to solve all human problems (Morozov 2011). The various literature reviewed on the capacities of the internet concerning the new media platform made it evident that the technology presents many affordances for participation, engagement and increased audience visibility in the news processing chain. However, the internet is not a perfect space as there are mitigating factors already discussed which affect the realisation of the affordances already mentioned.

3.3 Internet Usage in Nigeria

Nigeria’s adoption of the internet similar to many other countries within sub-Saharan Africa was late and far behind other states like the US, Canada, United Kingdom and many parts of Europe (Naidoo & Schutte, 1999). The technology gained its entrance into Nigeria around 1996 (Adomi, 2005). The total number of internet users in Nigeria currently stands at 123,486,615 million, with 61.4% internet penetration and 61.643% growth from 2000- June 2019 (www.internetworldstats.com, 2019). With this statistic, Nigeria rates as the country with the highest number of internet users in Africa (www.internetworldstats.com, 2018). However, the penetration rate and the growth, though on the increase, are low when compared with Western Europe. There are lots of militating factors responsible for the slow growth of the internet in Nigeria and by extension, Africa. In a comparative study conducted to assess the use of the internet in Kenya and Nigeria, findings confirmed that there are various militating factors against internet accessibility. These factors include erratic electricity

supply, cost of acquiring necessary facilities to provide internet services, low-speed internet connectivity and other expenses associated with doing business in Nigeria (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Adeya, 2004).

Equally, irregular power supply, for instance, has a significant impact on the diffusion of the internet in Nigeria and this has a bearing on the relatively high cost of engaging in the business of internet in Nigeria. Moreover, staying connected to the World Wide Web requires powering all the necessary equipment and where this is not regular; the operator relies on alternative sources of power like the generator which runs on fuel or solar energy that requires the purchase of several solar panels. Consequently, the operators incur extra operating costs passed to users who in most cases, cannot afford to pay for the connection.

Despite the various problems affecting internet penetration in Nigeria and the dark side of the technology as a result of its use for fraud; the internet has continued to impact on the country in the area of information dissemination, socio-economic development and democracy. In 2014, the ICT sector in Nigeria, which includes the internet contributed \$50 billion, about 9.58% of the gross domestic product to Nigeria's economy (Kolawole, 2017). Also, and within the academic community in Nigeria, the internet has become an essential tool for research and even in the area of teaching and instruction (Awolaye et al., 2008; Jagboro, 2005). Similarly, the various internet platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, online news sites, YouTube and WhatsApp are now tools for political engagement in Nigeria (Edegoh & Annunike, 2016).

One significant development in Nigeria that has helped to increase internet penetration and access and at the same time improved the pattern of communication at the level of interpersonal and group interaction is the use of the mobile phone (Kolawole, 2017). The mobile phone was launched in Nigeria in 2001, with the Global Satellite Mobile technology (GSM) adopted as the standard platform for its deployment. The relatively cheap cost of acquiring a smart mobile handset in Nigeria has proved valuable in respect of the issue of digital inequality and access to the internet in Nigeria as it has increased citizens' access to the internet. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report for 2017, Nigeria has the highest number of mobile phone subscription in Africa with 152 million subscribers, and a large percentage of the mobile handsets are smartphones.

The effect of the mobile phone was further described by Obadare (2006) explaining that the possession of a cellular telephone has a transformational impact on its owner because it removes the fixed geographical and space barriers and enables the owner to communicate across a distance without physically moving from his place. Also, internet technology is gradually becoming a vital necessity in the lives of an average Nigerian and veritable technology deployed in business and even public-sector operations.

Although internet access and penetration are low in Nigeria when compared to other states, the rate of penetration and access has continued to grow as the cost of acquiring smartphone and broadband comes down. This low cost of smartphone acquisition and an increase in broadband penetration has also made more people who initially could not afford phones able to do so. The mass media in Nigeria, including both the electronic and print, have also explored the internet potentials fully by having an online presence. As a result, it is now possible to watch and listen to both Nigerian television and radio stations on the internet and read newspapers without recourse to the traditional modes (Paul, 2019). Apart from access to conventional media, the internet allowed news media to provide a platform for interactivity and a space for the audience to engage in real-time debate on issues with each other.

Likewise, another area where the Nigerian citizens are exploring the potential of the internet is in the field of political communication where an avalanche of diverse information is available through the various platforms on the internet to serve as a guide for the citizens in making their choices especially during elections (Targema & Suntai, 2018). Accordingly, the multiple information platforms the internet offers have helped change the old narratives where information and news available to citizens are unidirectional and within the confines of the mainstream media. Furthermore, the mainstream media is constrained by space, time and owner's influence in the newsgathering and dissemination process. Another issue with the mainstream media is in the area of news gathering, processing and dissemination. The issue has to do with the subjection of information to the gatekeeping process which may include the editorial policies that insist on conformity to the ideological leaning of the media organisation, and, by so doing, some information that may be vital for decision making by the audience/readers may become twisted.

Therefore, the adoption of internet technology into the communicative space apart from enhancing the information dissemination system also signals a paradigm shift. The paradigm shift entails

moving from the conventional old order approach of disseminating and managing information to a new order that stresses participation and interactivity by incorporating the readers/audience hitherto passive into becoming part of the production and feedback chain. Besides, Adeyanju (2013), in his analysis of the growing influence of the internet, argues that the politician and opinion moulders now use social media platforms to reach out to citizens.

In summary, the internet, since its introduction has made a noticeable impact in Nigeria. However, there are problems concerning accessibility, speed and cost due to issues which are also present in many developing countries, especially in Africa. Nevertheless, the technology is gradually permeating every facet of human endeavours in Nigeria, such as the mass media, government activities, banking, education and even social relations.

3.4 The concept of democracy

The practice of democracy features daily at various levels of human undertakings. It is a system of government that allows citizens to take part in governance directly or indirectly, a concept used to describe discussion that is inclusive and where decisions are negotiated before arriving at a compromise. McNair (2008), asserts that:

Democracy, then — imperfect and limited as it can be; grudgingly delivered though it is by political elites in many countries, and subject to attack and roll back at any time — has become a global universal to which all claim allegiance, or at least pay lip service. The scale of this transformation, which has occurred in little more than one-quarter of the time elapsed since the Putney debates of 1647 and the English revolution first established the principle of the sovereignty of parliament, is truly remarkable.

The origin of democracy emanates from a system of government practised in Greek society some thousands of years ago. Møller & Skaaning (2013) explain the concept as the ‘synthesis of the words ‘demo’ and ‘kratic’ to mean the rule by the people’. Although the practice thrived in ancient Greece for a long time, it did attract criticisms during the period. It was referred to by Plato as a ‘form of misrule’, while Aristotle sees it as the ‘tyranny of the poor’ (Molter & Skaaning, 2013). The type of democracy practised during this period is direct democracy and involved every citizen. Also, the modern arrangement of various institutions of the state that distinguish one from another was not well defined during the period. Nevertheless, the fundamentals of democracy which still determine modern democracy today - equality, freedom and tolerance - were the tripod on which the survival of Greek democracy hinged (Garner et al., 1993). Despite these three cardinal principles, Dahl (1989) and Held (2006) have argued that there are exceptions which influenced the criticisms of Greek

democracy as espoused by Plato and Aristotle. These exceptions include the discrimination against women from participating in the electoral process, and the exclusion of slaves as well.

In the contemporary time, defining democracy is difficult as the concept connotes different things to different people. This position is corroborated by Dahl (1989) that the term democracy refers to so many things that it no longer has a restricted meaning. There are various understandings of what it is, and these perceptions are often informed by one's standpoint along the contradictory continuum influenced by social, economic and historical conditions of society (Jebril, Stetka, & Loveless, 2013). The definition could be anchored on a periodic free election, and on a system that allows for various forms of participation (Rozumilowicz, 2002; Schmitter & Karl, 1993). For a definition that dwells on the election, democracy is a process where candidates present themselves for elective positions, and electorates make their choices periodically. The second strand of defining democracy is not limited to the election but the capacity to allow people the freedom to participate and discuss issues that concern them. The different patterns of democratic development and experiences in different milieu have also played out in the name tags given to such democratic practices. There are such labels like liberal democracy, deliberative democracy, western democracy, semi-democracy, and façade democracy (Storm, 2008).

Collier & Levitsky (1996) attempt a definition of democracy by placing the concept within six frameworks. The frameworks include maximalist, procedural minimum, expanded procedural minimum, the prototypical conception of established industrial democracy, non-democratic and the electoral democracy. Storm (2008, p. 216) explains that the six categorisations are based on the conceptual benchmark of:

- Reasonably competitive elections, devoid of massive fraud, with broad suffrage;
- civil liberty, freedom of speech, assembly and association;
- elective governments have effective power to govern;
- additional political, economic and social features associated with industrial democracy.

This categorisation of democracy and the conceptual benchmark that frame it may look very comprehensive; it, however, reflects the western ethos and fails to consider the historical and cultural imperatives which shape democracy in other societies. This assertion is more so especially when one considers the fact that the basis of the democratic paradigm in the west is a majoritarian democracy which is about multi-party politics where the winner needs to have a majority vote (Wiredu, 1996). Therefore, it is challenging to use western categorisation and benchmark to describe the type of

democracy in other states like Africa. It is important to note that contrary to the assertion that the origin of democracy and its practice exclusively belong to the western countries especially Greece, democratic practices also existed in pre-colonial African societies long before any contact with the Europeans. The features of democracy such as checks and balances and even participatory decision-making process found in kingdoms like the Oyo empire in present-day Nigeria and Akan in Ghana have been in practice long before their contact with the west (Oladipo, 2001; Osabu-Kle, 2000). One of the components of the African democratic paradigm argues that power resides with the people and is only held in trust by the rulers. Rulers can be removed for abuse of office based on the institutionalised procedure for such (Oladipo, 2001). Also, the principle of dialogue is part of the African traditional democratic system, and most decisions in the kingdoms are agreed on after extensive consultations with stakeholders (Todd Bradley, 2011; Nwala, 2005).

Radical democratic politics is another strand of democracy. This brand of democracy is concerned with the question of equality and liberty. Furthermore, radical democracy has two tenets which are also the primary conditions for identifying a democratic practice. The first tenet stresses unfettered access to and the free participation of people in government and the second emphasises that the legitimacy of government derives from the people (Davidson, 1987; Laclau, Ernesto; Mouffe, 2013; McNeilly, 2016). Furthermore, radical democracy explains the contradictions and the contestations intrinsic in a democracy teasing out its imperfection and the need to revise any part of democratic practices if need be regularly. Despite the critical tenets that identify radical democratic politics, there seem to be divergent views regarding how to approach the concept. Therefore, this leads to three different approaches to the idea: deliberative, agonistic and autonomist (Mouffe, 1999; Siapera & Veglis, 2012).

The deliberative model emphasises on the discussion before arriving at a decision. In contrast, the agonistic approach stresses arguments and conflicts before deliberators arrive at conclusions. The agonistic approach assumes that society comprises conflicting groups and ideas, all struggling for the control of power. As a result, the most successful of the groups in contestation automatically impose its hegemony and power on the other groups and the entire society. For the third approach, which is autonomist, democracy is a struggle between labour and capital (Mcneair, 2008).

Habermas (1994); Badie, Berg-Schlosser and Morlino (2011); Perloff (2013) identify what they refer to as the three normative models of democracy explained as a way of having a good understanding of democracy. These models are classical direct democracy, liberal democracy and deliberative

democracy. Each of these models highlights the various components of democratic practices, as shown in this table:

Table 3.1 Three models of democracy

Classical Greek Direct Democracy	Liberal Democracy	Deliberative Democracy
Principles:		
Direct citizens participation	Natural rights of individuals	Reasoned public deliberation about an issue
Equality	Representative government	Civil discourse
Citizens obligation to society	The private market place of ideas	The collective dialogue that influences policy
Communication emphasis:		
Well-crafted rhetorical arguments	Free expression, no-holds-barred press	Forums/articles that encourage deliberation
Shortcomings:		
Impractical in mass society	Treats citizenship as a private commodity rather than the public good	Preachy and dismissive of a decision not based on pure deliberation.

Perloff, 2014, p.15

The classical democracy or what is referred to as Athenian democracy stresses direct participation of all citizens in governance. Dated back to about 4th century BC, the Athenian democratic model remains a key reference point in any discourse connected to modern democracy in the contemporary period. The core values of the Greek democratic system are liberty, equality and the possession of excellent rhetorical skills. Furthermore, the Athenian democracy anchored its decision-making process on deliberative practise, where they consider dissenting opinions before a decision is reached (Canevero, 2018). However, Harding & Hansen (1990) argue that ‘exchange of views’ is not active

in the Athenian democracy contrary to the view held by some scholars regarding the deliberativeness of the Athenian system of government. Liberal democracy has its foundation in the enlightenment movement of the 17th and 18th century Europe, especially in France and England. The theory explains that democracy depends on individual right and autonomy in the public sphere (Perloff, 2014). It recognises the concept of the marketplace of ideas, and therefore, freedom of speech and press are some of the essential components of the liberal democracy. In the same way, the philosophy of the media under libertarian democracy serves as a purveyor of information without any form of interference from government (McQuail, 2010).

Therefore, in a modern liberal democracy, one of the institutions responsible for providing information and ensuring good governance within a democratic state is the mass media (Street, 2010). The role of the mass media is critical in politics and democratic process ranging from reporting political news to shaping opinions and setting agendas. Dryzek (2000); Parkinson and Mansbridge, (2012) describe the role of the mass media in democracy as one that provides a space for connecting the various strata of the democratic system to discuss policies critically. They also interpret and analyse trends within politics. However, these functions are conditioned or shaped by the type of democracy practised in a country. In a liberal representative democracy, for instance, the role of the media will be to provide information that will help citizens in forming opinions and provide feedback from the citizens that serve as input for government in formulating and implementing policies. The mass media within the liberal representative democracy can identify with a political ideology provided such position does not blur the line between truth and opinion and as determined by the legal and ethical framework around the journalism profession. There is also an assumption that human beings in a liberal representative democracy are rational and naturally and possess the faculty to choose and decide from the information available to them (Siapera & Veglis, 2012).

The mass media in a libertarian democracy recognises the need for a communication space which accommodates a multiplicity of opinions and plurality of media ownership (McQuail, 2010). In the same way, the mass media within the ambit of a liberal democratic environment 'enhance the functioning of democracy by encouraging constructive and reciprocal communication between different groups in society (Curran, 2002, p.7). In short, the arguments of scholars on the role of the media within a libertarian democracy depend on the premise that the mass media serve as a watchdog and also possess the freedom to criticise the activities of government by providing space for citizens to deliberate on issues affecting them (Oso, 2013; McQuail, 2010; Curran, 2002). The Nigerian

media environment has the highest number of newspapers, radio and television stations on the continent of Africa (Oso, 2013). However, the proliferation of mass media organisation in Nigeria does not translate to a plurality of ownership as most of the organisations are owned by a few people. As a result, the media is not fulfilling its role based on the libertarian principles as they reflect the ideological, ethnic and religious positions of their owners. As stated by Oso (2013), any evidence of the diversity of news content within the media space in Nigeria only reflects the nuances of the owners.

Furthermore, Agbaje (1993) argues that these dominant groups influenced the operations of the media in Nigeria and went on to assert that ‘...the press remains largely a captive of jingoistic claims of ethnicity, petty rivalries, personal ambitions, religion, regionalism and partisan politics as outlined by dominant groups in civil and political society’(Agbaje 1993, p. 469). Equally, the relationship between the government and the media is far from the expectations of a mass media operating in a liberal democracy. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under section 22 reflects one of the ideals of libertarian democracy by providing for the freedom of the press and confer on the mass media the right to hold the government accountable. However, the complexities of the relationship between the mass media, the ruling class and the economic imperatives have made the mass media fulfilment of its constitutional role difficult. Similarly, the political and economic underpinnings which influence media productions and operations have a severe effect on the Nigerian media capacity to discharge their constitutional functions (Oso, 2013). This assertion supports Waisbord (2003); Schiller (1986) argument that the mass media possesses the capacity to facilitate a public sphere detached from the influence of state and market and provide the type of information citizens need to take a rational political decision. However, the media can only fulfil this where state and market influence do not interfere with the operations of the press.

Deliberative democracy, as the third theory has its roots in the works of philosophers like John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas. Rawls’ argument of seeking for ‘original position’ or ‘veil of ignorance theory’ in discourse and Habermas public sphere theory both shaped the deliberative approach of democracy. Deliberative democracy is a response to - and runs against - neoliberalism in which emphasis is focussed more on the individual rather than the common good. Neoliberalism encourages over-reliance on elected officials that may lead to a state of disconnect between citizens and governance. It can also lead to a situation where there is a close relationship between the corporate world and the government, which may lead to heavy influence on the state’s political decisions by

the corporate world at the expense of the citizens (O'Toole, 2014). Deliberative democracy theoretical approach to the understanding of democracy also draws strength from Habermas's (1989) submission that a place exists between the state and private life where public opinion emerges. Therefore, and ideally, in the space described by Habermas, freedom, liberty, and competition just like in a free marketplace dominates discussion allowing for optimum utilisation of politics in citizens life (Perloff, 2014).

Deliberative democracy provides a practical judgement after considering issues through discussion. Deliberative democracy is the type of democracy which puts talk and communication at the centre of democracy over just mere voting at an election. In this context of democracy, democratic legitimacy rests on the capacity of citizens to freely participate in the discussion that results in a collective decision (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). Deliberative democracy is 'an imaginative rethinking of democracy offering a new kind of participation, one that not only gives citizens more power but allows them more opportunities to exercise power thoughtfully' (Held, 2006, p.235). Deliberative democracy ensures the legitimacy of decisions due to the participatory process involved. It also provides an opportunity for the discussion of issues publicly, and therefore allow for reciprocity in decision making, and provides a means of looking at the past to correct mistakes (Gutmann & Thompson, 2009).

The various theoretical explanations of democracy espouse five essential characteristics that run through the analysis. These characteristics as enunciated by Perloff (2014) based on Coleman and Blumler (2009); Dahl (1989) are:

- 1) adults citizens right to vote and contest for election;
- 2) free and fair elections in which more than one political party participates;
- 3) freedom of the individual, and expression even if such a person belongs to the opposition party;
- 4) existence of a civil society with the rights and freedom to operate;
- 5) platform and freedom for the citizens to engage in rational public deliberations on public issues.

So far, the researcher has through the literature reviewed, espoused the various explanations of democracy. Abraham Lincoln's definition remains relevant to modern time:

Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people.' The central thesis of this definition is that the supreme power of the state is vested in the people and used by them through a representational system of government that is voted for periodically either directly or indirectly through elections.

3.5 The practice of deliberation

Deliberation is one of the essential themes in a democratic society and some of its features when correctly followed enhance good governance, citizens' participation in public issue debates, in which their comments become inputs in policy formulation and decisions. Similarly, deliberation takes place when people engage with each other in a discussion filled with mutual respect and a decision made after due consideration of divergent views and opinions during a deliberation (Gastil, 2008). At the same time, deliberation is 'debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinion in which participants are willing to revise preferences and positions during the conversation in the light of new information and claims made by fellow participants (Chambers, 2013, p.309). The term is applied loosely to refer to various acts of discussion or conversation such as dialogue, or regular social conversation (Stromer-Galley, 2007). Deliberation, however, entails discussing a common problem to arrive at a solution (Habermas, 1989; Zappen, 2004). It is all about putting communication at the centre of politics and creating a platform for citizens to discuss issues with mutual respect, shifting positions where necessary with rational justification, and ensuring inclusiveness (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). One of the key markers in any discourse on deliberation that should be taken into cognisance is dialogue. Dialogue emphasises the importance of understanding each other, especially where there seems to be a divergence of opinion.

Dryzek (2011) identifies the flexibility of deliberators to shift their positions in the course of discussion as one of the qualities of deliberation that separate it from other forms of political communication. Scheufele (2001) while explaining the importance of debate in a democratic discourse insists that citizens' interaction with each other helps in providing good understanding to an issue and this contributes to quality participation in the political process. Besides, the deliberative process enables citizens to engage in a meaningful discussion and through thoughtful and critical comments added during debates provide solutions to a problem and the capacity for evaluating the proffered solutions (Stromer-Galley, 2007). Likewise, Mendonça (2015) describes deliberation as a process reflecting reason exchange on an equal plane among participant in a deliberative situation. Correspondingly, this shows that deliberation is a dialogical practice during which social actors seek to convince others about their stance on issues through a discursive exchange. The deliberative system is like 'a set of distinguishable, differentiated, but to some degree interconnected parts, often with distributed functions and a division of labour, connected in such a way to form a complex whole' (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p7).

As there are various definitions of deliberation, so are diverse approaches to the way a discussion is conducted and how the decision reached in the process of discourse is applied to the real world. Moreso, the differences in the discourse process, especially when one considers the complexities of modern society and the interconnectedness of the various components that form a community are all keys to any discussion on deliberation. In traditional African society, the implementation of an outcome of a deliberation sometimes does not produce desired results. For instance, it is counter-productive to deliberate on issues that are fundamental to cultural practices at a micro-level and implement the conclusion reached at the macro level without the understanding and acceptance of all stakeholders. Therefore, Pennington (2010) argues that the imposition of decisions from deliberation on all citizens is illegitimate if citizens cannot come to term with or understand the reasons (s) for the imposition of such a decision.

The concept of deliberation and deliberative democracy is both a reform movement and an academic undertaking. Its primary motive is to allow for the participation of ordinary citizens in governance and decision-making process (Smith, 2009). It could take the shape of a mini-public discussion or community deliberation on issues (Bächtiger et al., 2014). However, Pateman (2012) challenged the idea of a mini-public debate as a microcosm of a democratic debate arguing that the size of deliberation is not good enough since the vast majority of the citizens are excluded from participation. Therefore, any decision emanating from such cannot be said to be representative enough. Similarly, voters' indifference, the complex nature of the world, the pattern of political communication often garbed in a fashion far removed from ordinary citizens' understanding of worldview along with party affiliation and loyalty lines may harm deliberation (Kuyper, 2015).

Furthermore, these factors can affect deliberation negatively in the long run over the decision to be taken since opinions have already polarised along with party affiliations, and this may block any sense of objectivity and reasoning. Party members always stick to their positions based on political or party ideologies, thereby making the idea of rational deliberation difficult. Debates on public issues in Nigeria do not achieve their goals because citizens project ethnic, political affiliations and religion sentiments into a conversation (Akinola, 2014). Looking at the possibility of deliberation from this angle, reaching a compromise on discourse is difficult as the participants have become polarised into various ideological leanings, hence, making reaching an agreement complicated (Schkade et al., 2010). Lebech (2002); Price (2006) argue that the concept of deliberation can take two perspectives - horizontal and vertical. The horizontal perspective of deliberation centres on citizens' deliberation

among each other and has nothing to do with the mainstream political class and activities. On the other hand, the vertical perspective of debate is a form of interactive engagement between the citizens and the political elites. The critical aspects of the interaction here are space or opportunity for the citizens to express their feelings to their political representatives, and in return, allows the politicians to provide their feedback and convince the citizens to tow their line of thinking or align to the politicians' philosophy. However, Price and Lebeck's description of deliberation dwells more on the expectations or results of deliberation than the process involved in achieving results.

Rosenberg (2006) argues for a strand of democratic deliberation that focusses on the process of deliberation rather than most of the existing works in deliberative democracy which focusses on the results. Rosenberg identifies three types of discourse based on the process of deliberation. The first is the conventional discourse, and it focusses on a problem and the way to solve it. Conventional discourse also has as one of the processes of achieving its set target, which is the regulation of discussion along with the societal convention of civility and politeness. The second type of deliberative discourse from Rosenberg typology is cooperative discourse. Likewise, it is a step further from the conventional discourse by refining the discursive space in such a way as to provide an atmosphere for participants within the discursive space to understand the problem necessitating deliberation and the various dynamics surrounding the issue for deliberation.

The third level of deliberation, according to Rosenberg (2006), referred to as collaborative discourse, harnesses the psychological and cultural resources of participants involved in deliberation. The aim of doing this is to facilitate an atmosphere where participants understand each other's cultural and psychological peculiarities. By doing this, participants will achieve a level during a discussion where they can collaborate and discuss a solution to the issue of debate rather than engaging in an unresolved argument. Rosenberg's typology of deliberation seems to have addressed some of the criticisms levelled against deliberation, such as individual's personality, culture, traits, and gender which are some of the arguments espoused against the concept of deliberation (Mendelberg, 2002). However, it is unlikely that Rosenberg's notion of deliberation is achievable in the real practical sense of deliberation. It is idealistic and sounds utopian. For instance, Rosenberg's argument on the general level of deliberation for regulating discussion along societal convention for civility and politeness is impracticable, especially in a society like Nigeria. This assertion is because Nigeria is a heterogeneous and with high diversities regarding cultural norms and mores. As a result, determining

what is civil and polite or setting a standard for these principles will be challenging, where participants are coming from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, from the mass of literature on deliberation and deliberative democracy; three waves of deliberation are identified. Kuyper (2015) explains that the first wave represents the works of John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Joshua Cohen, and they were all concerned with explaining the ideals of deliberative democracy (Kuyper, 2015). The first wave described decision reached from deliberation as based on “consensus” where superior argument prevails. The scholars within the first wave, however, disagreed on the approach to arriving at a consensus during a deliberation. Rawls and Cohen contend that decisions made during debate should reflect justice and fairness. For Rawls, the ideals of deliberation are connected to his social contract explanation of the concepts of “fairness and justice” in his book “A Theory of Justice” first published in 1971. Rawls argues that for deliberation to achieve its objective and a decision taken, participants must return to the ‘original position’ and adopt a ‘veil of ignorance’ where they are deprived of the prior knowledge of their positions or social status and all participants assume equality.

Equally, the importance of the constitution helps to provide the needed reason on the part of citizens through a public political forum to decide for the common good of society. Rawls (2001) and Cohen (2007) are in support of institutionalised political formation or units for a deliberative process. Habermas, on the other hand, emphasises the rationality of decisions in his approach to deliberation. Furthermore, Habermas insists that individual morals should come to bear in deliberation, and the domain for discussion should not be limited to the official or public political forum. Contrary to Rawls and Cohen preference for a public political forum as a space for deliberation, others including Habermas argue for space other than the political forum that will include private citizens (Habermas, 1992; Saward, 2001). Besides, the inherent argumentative nature of any deliberative encounter is essential to the question of legitimacy concerning a democratic system where pluralism subsists and where the unilateral imposition of ideas on others is absent (Habermas, 1994). Also, Habermas (1994) insists that a well-defined measure and precise mode of communication and interaction within a forum is capable of fostering an active deliberative space.

Furthermore, Habermas’ notion of deliberative democracy describes discourse and opinion formation as occurring at two separate but complementary layers. These layers consist of informal and formal opinion formations. The informal opinion exists within the public sphere while the formal opinion

formation takes place within the realm of the political institutions (Bohman, 2004; Elstub, 2010; Habermas, 1992, 1994; Pennington, 2003; Wiklund, 2005). While rejecting the liberal tradition of politics which view the political space as a market and competitive terrain with actors as self-seeking and in a constant struggle; Habermas (2001) argues for a deliberative approach that stresses participation and consensus in opinion formation and decision making.

One conclusion likely to be inferred from the works of the first wave of scholars on the concept of deliberation scholarship is that researches and findings are mostly normative and only explain what the practice of deliberation entails. According to the first-generation deliberative theorists, reason exchange is the only form of communication tool that can induce uniform change which will ultimately result in consensus (Elstub, 2010). However, the standpoint of the first generation is too idealistic and impractical. How can one measure sound and logical reasoning which will prevail over other arguments in a deliberation without reaching a compromise? There is every possibility in a debate that there are people with a strong opinion and not willing to shift ground. In such a case, reason exchange will not lead to a decision but a rowdy and inconclusive deliberation.

Above all, some of the drawbacks in the first generation influence the emergence of the second-generation theorists. The second wave of theorists' preoccupation is on the application of deliberative principles in the real-life situation. They, therefore, attempt to fuse them with liberal democracy (Young, 2001; Kuyper, 2015; Guttman and Thompson, 2004 and Bohman, 1998). Estub (2010, p.291) in his explanation of the second wave of deliberative practice submits that 'preferences will adapt to public reason and new information, but not in a uniform manner. Therefore, reaching a consensus in public discourse is practically impossible. In order to address the lack of consensus, other forms of communication other than reason exchange should be included in a discussion.' The second-generation theorists focussed on how deliberative ideals can be applied in a practical situation. They are also concerned about how to accommodate the complexities of economic and social inequalities and cultural marginalisation in a discourse (Curato, 2012; Curato & Ong, 2015).

Besides, the second generation theorists challenged the classical or first wave theorists' argument that decision from a deliberation should be based on reason and rationality. According to these theorists, 'reason' is just one of the various means of justifying a position in a deliberation. Consequently, seeking information and forming a consensus will not take a uniform way but require accommodating other modes of communication apart from the reason-giving (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Estub,

2010). Curato (2012, p.424) argues that ‘...interlocutors have different ways of articulating their positions and that various discursive tactics can contribute to inter-subjective understanding.’

Other modes of communication, like humour, helps to ensure a relaxed environment for a free flow of discussion (Mansbridge et al., 2006). Additionally, other factors like rhetoric in bringing out the critical part of a discourse (Dryzek, 2000), and the relevance of storytelling in assisting participants in finding common ground can contribute to the creation of mutual understanding and cooperation in deliberation (Polletta & Lee, 2006). First position and stance in deliberation are amenable to new information and public reasons. However, this shifting of opinion does not take a uniform pattern (Bohman, 2004; Gutmann & Thompson, 2009). Similarly, people always seek for their self- interests and in public deliberation, those various interests can be brought together to achieve a purpose, but can never be wished away (Bohman, 2004). Mansbridge et al. (2012) contend that ‘self- interest’ is essential and should be one of the features of deliberative democracy. It is vital for each participant in deliberation firstly to know and understand how the issue or policy under discussion will affect her/him, and secondly how it will affect other individuals participating in the deliberation. The second-generation deliberative theorists, however, have an epistemic gap in the sense that it does not give a comprehensive explanation as to what is required for deliberation to take place in a society with complexities (Estub, 2010). A reference point is Nigeria with ethnic and religious diversities. These diversities often affect discussion on issues of national importance. Quite often, in Nigeria, a consensus is difficult to reach on national discourse irrespective of any mode of communication employed.

The third stage of democratic deliberation described as the ‘systemic turn’ moved the focus of deliberation to the application of its features on a large scale (Curato, 2012; Dryzek, 2010 & Chambers, 2009). It reconciles the arguments put forward by the first and second-generation deliberation scholars, and how it applies to real-world settings (Baber and Bartlett, 2005; Parkinson, 2006; Chambers, 2013; Kuyper, 2015). Kuyper (2013, p. 54) explains that:

Epistemic, ethical, and democratic legitimacy are the primary motors pushing the systemic approach forward. Epistemically, deliberation and decision making should be appropriately informed by facts, logic, and different points. This entails learning about other people’s preferences and accepting that many types of speech are vehicles for reason-giving.

Furthermore, the deliberative scholars who operate within the systemic turn have argued against the Habermasian conditions of what constitutes a public sphere and an ideal democratic deliberation. They argued that Habermas viewpoint of critical and rational debates approach ignores the place and

influence of power and competition in civil discourse (Coleman & Moss, 2012; Dahlberg, 2011; Dryzek, 2002; Kies, 2013). Hendriks (2006) identifies two types of deliberation in the 'systemic turn' of democratic deliberation: a) micro deliberation and b) macro deliberation. Micro deliberation is concerned with the small-scale type of deliberation with the primary focus on decision making, and whether participants are impartial in a debate. Similarly, micro deliberation does not focus on mass participation in political deliberation but on how to enhance the quality of face to face deliberation (Lafont, 2015). Micro deliberation, on the one hand, possesses the quality of reflecting the diversity of a society more than the electoral system (Baber & Bartlett, 2001). Also, transforming a democracy into becoming more deliberative is more comfortable with micro deliberation (Gastil, 2000).

About the above statement, Chappell (2010, p.298) argues that 'the characteristics of micro deliberation make it easier to apply the normative values of the ideal theory of deliberative democracy to it than the macro model.' The essence of micro deliberation can, however, be counter-productive judging from the basis that individuals are passionate and convinced about their beliefs and positions on issues, that anybody holding a contrary position might be viewed or treated negatively (Talissee, 2013). Correspondingly, this can result in the polarisation of opinions along a line and could lead to exclusion or systematic annihilation of some groups or opinions (Young, 2001). Macro deliberation, on the other hand, is a form of deliberation that is not structured, done on a large scale and involves mediation. Also, macro deliberations are the various political discussions that occur daily within platforms like the media, civil society, and even everyday conversation (Habermas, 1996; Mansbridge, 1999; Parkinson, 2006; Talise, 2013 & Kuyper, 2015). It facilitates inclusiveness by allowing for a broad debate. It also performs the function of agenda-setting and publicity (Lafont, 2015; Chappell, 2012).

Generally, deliberation has attracted lots of commentaries as regarding its practicality, as Min (2009) refers to the concept as a normative ideal (Min, 2009). Likewise, critical scholars, especially from the feminist background, argue that deliberation has failed to consider the issue of power within the context of deliberation (Mouffe, 1999; Sanders, 1997). Moreso, as the various vital elements of deliberation such as equality, rationality and critical assessment of issues during deliberation are values lying within the confines of the elites (Sanders, 1997). The display of such refined character traits requires a right level of education which the majority of the population may not have, especially in a country like Nigeria. In Nigeria, for example, the level of poverty is high, and a correlation between poverty and access to information has been established (Olayiwola, 2014). Consequently,

the deliberative space will become a closed system open only to the elite group since they are the only group that has access to information necessary for making input during deliberation.

3.6 Online deliberation

Scholars have described the internet as possessing the ability to connect people irrespective of their status. This ability allows in a way for people to interact and bring to reality one of the popular features of the technology which includes creating platforms for deliberation and the free flow of information (Bolaño & Vieira, 2015; Castells, 2015). The internet platforms, primarily social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogosphere, have helped create a public space for discussing political issues and challenging authority (Kuyper, 2015; Papacharissi, 2002). However, internet pessimists expressed caution in the assertion of the internet's capability to allow for participation, inclusiveness and public sphere for democratic deliberation as argued by the internet utopians citing the problem of fragmentation of discourse and inequality of access based on technology literacy (Papacharissi, 2002). Also, cyber-bullying and flaming are equally some of the issues working against the realisation of the cyberspace as a democratising space for public discussion.

The participatory and engagement features of the internet have gained currency and attract attention from scholars within academic the notion of the internet's ability to facilitate a platform for a civil deliberation. Kies (2010a) refers to web deliberation as another form of democracy and tags it as e-democracy. Dahlberg (2011) identifies e-democracy as another model of democracy utterly different from the existing models, including liberal-individualist, counter-publics and autonomist Marxist. Of particular interest to the thesis and which serves as the anchor of the study is the argument that the internet with its communicative features possesses the ability to 'mirror' the traditional public sphere. It can also facilitate a deliberative space that is participatory within the online news media commenting space in Nigeria (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010).

Furthermore, Papacharissi (2002) maintained that the transformation of a created platform into a public sphere is not the responsibility of internet technology. Therefore, it clearly shows that there is a marked difference between a space for deliberation and the public sphere. The fact that there is a space for people to converse on the internet does not mean that space is automatically a public sphere. For example, Miragliotta (2012) argues that contrary to assumptions, Twitter has limitations in promoting high-quality political participation. This position is supported by el-Nawawy & Khamis,

(2011) in their description of ‘collective Islamic identity’ on Twitter that it lacks rational-critical discussion, and there is no reciprocity in debates.

The fact that the internet facilitates a space for discussion cannot be said to apply to all states considering the inequality of access to information or the digital divide (Sparks, 2010). In Nigeria, the rate of access to the internet by the citizens is low, and where there is access, connectivity is abysmal. Recently, the 2019 speed test global index rates Nigeria 115 on the speed of internet connectivity in the world (www.speedtest.net, 2020). According to the report, the mobile download speed is 15.32 Mbps, while the upload is 7.85 Mbps. Although Ahiabenu (2014) in his report, mentions the progressive impact, the mobile phone is making in Africa, the key questions, however, remain about who are the people using the technology the most? What do they use it for and do most people possess the skills to operate and use it for discursive engagement on social issues? Ott & Rosser (2013) maintained that for a people to play an active role, and influence their political space, using the internet, there is the need for internet literacy which is very low especially in Africa.

In Nigeria, for instance, the government is beginning to recognise the potential of the internet as a tool for deepening democratic values and give access to ordinary people to participate in decision making. For instance, the federal government launched a website and a portal for the review of the constitution in 2012. It allows the citizens to visit the site and give their opinions on the subject matter (Ayo et al., 2015). However, the implementation of the project and incorporating online democracy became hampered with several issues in Nigeria. For instance, internet diffusion is higher in the cities, and even in the town where these facilities are available, poor infrastructure such as electricity outages, limited bandwidth and the exorbitant cost of accessing the internet are significant challenges.

Furthermore, Manosevitch and Walker (2009), in their investigation of online deliberation with focus on online comments, identify some criteria for studying the deliberative quality of online comments. These criteria are narratives, facts, sources, values, positions and reasons given by commenters. Narrative as a criterion identifies with a comment where a commenter shares a personal experience on an issue under deliberation. Also, facts are the various evidence provided by a commenter to support her/his argument. Furthermore, Manosevitch and Walker (2009) also code sources as a criterion for measuring deliberation by identifying the origin of an argument raised by a commenter in a comment. Values as part of the indices of measurement require looking at any evidence of value explicitly expressed in a deliberation. However, Manosevitch and Walker’s inclusion of ‘values’ as

one of the measurement indexes is quite debatable. The argument is because the concept of value is relative and what one person holds as his value may be different from what another person holds. Therefore, using it to measure comments may become conflicting, especially if the commenters are of diverse background and cultural orientation.

Contrary to the study of online deliberation based on an approach anchored on the quality of debates or the procedure inherent in the discursive sphere, Dahlberg (2007), argues for the study of online deliberation that emphasises the ability of the discursive sphere to challenge the dominant narratives and the power structure that sustain hegemonic values. Dryzek (2000), in his explanation of the shift to deliberative democracy, argues that the concept is not only about voting, self-determination, respect for human rights or articulation of interests to influence government policy. Instead, deliberative democracy includes the capacity for citizens to engage in deliberation on public issues freely.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the various literature on the internet, democracy, deliberation and other associated concepts in order to establish the relationship between democracy and the internet. Also, the chapter traced and discussed the emergence of the internet, including its affordances as argued by scholars. It also explained the different types of deliberation and waves of theoretical expositions on the subject. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted and discussed different kinds of democracy and interrogated how the internet has been able to promote participation towards the realisation of online deliberative democracy. The review of literature also noted that the internet penetration, speed of connectivity and the number of users is low in Nigeria when compared to other states primarily in the western world. Subsequently, this implies the study in the area of participation and digital exclusion of some class of people from online deliberation. However, the speed of diffusion is increasing faster owing to mobile phone technology across the various sphere of activities in the country. The next chapter focusses on the phenomenon of online news commenting platforms as a deliberative space.

Chapter Four

Exploring the Online Newspaper Comment Section as a space for participatory and civil discourse

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter sets commence with a review of the extant literature on online news commenting and through the review provide various positions on the comment section of the online newspaper's ability to provide a space for democratic deliberation. Furthermore, the researcher explores the various arguments put forward by scholars on the gravitation of journalism towards the internet in order to identify the reasons for such gravitation. Also, the chapter explores the different positions of scholars on the nature of participation and practices within the space.

4.2 Online news commenting

Globalisation and the internet have both influenced and redefined the information and communication space. It signals a paradigm shift in the description of what news is and how people understand the concept in the 21st century. The physical boundaries, which have an impact on the news flow, have been shrunk by the information and communication technologies. The information and communication technology have reduced the world to a global village, and distance is no longer a barrier to know what is happening anywhere in the world within a second. Similarly, improvement in technology has now made news production cheap and easily accessible. The emergence of the internet gives room for real-time reporting of news. It gives easy access to information, the democratisation of opinions, freedom of deliberation and real-time feedback on a news report. Besides, the encroachment of the internet into the terrain of news provision is gradually blurring the traditional concept of news values and system of processing news and dissemination

Also, the internet platforms like the online news and social media platforms disseminate information faster such as breaking news and a cheaper means of sourcing for information without the hiccup of geographical barrier and has also converged all the traditional platforms of mass communication like the newspapers, magazines, radio and television into one space making all of them accessible at the same time. Also, the online news provides a system that allows users to not only read the news but engage with other readers in their reactions and discussions on the news content.

Additionally, the online media have enhanced the feedback mechanism of the mass media, unlike the mainstream or legacy media where feedback there is delayed due partly to the mode of media

technology which does not have the capacity for real-time response. Traditionally, the feedback system in the form of letters to the editor and phone calls takes days to get published. Also, the number of readers that provide feedback is small, and the news media have complete control on which audience feedback to include in their publication (Lee & Tandoc, 2017). On the contrary, the online news platforms, unlike the traditional media system, enable interactivity among the audience and include a more significant number of readers.

Furthermore, the commenting space within the online news media platform has now made it possible for the audience to respond to a news story in real-time. Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) in their study, argue that online news increases more discussion than the print version. It also encourages the production of content that is an agonistic and accurate reflection of the various political positions (Mouffe, 1999). In Africa, the online news commenting phenomenon is gradually changing the news production ecology as readers are becoming more engaged with the news, providing diverse perspectives on issues and sometimes set an agenda for the legacy media (Moyo, 2009; Mudhai, 2004). The comment section of the online newspaper has transformed into spaces for debate and discussions by readers. Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead (2010) argue that one of the reasons that encourage readers going to online news platforms to access information is the opportunity to share and discuss issues with other readers.

For this reason, online media has become a deliberative platform where readers discuss issues affecting their society, and it also serves as a template for advocacy activities. Equally, the online news commenting phenomenon is a new form of journalism that now includes citizens that are not trained in journalism to be part of a news production system (Mabweazara, 2014; Mutsvairo, 2016). Within the Nigeria media context, Kperogi (2016), also recognises the online news media platforms as a form of citizen journalism starting with the diaspora media and later social media platforms. They have become critical elements of the communication and information ecology in Nigeria and, at times, are platforms for citizens discursive engagement on public matters including space where the mainstream media scoop for information (Kperogi, 2016)

Online media provides a platform for social interaction among citizens and a space for public discourse (Nagar, 2011). Similarly, the need to interact with others on public issues and expression of individual opinions are some of the motivating factors for online participation (Milioni et al., 2012). Also, Liu & Fahmy (2011) in their study argue that online news websites help in addressing

the fear of isolation expressed by people whose opinions on issues run contrary to the prevailing opinions within the mainstream media space and often keep their opinions. Therefore, such individuals, due to the nature of the online space that gives room for various homogenised social groups to have their presence, will be able to identify one that fits his position and express himself freely. In a study on how readers use the mainstream media and online media, Pape & Featherstone (2005) in their findings explain that readers use the online news platform to keep updated on breaking news while the mainstream media provide detail information about the issue.

In the same way, most of the mainstream media in Nigeria now consider having an online version of their publications as necessary. The numbers of Nigerian online newspapers on www.onlinenewspapers.com/nigeria as of 2018 is 205, including those in the diaspora. Nearly 70% of these online media are the online versions of the mainstream media and prominent diaspora online news sites, including Sahara reporters. Therefore, the news contents they post online still pass through the traditional model of news gathering and editing before posting the news story on the internet (Akinfemisoye, 2013). Initially, the mainstream media viewed the emergence of online news media as a threat to its survival, especially in the area of revenue (Grabowicz, 2014; Hassid & Repnikova, 2016). This assertion support Simon and Kadiyali (2007) and Hassid & Repnikova (2016) findings from their studies that the internet and its features like blogging plummets the sales of newspapers and subscription as the internet provides a free space for people to have access to news. For instance, Lowrey and Anderson (2006) citing the rising influence of blogs as a reference point explained that the internet might erode the ‘authority’ and influence wielded by the mainstream media in the shaping of opinion. Contrary to these views, Downie & Schudson (2009) argue that the internet has helped to expand and improve the news gathering and distribution process as the distance is no longer a barrier to access. With an internet connection, a reporter can send his/her report irrespective of geographical location.

As one of the critical features of the online news websites, the comment section provides the audience with a space to react and deliberate on public issues online. The online comment section allows readers to express their feelings about issues and also serves as a means of assessing opinions on a public issue (Jürgen Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010; Manosevitch & Walker, 2009). In Nigeria, most of the mainstream media organisations now have their websites through which they disseminate their news contents to the audience and provide a space for readers to react to news stories and engage others in discussion.

Additionally, the commenting section of online news platform is the virtual replica of the traditional feedback mechanism of the mainstream media known as a letter to the editor, and it is a way for the media organisation to engage and gauge the readers' reactions to a news story (Knights & Cooks, 2013). Unlike letters to the editor where publication is determined by editorial policy, the online news sites offer readers instantaneous opportunity to react to news stories and also allow for real-time interaction with other readers. Online news commenting space also encourages the exchange of information even among people with opposing opinion or standpoint on an issue and Carpini, & Delli Carpini (2004) describes this as 'cross-cutting discussion'. On the contrary, other scholars even though accept the fact that the online discussion platform has helped expand the volume of information and also increased interaction. However, they argued that readers often select through filtering system the news sites they wish to access information and even join in online discussion (Knobloch-Westerwick & Johnson, 2014; Lu et al., 2016; Stroud et al., 2015).

Consequently, the filtering system may involve exposing oneself to information that aligns with a person's political or religious views. As a result, researchers have identified some motivating factors that influence commenters' decisions to contribute to an online discussion. Concerning this, Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger (2015) assert that two factors motivate a commenter to participate in an online discussion. The first is the intention to share an opinion while the second is responding to comments in the online forum. In the same way, a commenter's urge to post comment may be as a result of the need to agree with an opinion on an online forum or to disagree (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009).

The assertions by Springer et al. (2015) and Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) on the motivating factors for online commenting are not exhaustive as there are times when readers post comments online which are not related to the subject of deliberation. Sometimes, some of these types of comments are in the form of advertisement of products or services. Furthermore, the personality involved in a news story also influences the traffic flow of commenters (Tsagkias et al., 2010). The more prominent the subject of a news story is or how relevant an issue of discussion is, the more it attracts comments and reactions. There is a connection between power, the traditional model of selecting news or news values and online news platform, commenting on news stories and interactivity (Weber, 2014). In relations to this, studies have shown that the process involved in the selection of news does influence the number of times readers post comments on the news websites (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012; Eilders, 2006; Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015; Weber, 2014). Tenembom and Cohen (2015) conducted

a longitudinal study of online news and comments in Israel. Their findings revealed that political, social and controversial news stories and articles attract more comments from readers than other news items. The implication of this is that online news media give controversial news events more attention or prominence. Thus, the controversial news contents attract increased engagement from commenters and get them to think more of the news stories against other equally important issues which did not receive any form of prominence from the news media.

Several scholars drawing on public sphere theory as a framework for analysis have conducted research on the participatory and democratic potentials of the online news commenting space. According to Benkler (2006), the internet enables a multi-directional form of discourse and has the potential of promoting a thorough discussion of public matters. Also, Al-Saggaf (2006) and Freelon (2015) maintain that the comment section of an online newspaper promotes the ideals of deliberative democracy by allowing for a diversity of opinions on public issues. Similarly, Grabowicz, (2014) describes the phenomenon of the online newspaper comment section as serving two functions which are: the provision of a space for social interaction; and the opportunity for direct response to news content. Kies and Jansen (2004) assert that online news comment section due to non-geographical barriers and other restrictions associated with mainstream media such as editorial and house style encourages citizens participation in democratic discourse. Manosevitch and Walker (2009, p.21) from the findings of their study explain that the online newspaper comment section often provides a large ‘... amount of information and demonstrated a public process of weighing alternatives via the expression of issue positions and supporting rationales.’

Freelon (2015) criticised the current approaches to the study of online discursive spheres, particularly their emphasis on the deliberative potential of citizens’ online discourse and the ideological underpinnings of online debates. According to Freelon (2015), the two approaches labelled as normative (deliberative) and selective exposure, address the issue of deliberation. Both use the parameters of civility, openness, rationality, criticality, and reciprocity to measure the deliberative tendencies within the online commenting space. The normative approach is concerned with the ‘deliberativeness’ of a commenting space by examining audience comments in order to ascertain the level to which they meet the deliberative criteria. Selective exposure focusses on the filtering of online information to target a particular segment of readers (Raphaël Kies, 2010a; Stromer-Galley, 2007; Toepfl & Piwoni, 2015). Explaining further, Freelon (2015) and Toepfl and Piwoni (2015)

highlight the weaknesses of deliberation and selective approaches to the study of online commenting as:

- failure to consider other equally salient political behaviours on the internet such as communitarianism and liberal individualism
- methodological limitations in the sense that research into online news commenting requires the combination of different methodological approach as a single approach cannot provide a holistic insight about the phenomenon.

Freelon (2015) argues that failure to consider other political behaviours in the discursive sphere such as the tendencies of commenters to collaborate and advance a particular ideological stand with a like-minded audience and the rigidity in the application of the method of enquiry both impinge on the holistic understanding of the online commenting phenomenon. For instance, enquiry on the deliberativeness of a comment section applies content analysis method and investigation of commenters to establish their motivation for participation, and the way they interact with other commenters applies survey (Freelon, 2015; Kies, 2010b). However, to have a comprehensive understanding of online discursive space like news commenting requires that methods of inquiry and multiple conceptual frameworks are combined (Kies, 2010b).

To resolve the inherent weaknesses highlighted in the preceding paragraph requires the application of multiple frameworks to the study of online news commenting (Kies, 2013; Kies, 2010b). In the same way, Freelon (2015, p.775) argues for the use of a ‘multi-norm’ framework for the study of online news commenting by combining liberal-individualist and communitarian perspectives and explains that:

The simultaneous use of multiple norms allows a greater degree of online political behaviour to be categorized and understood than would otherwise be possible. Multi-norm frameworks add a means of understanding the various types of “non-deliberative” communications that have been dismissed as worthless or unproductive...

Toepfl and Piwoni (2015) in their study of online news commenting accepted the need for the application of multiple frameworks in the study of online commenting space and propose an additional framework of the counter-public theory. Applying the framework, therefore, to their study on the German online newspapers comment section, Toepfl and Piwoni (2015) found that the political leaning of an online news platform impacts on the level of commenting and the content of comments. Their findings also revealed that commenters adopt counter-public strategies in their arguments on the commenting platform of online newspapers. Lately, some of the studies on online news

commenting have raised concerns on whether deliberation and the nature of online comments are civil or devoid of mutual respects for others (Manosevitch & Walker, 2009; Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2016). Although, defining incivility is very difficult, fluid and relative, especially when one attempts to generalise the concept irrespective of socio-cultural background. Herbst (2010, p.3) argues that incivility and civility are ‘...very much in the eye of the holder’. Shapiro (1999) describes civility as standard rules that promote overall good while Mutz and Reeves (2005) postulates that incivility in the online comments is statements that insult and demean other commenters without any show of respect to their opinions or comments. In Nigeria, which is the study area of this research; there are certain norms and values in her socio-cultural milieu, which are uniform and permeate through the various ethnic and cultural divides of the country. These norms and values are critical to deciding comments that are civil or uncivil in the deliberative space.

One of the ways of ensuring civility in the online news website comment section is the moderation of comments through the installation of filtering software or human moderation. Studies conducted by Duyn, Peacock, & Stroud, (2019); Ksiazek, Peer, & Zivic (2015) and Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman, and Curry (2015) assert the importance of moderation of online commenting space in order to ensure constructive and quality discussion. However, moderation can result in the limitation of free speech and project a particular ideological standpoint (Cenite & Zhang, 2010). Nigeria is a complex society based on her heterogeneous nature regarding religion and culture. These factors play an influential role in political affiliations, public policies and the allocation of wealth. The factors also run deeply into the national psyche of the country to the extent that they often influence discussions among citizens. Comments on news stories posted on various online news platform and social media space about national issues very often are polarised along ethnic and religious lines. O’Sullivan & Flanagan (2003) recommend that any study or analysis of the online news readers’ comments should look closely at the content and consider the social and technical context of the produced news contents and comments on it.

The finding of a study conducted revealed that professional journalists are critical of online comments and referred to them as informal and inflammatory (Leung, 2009). An article in The Guardian newspaper (2014) describes online news commenting as poison and illustrates further that online news commenting:

...sits like an ugly growth beneath articles, bloated and throbbing with vitriol. It groans as hatred expands its force, waiting for any point of dissent to break it – to unleash its full fury on targets who dare convey some measures of civility or dissent.

Outside Nigeria, and in other African countries, the idea of citizens' participation in the online news media and information dissemination ecology is gradually becoming popular. Several studies have shown that the social media and other online news platforms now provide alternative space for political discourse away from the restrictive, patron-client and elite-driven legacy media (Bosch, 2010; Grönlund & Wakabi, 2015; Mabweazara, 2014; Oyedemi, 2015; Skjerdal et al., 2015; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). For instance, the report of a study shows that social media space in Ethiopia provides an alternative discursive sphere where political and ethnic issues dominate discourse (Skjerdal & Gebru, 2020). Also, the commenting sphere in Ethiopia indicates a high degree of a plurality of discussion but cannot replicate the type of result produced by the Arab spring due to the monitoring of the digital space by the government (Skjerdal, 2016).

In Kenya, the online media space and the commenting space it facilitates have helped expand the public sphere providing an alternative platform for citizens to engage in political and social discussion (Ogola, 2015). Also, the various discussions on the social media space sometimes set an agenda for the mainstream media in Kenya (Dugmore & Ligaga, 2013; Mkinen & Kuiru, 2008; Ogola, 2015). Furthermore, discussion within the online discursive space in Kenya centre more on economic, political and social issues and twitter appears as the dominant space for such discourse (Ogola, 2015). The online discursive space facilitates a form of engagement which bring into focus marginalised but critical issues and opinions that drives inclusiveness and provides robustness for political and social discourse.

Mabweazara (2014) observes that online news commenting is gradually becoming an influencing factor in the news production ecology in Zimbabwe. Also, the nature of the commenting platform is influenced by Zimbabwe social and cultural context (Mabweazara, 2014). As a result, the discursive space plays a critical role by providing a rich source through which the legacy media source and scoop information, as illustrated in particular by the legacy media experience during the repressive regime of President Mugabe (Moyo, 2009). Apart from serving as a feedback mechanism and space for civic engagement, 'user comments thus offer an alternative "balancing act" to news discourses in Zimbabwe by allowing a heterogeneity of voices' and points of view that oppose or interrogate the hierarchies of discourses in news stories (Mabweazara, 2014). Within the South African online news media space, Bosch (2010) argues that the discursive affordance provided by the online news platforms including blogs confers a form of authority and credibility outside the legacy media

regarding political discourse. In Mozambique and Angola, the online commenting space and blogs are platforms for calling for civil debates on national matters, and also influence the legacy media in their news process including agenda setting (Salgado, 2012).

Barnes (2018) produces a model offering explanation on the various factors that contribute to the understanding of online news culture. The model asserts that there is the interplay between commenter’s offline and online behaviour and the two behaviours exerts influence on each other and ultimately affect the person’s disposition online. Besides, the model concludes that personality, emotions, affects and the institutions that provide the space for commenting like the online news media are the various dynamics that should be analysed to have a full understanding of online news commenting phenomenon (Barnes, 2018).

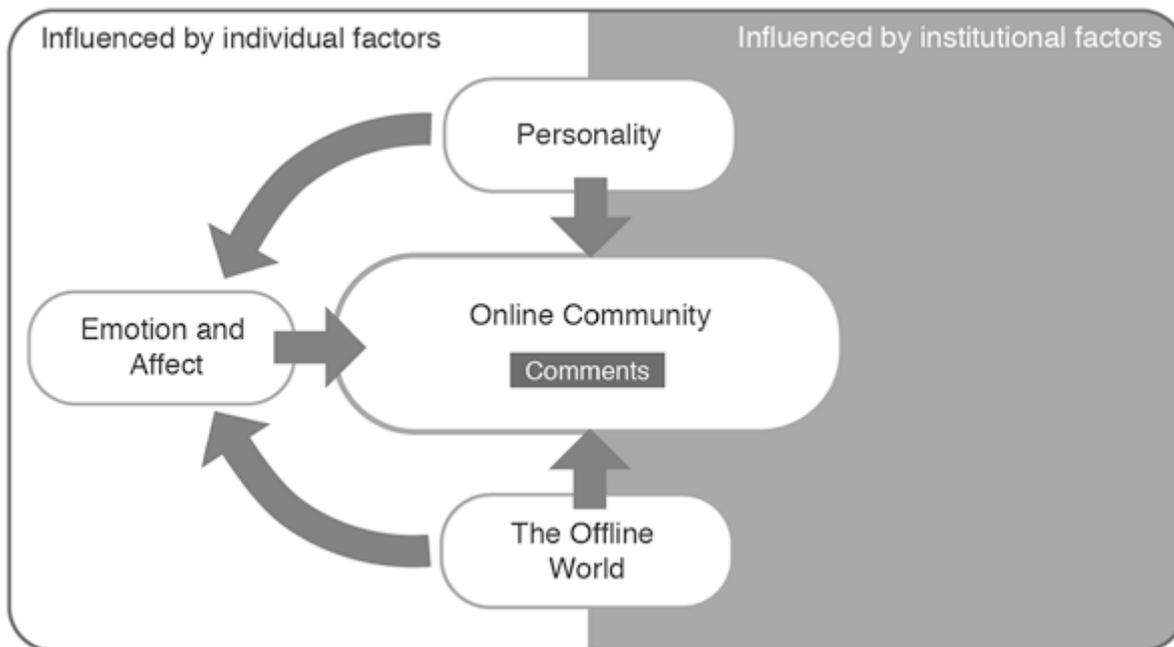


Figure 4.1 A participatory model for understanding commenting (Barnes, 2018, p.125).

Clearly, the positive features of the online news such as its ability to promote democratic deliberation and social interaction have been emphasised earlier in this section; other scholars have also looked at the negative sides of online news media. Hlavach & Freivogel (2011) argue that the non-moderation of some online news sites and allowing for anonymous comments sometimes encourage flaming. More so, when a commenter feels his anonymity will not make him accountable for his comments. Besides, offensive comments can discourage potential sources from giving information on an issue (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). To this end, according to Nagar (2011) and Diakopoulos and Naaman (2011), most online news platforms now put moderation algorithms in place to check

unruly deliberative space without tampering with anonymity. Placing this algorithm in place is essential, but anonymous comments are also critical to sustaining a democratic culture and encouraging freedom of speech online (Christopherson, 2007).

The principle of anonymity in the online news media commenting space gives a commenter the confidence to express him/herself freely on any issue and makes a useful comment without any fear of reprimand (Johnson, 2011). The prospect of anonymity in the discursive space can be problematic, especially when commenters conscious of their anonymity, become abusive through comments or arguments that cannot be substantiated. Nevertheless, anonymity can help increase interactivity and participation among people.

4.3 Polarisation in online news commenting

Several scholars have acknowledged the internet and digitisation as capable of increasing political participation and give voice to people at the periphery of the society who were hitherto voiceless (Curran, 2016; Shirky, 2011; Papachirisi,2002;). Similarly, the internet has also enabled citizens of a country to have access to information, participate in public dialogue and provide a platform or forum to carry out mass or collective action (Shirky, 2011). This assertion is true to an extent, considering how citizens use social media for citizens' mobilisation and collective actions in places like Tunisia (Ziccardi, 2013). Also, the removal of Spain President in 2004, the communist loss of power in Moldova in 2009 (Shirky, 2011), Egypt uprising and recently in Togo, a country in West Africa are pointers to the influence of the social media. With these examples, people have explored the various platforms of the internet like the blogosphere, Twitter, Facebook, online news sites with a view of offering alternative views and information and creating space for deliberation.

As promising as these promises sound, the reality is that the internet and its various platforms have turned into a battle zone where people contest ideas fiercely and become intolerant of each other positions or views. As a result, the discursive platforms on the internet have become polarised with people identifying and pitching camp with those who share their position (Guerra & Kleinberg, 2013). Similarly, rather than being an equaliser, the internet promotes inequality and exclusion (Hindman, 2009). Contrary to the argument about the democratic potentials of the internet, the various filters of the internet can create polarisation of discussion along with political affiliation and beliefs (Pariser, 2011). Polarisation in the online news media can also take the form of ideological polarisation. Ideological polarisation is possible by exposing readers to news contents that are

congruent with their ideological dispositions and block those comments that are not incongruent with their ideological, political or social leanings.

In Nigeria, the online comments on blogs, Facebook, online newspapers websites and other social media platforms have become polarised along with religion, ethnicity and to a lesser extent political affiliation (Ajiboye, 2016). The finding of a study on ideological influence in the Nigerian media space with a focus on the 2003 and 2007 general elections reveals that the news media in Nigeria:

use the ideological polarisation between the ideological structures of ingroups and outgroups, such that ingroups typically emphasise their good deeds while they de-emphasise their bad deeds; on the other hand, outgroups de-emphasise or even totally deny their own (sic) bad deeds while they emphasise their good ones (Oyeleye & Osisanwo, 2013, p.763).

According to Spohr (2017), the scholarship on the polarisation of online news reports and comments anchors on two parallel views or approach. The first argument rests on the premise that there are embedded algorithms on the various online news platforms that filter and condition readers' experience in line with their ideological leanings and beliefs (Pariser, 2011). The second argument on polarisation notes the existence of polarisation of news contents and comments from the prisms of psychology. This argument focuses on how the theory of selective exposure which is concerned with exposing oneself to information that reinforces one's belief and ideology and the avoidance of information that holds contrary view could cause polarisation (Spohr, 2017; Stroud, 2008). As a result, polarisation occurs in a discourse where arguments, conclusions and positions run sharply along two opposing or parallel lines. Likewise, polarisation occurs in an online discussion where nodes divided in such a way that one part of the nodes accommodates homogeneous opinions and runs contrary to the views expressed in the other nodes (Guerra et al., 2013). Pariser (2011); Sustain (2017) in their study on the internet and the polarisation of the American political space argue that the internet facilitates the creation of an 'echo chamber' where the only voice or information a reader sees or hears is the one similar to his belief or position.

Polarisation is created sometimes by the various algorithms on websites to identify, and group people together based on certain similarities (Pariser, 2011). These similarities may be sharing of same political ideology, sex, religion, value system, ethnic affinity and other issues capable of drawing public discourse. Consequently, the sifting process of online comments or what Pariser (2011) refers to as 'filter bubbles' by algorithms along similar patterns will ultimately affect the quality of discourse and the internet as a platform for democratic deliberation negatively. Deliberation and plurality of opinions are necessary for a democracy. However, these cannot be achieved where views

and opinions are filtered out simply because such views run contrary to the algorithm preferences of an online site. Others have argued and described filter bubbles in good light that they are necessary for the protection of democratic values in public discourse depending on how one perceives and understands democracy (Bozdag et al., 2014). Expectantly, the internet features of anonymity of commenting and impersonal communicative environment encourage polarisation (Witschge, 2008) Furthermore, it is unlike face-to-face communication where specific societal cues like the need to maintain peace, constructive criticism, and identified source of information can help reduce the incidence of polarisation. In the United of America, for instance, online polarisation attracts more academic investigations after the Presidential elections of 2016. Findings from most of the studies highlighted race, gender and other personal identity markers were some of the issues that promote polarisation in the election (LaHurd, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018).

Similarly, in a study conducted by the Reuters Institute of Digital News Report in 2017, polarisation is described as a critical issue in an online media environment, and its nature varies from one nation to another. What the results imply is that people identify with a news source that shares the same political-ideological leaning with them. In the same way, Yang et al. (2016) posit that the relationship between mass media and its ability to drive polarisation is country-specific. In the UK, for example, polarisation seems to correspond to how people identify with news source (The Conversation, 2017). The import of this is that people identify with a news source that shares the same political and ideological leaning with them. Most of the media organisations seem to move toward one political ideology or another, and that explains the reason for the news media labelled as having either a liberal bias or conservative bias.

Furthermore, Yang et al. (2016) conducted a polarisation study using a comparative approach across ten countries. The finding of the study revealed that the relationship between traditional media and perceived polarisation is weak. The study, however, found a strong association between online news media and perceived polarisation. Besides, Turetsky & Riddle (2018) explain that exposure to news, especially controversial news or a report on high profile personality in a selective manner is capable of fuelling polarisation. In other words, the polarisation of opinions based on news reports and additional information from the media has been a recurring decimal in various societies. Several research findings have revealed a correlation between mass media pattern of report laden with ideological positions and citizens' positions (Shaffer, McWilliam & Nteta, 2018; Spohr, 2017; Stroud, 2008; Ajiboye, 2013; Oyeleye and Osisanwo, 2013). In the same way, the online media

environment and the massive quantity of news and information on it have attracted much attention from scholars. Similarly, the various algorithm software which has made news and information to become tailor-made and pushed to a targeted audience has necessitated for various studies already reviewed with most of the finding establishing the relationship between online news media contents and polarisation (Turesky and Riddle 2018; Yang et al., 2016; Wischge, 2004; Pariser, 2011).

4.4 Moderation in online news commenting

Online news commenting has become part of the features of online news websites. In theory, it provides space for the expression of views by online news readers on news contents, engagement with other readers in discussion and, ultimately the potential to transform to a public sphere that will facilitate rational and critical deliberation. However, over time, these comments sections have become a war zone and a space for the exchange of acerbic and hate comments. Online news commenting is one of the democratic features the internet offers as well as making the audience to become active within the chain of news production (Trygg, 2012b). However, some people see it as a source of concern to the society especially where the comments turn to exchange of uncouth, and offensive comments and this hurts civil discussion and deliberation (Braun & Gillespie, 2011; Crawford & Gillespie, 2016; Díaz-Noci, Domingo, Masip, Lluís Micó, & Ruiz, 2012; Ksiazek et al., 2015). The World Association of Newspaper and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) conducted a study involving 104 news organisations from 63 countries on online news commenting and moderation. In their findings, news organisations delete an average of one comment in every ten comments. Also, there is no evidence to establish that moderation of comments limits free speech (WAN-IFRA, 2016). As a result, most online news platforms have various mechanisms of filtering comments on their platforms to ensure civility and constructive comments within the online news space. In a study conducted by Stroud, Van Duyn, & Peacock (2016) on the perception of the American public towards the moderation of online news comments, 40% of the online news readers sampled believed there is a need to moderate online news comments to ensure credibility and quality of deliberation. However, another study argued that moderation of comments within the online news space is an encroachment on the freedom of expression and capable of eroding the principle of plurality of opinion which is challenging to deliberative and representative democracy (Fourie, 2007).

Similarly, moderation of online news readers' comments can result in a news platform having a credibility issue with the belief that moderation and editing out of some comments may lead to a skewed and partial presentation of readers' reactions to an issue (Rolston, 2015). Also, moderation

of online news readers' comments can project an ideological standpoint instead of promoting online civility (Cenite & Zhang, 2010), and it can also discourage commenters from giving oppositional or contrary views on issues (Sherrick & Hoewe, 2018). On the contrary, Lampe & Resnick (2004) argue that moderation of online news readers' comments is necessary as it helps increase participation. Also, Wise, Hamman, & Thorson (2006), in their research findings, explained that a moderated news website encourages readers to comment more than unmoderated news websites. Coe et al. (2014) also submit that moderation of comments in online news websites can help achieve civility in the online news commenting space. The increase in participation would be as a result of the readers' awareness of the online news organisation's policy to leave out offensive comments. It gives confidence to a commenter that he would not experience intimidation or cyberbully and that online news sites will ensure conformity to commenting rules. Also, the level of topic relevance about news comments is high on online news sites that have moderation features in place (Ruiz et al., 2011).

There are different methods of moderating online news comments ranging from human moderation to machine or software moderation. Human moderation entails reading and taking out comments that flout the rules of the commenting space and may involve a single person, more than one person where the function of administering the websites does not reside in one person. Machine moderation involves the use of inbuilt algorithms or software to sieve unwanted contents from a discursive sphere. Another classification system approaches the issue of moderation of online news comment section into pre-moderation and post-moderation (Ksiazek, 2015). In pre-moderation, comments become scrutinised to ensure conformity with the policy guiding posting of a comment on a news website before readers can view the comments. As a result, comments that do not conform to the policy of the news websites are screened out and not allowed to be read by readers. Post-moderation of online news comments, however, involves the removal of comments already posted on the news websites which may have been reported or flagged by other readers as offensive or not civil.

Furthermore, Løvlie, Ihlebæk, & Larsson (2018) propose a model for studying online news commenting moderation referred to as interventionist and non-interventionist approaches to moderating comments within the online space. The interventionist approach emphasises close editorial and regulatory monitoring of comments by the editorial team of the online news websites. Here, comments are scrutinised by the editors before approving its posting on the news sites. However, the non-interventionist approach emphasises little editorial or regulating activity on the part of the editorial team of online news websites, and commenters have the freedom to post

comments. As such, anonymous commenters and use of pseudonyms are some of the features likely to be seen in online news sites that adopt a non-interventionist approach to readers' comments (Løvlie, Ihlebæk & Larsson, 2018). The interventionist approach to moderating online news commenting enables the online news platforms to guide against any legal issues that may arise from comments that pass through their news sites. In contrast, non-interventionist approach from the economic point of argument increases the number of traffic (visitors) to a website because of the absence of moderation (Løvlie, Ihlebæk & Larsson, 2018). However, and irrespective of whether an online news organisation chooses to moderate comments that pass through it or not, the internet has helped increase participation in public discourse but its nature, civility and how democratic space remains a subject of continued research enquiry.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on online news platform and its commenting section, and as a result, discussed the various analysis and findings on the phenomenon. Furthermore, the chapter revealed through the assertions of scholars how the various features of the online news commenting space replicate the notion of a sphere for democratic deliberation or how some of the features negate the arguments of the commenting space potentials to facilitate a sphere for democratic discourse. It also discussed the various issues raised particularly on the framework of analysis in the study of online news commenting space and how its application in a study on online news commenting space affect the methodological and overall understanding of the phenomenon. Based on the various issues highlighted in this section of the research, the next chapter focusses on the framework of analysis adopted for the research.

Chapter Five

Theoretical Framework applied for the Research

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter explains the theoretical underpinnings used in this research. Rosenberry and Vicker (2017) maintain that theories help to provide an explanatory framework to a phenomenon under research investigation. In this study, the theoretical framework provides the analytical tools for the explanation and interpretation of results from the data analysed. Furthermore, the use of a theoretical framework enables the researcher to explain his epistemological standpoint and the justification for his choice of methods in the study. Accordingly, the conceptual framework for the study utilises the theories of the public sphere and critical political economy. This chapter has as one of its aims to use the lens of the public sphere theory and its conceptual arguments to assist in the construction of a framework for the analysis of online news commenting space. Also, the theoretical lens will examine the debates on the platforms to ascertain the extent of its democratising role. The chapter explored the various arguments on the public sphere framework and how these criteria reflect the online deliberative space to understand the discursive features of the online news commenting space sampled in the study. In complement, the chapter also explains the role of critical political economy theory as part of the theoretical framework used in the study. In this chapter, the critical political economy theory seeks to gain an understanding of how structural, institutional issues, social and power relations, ideology and the broader context of Nigerian political economy manifest in the production of news and relate to the discussion within the online discursive sphere.

5.2 Theoretical perspective used in the study

Scholars within the field of communication and journalism, in response to the transformation of the media space by digitalisation, are beginning to reassess the relevance of some theoretical underpinnings in the explanation of emerging digital journalism scenarios. As Steensen and Ahva (2015), point out, there are different phases of research in digital journalism. These waves are normative, empirical, constructivist and recently, the fourth wave which not only looks at the concept and notion of journalism from a traditional perspective but focusses on the ecosystem including the emerging connecting systems outside the conventional domain of journalism practice. For each of these phases, different theoretical perspectives are applied in the investigation of a research problem. Often, these theoretical frameworks criss-cross different academic disciplines to provide holistic insight into a study (Zelizer, 2009). Although not mutually exclusive according to Steensen and

Ahva, (2015), the various theoretical approaches within the field of journalism and the media are classified into five major areas: cultural analysis, language, political science, sociology and history (Zelizer, 2009).

Critics have raised arguments over the suitability of applying some of these theoretical perspectives to investigating the connection between media and democracy in Africa owing to their western-centric approach (Atton & Mabweazara, 2011; Berger, 2002; Mabweazara, 2015; Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019; Nyamnjoh, 2010). Nyamnjoh (2010) raises concern on the dilemma often experienced by scholars interested in the study of media and democracy in Africa due to the peculiarities of the majority of the existing frameworks for analysis which are western and do not factor the various realities in African socio-cultural practices.

For this study, the researcher locates the perspectives of the theories used in political science and cultural analysis. Despite the identified flaws concerning the various theoretical frameworks for analysing the relationship between the media and democracy in Africa, especially its western-centric approach (Berger, 2002; Rodney-Gumede et al., 2017), the political science and cultural analysis perspectives remain the most appropriate for the study. Although, the two theoretical perspectives reflect the liberal-pluralist orientation of the west, however, there are some aspects in the approaches that are useful to the analysis of the evolving media and democracy relationship in Africa (Berger, 2002). For instance, the public sphere theory, one of the theories from the political science perspective applied in this research is critical as it provides the framework for investigating the link between the online news commenting space in Nigeria and its suitability as a public sphere that facilitate a democratic deliberative platform. At the same time, the cultural analysis perspective with a focus on the critical political economy theory used in this thesis enables the researcher to tease out how power relations and other political economy factors in Nigeria affect deliberation in the discursive space.

Above all, the theoretical approaches used in this study draw on political science and cultural analysis perspectives. The researcher rationalises the choice of the theoretical perspectives based on the research objectives which aim to provide an understanding of the state of online news commenting in Nigeria and how they reflect democratic deliberation in the form of a public sphere. Therefore, the aim of this research is not to investigate per se the mainstream journalistic approach online or by contrast, citizen journalism. Instead, the study focusses on the discursive forum provided by the

online media platforms and the debates that pass through them. As a result, the application of political science theoretical perspectives like the public sphere and the cultural analysis approach of critical political economy are considered apposite for the research.

5.3 Public Sphere Theory

The concept of the public sphere explains the existence of a space where people discuss rationally and critically issues that affect them. Also, the public sphere is a discursive space in the society where opinions are formed (Seidman, 1989). Similarly, Hauser (1999) describes the public sphere as a deliberative space where citizens come together to converse on issues of mutual interest and through deliberation form an opinion. Furthermore, Habermas (1991: 398) in his landmark analysis of what the public sphere is, argues that it is:

... a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of public sphere...

Historically, the emergence of the public sphere in the 18th century coincides with the rise of the modern state and the new class of bourgeois (Bulut, 2016). Before this period, religious organisations and the state control public opinion, and both shape social identities. The emergence of public sphere runs parallel to the features of an absolutist society as represented by the church and the monarchy in the 17th century Europe that monopolises the meaning and interpretation of knowledge and public matters (Habermas, 2006). The various salons, coffee shops and the free press during the period offer platforms for the bourgeoisie - defined from Marx analysis as the class of people in the production society who control the means of production - to get together and discuss literary works. This salon transforms into a literary public sphere and later coalesced into discussing civic issues critically and rationally (Outhwaite, 1994). Another argument asserts that the public sphere is not a product or creation of the bourgeois. Instead, it is a sort of replication of the type of publicity that happens at the prince's court and the bourgeois through their closeness to the court, imbibe the art of bringing together middle-class men to engage in a critical-rational debate over public issues (Bulut, 2016).

Although, the public sphere reflects in the works of scholars like Kant, Hegel and Marx, which all influenced Habermas in his writings. However, Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1989), arguably the most read seminal work that sets the tone for academic

discussions on the public sphere, provides a historical and sociological analysis of the rise of the public sphere, its transformation and decline (Mustapha, 2012). He critically examines the change in the relationship between public opinion and political process and how the mass media influence this relationship (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013).

The public sphere is a communicative space within a society where deliberation takes place without coercion and allows for people with different political positions that may exist in a democratic environment to express their opinions (Dahlgren, 2005; Moufe, 2000). However, this description of the public sphere is too simplistic and does not consider the fact that individuals in the society do not participate in public discourse on the same level (Adut, 2012; Ryan, 1990). The question of access to the discursive space is critical to the understanding of the nature of the public sphere. According to Habermas (1992), the 'lifeworld' to which the public sphere is part of, is the environment where the citizens gain lived experience and the 'system' refers to the economic system, ideological and state apparatuses which are all necessary to the understanding of political power acquisition and its sustenance (Marshall, 2007).

Habermas argues that the public sphere had lost its original function of providing a platform for critical and rational debate of public issues due to the influence of the economy, technology and politics (Habermas, 1989). Also, the deliberative space according to the dominant approach stresses dialogic and equal participation of citizens in debate within the sphere (Adut, 2012), and a platform through which the society mirrors itself based on democratic principles (Holub, 1991).

Although, Habermas central thesis in his various academic undertakings on the public sphere dwell on the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere and the place of public opinion and its implication for democracy. One of its central themes that stresses the intellectual space for critical debate applies to online deliberative space (Habermas, 1998). Similarly, any discussion of contemporary democratic principles and the type of discursive space within it requires a reference to Habermas public sphere. As a result, this theory, particularly Habermas strand, will provide a framework for the study because it gives a useful insight into understanding discursive trends, especially with the development of new media forms. As a result, the public sphere theory is used as a framework in the study to enable the researcher to understand how the media and in this case online media and the discursive space it provides facilitates a democratic deliberative space.

Habermas expounds that the public sphere is a space that facilitates “critical public debate” (Habermas 1991). The critical and rationale components which are essential for the existence of a public sphere imply that decision is reached based on reasoning engaged in by those with education, possession of properties, mutual and good knowledge of the principles that guarantee consensus decision in debates (Willems, 2012). Also, the rationality and criticality features of the public sphere ensure that the process of public discussion is not tainted or influenced by power or vested interests (Barton, 2005; Willems, 2012). The absence of capitalist imperatives, according to Habermas, is essential to achieving a robust discursive space where rationality and criticality are both ‘rules of thumb’ for decision making. However, the rational-critical role of the public sphere, as argued by Habermas, has been critiqued by scholars as very difficult to achieve within a discursive forum. Sometimes, what gets identified as debate issues are identified and processed by specialised agencies based on the search for the common good which could overburden the discursive sphere especially with its divergence in terms of people that constitute it (Haussler, 2018).

In other words, determining rationally what a common good is within a sphere of deliberation is very complex and challenging considering the dynamism of human relationships and the fact that human beings have the propensity to conceal real intentions while participating in a public debate. For instance, in Nigeria, prominent politicians sometimes engage in public opinion debates on public issues aligning their opinions with the majority and in the process gaining popularity and acceptance. However, the same politicians, as soon as they get access to the realm of power, introduce policies that are contrary to the earlier stance they took that gave them prominence and acceptance. Furthermore, Foucault (1980) argues against the possibility of achieving critical and rational discourse on the point that power contestation is at the heart of information and communication exchange. As such, there is no value-free communication, as every discourse reflects power relation and contestation.

Mustapha (2012) argues that the public sphere conceived by Habermas is not limited to the physical structure (salons or coffee shops), but an abstract space for dialogue. Therefore, the effective functioning of the public sphere, according to Habermas (1991) requires inclusivity meaning the space should not exclude people because of any bias. Everybody should have access to space. Equality is another criterion for the proper functioning of the sphere. Participation in dialogue should not be on social standing or position. However, realities within the public sphere are at complete variance with the equal participation and egalitarian features of the public sphere as argued by

Habermas. Firstly, equal participation may not be achievable not because a specific class of people are denied access to the sphere because of gender or other parameters. Instead, equal participation is not achievable because they are indifferent to deliberation on public issues or even see themselves as apolitical, hence not interested in politics or public issues. For example, in Nigeria, some citizens believe that participating in a discourse on public issues will not add any value to them. There is a famous saying that ‘Will discussing Nigeria’s issues put food on my table when whatever we say does not influence the government in any way?’.

Secondly, lack of knowledge or ignorance can also lead to the exclusion of a specific category of people within the public sphere (Adut, 2012). Citizens especially feel intimidated when they do not have a knowledge of the issues under debate. In that type of deliberative sphere, there is deficit in participation and equality as those who know the subject of discourse dominate the discussion. The third position, according to Adut (2012), stresses the need for rationality and logic in debates before making a decision. Participants should also have the freedom to discuss freely without being subjected to any form of coercion that may influence the decision to be reached. Likewise, Poor, (2006) adapting Habermas idea of ‘public sphere’ highlights elements necessary to form a public sphere. The first is being able to provide a deliberative space for those previously excluded from political discourse. The second, according to him, is that the public sphere should be formed through mediated discussion while the third says ideas presented should be considered based on merit and not on the social standing of the commenter.

Gerhards & Friedhelm (1993) highlight three types of the public sphere: encounter public sphere, public events and the mass media. The encounter public sphere is everyday face to face interaction with no structured pattern of communication where issues. In this type of public sphere, according to Gerhards and Neidhart (1993), the impact of deliberation is weak, and the reach is low. Public event has a little presence of organisational structure, and experts and opinion leaders are often part of deliberation and may dominate the discussion. The reach of participation by citizens in public events public sphere appears more extensive compared to participation in the encounter public sphere. The mass media, as the third sphere, has the skills and organisational structure, but the audience is passive. Improvement in printing technology and the increasing influence of newspapers and journals aided the rise of the bourgeois public sphere and made it a powerful force capable of bringing change (Ebeling, 2006). However, the encroachment of politics into the sphere and the gradual blurring of lines between state and society impinge on the realisation of the ideals of the public sphere especially

since the vibrancy of the public sphere depends mostly on a clear separation between the private and the public space, and collision of the two brings decline (Crossley and Roberts, 2004; Holub, 1991). The core features of the public sphere theory as enunciated by Habermas (1989) rest in the argument of the existence of a social space where citizens come together for rational and critical debate on public issues. Also, the composition of such discursive sphere ‘... transcends the boundaries of their personal lives.’ (Susen, 2011), as each of the persons gathers to form a public sphere for debate.

Even though various arguments have discussed the public sphere as a realm for deliberating on public issues critically and rationally (Asen, 2015; Jürgen Habermas, 1989; Jürgen Habermas, 1992; Ruiz et al., 2011; Su, 2016); several discourses have also highlighted the weaknesses in the public sphere. For instance, Downey (2014), argues that the public sphere is in a ‘flux’ or mobility to account for the various changes within the public sphere necessitated by migration, technology and social practices. Habermas idea of the public sphere is restricted to property owners and failed to recognise those spaces of deliberation that are occupied by participants who are at complete variance with the qualities obtainable in bourgeoisie public sphere (Cuceu, 2011; Fraser, 1990; Fuchs, 2012).

Similarly, consumerism and commercialism within the sphere of private and public life have weakened the public sphere and its primary functions of providing a space for critical and rational debate (Norris, 2010). According to Norris (2010), the weakness arises from the fact that people are manipulated with much information, thereby denying them of any meaningful political life. Subsequently, the resultant effect of this on the society is a manipulative deliberative space through publicity made possible by the mass media. However, his conception of the bourgeoisie public sphere is nothing more than an inaccurate, exclusionary and imaginary analysis of the public sphere which places emphasis on elitism neglecting other parallel space of public deliberation dominated by proletariat and women (Eley, 1992; Fraser, 1990; Haussler, 2018). Furthermore, the space excludes different classes of people like women, proletariat and those outside the class of the bourgeoisie.

Therefore, referring to the platform as a mirror reflecting the society is merely seeing society from a one-dimensional perspective or a unitary public sphere. Habermas’s analytic approach to the understanding of the nature of the public sphere by looking only at its structural transformation will not give a holistic insight into the understanding of the public sphere. Structures and institutions do not operate in isolation of people that occupy them. As a result, it is essential to understand the individuals that constitute these structures, the institutions and the transformative factors that shape

their participation and interactions within the structures and institutions such as religion, cultural affiliations, gender affiliations, economy, education and other social factors.

The way people use information and telecommunication technologies has raised issues over what constitutes a public sphere in the 21st century. Moreso, the information and telecommunication technologies especially the internet with various embedded algorithms has created a kind of public with shared characteristics and what gets discussed within this type of forum are nothing more than an echo chamber and reinforcement of common belief and ideology. Similarly, the theory does not consider the existence of public in other states whose nature, space and pattern of deliberation may be different from the salons and the coffee shops in England and France at the time Habermas was writing. Besides, Habermas theory is paternalistic and excludes women from the public sphere. It merely reflects the society historical tradition of privileging men over women or only male dominance in both public and private space (Bolton, 2005; Cuceu, 2011; Fraser, 1990). There is a clear boundary between public and private space. The public sphere is an 'exclusive' space for men, where political and social deliberation takes place. In contrast, the private sphere is a "...domain of the household of reproduction of life, and intimate or sentimental manifestations (Cuceu, 2012, p225). The exclusion of these publics, Fraiser (1992), referred to as 'counter-publics' from the public sphere is counterproductive, and runs parallel to the ideals of having a free society based on equality as a multiplicity of public spheres is pertinent to achieving such a society.

Fraser (1992) argues for a subaltern 'counter-public' that runs parallel to the bourgeois public sphere and represent the interests of citizens that are outside the bourgeois sphere and whose interests are oppositional and challenged the hegemonic influence of the bourgeois. In Nigeria, for instance, the presence of this subaltern public spheres is vital to the discussion of equally essential issues outside politics. Maternal mortality, public health and family planning are naturally domains outside the interests of the Habermas's bourgeoisie sphere, which deliberates more on politics. Fuchs (2013, p182) however disagrees and highlights the problem in a multiplicity of the public sphere, arguing that 'the danger of pluralistic public without unity is, however, that they will in social struggle focus on mere reformist identity politics without challenging the whole, which negatively affects the lives of all subordinate groups.'

Contrary to Fuchs's argument, pluralistic public spheres may not be dangerous to the health of a society, but a necessary means of fostering inclusiveness of all the components of society in public

discourse. Furthermore, this assertion is true of society with diversity in ethnicity and religion. In such society, it is essential to have various spheres where public discourse takes place, to give voice to those who ordinarily are voiceless in a single public sphere platform due to low status or other disadvantages. Also, Arendt's concept of the public sphere argues that the public can only exist in the presence of others. The public in the argument of Arendt et al. (2010) comes to reality when there is deliberation where people can hear and see each other. The participants in the public sphere, according to Arendt, are equal, and deliberation is agonistic, taking cognisance of different opinions on an issue (Arendt et al. 2010). Arendt modelled her idea of the public sphere after the Greek city where there is a public space called 'Arena' opened to every citizen.

Although Hanan Arendt did not use the term 'public sphere' in her work, she, however, discusses the concept in one of her major works, 'Human Condition, (1958). In contrast to Habermas's (1998) argument of a rational-critical debate resulting in a consensus, Arendt's public sphere emphasises the agonistic form of debate or contestations. She anchors her construct of the public sphere on the exclusion of certain classes of people, including women. The exclusion also determines the type and nature of contents for deliberation, and by so doing, specific issues are not considered for discussion within the space (Cuceu, 2012). Similarly, Suse (2011) argues that the public sphere theory does not provide an adequate explanatory framework for understanding the structural transformation of the public sphere in late modern societies. More so, as the public sphere model proposed by Habermas, is limited to the bourgeoisie and forecloses the importance of alternative discursive spheres to the discussion of public issues. Also, public sphere theory does not account for exclusion, especially with the question of the digital divide and does not theorise pluralist public sphere (Graham, 2015). Manning (2001) questions the possibility of arriving at a rational and critical decision within a discursive space because power relation influenced the production of information and meaning. Finlayson (2005) argues that Habermas notion of the public sphere is a utopian concept and its associative concepts such as openness, rationality, and equality are difficult to achieve within a deliberative space. There are some 'infrastructural conditions' necessary for the emergence of the public sphere, and these include the existence of the print media (Taylor, 1992). Similarly, there is a marked difference between 'public opinion' and the 'opinion of humankind'. Public opinion is arrived at after participants engage in a critical deliberation, and the engagement becomes possible due to the participants reading of the newspaper and having the consciousness that the newspaper contents are meant for public consumption to elicit public debate (Taylor, 1992). Public opinion formulation based on Taylor's explanation of the public sphere should be arrived at in a deliberation

based on consensus formed through reasoning and critical debate (Koçan, 2008). Similarly, the Habermasian public sphere is a closed environment which only has value for male elites and fails to recognise that women equally play an essential role in democratic deliberation (Cuceu, 2012; Fraiser, 1992).

Consequently, assessing how democratic discussions in the public sphere are using the notion of the earlier writings of Habermas based on restrictive membership criteria of the public sphere will be challenging. An example of this argument is a situation where the female population are very active online, but cannot be part of the deliberative space based on Habermas notion of the public sphere. Equally, the online public sphere in Nigeria is not solely the confine of the elites in the tradition of the Habermasian public sphere. It consists of various parallel spheres from civil society groups to bloggers who deliberate on different issues. The role of the media is not only about providing information but seeing themselves as responsible to the public, to provide a template for the public to dialogue on issues and articulate such responses for action on the part of the government. This position is supported by Habermas (1996) that the media should come to an understanding that they have an obligation to the public by enabling space for the citizens to access information. Furthermore, access to information by the citizens would allow them to learn about the activities of their government and through the same media become equipped with the necessary information for engaging in discourse with other citizens in a deliberative manner.

Therefore, the mainstream media (broadcast and print) attend to some of these features, especially in the realm of political news. However, the entanglements of the mainstream media with politics have not resulted in the type of democratic deliberations that are rational and accommodate the diverse shades of opinions in a society (Fenton, 2018). The reason for this is because the news corporation often dominates the platforms of discourse under the influence of the political class and capitalist imperatives. Hence, most decisions do not emanate as a result of civic engagement but an extension of the hegemonic ideas of the ruling class (Balnaves et al., 2008). There is the tendency, therefore, for the mainstream media to exclude people who may have good ideas to contribute to society and democracy. Even where some elements of deliberations are present, they often come as mediated deliberations. For example, the opinion page of newspaper /magazines and discussion programme on television/radio may reflect the political or ideological leanings of news organisations and ignore those that are contrary. Where this is the case, the agenda set by the media for discussion become

skewed along with a pattern, and by so doing, such a scenario is not reflective of democratic discourse.

Several arguments have been raised by scholars over the capacity of the internet to facilitate a public sphere (Batorski & Grzywińska, 2018; Carlos & Victor Sampedro, 2018; Colleoni et al., 2014; Fenton, 2018; McDermott, 2018b; Papacharissi, 2002), and also its ability to provide multiple platforms to source for information and deliberation by the citizens (Dylko, Beam, Landreville & Geidner, 2012; Benkler, 2006; Dahlgren, 2005; Negroponte, 1996). Any new mode of communication technology comes with its affordances and potentials. Regarding the internet, studies have pointed out the affordances inherent in the technology and its capacity for communication such as the transformation of a community, globalised connectivity and personalisation (Wellman et al., 2006). The question of making the affordances within the internet space and its application to the various platforms of social interaction uniform is an issue of concern. More so because each of the platforms has its peculiar attributes and use (Fox & McEwan, 2017).

Therefore, some of the Internet affordances enable a form of social interaction and quick exchange of a large volume of information at both local and international levels (Wellman et al., 2006). Also, the internet provides the affordances of a diversity of information that helps in learning and create an interactive community which encourages engagement and debate (Conole & Dyke, 2004). Similarly, Baek, Wojcieszak and Delli-Carpini (2011) argue that some of the qualities of the online public sphere include its potential of allowing for inclusivity and diversity among participants. For instance, the social network platform Facebook reflects some of the features of a public sphere as it provides space for people to participate, interact and express themselves freely (Robertson, Vatrapu & Medina, 2010). The potentials of the internet being able to facilitate inclusivity and diversity is debatable primarily when such issues on internet literacy, affordability and penetration in countries like Nigeria and other developing countries is raised (Borcuch, Borcuch and Swierczynski-Kaczor, Rasmussen, 2014).

The recent controversy involving Facebook on the Cambridge analytical data manipulation of the election process has raised concerns and call for critical scrutiny of the online media platforms. It raises questions whether they can serve as a public sphere for rational and critical deliberation to take place, mainly where algorithms influence deliberation in order to skew opinion along with a premeditated direction. The issue of polarisation in online discussion (Sphor, 2017; Sustain, 2017;

Pariser, 2011) and digital-divide especially in the developing countries where a segment of the population does not have access to the internet and cannot access information online nor participate in online discussion (Borcuch et al., 2014) pose concerns on the democratic potential of the internet. Also, the second level of digital-divide described as systematic digital inequality especially in the western world where there is a disparity in digital skills which also influence access and participation online (Beam, Hmielowski & Hutchens, 2018), all question the internet's potential as a public sphere.

Benkler (2006) identifies two levels of criticisms by some scholars against the democratic and public sphere potentials of the internet situating their arguments within the precincts of first-generation and the second-generation critique. The first generation of critics criticises the volume of information on the internet and the fact that everybody seems to be talking at the same time, which creates a 'cacophony' of voices. In the long run, such inducement like monetary factor may decide whose voice is heard and the ones that get drowned into obscurity, which ultimately encourage polarisation and echo chamber (Cropf, 2007). Also, the second generation of critics rests its argument on the fact that fewer websites attract vast numbers of attention. In contrast, large numbers of sites record low traffic, and according to this body of critics, this scenario is capable of promoting concentration (Cropf, 2007). Besides, referring to the online news media as a public sphere is debatable, because some of the comments that pass through the discursive space are irrational and uncritical (Al-Saggaf, 2006).

On the contrary, Dahlgren (2006) identifies three fundamental aspects of the public sphere and applied these three frameworks to explain the online deliberative environment in order to justify the existence of an online public sphere. These fundamentals are the structure, representation and interaction. Dahlgren (2006) explains that the structural dimension of the public sphere relates to the pattern of media ownership, organisation structure, as well as the political economy aspect of news production and how all these affect the critical functions of the mass media as an enabler of the public sphere in terms of access and participation of citizens within the deliberative space. Although, arguments abound that the public sphere does not prescribe what policy should be adopted, but through its analytic framework can help to determine how to come up with appropriate policy to determining online news environment as a public sphere (McChesney, 2013). Dahlgren (2006) explained that the parameters of 'structure' could apply to the study of online communicative space through such dynamics as its regulations, political economy and even its technical configurations in order to understand how it impacts on democratic deliberation.

Similarly, any argument on whether or not the internet and its various platforms possess the traits of a public sphere requires the consideration of political communication and the political economy of online environment (Fuchs, 2017). Fuchs raised the questions that should help determine whether the internet can qualify as a public sphere. These questions, according to Fuchs (2017), are concerned with the analysis of the political economy dimensions of mediated communication and ownership and whether such ownership of media organisation and its resource is democratic or not. Also, the question of censorship and exclusion was germane to determining the suitability of the internet as a public sphere and these questions bothered on whether there is political and economic censorship within the online news platforms (Fuchs, 2017). Also, other questions recommended for determining the levels of which the internet reflects a public sphere concerned whether corporate and elites' views which signify pro-capitalist worldview are overrepresented in the content on the website and thereby raises the issue of exclusion.

Furthermore, questions should also be asked on who can produce content and are the contents produced relevant and impactful (Fuchs, 2017). On the other hand, the analysis of political communication dimension raised by Fuchs to determining the public sphere features of the internet should include the question of access. Access is based on the frequency of use, education level of users, gender, ethnicity and the relevance of the websites to other websites that are not political in an orientation such as entertainment. Furthermore, establishing the public sphere potential of the internet also requires ascertaining whether the discussions on the sites are free from economic and state influence. It is crucial to question the quality of discussion on the various websites that allow for deliberation. To do this requires looking at the validity, inclusiveness and the reflexivity of discussion within such sites (Fuchs, 2017).

The internet possesses the potential to solve the various limitations observed in the traditional public sphere of public salons and the mainstream media. Such limitations include the question of space and time regarding the transmission of a message and representative democracy which limits participation to the elected few (Bohman, 2004). Also, the structure of the internet provides for plurality and diversity of opinion, which further reinforces citizens' participation and upholds its description as a more suitable public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005). However, Sustain (2017) raises counter-argument on the suitability of the internet as a public sphere citing issues like anonymity, access, and of course, commodification and commercialisation of the online space which all affect the content and quality of discussion and participation (Sustain, 2017).

Therefore, the analysis of the inherent tendencies of each platform on the internet and how they are used will go a long way to establishing its public sphere potentials (Rasmussen, 2014). Furthermore, Benkler (2006), discusses the transformation the internet brought into the communication process by democratising and allowing for more participation within the discursive realm, unlike the traditional mass media in which the mechanism for feedback and participation is rigid. The participatory model of the online public sphere due to the absence of gatekeeping processes unlike the mainstream media gives the audience some level of assurance that their comments will be disseminated (Jürgen Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010). Also, the internet has transformed the audience from being a passive recipient of information to engaging with and deliberating on the issues (Cropf, 2007; Rasmussen, 2014).

This alteration in the individual's pattern of participation within the public sphere is because of a shift in the 'network architecture' necessitated by the internet (Cropf, 2007). Furthermore, this changed the communication process from a central point for information processing directed at a broad audience in a unidirectional pattern to one where there are various interconnections in information processing, upload and dissemination (Cropf, 2007). The configuration of the internet reflects the various indices of determining a public sphere and the findings of Gerhards & Schäfer (2010) on the study of the traditional and the internet-based fora of deliberation reveal that the internet scores very high in the area of openness for the participation of citizens in public debate.

5.4 Public sphere in Nigeria

Most of the studies about the public sphere are concerned with western society with little focus on other cultures. However, can the western models of the public sphere be situated within the African context, and does public sphere exist in Africa, particularly Nigeria, which is the centre of this study? Nigerian society in the pre-colonial days was not short of a discursive space and had a public sphere like the Habermasian model, but with a slight modification. In the same way as the salons and coffee shops in the Habermas's sphere, citizens in the pre-colonial Nigeria come together at palm wine or other locally brewed liquor 'joints' to discuss social issues and other matters affecting their society. Kperogi (2016, p293), observes that:

The pre-colonial African village square...has many resonances with the early European bourgeois public sphere that Habermas historicised; only that the African village was pre-modern, pre-bourgeois and did not function as a counterweight to the ruling class.

Furthermore, the pre-colonial sphere in Nigeria has a private space and public space. The public space is mainly the domain of men, and it is the space where issues concerning the community and other social problems are discussed. However, the private space is constituted mostly by women and deliberation within the sphere is mostly on domestic issues such as family issues, fashion and the discussion of trivial matters.

In contrast to Habermas's single sphere, there is evidence of multiple public spheres in Nigeria (Ekeh, 1975; Mustapha, 2012; Orji, 2010). Ekeh (1975) maintained that Nigeria has multiple spheres consisting of two public realms which are primordial public space and civic public. In primordial public space, emphasis on issues like morality, group affiliations, and cultural underpinnings influence discourse and individual disposition to matters. The civil sphere, unlike the primordial space, has its membership drawn from the educated working class, and do not place importance on moral, but on duties (Mustapha, 2012). The multiplicity of the public sphere in Nigeria is made possible by the colonisation experience which led to the emergence of the educated elites, who are in charge of the administration of the country, and their space of discourse is entirely different from the primordial space (Ekeh, 1975; Osaghae, 2006).

Consequently, the control of public authority by the educated elites is influenced by ethnicity and religion sentiments, and these two factors influence any discourse within the civic sphere (Mustapha, 2012; Orji, 2010). Ethnicity and religion are vital influencers in any discussion within the public space and play a significant role in how participants identify, argue and maintain a position in a deliberation. Orji (2010), in his research, explains that:

In the ethnicised public sphere, the relations between the ethnic public are usually conflictual because the rhetorical contestation among the public is part and parcel of overarching struggle by the ethnic groups to capture and dominate the state (Orji, 2010, p, 169).

The space for the public sphere in Nigeria from the colonial time to the present day is characterised by the presence of the mass media (Oke, 2013). Orji (2010) explains that the nationalists struggle for increased participation of citizens in governance, and later the clamour for independence transformed the public sphere in Nigeria to a mass-mediated sphere. The press played a significant role in the shaping of opinion and providing a space for deliberation during the colonial period (Omu,1978). Also, the media as a discursive space during the colonialism Nigeria present two faces of the public sphere. First, the mass media portrays itself as space for the citizens to discuss and express their opinions about the colonial government and her policies. These contestations are articulated and

presented by the media through news, editorials and features. Second, the press during the period provides discursive space for the contestation of ideas among the elites and the educated class. This space transcends discussing public issues and colonial government matters about the citizens. Instead, the discursive space is more of the struggle for popularity and acceptance among the political class (Oke, 2013). Consequently, rational discussion of issues and reaching a decision is often difficult within the space. All these factors have all contributed to the shaping of the modern public sphere in Nigeria.

The incursion of the military into government in Nigeria from the first military coup of 1966 harms the public sphere in Nigeria. The press was suppressed from performing their duties, and freedom of speech was curtailed (Olukoyun, 2014). The media became an extension of the military regime and report issues sanctioned by the government. Decrees were promulgated to discourage open debates or criticisms about government. Most of the media organisations, especially the electronic media, were under the control of the government and could not discuss or facilitate a space for discussion that is against the government (Okon, 2015). To create a false impression of the existence of the public sphere in Nigeria, the various regimes during the period created phantom civil society groups. These groups pretend to be fighting people's cause in the open or facilitating space to discuss public issues, but in reality are extensions of the government (Obadare, 2005; Agbaje, 1999). Some of these civil society groups activities are couched in religion and ethnic agenda and as such, attempt to skew public discourse along with their objectives within the discursive sphere often results in dialogic conflicts (Obadare, 2006). This analysis explains some of the factors responsible for power relations within the deliberative space in Nigeria.

The liberalisation of the media industry, the introduction of mobile telephony and the internet brought a new angle to information dissemination and redefined the public sphere in Nigeria. One of the significances of the media industry deregulation is that it provides an alternative platform, especially to people whose values and political affiliations may be opposite of the government to express themselves. Similarly, it eases the process of communication, and the internet gradually became a space for deliberation on public issues which the mainstream media will not allow for fear of reprimand from the government. The internet has helped to expand discursive public spaces in Nigeria. Also, there are several online news media sites today in Nigeria, such as blogs, Facebook pages, twitter, and other internet features where people access information and freely discuss issues. The migration of most newspapers in Nigeria to the internet, its commenting features and other social

media sites have transformed the public sphere in Nigeria. Therefore, issues which ordinarily would have been labelled as classified matters or out of the open space by the government are now discussed freely on social networks like the Facebook, and Twitter (Oladepo, n.d.).

Despite the various criticisms already discussed concerning the public sphere, it remains an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. The application of the public sphere framework in this study will allow the researcher through the analysis of comments to evaluate the discursive forum to determine the existence or otherwise of democratic elements within it. The application of public sphere theory in this study allows the analysis and explanation of the features inherent in the online news commenting space and for understanding the nature of participation and interactivity that occur within the discursive space. However, it lacks the necessary tools to unpack the power relations and differentials that shape the production of news and how this affects the way commenters participate and debate in the online news commenting spaces. As Susen (2011, p.53) argues:

The ideological nature of public discourses is embedded in the material organisation of social resources. The symbolic resources of critique are always dependent on the social resources of power. The vertical structuration of society manifests itself in the interest-laden structuration of ideology: socially positioned subjects produce relationally contingent discourses. The hegemonic discourses generated within the bourgeois public sphere express the particular interests of the most powerful social groups.

Based on these inadequacies, therefore, the researcher used the critical political economy theory as the second main element of the explanatory framework in this study to understand how the political economy of journalism and the broader Nigerian political economy manifest in the online news discursive space.

5.5 Critical Political Economy Theory

The study also applies the critical political economy theory as the other theoretical framework for the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Traditionally, the application of political economy theoretical lens into the study of mass media combines both the economy and the political underpinnings of the media towards the understanding of a research problem. As an area of academic discipline, defining political economy with a high level of precision is difficult because the theory crisscrossed several disciplines of studies such as politics, communication, economics, language and even technology. Eatwell, Milgate, & Newman (1991) describe the political economy as the science of wealth and the various efforts made by man to meet human wants and desires. Mosco, 2005, p.24) opines that political economy is the "...study of social relations, particularly the power relations, that

mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources. Furthermore, the political economy approach assists in the examination of a social process that conditioned the production of texts, its interpretation and circumstance that shape its production (Golding & Murdock, 1978).

Therefore, the main reason for using the critical political economy in this research is to complement the other theory applied in the study - the public sphere. The latter does not allow for critical insight into understanding the factors that influence the news posted on the platforms and how these shape discussion. The public sphere, through its measurement criteria, provides us with the capacity to establish whether the conditions for democratic deliberation in a discursive sphere exist. However, it does not provide us with the intellectual insight to understand the power differentials, the relative inequality and the material conditions that influence the posting of news on the online platform by the media organisation and the way participants react to news stories and debate on the news platform comment section. Also, the justification for the use of critical political economy in the study aligns with the submissions of Golding & Murdock (1978) and Mosco (2005). Both assert in their studies that the application of critical political economy to the study of media content requires the examination of social process and social relations at the heart of production and distribution of texts.

Furthermore, Webster (2002) opines that questions of power relations, capitalist imperatives and the requisites for democratic practices which are some of the issues political economy approach is concerned with are necessary to understanding the implications of new technology on the social world. Additionally, McChesney (2013) explains that the political economy of communication theory examines the media, including the online media from two prisms. First, it investigates the influence structural and institutional issues exert on the contents and the kind of role it plays in the society. Secondly, it interrogates government policies as it affects the media system within a society. Equally, Henderson (2012) argues that political economy equips a person with the knowledge to be critical and have a deeper understanding rather than being simplistic of the various factors underlying action or worldview.

Mansell (2004) argues that political economy framework is relevant in the study of online news environment because most researches concerning the internet and online media focus on affordances provided by the internet and the plethora of online platforms neglecting the underlying dynamics of power that drive them. Therefore, according to Mansell (2004), any application of political economy

theory in the study of online media should consider the associated structures and process of power embedded in the new media. Vast numbers of studies in online news commenting situate their approach within the public sphere framework and focus mainly on how discursive platforms constitute space for rational and critical discussion to achieve a democratic deliberative space. By so doing, such an approach to the study of online deliberative space neglects the interface of political and economic imperatives that influences the type of information posted on the news platform. Furthermore, it does not account for how political-economic factors influence the perception and production of meaning by the audience.

While justifying the application of critical political economy to the study of online news media, Mansell (2004) argues that political economy addresses the question of scarcity created by power relations in the production and consumption of online media content to maintain inequalities and hegemony (Mansell, 2004). Additionally, the choice of the theory as a complement to the public sphere theory in this research is due to some of the drawbacks of the public sphere theory which may not allow for a holistic analysis of the dynamics within the online news media and commenting space in Nigeria. Public sphere framework does not have the analytical tools to address how power contestation affect the structure of news production and its effect on how readers produce meaning and relate with each other in the discursive platform. (Dahlgren, 1991). This assertion is supported by Lee (2011) that political economy theory helps to ascertain whether the economy of production shapes public discourse (i.e. the range of debates available) and change meaning within a text. The influence of power contestations and power relations are essential to the understanding of online news media platform, production of texts and the way readers input meaning into them. As such, failure to understand and recognise these contradictions may result in a superficial understanding of online news media contents and comment.

Although, the public sphere theory argued for public space of debate utterly independent of government and where citizens are free to dialogue without any fear of reprimand from the state. The public sphere criteria of critical and rational evidence in a discussion for determining the existence of a public sphere will allow for the establishment of whether the condition for democratic deliberative space exists in Nigeria. It, however, does not provide an analytical framework through which one can understand critically the factors that underpin and influence the way commenters comment concerning the contextuality of produced texts and the meaning inherent in the comments.

Additionally, the application of the critical political economy framework is relevant to the study because the use of public sphere theory alone in the research without complementing it with the political economy theory may reduce its explanatory framework to technology determinism. It implies that the internet technology can help facilitate a platform for democratic deliberation, but determining how the question of power, politics and ideology shapes the deliberative sphere and the comments that pass through the discursive platform are entirely out of the explanatory framework of the public sphere. As a result, the critical political economy theory will allow us to understand power differentials, material condition and the relationship of inequality and the reason behind such in online deliberation, which could lead to an impoverished public sphere. By so doing, the use of the theory as a complementary theoretical signpost will help to determine whether the political-economic conditions in Nigeria and the pattern of online news commenting in Nigeria are mutually reinforcing.

Additionally, the theory is applied in the study to understand and locate commenting within the Nigerian political economy environment. The theory will provide explanations of the way power relations and contestations embedded in the online news environment with specific reference to the Nigerian online news settings shapes the kind of deliberation illustrated by the application of public sphere theory. The political-economic approach in this study helps to explain whether religion and ethnicity which are the key drivers of the political economy in Nigeria as argued by Aiyede, (2009); Duncan & Williams, (2012); Kalu (1996) reinforces and shape discourse within the online commenting space. The researcher in the application of political economy theory mainly leaned on the critical political economy strand and considered it to be a robust utility in the understanding and analysis of the various dynamics around the digital world (Chesney, 2013).

Also, most of the online news media in Nigeria are online versions of the traditional media and as part of the soft institution, including religion and ethnic groups, reproduce the ideological narratives of the elite. Therefore, this production shapes the social consciousness and sustains the elite hegemonic influence on the citizens. Explaining the significance of power relations within the media and discursive sphere in Nigeria, further, Adebani (2016) connects the issue of ethnicity to the political economy through the question of allocation of 'economic resources' and situates the role of the press as facilitating what he describes as 'discursive territoriality'. According to Adebani (2016, p.213), the role of the mass media includes 'the utilisation of the structural context in which these relations are located as resources in the mobilisation of identity and the struggle to gain primacy in

the territorial struggle, particularly with an eye on the political, economic, social and cultural implications of such victory.’ In contrary to the arguments by the utopian school of thought that the internet has democratic and participatory features (Pavlik, 2001; Benkler, 2006; Aheran, 2009). The political economy analysis of citizens’ participation online in the form of reactions and feedback to stories reveal they are not just technology-induced but contestations among the various groups of the society (Mosco, 2008). Therefore, comments in the online platform are contestations and struggle for dominance between the different stratum of society.

Consequent upon this, the critical political economy theory will provide the theoretical lens for close analysis of how media ownership and control, the commodification of information and careful structuring of news stories by online newspapers in line with ideological and the hegemonic underpinnings of news organisations shape and influence online commenting by readers. The relevance of political economy theory in the analysis of online media environment is critical especially looking at the fact that there is nothing new about the ‘new’ media since it is only a platform where all the various existing old media platforms converged. It is a case of old wine in a new bottle as the focus of the study is on the comment sections of the online news media, most of which are online versions of traditional media in Nigeria. Therefore, the various political economy factors underlying the legacy media news provision is replicated online.

Most of the online news platforms in Nigeria provide their content for free, and some of them are also online versions of the legacy media. The question, however, arises of how these organisations, whether legacy media websites, blogospheres, twitter handles, and other social media news websites maintain the platforms. Also, do these online media platforms see their activities as part of their social responsibilities, and providing space for deliberation to democratise discursive space and deepen democracy? Studies of the internet as it relates to its audience activities have however suggested otherwise as advertising and profit motives still have a conspicuous presence in the online world (Fuchs, 2017, Mosco, 2017, Schneider, 2015). Robles and Córdoba-Hernández (2018) expounded on the issue of commodification, arguing that the various online discursive platforms, including online news commenting space, have a model of private-public business. As such, the regulatory framework for most of the news websites are influenced by market forces, and therefore, the need for profitability takes pre-eminence over other factors.

The online audience, including the online news commenters, are ‘prosumers’ who consume news and produce information which could be in the form of reacting to news through comments or disseminating information. Unlike the legacy media, the news content is not the product or commodity, but the ‘prosumer’, (Mosco, 2005), and in the case of this research, the news commenters. As a result, most of the online news websites, blogs, Facebook pages of media organisations and their twitter handles have embedded data harvesting algorithms through which data on the audience such as their biographies, lives and consumption patterns are harvested and sold to advertisers (Fuchs, 2017, Schneier, 2015, Mosco, 2009). The amount of money made from the sale of data to advertisers depends on the number of traffic on an online news site. The online news sites in order to attract traffic and increase advertisement revenue sometimes commodify their news content and post sensational stories to attract and grow the audience base. This news content may not reflect reality in its entirety (Fuchs, 2017).

However, the sensationalism of news contents in the online media to attract more audience and profit has a negative bearing on the political space. Furthermore, allowing economic and profit imperatives to determine the type of news content posted on online news sites also has its influence on the public sphere and the kind of information available for deliberation. Within the Nigerian context, most of the factors already discussed have connections with the mass media system. Since the focus of the study is the online media news media of which large numbers of the mainstream or legacy media have an online presence, it is crucial to apply the critical political economy theory to the understanding of the deliberative space they provide for citizens to discuss.

Most of the issues that defined the existing media systems in terms of contents, production, meaning and policy are also present in the online world in varying degree and structures. The realisation of the connection between legacy media, the online media and the use of the critical political economy to its analysis must be preoccupied with ‘... form, meaning and action as it is with the structure of power and institutions’ (Mansell, 2004: 98). The public sphere theory lacks the mechanics to do this as Freedman (2016) points out that the public sphere theory fails to account for how participation and discourse in the online space are affected by economic and power relations. Therefore, the public sphere and the critical political economy are apposite complements in the light of the purpose each of the theories served in the research. The use of critical political economy theory will enable the researcher to engage with the online news website comment section critically and also with the audience to understand how the Nigerian political-economic imperatives affect the online

deliberative space. Therefore, the scope of the critical political economy in this research will investigate how the issues of Nigerian political economy like culture, religion, power and contestation reproduce hegemony and affects the material condition of online deliberation and the production of meaning.

Table 5.1: Explanatory framework of the theories applied in the study

Theories	Strengths of the theory in the study	Weaknesses of the application of public sphere theory in the study
Public Sphere Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The criteria of the public sphere framework applied in this study will help to determine whether the conditions for democratic deliberative space exists within the websites analysed. • The framework provides the needed tools to map out ideas from the comments to explain the state of online news commenting space in Nigeria as a functional or dysfunctional public sphere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theory does not explain the factors that influence discussion and participants' positions. • Public sphere theory does not look at the communicative realities of the social environment, such as the factors that influence the way commenters comment. Also, the framework does not have the parameters to examine the activities of the online news organisations concerning the ideological and economic imperatives that influence its contents and how these impact on commenters and the commenting space.
Critical Political Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critical political economy framework in this study will is used to explore the material condition of the production of texts among participants within the online commenting space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The political economy theory does not have the tool to illuminate or identify the existence of discursive space.

The Researcher, 2019

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on the public sphere and the critical political economy theories and situated the research within these two theoretical planks. The public sphere theoretical framework will help to provide an explanatory framework whether the conditions for democratic deliberation exist and that space exists where citizens come together to deliberate on public matters critically and rationally. Also, Habermas in 'further reflections' (1992) explains the importance of the public sphere in unpacking and shaping the democratic process of society by taking the public sphere as an integral part of a 'lifeworld' which cannot be understood in isolation of another concept he refers to as the 'system'.

The researcher used the political economy as a theoretical framework in the study to understand how power relations within the Nigerian social space, including the material condition of production shape online comments and debates. The researcher concludes that both the public sphere and political economy theories are mutually re-enforcing, therefore allowing for a more in-depth insight into the activities within the online media commenting space. The political economy complements the public sphere theory by providing an explanatory framework to why and what influences commenters ways of participation in deliberation. The chapter also established that the existence of the public sphere in Nigeria dates to the pre-colonial period and argues that religion and ethnic narratives dominate the contemporary discursive space. Conclusively, the political economy of the mass media and by extension, the online news platform in Nigeria is reflective of the broader Nigerian political economy dynamics.

Chapter Six

Methodological Approach to the study

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter explains the method employed by the researcher in the study. In any research undertaking, the research method explains the various steps and plans put in place by a researcher to enable her/him to provide answers to the research questions raised and in the long run meet the research objectives. Kerlinger & Lee (1986) describes research design as a planned, structured and strategy of investigation conceived to obtain answers to research questions and control variance. It is also structured and well-defined steps that indicate the procedure for obtaining the information needed in research (Stern et al., 1989).

The research design section is an essential part of a study that provides a detailed map or design on how a researcher intends to conduct research and help streamline a researcher's work into purposive and correctly synchronised components towards the realisation of the overall objectives of the study. By so doing, the incorporation of the research design section helps to avoid the incidence of uncoordinated and haphazard administration of data collection process, analysis and interpretation of data findings. The research paradigm and philosophical assumptions that guide this study, including justifications for their choices are explained in the chapter. Equally, this section of the thesis also discusses the population of the study, sample population, the techniques used by the researcher in drawing the sample population for the research and the justification for the choices made.

As part of the attempt to provide a clear view of the procedural steps employed by the researcher in the study, the chapter explains the adoption of consequential exploratory mixed-method design and the reason for its option. The section includes a graphical figure of the consequential explanatory diagram and the way the researcher applied it in the study. Furthermore, and within the precinct of consequential exploratory mixed method design selected for the research, the chapter explains the type of each of the methods combined for the study.

6.2 Research design map for the study

This section briefly gives a graphical illustration of the research design for the project and the interconnectedness between the different stages of the research plan.

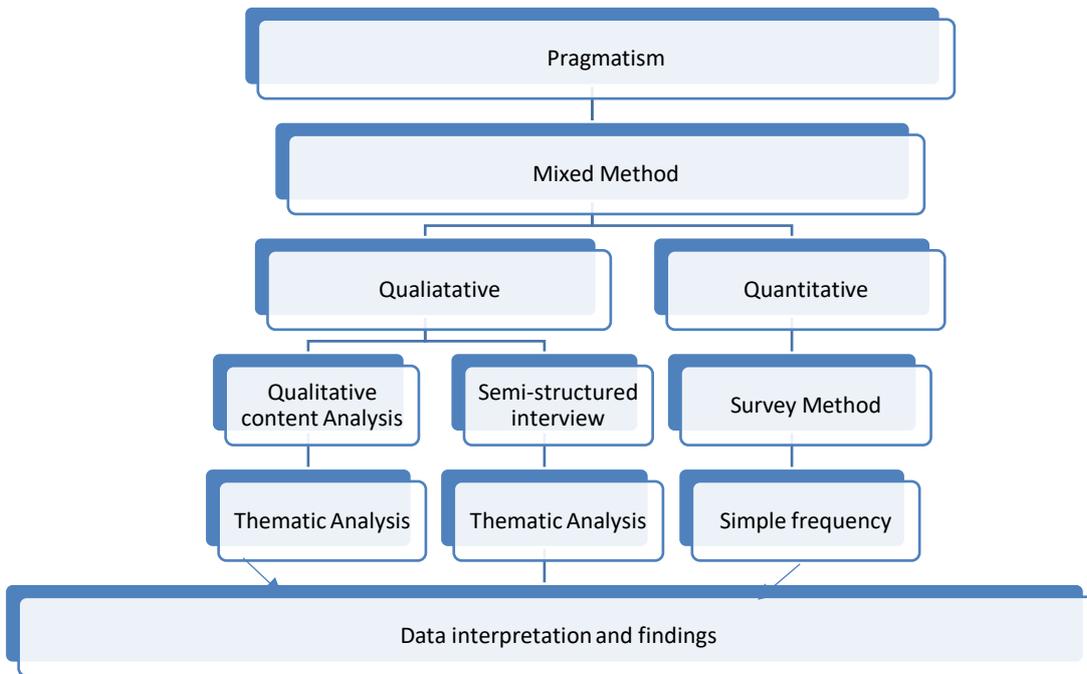


Figure 6.1: Research design Source: The Researcher

6.3 Research Paradigm and Philosophy

Research philosophy relates to how knowledge is acquired, what influences the process of acquisition and the nature of value in the process of acquiring the knowledge. Also, research philosophy helps to situate the process through which a researcher collects, analyzes and interprets his data within a particular philosophical tradition or what (Creswell, 2014) refers to as the ‘worldview’. The philosophical worldview of a research study, as explained, is ‘... a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study’ (Creswell, 2014, p.16). The application of philosophical worldview in a research study assists a researcher to shape his methodology in such a way that there would be synchronisation between the various components of the study design (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2002). Also, the choice and application of a philosophical stance in a study help clarify to readers of research work the position and approach of a researcher regarding his approach to knowledge acquisition, interpretation and the dissemination of research findings.

Galliers (1992) identifies two philosophical traditions regarding the acquisition of knowledge which is positivist and anti-positivist. The positivistic approach according to Gallier (1991) believes that direct experience or observation leads to objective knowledge (Colin & Kieran, 2016), and the phenomenon under investigation is observable without the researcher's values and beliefs interfering with the outcome of the study results (Levin, 2012). Conversely, anti-positivistic philosophical approach to knowledge or social constructivism approach believes that meaning and interpretation are not outside but within human interactions, and that there are multiple realities (Colin and Kieran, 2016). Also, Creswell (2014) identifies four philosophical worldviews: post-positivism, constructivism, transformative and pragmatism. Post positivism worldview anchors its approach to research on cause-and-effect. According to Phillips and Burbules (2000), empirical evidence and rationality are critical in the conduct of research and acquisition of knowledge that is postpositivist driven.

Post-positivism is an offshoot of positivism, and both subscribed to objectivity in the analysis of their approaches to research. However, post-positivism differs slightly arguing that objectivism alone cannot unpack what it is to know regarding a study. In contrast, positivism emphasises on no relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon under observation. Post-positivism argues that rationalism and objectivism are sometimes affected the researcher's background, values and other personal nuances which ultimately affect the outcome of research (Creswell, 2014; Phillips & Burbules, 2000). As a result, and unlike positivism that foreground the quantitative method as the appropriate method for research, post-positivism embraces both qualitative and quantitative methods. The constructivist worldview, another approach in the philosophical worldview regarding research and interpretation of knowledge, is concerned with the subjective explanation of a phenomenon. It argues that the understanding or knowledge of reality is socially constructed, and to have access to it requires looking deeply at such concepts like language, social conventions, and shared meanings (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2012). There is no fixed meaning in the interpretive epistemological approach as a definition is based on the various existing system that influences it in society (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Consequently, the interpretation of the social world or human actions cannot be explained through the descriptive lens of the causal relationships among variables. Instead, understanding the various factors responsible for social interaction and gaining a deeper understanding of the social world requires interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, constructivism demands 'capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to

phenomena to describe and explain their behaviour' (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006, p.132).

The transformative philosophical worldview is a direct reaction and criticism against other worldviews like post-positivism and constructivism (Creswell, 2014). It criticises the postpositivism for its rigidity, which does not consider the problem of marginalisation, oppression and the question of power (Creswell, 2014). One of the main arguments of the transformative worldview is that research cannot be conducted in isolation of politics and power narratives. Consequent upon this, therefore, any study or investigation of a phenomenon must consider asymmetric power relations and the question of how power dynamics and politics contribute to social injustice, oppression and discrimination with a view of how research can induce change and positive transformation (Mertens, 2010). One of the expectations of the application of transformative philosophical worldview in a research study is to tease out asymmetric power relation in a community and through findings that proffer ways of addressing it (Jackson et al., 2018)

The fourth type of the philosophical stance for acquiring and interpreting knowledge espoused by Creswell (2014) is pragmatism. This philosophical worldview is often used by researchers to investigate and understand a phenomenon from a mixed-methods methodological perspective. It is the philosophical stance adopted for this thesis. Pragmatism originates from the works of Dewey, James, Pierce and Rorty. As a philosophical worldview, it argues that a practical consequence of an action is crucial to arriving at the truth (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, the pragmatic approach postulates that knowledge is constructed and based on lived experience (Colin and Kieran, 2016). Pragmatism seeks to harmonise the line of difference between post-positivism and constructivism. Pragmatism argues that both pragmatic and constructivist approaches are both critical in the understanding of the world and therefore are '..two side of the same coin'(Morgan, 2014). Also, from the perspective of epistemology, the pragmatic approach possesses the features of accommodating both qualitative and quantitative research approach (Morgan, 2007; VL & Badiee M, 2010). Therefore, as a philosophical stance, it is concerned with a research problem, particularly research questions and methods for finding a solution to it.

Consequently, pragmatism emphasises the use of multiple methods of conducting research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). A Pragmatism approach argues that realities are always in a state of flux, and what we assumed to be truth presently can change at any moment (Robson & McCartan,

2015). As such, the approach acknowledges the dynamism inherent in human relations and emphasises the practicality of ideas and what works for a given situation. However, the application of pragmatism as a paradigm in research comes with some levels of unclarity. It does not state in clear terms how to address the point of divergence between qualitative and quantitative approaches (Bergman, 2008). Likewise, its simple description of a philosophical worldview that primarily hinges on 'what works' is potentially problematic (Morgan, 2014). Besides, searching or situating mixed-method appropriately within any of the philosophical stances has become an issue of contestation among scholars (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Hall, 2013; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This contestation is a result of the debates among scholars over the superior methodological approach between quantitative and qualitative methods (Reichardt, Charles & Rallis, 1994). This contestation is more so considering the point that a mixed-method involves both qualitative and quantitative methods and can sometimes become problematic, especially in the choice of a paradigm for research.

Hall (2013) drawing from Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) six philosophical stances for mixed methods research compressed the six positions into three categorisations in the mixed-method study: a-paradigmatic stance, single paradigm stance and multiple paradigm stances. According to Hall (2013), the a-paradigmatic approach does not consider the place of a paradigm in a research study. For the multiple paradigm stance, Hall (2013) argues that the paradigms are different from each other and hence can be applied concurrently in a study. The third category in Hall's explanation is the single paradigm, and the thesis of this category is that it is possible to use one paradigm for a study that combines both qualitative and quantitative method.

Therefore, one of the reasons for the choice of a pragmatic philosophical approach is that it can provide a philosophical worldview for a study combining both qualitative and quantitative as argued by Creswell (2014); Hall (2013). Also, the researcher premised his justification of using the mixed method on the fact that the research question and the objectives drawn for the study cannot be understood and investigated using a single research method. Moreover, each of the research questions raised requires different methods of collecting data. Likewise, the subject matter of this study involved so many practices that one research method is insufficient in scope. The subject of the research is concerned with the nature of online news commenting space in Nigeria, and whether it facilitates democratic deliberation. The application of pragmatism as a paradigm for the study allows the researcher to gain insights into the realities inherent in each of the methods combined for

investigating the phenomenon of online news comments. At the same time, the use of pragmatism in this study gives the researcher the flexibility to use the most appropriate method and data collection technique to address each of the research questions raised in the study.

Furthermore, and as argued by Andrew & Halcomb (2009), the most critical factor for selecting and determining a research design should be the research question. The research questions particularly lend themselves to different methods of enquiry, hence the need for their combination and the choice of pragmatic philosophical stance to guide in the interpretation of knowledge and findings from the study. Dewey's model of inquiry in line with the pragmatic philosophical approach treats inquiry as '... any form of experience, a continuous process that may involve many cycles between beliefs and actions before there is any sense of resolution.' (Morgan, 2014, p.4).

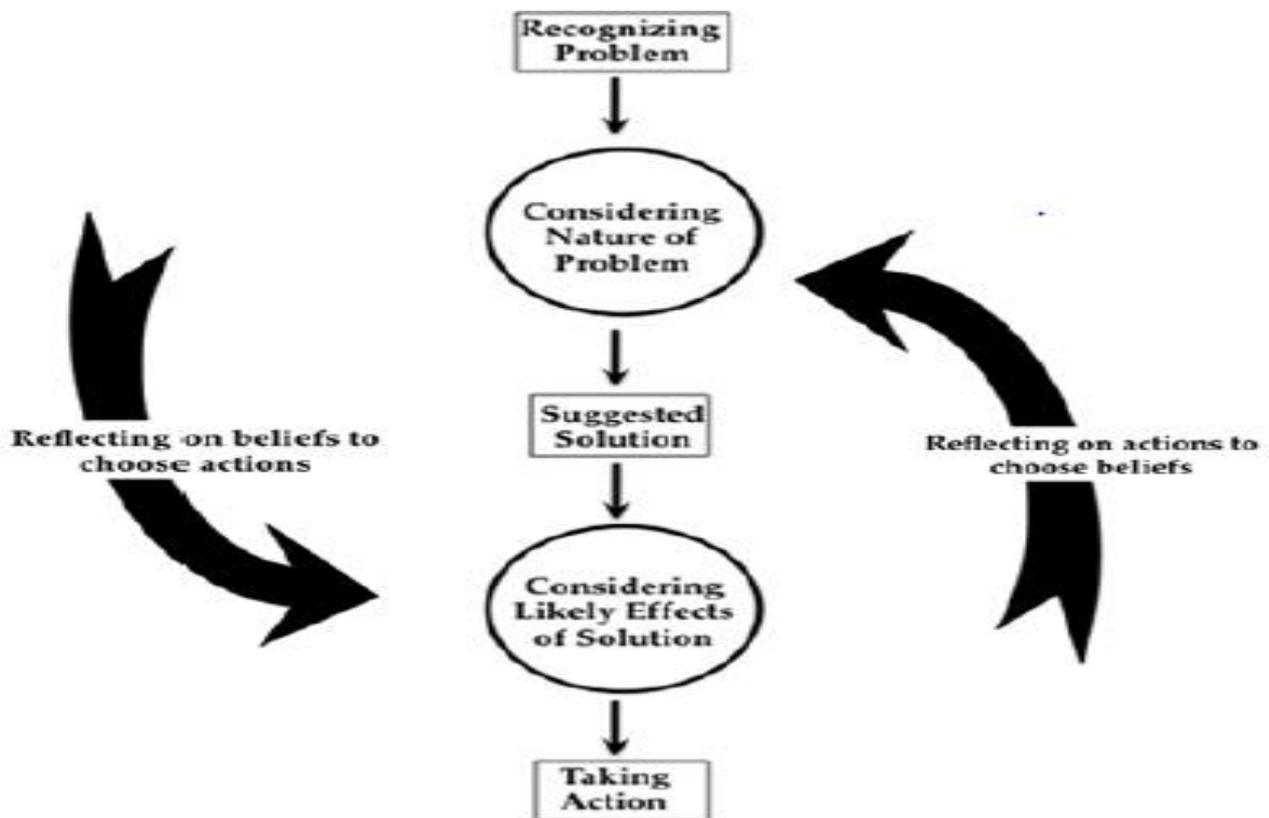


Figure 6.2 Dewey model inquiry

Also, pragmatism insists on a value-oriented approach to research which emanates from cultural values hence its usefulness and application to areas of inquiry like democracy, freedom, equality and progress (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, knowledge production often happens within a social context, and the interaction of belief and action leads to experience (Morgan, 2014). Since the study is concerned with establishing whether or not the online news discussing space is a public

sphere. The approach for investigation will involve examining interactive texts produced by online readers, their debate with each other online, and the factors that influence the commenting pattern requires more than one method. The choice of the pragmatic philosophical approach is appropriate for the research since it argues for multiple research methods based on the notion that there are different ways of interpreting the world or realities. It also supports the application of any methodological approach a researcher deems fit as appropriate for investigating a research problem.

6.4 Research Strategy

This study adopted mixed-method research in its investigation. Many researchers have used different terminologies to describe a research method that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Some of these descriptions include synthesis, multimethod, integrating methods, but lately, the consensus seems to have settled for 'mixed-method' as a nomenclature (Creswell, 2014; Abbas Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). A mixed-method of research is the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in a study (Creswell & Piano, 2011). Similarly, mixed methods of analysis 'is an approach to an inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks' (Creswell, 2014, p.4).

One of the arguments for the adoption of mixed-methods in a study is their potential to give a comprehensive knowledge of a research problem because the weakness inherent in each approach is addressed by the other (Scammon et al., 2013). Besides, the adoption of a mixed-method approach in a study also facilitates the comparison of trends from research data drawn from the various methods combined, and which will help in the decision-making process (Creswell, 2014). Nonetheless, the mixed-methods approach has its drawback as its application in research if not carefully handled, can produce disorganised research (Mason, 2006). Similarly, a mixed-method approach can lose its focus where the reason for its adoption in research is not clearly stated (Bryman, 2018). Also, the researcher's adoption of mixed-methods will assist in the realising a holistic understanding of the various dimensions of online commenting and deliberation. While mixed methods of research involve the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the investigation of a phenomenon; however, there are different specific ways it manifests in research. Therefore, its application in a study can either assume a fixed or flexible approach (Robson & McCartan, 2015). Fixed method design seeks to investigate the causal relationship between variables of enquiry, and it leans more towards the quantitative research method. The flexible approach, on the other hand, gives

allowance for a researcher to freely adjust his data collection process as he embarks on a study based on certain realities on the field. Besides, a flexible approach assumes that research variables under investigation cannot be measured quantitatively where a researcher seeks to investigate a phenomenon beyond statistical analysis to look at, for example, the pattern of opinions which often involves the analysis of texts as it occurs in a natural setting. Due to the specificities of the phenomena in this study, the use of mixed methods of research – specifically interviews and surveys - allows the researcher to experience participants' reflective and subjective views on the subject matter of enquiry. Also, the mixed methods applied enables the researcher to incorporate quantitative data which provides a descriptive analysis of the subject matter. The next section of this chapter discusses the three research methods combined in the study.

6.5 Mixed method design for the study

There are different ways of applying the mixed-method as a methodology in a study. The reasons for the various designs in the application of mixed-method in research, unlike other methods, is because, by default, mixed-methods of research crisscross both the qualitative and quantitative traditions and combined elements of the two methodological traditions in a research undertaking. Correspondingly, three critical factors are central to conducting successful research where the approach is grounded in mixed-method, and these are, research area, the objective of a study, and research questions (John W et al., 2010). The research area demands that a researcher should have a good understanding of the field relating to the phenomenon under investigation. Secondly, the researcher also needs to have a good understanding of the purpose of his study and should be able to marshal his research goals and objectives. Thirdly, a researcher needs to come up with research questions that strongly connects to the objectives to be able to fulfil the purposes for of the study (McBride et al., 2019) Also; there is a vast amount of literature and recommendations from scholars about the different approaches. Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) explain that over four hundred types of mixed-method designs exist based on their review of the various authors' positions on the method.

However, there is an overlapping in the application of these four hundred approaches to any study using the mixed method. For instance, Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak (2010), argues for the delineation of mixed methods approach into two distinct area- sequential and concurrent designs. According to Castro et al. (2010), sequential mixed-method design category means that either qualitative or quantitative component of a study using a mixed-method approach comes first while the other follows subsequently. The application of concurrent design, on the other hand, in research

rooted in mixed-method implies the simultaneous collection of data for the qualitative and quantitative part of a study at the same time. Equally, Creswell & Plano (2007) in their attempt to avoid the overlapping of the different models in mixed-method design and streamline the various procedures, identified four basic types of mixed-method strategies: triangulation design, embedded design, explanatory design and exploratory design.

Triangulation design aims to use the qualitative and quantitative approach to elicit data on the same research topic in a complementary way to draw the strengths of the two methods in the collection and analysis data (Creswell & Plano, 2007). In this type of mixed-method design, data for qualitative and quantitative methods are collected simultaneously and later merged for a single interpretation (Creswell, 2014). According to (Creswell & Plano, 2007), the rationale for the choice of embedded mixed method design has to do with the yardstick that addressing a phenomenon requires different types of questions and various kinds of data sets. On the other hand, in the explanatory mixed-method design, quantitative data are collected first and followed by the qualitative data to provide better insight regarding the subject matter of inquiry.

Mixed methods designs					
Research design	Process	Purpose	Level of interaction	Priority	Example
Convergent parallel	Qualitative and quantitative (concurrent)	To obtain different but complementary data to answer a single research question.	Data collected and analysed independently.	Equal	Peters and Cotton (2013) collected postal surveys and undertook unstructured interviews with women with a physical disability to gain a broad understanding of the barriers and enabling factors associated with accessing and experiencing screening services for breast cancer and cervical cancer.
Sequential explanatory	Quantitative then qualitative	Qualitative data are collected to explain the quantitative findings.	Quantitative data frame qualitative data collection.	Quantitative dominant	Pfaff <i>et al</i> (2014) used a postal survey to measure perceived confidence in interprofessional collaboration among new graduate nurses. Following analysis of the survey data, they conducted interviews with 16 new graduate nurses to explain the quantitative findings and expand on them.
Sequential exploratory	Qualitative then quantitative	Quantitative data builds on qualitative findings to provide generalisability.	Qualitative data frames quantitative data collection.	Qualitative dominant	Hamshire <i>et al</i> (2013) conducted a series of interviews with nursing students to explore their experiences and expectations of their nursing course. The interview findings informed the development of an online survey that was completed by 1,080 students in nine UK universities.
Embedded or nested	Quantitative within qualitative or qualitative within quantitative	To obtain different data to answer a complementary research question.	Embedded data set provides answers to a complementary research question.	May be either qualitative or quantitative dominant.	Kinser <i>et al</i> (2013) conducted a randomised controlled trial of an eight-week yoga intervention for women with major depression. Outcomes measured included depression severity, stress, anxiety and rumination. Qualitative interviews were embedded in the trial to explore the feasibility and acceptability of the intervention.

Figure 6.3: Creswell and Plano mixed-method design

In addition to the four types of mixed method design identified by Creswell & Plano (2007), there are two other mixed methods: transformative and multiphase design. The transformative model is particularly fitted for a study with a transformative objective and comes in two phases: sequential and concurrent (Creswell 2014; Creswell & Plano, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; VL & Badiee M, 2010). Transformative mixed methods design is applicable in research where the objective is primarily to study people that are oppressed or marginalised in the society. According to McBride et al., (2019), the essence of mixed methods of research under transformative design is for the sake of ideological application rather than a methodological imperative. Therefore, the design through its participatory and empowerment approach induce action in the people being studied and often than not, this empowerment leads to change (Mertens, 2010; VL & Badiee M, 2010).

In multiphase mixed-method design, the process involves a repetition of both quantitative and qualitative data collection process at different stages of the study with the ultimate goal of the repeated processes providing answers to the research question and also fulfilling the objectives of the study (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano, 2007; VL & Badiee M, 2010). The multiphase mixed-method design most of the time is used in a large scale research project, and the repetitive nature of the model can be sequential or concurrent depending on the research objectives and research questions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). However, scholars have identified some drawbacks in the application of multiphase mixed-method design such as time constraint and cost of execution. Also, another drawback is seeking ethical approval at various stage of a research project due to the multiphase nature of the design adopted (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

The mixed methods research chosen for the study is the sequential exploratory design. Consequent upon this choice, the researcher collected data for the qualitative part of the study before the quantitative data. The researcher anchors the reason for the selection of sequential exploratory design as the strand of mixed-method approach for the study on the premise that the research questions that lend themselves to qualitative approach should be collected first. Doing this provides useful information for designing and administering the quantitative data collection instrument. Another factor that influenced the researcher's choice of sequential exploratory design is the fact that studies relating to online news commenting platform as a democratic space have not been given much academic attention within the Nigerian space. As such, the research needs initial critical exploration, including the fact that two theories with a different area of focus are being used by the researcher to

interrogate the phenomenon. The quantitative data will provide the researcher with a descriptive analysis of online news comments.

In contrast, the qualitative data collected from interviews and survey research will help the researcher to gain a more in-depth and subjective understanding of commenters' experience within the discursive space including their attitudes as reflected in the various comments posted. Therefore, drawing from Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, (2006), Morse (2003) and Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) symbol of describing mixed methods design procedures, the researcher presents the procedural diagram of the sequential exploratory design selected for the study on the next page. The diagram gave a concise picture of the application of sequential exploratory design in the study, each of the steps taken and how they are related to each other to achieve the objectives of the study.

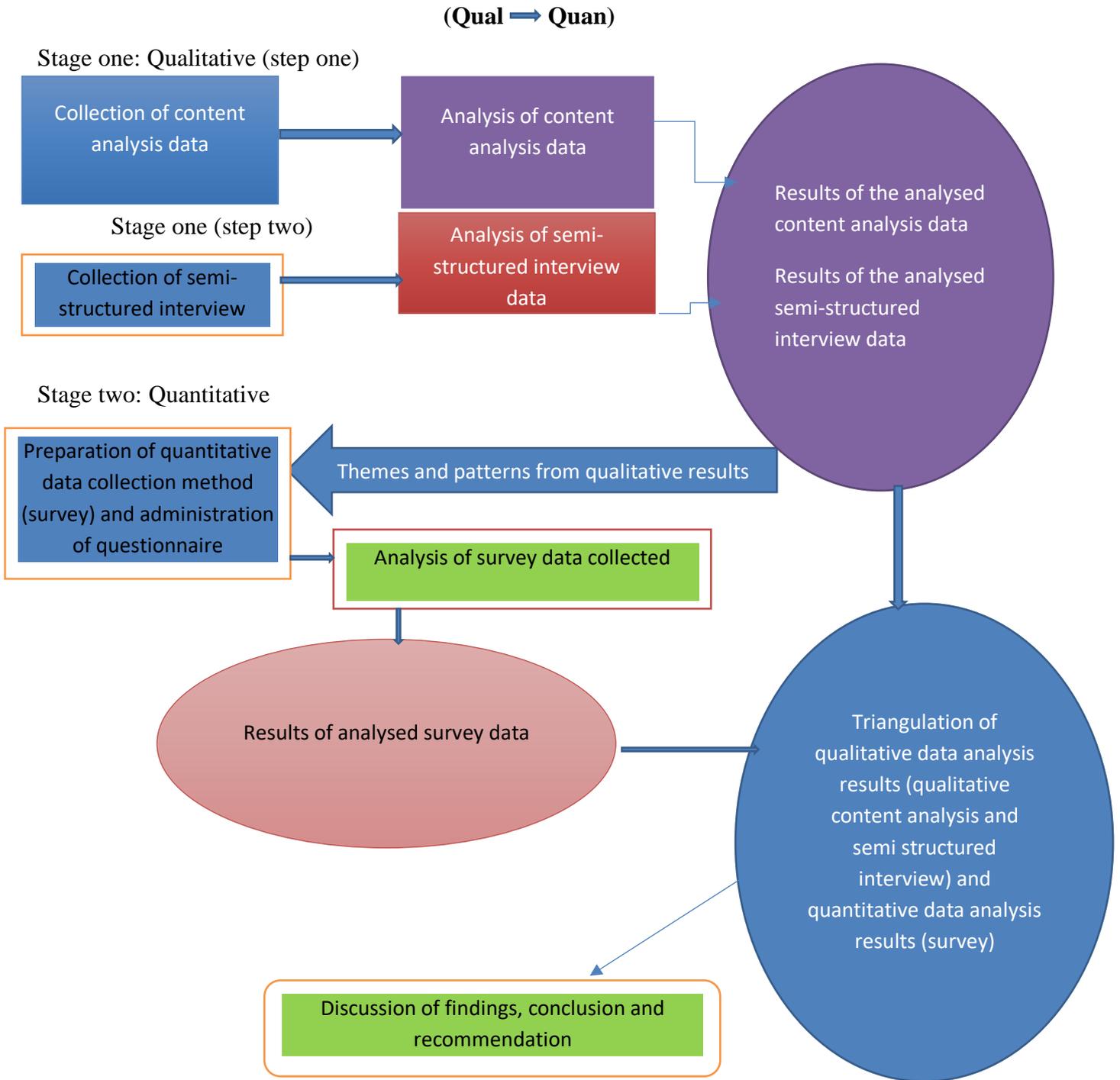


Figure 6.4: Procedural diagram of Sequential exploratory design adopted for the study

Source: The Researcher, 2019

6.5.1 Content Analysis Method

The researcher combined the qualitative and quantitative components of the method. Content analysis is a “... research method or measurement technique that involves the systematic study and quantification of the content or meaning of communication messages” (Stacks & Hocking, 1998, p.163). In the same way, content analysis is a method through which valuable inference is made about

data and the context within which such data emerged. The researcher used the two strands of the content analysis (qualitative and quantitative content analysis) method in the study. The qualitative component is predominant in the data analysis as the quantitative part is used only to calculate the frequency of some variables in the data relating the total number of news headlines and comments sampled. Also, the researcher applied the quantitative side in the analysis of comments that contain rational and critical elements based on the parameters used for measurement explained in the latter part of the chapter.

Unlike the quantitative content analysis, the qualitative content analysis is value-driven in the analysis of data, and it seeks to reveal the various realities within collected data to provide explanations to the diverse meaning inherent in a phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In a practical sense, ‘... qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns’ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1283). Similarly, qualitative content analysis focusses on the contextual pattern of data and tends to give an interpretation of the various trends within a data set (Graneheim et al., 2017). It argues that the context of communication content is vital to the understanding of a phenomenon under investigation (Bryman, 2012). Also, the analysis of social issues through content analysis provides a plank for understanding cultural problems and social interaction.

There are three potential ways to apply qualitative content analysis in a study. Hsieh & Shannon (2005), Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson (2002), in their studies, note conventional content analysis, directed content analysis and summative content analysis. The first approach, which is the conventional content analysis method applies in a situation where the knowledge of the research problem and the application of a theoretical framework is not adequate (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Also, it follows the descriptive angle of analysing data and tends to describe the emotional aspect of a research population about the phenomenon under investigation.

The conventional content analysis approach provides a researcher with the opportunity to have first-hand information from a sample population. It assists by removing the application of preconceived categories or theoretical guidance that very often limits a researcher in his attempt to cover every aspect of research population responses (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed content analysis is the second approach a researcher can adopt in the application of qualitative content analysis. This

approach is used in research when the goal of the study is to justify or give insight into a theoretical framework used in a study. In the application of this approach, prior or existing coding systems from previous studies serve as guides for the analysis of new data. Also, emerging categories from data are checked to see if the new group has any relationship with the existing one or is independent of them (Kondracki et al., 2002).

A summative approach aims to draw inference from content by contextualising the words. By so doing, a researcher working with summative content analysis approach quantifies the data/words. However, the aim of quantification is not to reduce the terms to quantitative analysis but rather, to assist in the interpretation and evaluation of studied words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher adopted a directed qualitative content analysis approach for the study because the contents analysis method for the collected data relied on existing categories from previous studies relating to online news commenting and deliberation. Equally, the study aims to validate the existence of the various underpinnings of the two theoretical frameworks applied in the study within the online news commenting environment in Nigeria, and this is in line with of the tenets of directed qualitative content analysis approach. Besides, one of the justifications for employing the qualitative content analysis in this study is the need to understand the way readers comment on online news sites in Nigeria. Therefore, to interrogate such issues like what motivates or influences the way readers react to information on the news websites and their posting of comments including the pattern of deliberation requires moving beyond the analysis of word frequency to looking at the underlying and subversive themes inherent in the comments.

As a result, the researcher engaged in the production of meaning related to the text analysed. Consequently, the rationale of the researcher's choice agrees with an argument for using qualitative content analysis as:

There is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognising the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analysed (and the categories derived from it) appeared (Bryman, 2004, p542).

Although, the researcher used existing categorisations from previous studies related to this research; some sub-themes also emerged in the course of the analysis, which is peculiar to the socio-cultural imperatives of the study area. Similarly, the researcher employed an element of quantitative content analysis, namely comment count to know the frequency or number of times each commenter posted

comments. Accordingly, this is to enable the researcher to establish whether power-law distribution exists within the online news comment space in Nigeria.

6.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview

The researcher also used the semi-structured interview in the study. A semi-structured interview is a method of research in which the researcher asks the interviewee open-ended questions that may lead to further unstructured questioning (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, semi-structured interviews

are conversations in which you know what you want to find out about- and so have a set of questions to ask and a good idea of what topics will be covered- but the conversation is free to vary, and is likely to change substantially between participants” (Fylan, 2005, p.65).

Also, a semi-structured interview is a type of research method that is conversational in collecting data, and it is especially useful for seeking the experience and opinions of participants on an issue (Information Systems, 2016). Besides, semi-structured interviews provide a researcher with the flexibility to dig deeper into a problem while conducting an interview. The flexibility to dig deeper is due to the unstructured nature of interview questions which gives room for a researcher to ask follow up questions with the aim of clarity or more information. Although, interview whether structured or unstructured in the strict sense is like an everyday discussion. However, interview within the purview of research is seen as asymmetry in a way where the researcher or interviewer controls and dictates the direction of conversation (Galletta & Cross, 2013). The semi-structured interview has an advantage of the flexibility and allows room for reciprocity between the interviewer and participant (Kallio et al., 2016). Also, semi-structured interview enables a researcher to tailor his question in such a way as to reflect the theoretical framework guiding a study and gives room to explore the experience of the participant (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

Although some scholars criticised, the semi-structured interview for being expensive in terms of collection of data, analysis, and the likelihood of a researcher’s bias interfering with the process of analysis (Ayres, 2008). Nevertheless, the semi-structured interview was selected as one of the research methods for the study because the researcher is keen to know the experience of online news media operators and commenters as this will provide a robust input into what takes place online and the form of moderation. Besides, studies in online news commenting in Nigeria are still in its infancy as academic research output. Data and papers in the area are few so, the choice of the semi-structured interview will enable the researcher to explore the various angles to the subject by sourcing for information from active players within the online sphere in Nigeria. Also, the choice of the semi-structured interview framework will help in collecting and analysing the data for the research

questions connected to the political economy framework, one of the theories applied in this study. It seeks to investigate whether there are contradictions that influence readers' production of meaning and the regulation of commenting space by the websites.

6.5.3 Survey method

Another research method used in this study is the survey method. The survey research method is concerned with the collection of data from a defined sample population using a questionnaire to know their attitudes and disposition on an issue (Stacks & Hocking, 1998; Visser et al., 2000). Similarly, a survey research method is a useful way of influencing opinion formation and decisions (Engel, 2015). For example, research using survey method has long been recognised by companies and even government agencies as a veritable tool for boosting sales and image of an organisation and increase the popularity and approval rate of government. Also, during elections, opinion polls and other forms of study using survey play an influential role in how people cast their votes.

The researcher chose a variant of a survey research methodology known as an online survey for the study. The online survey is a process in which the researcher administers a questionnaire for collecting data through the internet. Also, the use of an online survey in this study will complement the two qualitative designs of a semi-structured interview and qualitative content analysis to provide an answer to the question of generalisation of findings to the entire Nigerian population. In the same way, online survey method in this research will help to corroborate or invalidate results from semi-structured interview data analysis and the content analysis data. Besides, the researcher used the survey method to find out the demographic details of the sampled population concerning age, ethnicity, religion, sex, occupation and the level of education which will be difficult to establish through the content analysis. As a result, the researcher, through the data collected on the categories highlighted above, will be able to find out the ethnic and religious composition of the sampled population.

Also, the research objectives and the research questions influenced the choice of the three research methods. The combination of these methods will assist the researcher in the realisation of the research objectives, and in the process, provide answers to the research questions. In the next sub-heading, the researcher discussed the various mixed methods design available for a researcher that adopts mixed methods approach and still within the subsection, explained the mixed method design chosen for the study and the justification for the choice.

6.6 Sampling techniques and sample size used in the study

This section of the methodology chapter explains the methods applied for drawing a sample from the research population and the sample size used for the study.

6.6.1 Sampling technique and sample size for the content analysis method

In a research study, it is challenging to study the entire population because of issues like size, time constraint and the resources to do so. To overcome this, therefore, it is vital to take a sample that is representational of the entire population. The sampling process, therefore, involves taking out fragments of a population for study and ensuring that the sample taken is representational of the characteristics of the entire community for which results from such studies can be generalised back into the whole populace (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2003). Regarding the content analysis part of the research, a range of online news platforms was selected purposively for the study based on the degree of capacity for comments to take place through them. Purposive sampling method involves a researcher's judgement regarding the selection of what to include in the sampling frame to be in line with a researcher's objectives and expectations (Robson & McCartan, 2015). Besides, Mohsin (2013) argues that the choice of purposive sampling as a sampling technique for a study is justified where the elements included in the sample population have been pre-determined. The features that fit the set criteria are those to be included in the study.

Consequently, the researcher's justification for using a purposive sampling method for the collection of the content analysis data is because the researcher predetermined the issues the analysis focussed on. Therefore, the comments mined for analysis from the sampled news websites were strictly around the two public topics chosen for the research. The two issues selected as stimuli for the study are due to their topicality, currency and impact on the entire body polity of Nigeria. Also, the topics, especially the herdsmen/farmers' clash, have continued to be one the themes within the public discourse about Nigeria. As a result, the selected news platforms for the research include mainstream media organisations that have an online presence, diaspora online news platform and the local online news forum whose existence is only on the web. One of the justifications for the selection of these news sites is the need to reflect the ideological and philosophical trends within the media industry in Nigeria which in no small extent may account for or explain the demographical pattern of the audience and also affects the dispositions of readers in the online discussion. The editorials of the Nigerian mainstream or legacy media, including their online versions, sometimes reflect ethnic, religious, ownership and political cleavages (Oboh, 2016; Ojo, 2003; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the researcher selected the four news websites for the study to reflect these underpinnings. The researcher extracted comments around the President's ill-health, and medical trips abroad and the herdsmen/ farmers clashes from the selected news sites for analysis using a purposive sampling method from June 2016 to December 2017. The justification for restricting the period of news stories, headlines and comments between June 2016 to December 2017 is on the fact that the President of Nigeria was on medical vacation abroad twice within the period. Equally, several farmers/ herdsmen clashes occurred and reported by the media within the time frame of the collected data.

There are no fixed criteria for determining the sample size for a study using content analysis method. In this study, the researcher justified the total sample size on specific, pragmatic considerations. As such, the researcher purposively sought relevant information that is manageable in size. Equally, the informational need of the study concerning the research questions and objectives also formed one of the parameters used for determining the sample size. Consequently, the total sample size of the comments extracted for analysis is 7,934.

6.6.1.1 Background information on the topics used as stimuli for content analysis data collection

Farmers/Herdsmen clashes:

Herdsmen and farmers' conflicts are a perennial problem in Nigeria. The crisis has assumed an exponential dimension in term of the areas affected, the sophistication of the weaponry deplored and has resulted in colossal loss of lives and properties (Li, 2019). In some instance, the crisis reflects a form of earth scorched approach in which villages, including persons, animals and crops have been wiped out completely. For instance, the former Head of State, General Abdusalam Salami, taking a statistical approach explained that the conflicts resulted in the death of 2,500, 62,000 displaced citizens and a total of \$13.7 potential internally generated revenue lost in 2016 (Agbese, 2017). The majority of herdsmen in Nigeria are Fulani tribe, and the farmers are the indigenous owners of the various farmlands on which the herdsmen direct their cattle to for grazing, and this often leads to the destruction of farmlands, therefore, resulting in conflicts. These two groups are critical elements of the Nigerian economy. They are essential to the economic system of the country in the sense that the farmers produce the food for the country and the herdsmen produce the meat and other dairy product needed by the citizens. As such, any clash between the two groups attracts the nation's attention as it disrupts the country's food, meat and dairy products supply chain. In a study conducted by the Mercy

Corps and funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID), Nigeria loses a total of \$14 billion in revenue generation annually from it (Ogundipe & Oluwole, 2016).

The primary cause of the crisis is struggling for land, particularly for grazing (Li, 2019; Perpetua et al., 2018; Ugwumba, 2018). The herdsmen in Nigeria practise pastoralism and as such, continuously move from one location to another in search of lush and green fields for their cattle grazing. However, the effect of climate change due to global warming around the Sahel region of which Nigeria is a part has resulted in desertification and the shrinking of Lake Chad – a significant source of water (Fasona & Omojola, 2005; Odoh & Chilaka, 2012). Also, insurgency and banditry activities causing human displacement and subsequent occupation of areas of land that can serve as farmlands and grazing areas are other factors. Apart from these, other triggers of the crisis include urbanisation resulting in the encroachment on designated farmlands and grazing reserves, and the weak political will to tackle the problem (Ugwumba, 2018). The narratives about the crisis in the public domain have been ‘ethnicised’, and continuously create tension between the various ethnic groups that constitute the country. Subsequently, and apart from its role of reporting conflict, the online and the legacy media platforms have become a discursive space where various parties engage in contestation and debates on the herdsmen/farmers conflicts. The media space, therefore, serves as a barometer for measuring the public perception of the conflict.

President’s medical trips abroad

The President Muhammadu Buhari frequent trips abroad, especially during his first tenure in office, and the discussion on the matter in the online news commenting space serves as another issue through which the researcher collected data for the content analysis. Shortly after becoming the President, his health deteriorated and needed an urgent trip to the United Kingdom for medical attention. The matter assumed prominence within the media space in Nigeria and consistently attracts divergent views and analysis (Ozohu & John, 2018). The matter attracts prominence mainly because of the personality involved and the presidency reluctance to explain his condition to the public. The silence brewed conspiracy theories and different conjectures within the public space on the matter.

Furthermore, the frequency of the President’s medical trips increased after the first trip and between 2016- 2018, he spent 172 days abroad on medical-related issues (Akinwale, 2018). At a point, the public discourse on the issue becomes polarised and reflects the various divisive lines that define Nigeria as a country such as religion and ethnic sentiments. Based on this background, therefore, the

researcher considers the subject apposite for an examination of the realities of the state of online news commenting in Nigeria.

6.6.1.2 Criteria for selecting the newspapers sampled for the content analysis conducted.

The section explains the criteria for the selection of the four online newspaper websites selected for the study. The online media sites used in the study were selected based on the fact that they have an online presence and the capacity for comments and discussion to take place on their platform. The researcher, since the focus of the study, is on investigating the extent to which online news media platforms in Nigeria reflect a public sphere for democratic deliberation also did website comparison using the www.alexa.com traffic metrics tool to rationalise the news sites for historical traffic trends.

The traffic metrics template helps to explain the rate of user engagement with the news sites. The analytic graphics from the comparison are below:

Figure 6.5: Historical Traffic Trends of online news websites selected for the study



(www.alexa.com, 2019)

6.6.1.3 Short profile of selected online media

With the rate of internet penetration, access and its affordability increasing by the day in Nigeria, especially with cheap smart mobile handsets. Most of the legacy media organisation have also migrated online to be part of the new trend, and that is gradually transforming the new media landscape. Therefore, this section gives a short profile of the online news media platforms selected

for the study. The selected websites are Daily Trust (www.dailytrust.com.ng), Sahara Reporters (www.saharareporters.com), Premium Times(www.premiumtimesng.com) and Vanguard newspaper (www.vanguardngr.com)

- **Daily Trust Newspaper**

Daily Trust Newspaper is one of the print media organisations with its headquarters in Abuja, the federal capital of Nigeria. The newspaper started operation in 1998 as a weekly publication in Kaduna, the headquarters of Kaduna state in Nigeria. It later moved into daily production in 2001 and has various titles under its stable including Daily Trust, Daily Trust on Saturday, Daily Trust on Sunday and Aminiya- a vernacular newspaper in the Hausa Language. Although the paper appears to be national, the core of its readership is in the northern part of Nigeria. According to Abubakar and Yahaya (2017), the ratio of readership is 70:30 in favour of the north. Also, the newspaper does not accept advertisement of some products such as alcohol, tobacco and medicinal cure that cannot be verified (Yusuf & Odunuga, 2018). The newspaper paper has a vibrant online news website that updates its sites frequently as a news break and has a platform for readers to engage with each other in discussion.

- **Sahara Reporters**

Sahara Reporters is an online diaspora media organisation founded by Omoyele Sowore in 2006 in New York with fund support from Ford Foundation and Global Information Network. Sahara Reporters is arguably the most popular online news website in Nigeria (Kperogi, 2013). It is fiercest in its news reporting style with a penchant for doing expose on corrupt politicians and issues most of the mainstream media organisation would not report. Similarly, Sahara Reporters often explore the constant implosion and contestations among the political elites in the country to access and report sensitive information. Also, the online newspaper refers to itself as a signpost for advocacy journalism in Nigeria (Dare, 2010). The Sahara newspaper philosophy on its webpage insists that they are:

... an online community of international reporters and social advocates dedicated to bringing you commentaries, features, news reports from a Nigerian-African perspective. A unique organisation, founded in the spirit of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, comprising of ordinary people with an overriding commitment to seeking the truth and publishing it without fear or favour. Because its core members are unapologetic practitioners of advocacy journalism, Sahara Reporters also serves as an umbrella outlet for objective reporting of verifiable and accurate news and untainted social commentaries for anyone wishing to exercise their freedom of speech in the public interest and common good.

Generally, Sahara Reporters sees itself as a news platform devoted to exposing corruption and other ills within the government circle and places in ordinary citizens a space to debate on public issues. According to Dare (2010), it has become a vanguard for citizen and advocacy journalism in Nigeria.

- **Premium Times**

Premium Times is a significant player within the media landscape in Nigeria and has done lots of investigative journalism which has opposed politicians, government officials and their cronies on various financial crimes. The newspaper, together with other partners who formed a consortium on the Panama paper won a Pulitzer award for investigative journalism. Premium Times started operation in Nigeria in 2011 as an online newspaper in Abuja. The media outfit was floated by one of the renown journalists in Nigeria, Dapo Olorunyomi in partnership with Musikili Mojeed. The paper has as its core vision ‘... to help strengthen Nigeria’s democracy, advance the socio-economic wellbeing and rights of the people, promote and enrich their cultural practices, and advocate for best practices, good governance, transparency and human rights, in line with the values expected of a modern democratic state.’ (Premium Times, 2011). The publisher, Dapo Olorunyomi in an interview granted to Ntibinyane (2018) explains that the setting up of the Premium Times was motivated by the dwindling revenue of print media organisation and the problem of professionalism and ethical issues confronting the sector. As a result, Premium newspaper’s cardinal principle is anchored on investigative journalism, exposing corruption and leveraging on data journalism to give access to people to have information on figures and other data from government that may not be readily available in the public domain (Journalism, 2018).

Consequently, the newspaper runs a model that does not depend on advertising revenue or funding from government or private individuals to ward off any interference in its operations. Instead, the news organisation solicits support from readers in the form of donation. Equally, the newspaper also sourced its funding from organisations such as McArthur foundation, Open Society Initiatives to carry out its primary objectives which are investigative journalism and the training and retraining of journalists (Journalism, 2018). In terms of editorial and style of writing, the Premium Times style of writing is not significantly different from the legacy media. This similarity is explainable from the point that the publisher is a trained journalist and has worked within the legacy media environment before floating an online newspaper. Premium Times does not operate in the pattern of disseminating propaganda. Its strength as an online newspaper platform lies in its ability to investigate the public matter and disseminating its results with all empirical fact and figures.

- **Vanguard Newspaper**

The Vanguard newspaper started publication in 1983 with Sam Amuka-Pemu, one of the veteran journalists who has worked in various print media organisation in Nigeria as its publisher. Today, Vanguard newspaper is one of the oldest private newspapers that is still in operation in Nigeria. In terms of circulation, the paper has a national spread as it circulates across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Vanguard newspaper has a print run of 130,000 copies daily which makes it one of the most circulated newspapers in Nigeria (Vanguard newspaper, 2018), credited as one of the print media organisations that led the way at improving the quality of newspaper production in Nigeria (Daily Times, 2017). It has as its mission, ‘... to impact positively on our readers/clients and society by providing high quality reliable and affordable media products for promoting knowledge, political stability and economic prosperity’ (Vanguard newspaper, 2018).

Vanguard newspaper is one of the few legacy media that adopted online publication of their titles and setting up a website earlier. It has a robust online news site that allows citizens to react and engage with other readers in a discussion on the platform. In terms of traffic flow and user engagement, the newspaper rates as one of the fifteen most popular online news websites in Nigeria (Dare, 2010). The news contents on the online platform of the Vanguard newspaper is not usually different from the physical copy of the news title, except instances where the online version breaks the news that occurred after the physical paper has gone into circulation.

6.6.2 Sample Technique and sample size for the semi-structured interview

The researcher used a snowball sampling method to select the sample population for the semi-structured interview part of the study. Snowball sample technique is a type of sampling techniques where participants are chosen and asked to recommend other participants who share common characteristics required to participate in research (Crouse & Lowe, 2018). Although, studies have highlighted several drawbacks on the suitability of snowball sampling method such as its lack of randomisation which makes it difficult to generalise the result of research that used snowball sampling method back to the population of the study (Crouse & Lowe, 2018). Furthermore, determining sample error is near impossible using the snowball method to draw the sample population (Creswell, 2014).

Some of the advantages of the snowball sampling method argued by Noy (2008), such as ‘social knowledge’ and ‘power relations’ are influential in the researcher’s choice of snowball sampling techniques. Furthermore, the reason for the decision to use the snowball technique also connects to

some of the research questions raised in the study and the political economy framework - one of the theoretical framework used for the study. Equally, the choice of the snowball sample technique will help in the understanding of the factors that influence the production of texts by commenters. It will also help in selecting the right population to determine what motivates the online news media to engage in moderation or non-moderation of the commenting space of their news sites as the target sample population are those with the social knowledge of the study area. As one of the non-probability sampling technique, the adoption of the snowball sampling technique in this study provided the researcher with the opportunity of knowing some characteristics about the research population which are not self-evident before the commencement of the research. Therefore, the researcher chose this method of selecting participants for the study because determining who engage with online news platform and commenting within the space was challenging to identify.

The total number of participants for the semi-structured interview part of the research is 15. In determining the sample size, the researcher used the data saturation technique as recommended by Glaser & Strauss (1967), as a means of determining the sample size for a semi-structured interview. Saturation technique for choosing a sample size in qualitative method implies a point at which all the patterns in the data collected are established, and any additional data cannot generate any new category distinct from the ones already established (Francis et al., 2010; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The participants interviewed included the staff of the government office that monitors online news and social media, politicians, the staff of the selected media organisations and ordinary citizens that regularly comment on online news sites.

The researcher reached a saturation point in the collection of interview data after comparing the data collected and observed that the responses are similar, and the pattern did not reveal any new evidence. Based on Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe and Young (2018), recommendation on the principles for determining data saturation. The researcher analysed data from the first ten interviews undertaken and subsequently analysed data from two more interviews at a time until the interview responses became similar, and no evidence of new themes emerged.

6.6.3 Sampling technique and sample size for the survey

Since the researcher adopted an online survey for the study, the sampling technique adopted is purposive in the sense that the questionnaire targeted those who read news online and participate in an online discussion forum. Therefore, a copy of the questionnaire was sent to 228 respondents purposively selected via a link created on survey monkey - an online survey platform. The researcher

drew the sample for the study from Nigerians who use the internet estimated at 122,292,079 as of June 2019 (Statista, 2019). The sample size was determined using G power, a free software designed for determining the sample size for a research study. The total size recommended by the software for the survey is 111. The researcher sent the questionnaire to 250 respondents after considering the probable incidence of non-completion by some respondents or wrong filling of the questionnaire form. In all, 228 copies of the survey questionnaire were completed and returned for analysis.

6.7 Method of Data Collection and Analysis

6.7.1 Method of data collection for content analysis

Determining the criteria for analysing or evaluating comments in an online discussion forum as a public sphere is a highly debatable issue (Graham & Wright, 2014; Kies, 2010a). The debate over the criteria for assessing the online discussion platforms and the comments that pass through it stems from the way online discourse reflects the concept of the public sphere as described by Habermas, Taylor, Arendt, Fraiser and other prominent scholars who have published seminal papers in the field of the public sphere. Researchers have examined whether the online deliberative space reflects a public sphere from various epistemological and ontological positions. Schneider (1997) designed four ways for evaluating the online deliberative space: equality, diversity, reciprocity and quality. Wilhelm (1998) recommends that the criteria for the analysis of online deliberative space should be: topography, topicality, inclusiveness, design, and deliberation. Graham and Wright (2014) argue that assessing online discursive space as a public sphere should be based on the criteria of rational-critical debate, reciprocity, reflexivity, empathy, freedom, equality and sincerity.

According to Hüller (2007) researches on how deliberation on the internet fuel diversity of opinions and disagreements among participants/commenters often adopt 'respect' as the key index for evaluation and analysis. Besides, a researcher that is interested in how online commenting platform can facilitate social justice will anchor his measurement of the debate within the online sphere on 'inclusiveness' within the website (Young, 2016). For researchers interested in how political economy influence online discursive forum, their analysis is most likely to be rooted in how capitalists' interests shape online discourse. In like manner, exploration of the extent to which an online news commenting environment has public sphere characteristics requires the analysis of comments and debates that run through the website. To do this, therefore, involves the application of Habermas criteria of critical and rational discourse (Bohman, 2004; Jürgen Gerhards & Schäfer,

2010; Raphaël Kies, 2010b; Lunt & Livingstone, 2013). As such, deliberative criteria highlighted and explained later in the section were used to measure the sampled comments.

For the content analysis aspect of the collected data, one of the methods adopted for the study; the researcher used a web scraping tool, Octoparse to retrieve comments made by readers on the two issues: President Buhari medical trips abroad and the herdsmen/farmers class used as stimuli for the study. After extracting the news headlines and comments from the selected websites, the researcher coded the comments along with specific coding schemes drawn from previous studies on online deliberation and coding patterns that emerged from the data analysed. Although there are no agreed or fixed criteria for measuring online comments because most of the studies conducted relating to deliberation and reviewed in the course of the research reflects the methodological approach of a researcher and his research tradition and philosophical worldview. However, the coding scheme for the study drew mostly on the existing deliberative measurement index of Steiner (2004), Bachtiger (2009), Stromer-Galley (2007), Kies (2010), Hangemann (2002), Graham (2002), Tsaliki (2002), and Fuchs (2006). An additional category which is on the reflection of religion and ethnic dichotomy in discourse also emerged.

As a result, comments from readers were coded and measured along with these themes:

- Reasoning
- Topic relevance
- Inclusion
- Discursive equality
- Reciprocity
- Reflexivity
- Plurality
- Flaming and Non-flaming
- Reflection of ethnic and religion dichotomy in comments

Some of the essential parameters for determining whether a discursive space irrespective of its online or offline status is a public sphere involves assessing the comments and debates to determining how rational and critical they are (Habermas, 1989). To achieve this, therefore, the researcher coded the extracted comments of discussions along with the coding pattern of reasoning and topic relevance. To do this, this researcher sifted through the harvested comments and looked at whether facts, figures or statements of authority are used by commenters to justify their positions. To establish whether

Nigerian online news commenting demonstrates any form of democratic deliberation; the researcher coded comments along with the criteria of inclusion and discursive equality, reciprocity, reflexivity and plurality. The parameters used for measuring equality has two dimensions: equal voice and equal standing (Graham, 2002). Therefore, to operationalise the inclusion and discursive equality, the frequency of each commenter's comment was counted to ascertain whether or not one or few commenters dominate the discursive sphere. Also, establishing reciprocity within the thread of comments assumes that it exists where a commenter reads through a comment and responds to the comment. Therefore, the level of reciprocity in this study stemmed from three directions:

- The initiator of debate
- Comments responding to the initiator's message
- Stand-alone comments

The primary method of gauging reciprocity proposed by the researcher will be supported by reading through the comments to ascertain any evidence of agreement and disagreement in the deliberation. In determining reflexivity, comments were coded by reading through the texts to establish if there is any pattern of agreement or change of a commenter's train of thought after reading the argument of another commenter. The aim of applying reflexivity as part of the themes for analysing the content analysis data lies in the fact that a discursive sphere is a place where participants debate to reach a consensus. Achieving a consensus, therefore, depends on whether a superior argument based on fact can prevail. Therefore, the application of reflexivity will enable the researcher to know if such a factor exists within the Nigerian online commenting space.

The researcher also coded sampled comments based on the categorisation of plurality. Plurality as one of the ways of measuring online comments is '... the extent to which postings demonstrate a certain political affiliation in the form of supporting a person, an argument, an ideology or issue' (Tsaliki, 2002, 98). The aim of using plurality as one of the coding categorisations in this study is to ascertain the diversity and the heterogeneity of online news comments. It will enable the researcher to know how comments influenced by ideology, power relations and other variables which affect the position of a commenter in a debate. Also, the researcher used Tsaliki's (2002) framework for establishing the plurality of comments in an online discussion in the coding and analysis of comments in this study. Consequently, the researcher coded comments to establish whether they have an element of affiliation, non-affiliation or disaffiliation.

Comments posted under affiliation are those that are sympathetic or identify with a political stance, ideology, religion or ethnicity. Non-affiliation comments are postings that do not show any alignment or empathy for religious, political, ideology or ethnic lines. Previous research that applied the theme of plurality only considers the question of political and ideological affiliation to establish how divergent opinions on a deliberative sphere is. However, using this theme in the analysis of data within the Nigerian system requires the consideration of the political economy nuances of Nigeria, which are heavily influenced by religion and ethnicity. To do the coding and analysis, therefore, comments were read, and markers revealing the identity of a commenter where they identify themselves through a proper name and any tag pointing to their religion, ethnicity, political affiliation and ideology were highlighted and analysed.

However, the researcher alludes to the fact that the two sub-themes of religion and ethnicity and coding comments around them are not mutually exclusive when one considers the fact that people do change their religion of birth. There are names in Nigeria which are not synonymous with any religion. To complement this seeming inadequacy of the measurement, therefore, the researcher complements the analysis of this categorisation with a semi-structured interview to explain fully how political economy imperatives influence the discursive sphere including the regulation of the commenting space by the online media.

This research explores the online commenting space to know whether there is any form of insult or troll within the platform which may likely affect the overall objectives and quality of the deliberative space. As a result, the researcher used the themes of flaming and non-flaming to analyse extracted comments. Flaming for this study is referred to as a form of behaviour in online news commenting space that involves insults or using offensive language. At the same time, non-flaming is the absence of any insults or aggressive expression in comments. The researcher counted the total numbers of comments with real names and those that are anonymous in the flaming and non-flaming categories and the results compared.

6.7.2 Method of data collection for the semi-structured interview

The data collection process for the semi-structured interview in this study involves the preparation of an interview guide and information sheet. The interview guide contains the questions the researcher asked the participants. At the same time, the information sheet describes the aims and objectives of the study. The criteria for selecting the participants and how the information collected is applied in the study. Also, participants were given the freedom to decide the venue and time of the

interview. This freedom is to ensure a relax and conducive atmosphere for the interviewee. It is also important to note that there is no prior form of a personal relationship between the researcher and the participants in the semi-structured interview. Furthermore, the researcher recorded the conversation during the discussion through a digital tape recorder and transcribed. The researcher transcribed data and used NViVO qualitative data analysis software for the analysis.

Due to the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis, particularly the in-depth interview or semi-structured methods which require a researcher to examine a transcribed texts in a back continually and forth manner to ensure the full grasp of the meaning and the interpretations inherent in the data. The researcher in the coding and categorisation of the interview texts embraced the previous works of Bryman (2003), Galletta and Cross (2013) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) regarding how to analyse a semi-structured interview data. Therefore, the researcher commenced the analysis process by having a post-interview reflection after which the transcribed data were organised and read carefully to establish the categorisation and thematic patterns of the transcribed texts.

The researcher used thematic analysis technique for analysing the data. The thematic coding analysis involves reading through a data and establishing the pattern of documents to bring together under a theme similar comments based on their similarity and train of thought. To accomplish the task of reading, coding, analysing and interpretation of the interview data. The researcher as earlier mentioned in the chapter used the previous studies of Braun & Clarke (2006), Bryman (2003), Galletta & Cross (2013), Glaser & Strauss (1967) with particular emphasis on Braun & Clarke (2006) six-phase guide, which is:

- Becoming familiar with the data
- Generate initial code
- Search for themes
- Review themes
- Define themes
- Write-up

Using the above six process as a guide, the researcher below present the diagrammatic process of the semistructured interview used in the study.

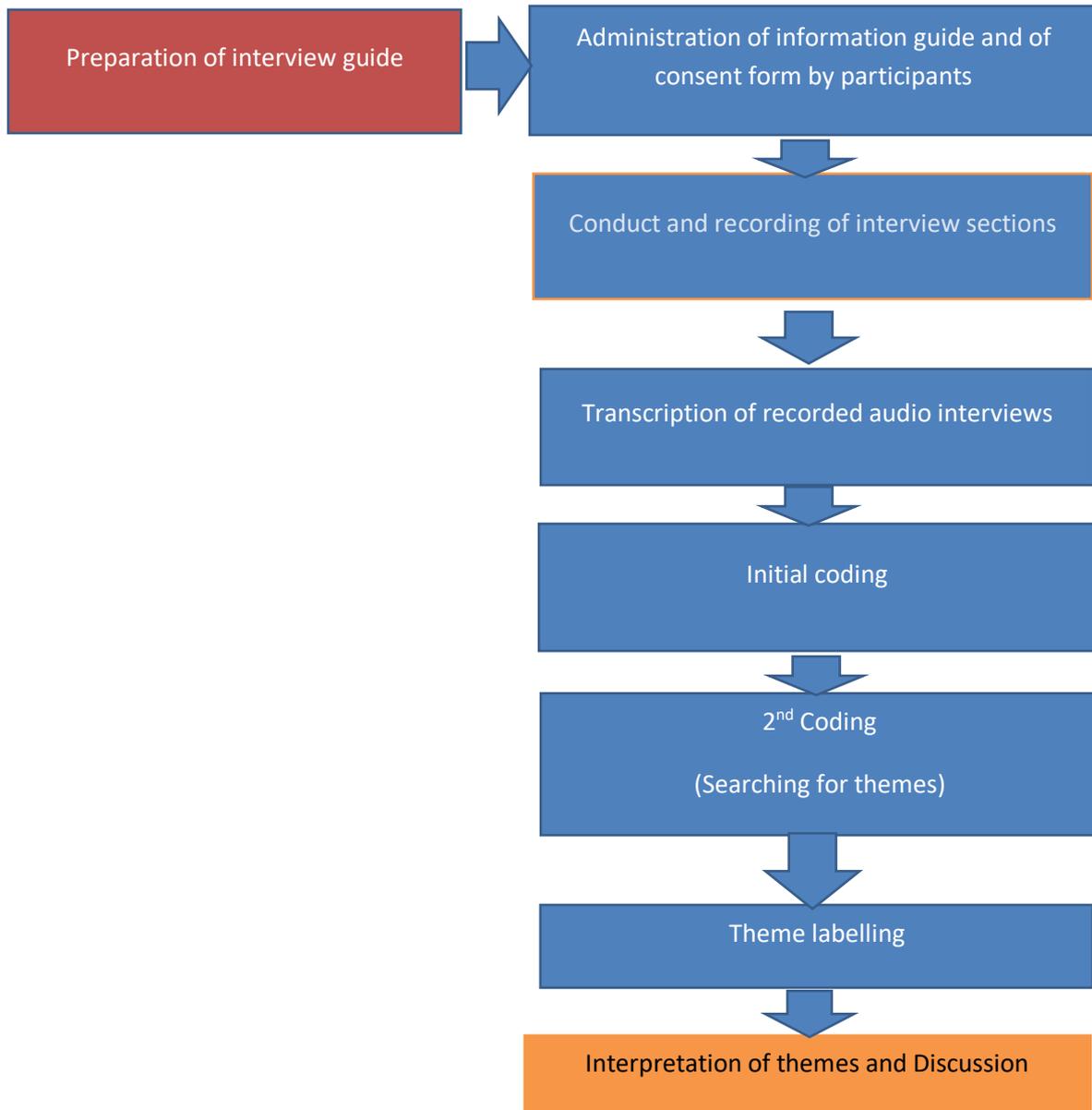


Figure 6.6: Diagrammatic process of semi-structured data collection and analysis Source: The Researcher

6.7.3 Method of data collection for the survey method

As mentioned in one of the sections of this chapter, the survey data analysed were collected online through the survey monkey. A link was generated from the survey monkey website and sent out to respondents' emails, WhatsApp page and Facebook messenger. On completion of the questionnaire, the form automatically uploads the completed response to the researcher's account on the survey monkey website, and the researcher receives a prompt to enable him to keep a tab of submission of the questionnaire. For the analysis, therefore, the researcher applied the statistical features on the survey monkey website to yield descriptive statistics to describe the pattern of the data concerning

the research questions and the objectives of the study. Consequent on this, the analysis involves the use of a simple percentage to provide answers to some of the research questions raised.

The essence of using and collecting survey data is to be able to provide a descriptive analysis and a deeper understanding and answers to research questions that a single method cannot sufficiently answer. The first research question raised for the study is on the extent to which the commenting space of online news website reflects the criteria for the public sphere. As a result, the comments from the four online news websites sampled for the project were content analysed using deliberative measures explained earlier in the chapter.

6.7.4 Methodological Triangulation

To reconcile findings from the qualitative data with the quantitative data analysed in the study, the researcher applied the concept of triangulation. As stated in the preceding section of this chapter, the researcher combined both the qualitative and quantitative methods to collect appropriate data, analysed the data, provide answers to the research questions raised and through this process meet the set objectives of the study. Therefore, the study combined both the qualitative and the quantitative components of the content analysis, semi-structured interview and survey and used the sequential exploratory model of the mixed-methods research which indicates that the data for the qualitative and the quantitative parts of the study were collected at a different interval. Also, the researcher adopted the theories of the public sphere and critical political economy theories in a complementary fashion.

Triangulation means the combination of different methodological and theoretical approaches to the understanding of a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Denscombe, 2010; Flick, 2011). Additionally, triangulation is ‘the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked’ (Bryman, 2003, p.697). Denzin (1978), one of the earliest scholars to point out the importance of triangulation in the investigation of a research phenomenon argues that to explore the whole angle to a research problem requires the application of more than one method or theory. Similarly, the quest to have a full understanding of a research topic involves the exploration of the different perspectives available on an issue, and this can serve better by combining different methods and theories. Although, there is a consensus formed around the notion of what triangulation means. However, its application is not limited to a singular approach as scholars have updated the concept into five different ways of applying the idea from the

Denzin (1978) initial categorisation of the use of the concept into four ways (Denscombe, 2010; LUO, 2012). These five forms, according to Denscombe (2010), are:

- **Methodological triangulation (between-methods):** This type of triangulation recommends the use of different kinds of methods in a study. Findings from the different methodological approaches are contrasted with each other. This form of triangulation methods gives the researcher the latitude to understand the phenomenon from different angles.
- **Methodological triangulation (within-methods):** The methodological triangulation (between-methods) emphasises looking at the differences in findings from different methods used in a study. The methodological triangulation (within-methods) stresses the use of triangulation to make a comparison for the same kind of approach to confirm whether the same type of method will provide similar results.
- **Data triangulation:** This form of triangulation is concerned with the collection of data using different types of techniques and which also involves collection at different time, involving separate contextual space such as socio-cultural and geographical space.
- **Investigator triangulation:** This is a form of triangulation where different researchers investigate and collect data on the same phenomenon separately. This type of triangulation aims to check for consistency and validity of findings and the research tools employed for a study.
- **Theory triangulation:** This form of triangulation argues for the use or combination of more than one theory in research. This form of triangulation provides dynamism in the way data are collected and interpreted, thereby allowing for a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to a research phenomenon. The application of theoretical triangulation in research increases the possibility of reliability and validity of findings in such a study.

Based on the five forms of triangulation explained above, the choice of triangulation in this study relies on methodological triangulation (between-methods), data triangulation and theory triangulation. Furthermore, and with the forms of triangulation adopted for the study, the researcher proposes that the discussion of triangulation of results, methods and theoretical underpinnings in some instance:

- a) Will converge and in a way, confirm and align with each other's position.
- b) Each of the methods used, their data analysis results and the applied theoretical frameworks play a complementary role to each other.

c) In some situation during the discussion, the comparison of results is divergent to each other.

The researcher presents below the triangulation process in the study based on the explanation offered in the preceding paragraph:

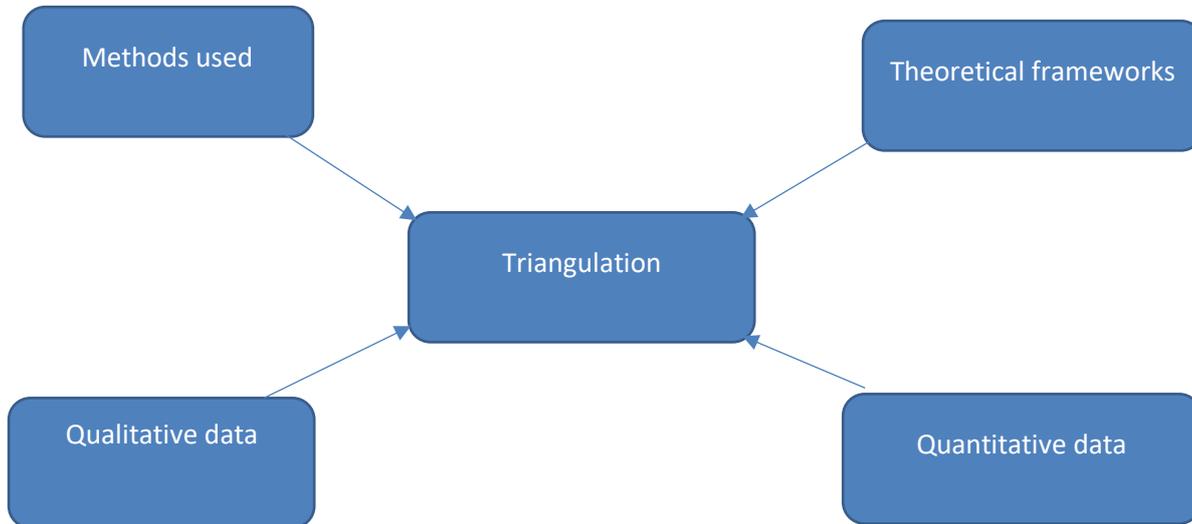


Figure 6.7 Triangulation process applied for the research. Source: The Researcher

6.8 Ethical consideration for the study

The researcher adhered strictly to the ethical guidelines of the University of Salford. An application containing the various steps for the collection of data by the researcher and the procedure put in place to protect the data collected and the anonymity of participants submitted to the ethical committee of the university. The researcher commenced the collection of data for the study after approval from the research ethics committee of the University of Salford. The researcher gave participants an information sheet explaining the details of the study and a consent form for them to append their signature, indicating their consents to participate in the study. The researcher also assured and protected the anonymity of participants in the research. As a result, the researcher stored the data collected in a password protected appliances like the researcher’s computer system and the audio recorder used for the interview to secure the storage of the data collected. For the semi-structured interview and the survey, the researcher informed the participants that they are free to withdraw from the interview session or the completion of the survey questionnaire at any time should they become uncomfortable during the process. The data collection instruments (interview guide and questionnaire) contained information asking the participants to contact the researcher within three

months after the interview, and the survey should they have any concern. The researcher has not received any message up to the point of writing up the thesis.

6.9 Methodological Reflexivity

Hesse-Biber & Reay (2014), argue that methodological reflexivity is a means of truthfully explaining the process involved in a study and how the researcher's nuances affect the investigation. Research into online news commenting as a public sphere within the framework of democratic deliberation is a complex terrain particularly when one considers the multiplicity and volatility that accompany how the criteria of what constitutes a public sphere should be measured. This disagreement often poses a dilemma to scholars regarding the method or best approach to studying deliberation and also theoretical frameworks as there are many divergent theoretical underpinnings with different values placed on the parameters for measuring debates (Kies, 2010b).

As a result, the first dilemma the researcher experienced is on determining the appropriate methods for the study. This dilemma includes highlighting the proper philosophical stance within which to situate the research and the interpretation of results. The researcher participated in a refresher training module on the different aspect of research methods and engage in critical readings on research methodology, and this help in the choice of the research process and the philosophical stance. Also, it is the researcher's first time of applying a mixed method in a study and using the pragmatic philosophical position. As somebody more familiar with the positivist approach to knowledge, the researcher initially expresses reservation on the possibility of the chosen method providing enough leeway to explore all the angles to the research area. Surprisingly, the mixed methods offer the study with rich, diverse data and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Although the best method to use in the collection of data for the survey aspect of the research is an online survey based on the fact that the research focus is on online news commenting and administering the questionnaire online seems the best option at the time. However, the researcher was sceptical of the ability to collect quality data and whether the response rate of completing the questionnaire will be reasonable. However, the completion rate of the survey was fair, and most of the items in the survey questionnaire completed correctly. Another concern about the methodological reflexivity in this study is in the analysis of the data collected for the qualitative content analysis. The researcher harvested the news stories, headlines and comments from four websites. The extracted

data were too many and therefore, reading and reducing them down before importing the data into NVivo and codifying them into themes were quite cumbersome.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodological issues, including the chosen paradigm relating to the research. The researcher argued for pragmatism as the research paradigm for the study and adopted the mixed-methods approach combining content analysis, semi-structured interview and survey. The chapter discussed the justification for the choice of research paradigm and methodology as influenced by the research objectives and the research questions. Also, the chapter highlighted the online news media websites selected for the study and explained the reasons for their selection. Furthermore, the researcher explained the ethical issues concerning the research in the chapter and described the methodological reflexivity and other challenges experienced in the course of conducting the research.

Chapter Seven

Presentation and Analysis of Data Collected for each of the Methods Used in the Study

7.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the data collected and analysed for the study. As explained in the research design chapter, the researcher applied a mixed methods research design and combined content analysis, semi-structured interview and survey methods. The researcher premised the justification for using the three techniques on the nature of the research questions and the objectives set for the study to which one research method is not sufficient for its investigation. The chapter analysed the data collected for the qualitative aspect of the content analysis and semi-structured interview through thematic analysis and presented the results in themes. Furthermore, the researcher explained the quantitative data part of the content analysis and the survey using frequency distribution and percentage and showed the results in tables and figures. Also, the parameters of the theoretical frameworks were used in the study to see how they are evident in the data analysed.

7.2 Presentation of Content Analysis data

This section of the chapter analyses and shows the results of the content analysis data collected for the study. The researcher harvested comments on the two public issues used as stimuli from the selected online news websites using Octoparse, a web scraping tool. These two issues dominate the discursive spheres in Nigeria within the research period and are the President's frequent medical trips abroad and the incessant herdsmen/farmers clashes. Furthermore, the analysis in this section provides answers to some of the research question raised in the study and meets the objectives that sprung from them. The researcher analysed the comments through the thematic analysis approach, and the frequency distribution analysis, which gives descriptive statistics of some aspects of the collected data. Also, the existing coding scheme previously used by scholars in research studies similar to the phenomenon under investigation served as the coding scheme of the study. These coding schemes are the parameters for determining whether a discursive space reflects a public sphere for democratic deliberation. The coding categories include:

- Reasoning
- Topic relevance
- Inclusion
- Discursive equality

- Reciprocity
- Reflexivity
- Plurality
- Flaming and Non-Flaming contents
- Religion and ethnic dichotomy in comments

The researcher used Braun & Clarke (2006) process of conducting a thematic analysis as a guide in the coding of collected data into meaningful themes based on the patterns of readers' comments, and which are:

- Becoming familiar with the data
- Generate initial code
- Search for themes
- Review themes
- Define themes
- Write-up

Also, some part of the content analysis and the semi-structured interview data complements each other to provide answers to research question three. Research question three seeks to understand whether political economy underpinnings influence online news deliberation and the regulation of online news commenting space in Nigeria.

7.2.1 Frequency distribution of online news headlines and comments sampled.

The research focuses on four online news websites and retrieved comments from readers on the selected news websites. The online news websites used for the analysis are Daily Trust newspapers, Vanguard newspapers, Sahara Reporters and Premium Times. A total of 7,934 comments were extracted and analysed. The table below shows the number of news comments obtained from each of the four news websites. The researcher mentioned the justification for selecting the online news websites in the methodology chapter.

Table 7.1a Total number of comments extracted on the President’s medical trip

News sites	No. of news stories	No. of comments extracted
Daily Trust	13	364
Vanguard	16	438
Sahara Reporters	11	1,411
Premium Times	8	822
Total	48	3,035

Table 7.1b Total number of comments extracted on Herdsmen/Farmers’ clash

News sites	No. of news stories	No. of comments extracted
Daily Trust	14	893
Vanguard	8	623
Sahara Reporters	24	1,862
Premium Times	21	1,521
Total	67	4899

RQ 2: To what extent does the commenting space of Nigerian online news websites reflect the criteria for the existence of a public sphere?

7.2.2 Reasoning

The researcher adapted the coding schemes of reasoning to ascertain whether the elements of rationality and critical discussion which are the essential components of public sphere theory are present in the commenting section of the online news websites sampled. To operationalise the theme, the researcher read through the comments to look at crucial words which reveal elements of facts, figures or statements of authority. Any comment that has evidence of facts, figures or statements

credited to power is coded as 1. Comments, where none of these is present, is coded as 0. For clarification, an authority in the context of this analysis refers to a person who is an expert in the area or subject matter under discussion or an official of government saddled with the responsibility of publicly addressing an issue or subject matter trending in the public domain.

Table 7.2a Rational and critical debates on the President’s medical trip

News sites	Comments with facts, figures and authority	%	Comments without facts, figures and authority	%
Daily Trust	39	11	325	89.2
Vanguard	94	21.4	344	79
Sahara Reporters	131	9.2	1,280	91
Premium Times	62	7.6	760	92.4

Table 7.2b Rational and critical debate on Fulani Herdsmen/Farmers clash

News sites	Comments with facts & figures	%	Comments without facts & figures	%
Daily Trust	62	7	831	93
Vanguard	51	8.1	572	91.8
Sahara Reporters	34	1.8	1,828	98.1
Premium Times	48	3.1	1,473	96.8

The tables show that the number of discussions and arguments on the online news platforms based on empirical, logical and presentation of facts to support the position of cases is low. It is clear from the comparison of the comments on the frequency table that the numbers of comments without any logical or facts to support positions are quite significant in numbers when compared with arguments

with verifiable facts. Also, the qualitative content analysis of the comments revealed that most of the comments sampled reflect emotional outburst, arguments and flaming reinforced by socio-cultural cues such as the use of ethnic and religious sentiments. The analysis further revealed that the comments made by readers within the commenting space are hasty and a space for the continuation of ethnic rivalry, labelling and profiling typical of physical discursive space in Nigeria. As such, the commenting platforms are fragmented with everybody justifying his position from ethnic loyalty and sentiments and therefore difficult to establish any trace of commonalities that can lead to a rational and critical approach to the discourse. Four comments extracted from the sampled commenting platforms below indicated this point further:

Vanguard newspaper

Those tribes are foolish for allowing them to attack them. They should forcefully attack them back and killed those herdsmen terrorist futa Jallon futa toro invaders thieves. family of terrorists Buhari and Atiku Fulani

Premium Times

Did the Fulanis through Dambazua not forge the signature of Yara Adua on his budget-----in faraway Saudi Arabia -----? Is Dambazua in prison for forgery-----Is he not the Minister of Interior who goes about importing Fulanis from Cameroon into Nigeria-? These Fulanis are nothing but professional lairs--ati master dribblers-----Imagine how Bingo Buhari enlisted into the army with a letter of recommendation----and was able to get away with it-----Now the same Fulanis who are not even Nigerians are holding the Yorubas to ransom-----while romancing quietly with the Ibos-----at the same time-----in the south-east via Obj-----separation is the only way out—

Daily Trust Online

Saad Abubakar has deployed his tribesmen with Buhari's body language entirely in support to go on a rampage. I warned the Numan people last week to prepare for an attack in line with Satan of Sokotos statement These Numan, Berong, Jukun, Idoma, Ibira, Gwaris etc. in the North who would queue behind the foolanis to vote for them anytime, are undergoing annihilation and would never learn their lessons. Anyway, they must prepare to give Nigeria a President in 2019 who we will be supported by four regions, if not their locations would have been erased from Nigeria map by 2023

Sahara Reporters

Buhari is d masterminded of all d terror that is happening in d Nigeria from Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and d innocent killings of Igbos. However, I know our God is not asleep!

Further analysis to establish the rationality and criticality of sampled comments showed that most of the arguments are internally based and low on arguments that point to an externally backed evidence to support position. Equally, most of the comments lack substance in public good and reasoning. Instead, the comments are not neutral, value-laden and supportive of group interests, particularly socio-cultural standpoints. Some of the excerpts below from the transcripts corroborate this assertion:

Vanguard Newspaper

This is the time to rise and defend yourself oh dreamer, Satan in the image of beastly government have been let loose into the world to kill steal and destroy, who has believed our report? We echo it at the rooftop and market square that this Buhari we know is a sectional, religious bigot, bias and sentimental human being and nobody cares to understand instead we were called all manners of names by even a lot of Christian, and Jihad is going on whether we like it or not many Islamic a gender are being introduced like Sukuk using Christian to actualize it. If we did not rise now sir, we are doom

Vanguard Newspaper

Because no arrest has been made against these herdsmen, because none of them has been charged to court, because Buhari is a Fulani and a cattle owner, these murderers called Fulani's are emboldened. They are killing in the large scale yet Buhari and is the government have not declared them a terrorist. IPOB that has not killed anyone he is quick to declare terrorist. Let Buhari know that, the evil that men do lives after them. God would surely visit his misdeeds to his coming generation.

7.2.3 Topic relevance

Comments were coded under this category to establish how related each comment is to the subject of discussion. Consequently, the researcher coded comments that stay on or is related to the topic as 1 and comments that are off-topic or not related to the thread of comment as 0.

Table 7.3a Topic relevance on President's medical trip

News sites	On topic	%	Off-topic	%
Daily Trust	356	98	8	2
Vanguard	423	97	15	3
Sahara Reporters	1408	99	3	0.2
Premium Times	821	99	1	0.1

Table 7.3b Topic relevance on Herdsmen/Farmers' clash

News sites	On topic	%	Off-topic	%
Daily Trust	876	98	17	2
Vanguard	613	98.6	10	2
Sahara Reporters	1,860	99	2	0.1
Premium Times	1,516	99	5	0.3

The two tables indicate a high degree of relevance of comments to the topic of discussion within the deliberative sphere. The high degree of topic relevance suggests that commenters focus on the subject of deliberation and are willing to make comments about the issue. Also, there are more comments on the Sahara Reporters and Premium Times, both of which are not an online extension of the mainstream media but exclusively internet-only news websites. Furthermore, this scenario may be an indication that commenters deliberate more on the space provided by online news websites with no relationship with any mainstream media because of distrust held by most newsreaders in Nigeria for the mainstream media. Additionally, online-only news media platform bears less risk and are less prone to government' reprimand or clampdown about published and can, therefore, afford to publish news stories that are sensitive which the traditional media may hesitate at publishing.

7.2.4 Inclusion

The researcher operationalised inclusion as one of the requirements for analysing and determining whether the online news commenting section as a sphere for democratic deliberation provides access for participation irrespective of status. The researcher studied the sampled websites to know if there is any form of condition for posting comments on the news comment section and participating with others in discussion within the sites. Consequently, the researcher observed that the comment sections of the four online news websites sampled have a system of registration and identification before in place before participation. The registration system requires commenters to register by providing some details of their identities before participating in the newspaper discursive forum, which indicates that the comment section of the online news media websites in Nigeria is not open. Furthermore, commenters on Vanguard and Daily Trust online platforms have photographs as means of identification while Sahara Reporters and The Premium Times do not. However, all the four online

news platforms have Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Pinterest plugins on their websites which allow commenters to participate in a discussion without any form of registration.

The analysis of the four online news websites also revealed that they all have a machine/ software moderation mechanism in place. The four news websites use Disqus, a moderating software with an inbuilt algorithm that automatically sieves comments to conform with the editorial and ideological biases of a news organisation. Therefore, reactions and comments from readers pass through the software for scrutiny before it is published. Some aspect of the semi-structured interview and survey data in the subsequent sections of the chapter complement the content analysis to have a full understanding of the theme of inclusion as one of the criteria for establishing the democratic deliberativeness of online news comment section in Nigeria.

7.2.5 Discursive equality

The purpose of using the criteria of discursive equality is to be able to measure the frequency of an average commenter's comment within the thread of comments. By so doing, the researcher can establish how concentrated discussions are on a subject of debate. Likewise, the criteria help to investigate whether few individuals usually dominate any discussion in the online discursive sphere in Nigeria. To operationalise the discursive equality theme, the researcher applied 'equal standing' perspective of the discursive equality theme. 'Equal standing' in the analysis quantitatively determine the number of times each participant speaks during a discussion by counting and establishing whether few voices dominate the forum, or all the participants are on equal standing. Therefore, the number of times commenters initiate comments or respond to comments were counted to establish if there is any evidence of dominance. The researcher presents below the analysis table representing the frequency of discursive equality on the website concerning the two issues used as stimuli for the study.

7.4a Discursive equality on the President’s medical trip to abroad

News sites	Single to five postings	More than five postings
Daily Trust	268	96
Vanguard	356	82
Sahara Reporters	983	428
Premium Times	641	181
Total	2248	787

7.4b Discursive equality for Farmers/Herders clash

News sites	Single posting to five postings	More than five postings
Daily Trust	765	128
Vanguard	556	67
Sahara Reporters	1453	409
Premium Times	1311	210
Total	4085	814

For the comments on the President’s medical trip abroad, 74% which translates to 2,248 comments out of 3,035 comments analysed from the four online news media sampled were single to five postings from various commenters. The remaining 787 comments representing 26% were from commenters who post more than five comments per person. The analysed comments on Fulani Herdsmen/ Farmers’ clash indicates that a total of 4,085 comments representing 83% were single to five postings from commenters. In comparison, the remaining 814 comments representing 17% were made by commenters who have more than one post within the threads of comments. As a result, the analysis shows that there is an element of discursive equality, and there is no evidence that few individuals dominate the commenting section by the sheer numbers of their comments.

7.2.6 Reciprocity

For the researcher to ascertain the level of reciprocity within a thread of online discussion, comments were coded by counting reply to comments within a comment thread. Therefore, the analysis focusses on the initial comment, response to the initial comment and stand-alone comment. The data analysed revealed that the level of reciprocity in the online commenting space was high. Most of the initial comments had responses from other commenters. The table below presents the quantitative description of the level of reciprocity within the commenting platform. At the same time, the qualitative analysis in the form of comment extracts gave apt examples to the way readers respond to other readers positions on the platform. For example, below are comments from sampled online news sites regarding President Buhari medical trip abroad in the Vanguard newspaper and comments on the Fulani/Herdsmen clash to show the level of reciprocity in the comment section:

Table 7.5a Reciprocity table on the President’s medical trips

News sites	Initial comments	%	Response to initial comments	%	Stand-alone comments	%
Daily Trust	48	13	308	85	8	2
Vanguard	32	7.3	386	88	20	4.5
Sahara Reporters	52	3.6	1354	95.9	5	0.3
Premium Times	53	6.4	764	92.9	5	0.6

Table 7.5b: Reciprocity table on Herdsmen/ Farmers' clash

News sites	Initial comments	%	Response to initial comments	%	Stand-alone comments	%
Daily Trust	36	4	836	93.6	21	2.3
Vanguard	62	9.9	591	94.8	30	4.8
Sahara Reporters	98	5.2	1732	93	32	1.7
Premium Times	76	4.9	1435	94.3	10	0.6

The sampled thread of comments analysed for reciprocity concerning President Buhari medical trip abroad

Nige'area zootopia

Anyone that says a word against Buhari's Hospital Bills will be charged for Blasphemy - Beware of EFCC and DSS

Keneri

...and Fulani herdsmen...

Nige'area zootopia

I believe you wholeheartedly!!!

Honesty

I thought I was replying a 'reasonable' human being, but you have proved me wrong. Please check all my comments on this forum and others alike and see that, although I speak Yoruba fluently, I am never a Yoruba man. However, I have always supported any reasonable and well-advised comment(s) whether from an Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba Individual. I never knew you are one of those stupid, ignorant and uncivilised youths on this forum. I asked you to do your findings not to believe my comments but please do your findings very well if you have privileged info.

Holy wahala

I'm smarter than everyone from your State of Origin... deal with fact, OBJ spent federal funds to bury Chief. Bola Ige, tell us that amount before I waste my time reading your gibberish beyond one line. Olodo rabata!

Kickboxer Rommel

God has something more worthwhile to do than to waste time on SCUMS OF THE EARTH from the Unitary Republic of Zoogeria (URZ), aka the ZOO!!

Omoagunmate

If Nigeria is a Zoo, what will call your little hell hole? fool... You na all dey craze. You idiot probably dey one dirty market corner for Lagos dey look the hand of the people you are abusing here for your daily bread. The fact that you have a cheap Nokia handset does not give you the right to come here to vent your hate and frustration in life. Go back to your hell hole, no one is holding you.

Sampled thread of comments analysed for reciprocity concerning Farmers/ herdsman clashes

Harshman

One year two months ago the people of southern Nigeria lived in relative peace and harmony with one another and with outsiders. Today a Hausa/Fulani man insists on having sex with a young Igbo girl in Akokwa, Imo state. She declines and, for safety, runs into the home of an older woman where she believes that she will be safe. The Hausa/Fulani man pursues her into that house, slaughters her for denying him sex and proceeds to slaughter the old woman that dared to give her refuge, and that attempted to provide a safe sanctuary for her. The retaliation was swift and deadly. Within a few hours no less than 6 Hausa/Fulani men, including the lustful beast that attempted to rape and ended up murdering the young girl and old woman, were butchered in Akokwa and hundreds more would have been killed had it not been for the timely intervention of the police.

Excisionist

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me. First, they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

ES3

How many innocent Nigerian civilians have Niger Delta Militants killed so far, even when checked from Yar'adua days in office till date? Nigerians, either deliberately or somehow, do not know who and where their real enemies are? If what the Benue people want for their people, then they should be ready to go extinct soon and only be remembered in history. At the same time, their ancestral lands are being occupied by people entirely not related to them.

7.2.7 Reflexivity

One of the critical elements of measuring the quality of deliberation and the public sphere is the criterion of reflexivity which is the ability of participants to shift position during a discussion after listening to or convinced by an argument that is superior and higher in knowledge to their initial views on the subject of debate. Therefore, the role of reflexivity as part of the measurement index in this study is to determine whether participants in the online discussion shift position after listening or reading from other responses.

The researcher conducts the analysis and interpretation of findings from a deductive reasoning approach, especially from the perspective of socio-cultural issues that have come to condition the social relations and national discourse in Nigeria. Therefore, the results from the analysis of comments revealed that there is a low level of reflexivity in the comment sections of the sampled

news websites. Evidence from the study showed that arguments did not result in a shift of position to indicate agreement or change in the line of thought. In some instances, where the analysis showed some evidence of agreement or change in position, the shift had no connection with the presentation of superior or verifiable evidence, but arguments based on sentiments and emotions. Below are examples of extracted comments from the threads of comments of the four news websites. For instance, comments by readers in the comment section of Vanguard newspaper on the herdsmen/Farmers' clash reproduced in this thesis, and none of the comments indicates a shift of thought as a result of empirical fact provided or superior argument.

Tony Ekpe

Moreover, the President said no reprisal until they killed all the Christians in the north and the minorities. The government of Buhari will tell the world that the Fulanis herdsmen are foreigners and that they do not know them, yet they are aided by Nigeria security forces to slaughter their host, Lord have mercy.

Dan Fulani

The killer Herdsmen, over 5000 herdsmen, were killed in Benue State alone last few months

Meefreedom

Supply your statistical reference base as done in the above report or go bury your herdsmen shameless and empty brain in the gutter. You think your atrocities are child's play because your Buhari herdsmen kins-person is presently in charge. Your times are well gone, and your acts are evidence for fuelling the much-needed restructuring we have been justifying until your brain dead brother climbed the mantle but of course temporary.

Furthermore, the threads of comments on the President's medical trips abroad did not show any sign of iteration among commenters as each did not yield from the initial position held whether in the form of showing interest or concern in others' argument or alluding to a superior position. In the thread of comments below, none of the commenters questioned each other's claim. The analysis revealed that the level of reflexivity in the Nigerian online commenting space is low.

Niga'area zootopia

HONESTY is an honest guy; I believe him. Yar'adua's people looted more than a National budget; in fact, they looted more than Abdulsalami Abubakar did before handing over to Civilians. They looted with absolute rascality because they knew they would not be probed

Mp-001 (joint chief)

We were vehement in opposing the Yar'adua cabal then. How they attempted to entrench their brand of fulanistocracy, but rational-minded individuals will not accept that 10 trillion Naira was spent on his health, even 10 million is an absurdity.

Fox oxymoron

Almost all the commentators here have missed something very crucial. Osinbajo will take charge as VP, not as acting President. There is a Gulf of difference between the two. Nigerians, especially southerners, have been taken for granted.

Anyway, for those who do not understand, from now, Osinbajo will be taking orders from people he does not even know or see.
Garbage Shehu will simply tell Femi and Osinbajo what "Buhari," said they should do.
Period.

Niga'area zootopia

That is a severe problem for Nigeria as a country. Yar'adua scenario is being replayed were one of the widows ruled Nigeria and ransacked the economy for nearly one year

Honesty

Another good reminder. Only in Nigeria will you hear that a President is proceeding on 'INDEFINITE LEAVE'. That is a new product manufactured in Nigeria by APC-led Govt. Well, my friend, they are just buying time, everything will soon be exposed. Its a mind game, kind of.

7.2.8 Plurality

The researcher used the thematic category of plurality to ascertain the extent to which discussion in the online news commenting sites is heterogenous, representative and diverse. To do this, three sub-themes of affiliation, non-affiliation and disaffiliation guided the analysis of comments. These components are essential in the assessment of an online discursive sphere as a democratic sphere. Tsaliki's (2002) submits that affiliation as a criterion assesses whether comments identify with a particular person, political party, ideology or a socio-cultural orientation. Furthermore, non-affiliation as another category for analysis under pluralism implies comments that do not show any sign of alignment with any ideology, political bloc or other socio-cultural imperatives. Comments with disaffiliation tendency are those that criticise or show disapproval of a political stance, ideology or socio-cultural identity.

To analyse the theme of plurality, therefore, the researcher analysed the sampled comment, coded them and created a table along with the three categories for assessing plurality in a discursive environment: affiliation, non-affiliation and disaffiliation. In the analysis, comments that support the President's trips indicate an affiliation. Also, comments that are neutral and do not show any form of support or resentment on the President's trips are coded as non-affiliation. In contrast, comments that criticise or show disapproval for the President's medical trips stand as disaffiliation. The researcher coded comments identifying with the clashes or sympathetic to either the herdsmen or farmers as an affiliation. Comments that show neutrality to either the herdsmen or the farmers are coded as non-affiliation. Comments that criticised the clashes are coded as disaffiliation.

7.6a Plurality table for news comments on President medical trips

News sites	Affiliation	Non-affiliation	Disaffiliation
Daily Trust	245	21	98
Vanguard	125	15	298
Sahara Reporters	402	77	932
Premium Times	387	18	417

7.6b Table for the plurality of news comments on Herdsmen/Farmers clash

News sites	Affiliation	Non-affiliation	Disaffiliation
Daily Trust	863	12	18
Vanguard	224	78	321
Sahara Reporters	830	68	964
Premium Times	283	15	1223

From the table, the results indicate that the gap between the comments that contain affiliative cues and disaffiliative comments in the online news commenting sections sampled is very close. Also, the three extracts of comments below from the commenting section of the selected online newspapers on President Muhammadu Buhari medical vacation show the evidence of affiliation. Although there is diversity in the numbers of comments and commenters from the analysis, it is not an ideal type of diversity. A close analysis of the comments shows that the direction of comments on the commenting space indicates a high degree of reference to and influenced by the socio-cultural affinities of the commenters and the personae to whom the news story revolves around.

This result is contrary to previous studies conducted in other states where pluralism within the deliberative space is influenced by ideological differences such as communism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism and other radical leanings. An example of this is a study conducted by Davidson & Elstub (2014) in which they found out that online discourse in the UK often takes the colouration of political affiliation and ideology.

A. Sample of comments with affiliation

Premium Times

President Muhammadu Buhari is a very straight forward, honest, transparent and patriotic leader who would not keep anything in hiding for the Nigeria-public. As a human being, Mr President Muhamadu Buhari can fall sick or incapacitated; hence, President Muhammadu Buhari deserves to listen to his doctors, and follow through whatever the direction his doctors may direct him. If he is alive, hail and in good health, then he could continue to lead Nigeria, toward fiscal prudence, economic progress and infrastructure development. Some naive and ignoramus in this forum will continue to display their common-sense-defect and stone-hearted-comments in this forum because they are not human beings.

Daily Trust Newspaper

A deserved rest Sai Baba; your official vacation and attention to matters of State simultaneously, is called multitasking in western climes which the die-hard confusions amongst us, will never understand. It is interesting how your detractors have not noticed how improved and invigorating your performance have been since your last check-up. At your age, recharging your batteries for the rigorous task ahead is the right thing to do. 2019 is yours for the taking. It has been planned by the diest indeed, and no clown can walk the path that rightfully belongs to you.

Premium Times

I believe most people disagree! In 2 years corruption is no longer the law of the land, in 2 years we are all aware of what has been happening in NNPC, NIA, Diezani, Yakubu, Customs, budget padding etc. In 2 years there has been recording recovery of loot, in 2 years the nation's foreign reserve has grown, and can we remember the 'dere ris God' episode when grieving mothers were summoned and accused of lying about their children being kidnapped when a President disputed the event and said nothing for days -- Well yesterday 82 girls were returned!! It is not perfect, but its better. OO and we also know Patience Jonathan her mother gave the ex-Buka / Beer parlour owner \$15million dollars.

B. Sample of comments with disaffiliation

Likewise, the sample comments below indicate the evidence of disaffiliation in commenters' comments on the sampled news websites. The comments on the herdsmen/farmers' clash shown evidence of disaffiliation:

Ezike (Vanguard Newspaper)

The military is out to protect the Fulani herdsmen against cattle rustlers. Minister of Defence confirmed that. Inadvertently, the life of cattle is paramount to the detriment of lives and property of Nigerians murdered daily by Fulani herdsmen.

Okechukwu (Sahara Reporters)

The Sultan of Sokoto is the Chairman of Miyetti Allah Fulani Herdsmen. Both Janjaweed Jihadist Buhari and Mallam Lamido Sanusi, a fellow Fulani, are executive members. Could these men be honestly ignorant of the genocide, land grab, internal displacement and forced Islamization perpetrated under the banner, authority and sponsorship of their organisation? Elsewhere around the world, cattle-rearing is a private business with little or no ties to terrorism,

genocide and land grab campaigns. In Nigeria, late Sir Ahmadu Bello's 1960 assertions that the Middle-Belt are willing tools of the Fulani

Franklin (The Premium Times Online Newspaper)

Northern Islamic secret agenda is entirely in place in Nigeria, and all their aims are working accordingly. All hail Buhari/Buraitai, (Nigeria military chief), the Nigerian Police and all the law enforcement agencies in Nigeria which have been hijacked and dominated by the Northern power for secretly empowering the Fulani herdsmen in carrying out in all the agreed assignment without fear nor delay.

C. Sample comments with non-affiliation

Although, the level of non-affiliative comments on the selected online news webpage and the sampled comments are low, below are excerpts from some of the studied newspaper indication that the comments tilt toward the non-affiliation category.:

IKE (Premium Times)

Until we come together as one to eschew evil no matter the tribe, religion or ethnic group This set of people will still be having their ways. Nigerian unites.

Joel (Vanguard Newspaper)

Pls let us condemn evil, let us not play politics with peoples lives, I have never been to any northern state, I know there is core Muslim there that are good but the problem we have in this country, is the person we have as President and people around him are not worthy to h be in various positions they found their selves.

Patriotism Bola (Daily Trust)

You misunderstood the reporter. They are different incident reported. According to the reporter, the one at yolde party is confirmed by the police spoke the person. "Mr Abubakar said he is only aware of a clash between farmers and herders in Yolde-patte, also a suburb of Yola, where, he said, the police arrested over two hundred cows that destroyed some farms. He said owners of the cattle had already agreed to pay for the damages caused by their animals." The damage refers to farms, not human being as it is in other incidences in the state. May God restore peace in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large

7.2.9 Flaming and non-flaming contents

Comments were content analysed in other to establish whether there is evidence of flaming or non-flaming in the Nigerian online news websites. To identify flaming and non-flaming in conversations on the online commenting news sites, the researcher did not focus on agreement or disagreement by commenters with one another as sometimes, for example, there may be a disagreement in an online discourse without descent into trolls. Instead, the researcher assessed each comment with the motive of finding out comments that contain insulting and abusive cues and those that are not. Therefore, the researcher used physical counting after identifying each of the comments for containing either flaming or non-flaming content to establish the frequency of flaming and non-flaming in online news

website commenting section in Nigeria. Overall, the result showed that 58 % of the entire comments analysed contained elements of flaming, while 42% do not.

However, the analysis only determined the presence of flaming contents on the comment section of the online news websites but could not establish the factors that promote flaming among commenters. Analysis of survey data gathered in this research will help to identify the factors that promote flaming in the commenting space. Similarly, the survey data will help determine the relationship between flaming and online news websites with moderation policy in place and online news sites without moderation mechanisms. Below are samples of comments from the four online news sites in which commenters while posting comments and debating on news headlines relating to the two public issues used as stimuli for the study used derogatory and abusive language.

Omoagunmate

Will you fools just shut the fuck up! wetin nao? you no get papa or wetin? You all shameless dogs coming here using your useless handsets typing rubbish and making empty noise, you are all so dull now. For all I care, you, whomever you are behind the veil you are hiding under can go rot in hell.

Kick Boxer

Well, look at you, what do you know, you sound frustrated in life. As in a loser in life, it shows in your hatred of others. If it is not the Hausas, it is the Yorubas or the British or your papa or mama. You sound a very sad and frustrated fool, for your own sake, get help before you self-destruct

Nwaodika Okechukwu

This is the time to rise up and defend yourself oh dreamer, Satan in the image of beastly government have been let loose into the world to kill steal and destroy, who has believed our report? We echo it at the rooftop and market square that this Buhari we know is a sectional, religious bigot, bias and sentimental human being and nobody cares to understand instead we were called all manners of names by even a lot of Christian; Jihad is going on whether we like it or not many Islamic a gender are being introduced like Sukuk using Christian to actualise it. If we did not rise now sir, we are doom

Charlz

The Fulani are sub-human with a barbaric mentality and with minds fatally bent toward stealing what belongs to others.

Nigeria's unfinished work is to cage the Fulani in a geographical place of their own because they are morally dissolute.

7.2.1 Religion and ethnic dichotomy in comments

These themes resulted from the content analysis data and provided complementary results to the research question three aimed at confirming if political economy factors influence Nigerian online news commenting environment. The researcher sought to establish from the content analysis data

whether political economy factors curb debates on the commenting sections. The thread of comments in this analysis, therefore, revealed an online deliberative space filled with ethnic and religious cues. Thus, the excerpts of comments below are on the President's medical trips abroad, and the analysis of the online debate did not point to any logical or rational exchange of ideas on the platform. Instead, the comments look to ethnic and religion cues which are some of the underlying factors in the Nigeria political economy terrain. Kalu (1996) argues that ethnicity and religion are crucial to the issue of political economy in Nigeria, particularly in the area of policy decisions concerning the allocation of resources.

Uche

Buhari is in an anguish condition. A Fulani cannot resign from power. They love power more than their life. He and his handlers prefer he dies there. When God refused him three times from becoming President, he did not know that God was saving his life. He needed power and got it, but God made him a spectator in his govt

Hassan

What marvels me is that Hausa people talk as if they are the people that are making laws in Nigeria which everybody will follow and abide by. It seems like because Buhari does not follow the law anymore, he does whatever thing he likes without anybody asking him why. Anyways, time will tell

Jude

#Help #Help #stop the killing of Biafrans Christians by Nigeria Soldiers led by Islamic extremists President Muhammad Buhari

Mohammed

where were the Igbos when Buhari become the President of Nigeria? ****foolish people****is, not the same Igbos neglect themselves of being in power, due to their selfish interest. You said, "Nigeria is a zoo", and you are still living inside, *****who are you? ***are you not an animal?** You better be careful of your words.

Ayo

#The Northern Islamic secret agenda is entirely in place in Nigeria, and all their aims are working accordingly. All hail Buhari/Buratai, (Nigeria military chief), the Nigerian Police and all the law enforcement agencies in Nigeria which have been hijacked and dominated by the Northern power for secretly empowering the Fulani herdsmen in carrying out in all the agreed assignment without fear nor delay.

7.3 Conclusion

This section analysed and presented the result of the content analysis data part of the study. The researcher, through the empirical evidence generated from the analysis, provided answers to research question one which inquires whether the online news commenting space in Nigeria reflect a democratic deliberative sphere. Based on the empirical evidence from the analysis, the online news

media in Nigeria provides citizens with deliberative space to discuss public issues. Also, part of the results indicated that the online discursive space has a high degree of topic relevance as commenters stay focus on the topic of discourse. At the same time, the results showed a high rate of reciprocity and discursive equality. However, the discursive environment is impoverished and deficient in some other criteria required of an ideal sphere for democratic deliberation. The evidence of rationality and criticality in debate within the online commenting space is sparse as comments are laden with emotions and sentiments. The next section presents the data analysis and results from the semi-structured interview. Also, the finding indicated that online debates and pattern of arguments by commenters are influenced by ethnic and religion bias which are both part of the political economy nuances of Nigeria.

7.4 Presentation of the Semi-Structured Interview Data and analysis

This section of the chapter presents the analysis of semi-structured interview data collected for the study. The researcher conducted fifteen interview sessions with sampled participants and the interview guide designed in a way to reflect research questions, objectives and design. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the semi-structured interview participants during the analysis and subsequently, interpretation of findings, the researcher labelled the identity of interview participants from RO1 to RO15. The composition of the interview participants includes university lecturers, journalists, politicians, civil servants, students, businessmen/women and teachers.

Table 7.7 Profile of semi-structured interview participants

Legacy media	Code
University Lecturer	RO1
Government official	RO 2
Civil Right Activist	RO 3
Civil Right Activist	RO 4
Civil Right Activist	RO 5
Government official	RO 6
Media Professional	RO7

Unemployed Graduate	RO8
Media Professional	RO9
Government official	RO10
Civil Right Activist	RO11
Media Professional	RO12
Government official	RO13
Media Professional	RO14
Media Professional	RO15

7.5 Description of the Interview guide and its justification

According to Jamshed (2014, p.87) ‘...interview guides serve the useful purpose of exploring many respondents more systematically and comprehensively as well as to keep the interview focused on the desired line of action.’ As part of the mixed methods of research design for this study, the semi-structured interview complements the other methods used. It enables the researcher to gain an in-depth insight into the subject of study. The application of the semi-structured interview also allowed the researcher to have a subjective and direct experience of research participants. The questions asked in the interviews, and the rationale for asking them are explained briefly below:

Item one in the interview guide asked the participants to explain their understanding of online news comments. The question provides the researcher with the knowledge of whether the participants understand the subject matter. It also intends to know whether there are divergent views on their perception of online news commenting by the participants.

Question two and three focussed on why commenters post comments and participate in online discussion and the factors that influence the way they comment. These questions aim to provide data and answers to research question two that seeks to know what motivates readers to post comments and participate in an online discussion.

Question four aims to ascertain whether commenters during a discussion in the commenting section have the notion that other contributors’ comments contain verifiable facts and evidence. This question is related to research question one which seeks to know to what extent the online news commenting sites in Nigeria reflects the public sphere using the criteria of a public sphere as parameters.

Therefore, the question served the purpose of complementing the content analysis of the extracted comments from the sample online news websites to verify the evidence of public sphere criteria. It carried out this by interrogating the commenters to have a more in-depth insight into whether their discussions contain rational and critical arguments.

Question five sought to find out whether such factors that are at the heart of the political economy in Nigeria: do religion, ethnicity and elitism relate to the way readers post comments and participate in an online discussion?

Question six intends to establish the frequency with which the audience comment or react to news/information on government programmes and policies. As a follow-up, question seven seeks to determine whether discussion on the commenting section has influenced government policies and decisions in any way by asking commenters to recall any example where the government changed its decision based on the intensity of citizens' reactions through news commenting.

Questions eight and nine seek to understand whether readers prefer an online news website, they post a comment to and the reason for their choice. The researcher designed the questions to gain an in-depth knowledge of the factors that influence online.

Questions ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen were explicitly for the media professionals that participated in the semi-structured interview, and they asked the professionals whether there is a difference in editorial approach to their newspaper physical copy and online version. The researcher also asked the questions to solicit for information on whether they moderate the online news website. If they do, the type of moderation put in place and the reason for the moderation.

Question fifteen also targeted the media profession that participated in the semi-structured interviews, and it focussed on whether the need for revenue by the online websites influence the type of news posted on the online news websites.

7.6 Analysis

The analysis of the semi-structured interview data in this study aims to provide answers to research question one and three. Besides, the collected data and its analysis also play a complementary role in the analysed data and findings for the other methods applied in this study. As such, research question one interrogates the sample population to know the factors that motivate news readers to post comments and participate in online deliberation. The interview data collected for this question complement the survey information analysed for the same purpose. Research question 3 seeks to know if there are political economy contradictions that influence commenters in the production of texts and, the moderation of the commenting space by the news organisation. Some of these

contradictions include power relations, ideological viewpoints, commercialism and ethnoreligious factors which are critical issues in the political economy of Nigeria.

The researcher applied thematic analysis to the semi-structured interview data collected for the study. Thematic analysis is a type of data analysis method that lends itself to the identification of themes and pattern within a qualitative data (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moira Maguire & Brid Delahunt, 2017). The choice of thematic analysis as the appropriate method for analysing the semi-structured interview data collected for this study has to do with the fact that the researcher aims to provide a descriptive analysis of the trend and pattern inherent in the interview data concerning the research questions and objectives. Besides, thematic analysis aligns with the pragmatist philosophical approach that allows the researcher to explore the whole angle to the data without being restricted to the limitations of the epistemological approach. As a result, the following thematic patterns came out of the analysed data:

- a. Social engagement
- b. A watchdog on the traditional news media
- c. Expression of position on a public issue with the sub-theme of lending expertise/professional clarification or opinion on the topic of debate
- d. The saliency of news story/information
- e. Impact
- f. Trust in a news organisation
- g. Anonymity
- h. Profit motive
- i. Ideological underpinnings

7.6.1 Perception of participants about online news platform comment section

The structure of the interview guide reflects the epistemological approach to this research which stresses pragmatism. This philosophical stance argues for the application in a study of the practicality of what works best to provide answers to research questions and meet a study's objectives (John W et al., 2010; VL & Badiee M, 2010). The researcher asked the participants questions about their understanding of online news media, its commenting section, participation in the discursive space of online news media websites and whether there is a significant difference between online news media and the traditional mass media system. The analysis of participants responses to the questions revealed how people perceive online news media and its commenting section. A pattern of perception

runs through the participants' responses regarding what online news discussion which the researcher identified and discussed as:

7.6.1.1 Social engagement

A good number of participants viewed online news commenting space as a platform for social interaction and getting their view known. According to the data analysed, it is a space that allows citizens to express their opinion freely without any fear of whether the opinion will be published or not. Participant RO14 explains:

It is about the social engagement between readers and the communicators. Unlike in the past, feedback to any issues is spontaneous. It is very open, transparent and democratic. It can also be compromised. (Interview 14, 2018)

Another participant echoed what participant 14 said but added a new dimension to the understanding of online news commenting platform. According to the participant, the discursive sphere on the online news platform is an emancipator that sets the people free from the control and manipulation of the media industry and news contents by the government. According to RO9:

My understanding of the commenting space in the online news media is that they are a blessing and emancipator from the control of our thoughts and what we read from the government. Before, you only read information about prominent people, but thanks to the internet, there are news websites where I can comment and express my mind freely. (Interview 9, 2018)

7.6.1.2 A watchdog on the traditional news media

As a follow-up question to how participants perceive the online news platform and its commenting feature, the researcher also asked the interview participants whether the online news platform is significantly different from the traditional mass media system. Majority of the interview participants responded that online discursive space provides them with an opportunity to put the activities of the mainstream media under scrutiny. They explained that, through the online commenting space, inaccurate news report and stories that appear like propaganda are raised or flagged. Participant RO15 explains that:

Yes, it does. It helps in monitoring the traditional media in terms of the comments that pass through it. For instance, where a report is fake, or the story is not substantiated, rather than calling the editor, readers online can quickly respond, which may make the editor drop the story. Another positive side is where reactions to stories are positive, thereby encouraging positive actions like digging more into the stories. Generally, commenting influences the decision of the editorial team to drop a story or encourage them to do further research. (Interview 15, 2018)

Corroborating RO15 explanation, another participant reacted that the online commenting platform

sometimes serves as an instrument of pressure on the mass media to dig deeper into a story particularly on issues that trend within the online news platforms.:

The way we comment and the direction of our comments sometimes prevail on the media organisation to do more report about an issue. I have also seen instances where some media apologised for a story already reported due to correction and presentation of facts by commenters in the comment section
(Interview 13, 2018)

7.7 Research question 2: What motivates readers to post comments and participate in discussion within the commenting space of online news websites in Nigeria?

This question seeks to establish the motivating factors behind online readers intention to comment and participate in the discursive platform. Question two, ‘why do you post comments or react to information/news online?’, including other follow up issues that emerged in the course of the interview provided the researcher with the data analysed to provide answers to the research question. Therefore, and from the transcript, the researcher runs a Wordsearch query on NVivo to have proper picture of the pattern of responses and the word frequency to know the number of times particular words was in the conversation. Consequently, the analysis of interviewees responses relating to the research question revealed a pattern of reactions categorised into five themes.

7.7.1 Theme 1: Expression of position on a public issue

This theme revealed that most online news readers that comment and participate in the online discussion view the online news websites deliberative space as presenting them with an opportunity to express their personal opinions on public issues. According to some of the responses, it will be difficult to state their view in the mainstream media where their opinions sometimes are not published. For example, RO1, one of the participants in the interview said:

Just to show my opinion, to express myself. Okay o, this is my own understanding as to what I have read or what I have seen online. Just to, okay, this is my own voice too. Just to make my opinion known, that is basically. Not to criticize, are you getting me, just to make it known and the thing is just that people don't need to succumb to your own opinion. There is freedom of opinion, as in expression anyhow, are you getting it, Okay, I have read this thing, I have read this thing online, this is what I feel, this is the solution I am professing, just to make my opinion counts most times, that is why I react to the news.
(Interview 1, 2018)

Corroborating the theme of expression of opinion further, RO3 explained his reason for commenting and participating in a discussion online. RO3 explained that his disposition to a news story drives him to post comments and debate with others on the news platform.

As I said, it is for me to show how I feel about particular news, if it is absurd, you can post your comment, if you like the news, you can also post your comment.

I remember the NYSC minimum wage that was discussed online, and people were happy about it. (Interview 2, 2018)

Some of the participants have a contrary view and said that commenting directly to a news story is secondary while reacting to other commenters' comments in the discursive space is critical and primary to their desire for participation. Accordingly, some online commenters do not bother about the news or the article but on the comments, others made in the platform. One of the interview participants, RO 9 that shared this position said:

The way I comment actually, we can say as a result of..., Sometimes, it might not be as a result of the caption or the news that attracted me. However, it may be because of a comment made by someone like me, imagine saying, let us give or take, like, some many years ago, do you understand, we had one of the strongest currency. You see someone coming to say we can still have, em what do you call it; we can still have a stable currency if only we support the government. I get pissed off by such a thing because the leaders of today were the leaders of yesterday. You get, so it's more like they ran us down drastically, so that is exactly why, so those are the kind of factors that move me to give some other comment. Most notably, some stupid comments, let me just say my mind. (Interview 9,2018)

A participant, RO5 shares the same opinion but added a new angle explaining that the platform sometimes provides him with the opportunity to register his resentment where an influential person who possesses the quality to induce change begins to sound insensible in the discursive space. He explains:

... and again, another factor could be, when someone that I consider to be a change agent, as regarding the news he is posting, is saying something negative. Of recently, let me give an example, we find our self in a country that the people that made the constitution are fighting against their laid down constitution. I see no reason why the court will order the release of a man and yet one institution in Nigeria, will choose not to do it. No, shut the f...k up, sorry for my choice of word, but yes, that is precisely the insult on the court, that is how they sent the message to the court, like will you shut up and my own will, will be done. Moreover, these are the same people that made the constitution and are fighting against it, so factors like this, piss me, they motivate me to talk. (Interview 5, 2018)

Furthermore, and apart from the central theme of expression of opinion on public issues revealed from the analysed data as one of the motivating factors for participating in the online commenting space, the analysis of interview data also shows a sub-theme labelled as lending expertise/professional clarification or opinion on a topic of debate. This sub-theme theme emerged from the mass of the data analysed and explained that some people participate in the commenting section of online news media not just to express their opinions but also to offer their technical know-how or expertise to clarify issues on the platform. Part of the analysed data explained that some people post comments in the online platform without any professional knowledge about the subject, which often leads to insult and wrong assumptions during deliberation. Therefore, according to

RO12, participating in the discussion forum and offering a professional angle of the matters is one of the ways through which issues get clarified, and logical arguments prevail:

I am attracted to comment in the forum to provide professional advice on issues. I remember an issue, yea! A media report about the cloning of the President. Many people, especially on Nairaland, believed the crap and I wonder what type of minds we are. As a Lab Scientist, I posted on the forum to explain from a professional background that it is impossible to clone a person that will appear of the same age with Buhari. This single issue prompted me to start posting regularly to correct mediocrity on the site. (Interview 12, 2018)

Another participant, RO 8 also confirmed the view of RO12 opining that the reason that attracts him to post comments and participate in the online discursive is the passion of sharing his experience with others on the platform so that they can learn:

So that people can em, hear your views about it that is one. Then secondly, probably you can also share your experience with other people as well. So that other people can learn from your experience, that is if you have gone through that kind of experience before. (Interview 8, 2018)

7.7.2 Theme 2: Saliency of news story/ information

Another factor that influences audience posting of comments and participation in the online news commenting section is the prominence of a news item. The importance attached to a news item and how viral it has gone influence and increase participation in an online discussion concerning the news story. Participants believe that any news with a high level of prominence shows that it will attract attention from the entire country; hence, the need to contribute to its debate. A participant, RO 15 in the interview responded thus:

Most of the news that attracts people is in the area of politics. Because in Nigeria, the most salient factor influencing people's reaction to the news is politics. You know, em there are some things people want to be accurate, and there are some things they do not want to be true because of their political orientations, their political inclinations. There are several factors; people comment based on their age, based on their sex, based on their experience. However, for me, the most salient is politics. (Interview 15, 2018)

At the same time, another respondent agreed that the prominence attached to news items and how appealing information is on the news sites influence or motivate people to comment and participate in deliberation on the online news websites discussing platforms. Participant RO 5 explained this:

It depends on how appealing the content of the news. Most times people tend to comment on let me say probably a political issue or entertainment issue that appeals to them. There are some articles that some people read online and probably see no reason. However, then when you feel like okay, this is something that is affecting me, especially when it comes to politics and entertainment that people tend to comment more on or probably agriculture or something like that. Okay, I was reading something recently about the issue of rice importation and everything. Everyone was talking about the idea about the fact that the border has been closed, however, the local rice we have in Nigeria is not well processed to the extent that it can be consumed, and the

government should help in the processing. Moreover, when it comes to rice, it is something that affects everybody, so depending on how affected one is, that is what determines the comment that people make. If there is an article that does not concern me, I might not put any comment on it. It depends on how affected, one is, that drives the comment
(Interview 5, 2018)

7.7.3 Theme 3: Impact

The analysis of participants responses to questions revealed that readers of information on the online news platforms do participate in a conversation online after ascertaining that the news content and the debate is likely to have an impact on them or issues related to them. They responded that news reports and conversations about topic or events that are of importance to them and likely to have an impact on their wellbeing or social relations naturally attract their attention within the deliberative space. Participant RO5, for instance, says:

I participate when I feel the topic has a direct bearing on me. Even, if it does not, I still comment, if it will affect someone around me. Also, if it does not affect them now, probably in the long run. It will affect them.
(Interview 5, 2018)

Furthermore, participant RO9 explains that:

I am often persuaded to join others in a discussion online when I have a feeling that the issue being discussed will have an impact on my life, especially where the deliberation is civil and respectful of each other. For example, I read a story recently on one of the news platforms online about the management of sickle cell anaemia patients through the use of natural herbs, and I decided to participate in the online discussion because I have a sister who is a Sickler. I believe the information I get from the forum will be of help to her. (Interview 9, 2018).

Another angle to the theme of impact as one of the factors that influence the posting of comments by audience and participation in online news commenting space came from one of the responses provided by a journalist. Unlike the previous two comments on impact as a factor for participating in the online discussion offered by online news readers, participant RO 15, a journalist explained that impact as a factor that influences participation in the online deliberative sphere goes both ways. Apart from making others participate and comment, it also affects what information or news get posted for the readers to access by the online news editors especially where such information may affect his religion or other socio-cultural activities negatively. RO 15 explained the scenario below:

Absolutely, and it goes both ways. In terms of the person doing the commenting and in terms of the person placed in charge. Let us be realistic if you have an online editor for instance or somebody working online who is a Muslim, and a piece of news is coming that he perceives that is harmful to Muslim. He might remove it, and the rest of us may not know. So em, yes, I agree to the premise of that question.
(Interview 15, 2018)

7.7.4 Theme 4: Trust in a news organisation

The analysis of the interview responses indicates that the level of trust readers has in a news organisation serves as a factor that influences the posting of news and participation in online deliberation by readers. From the responses, readers are more likely to post comments on the platform of a news organisation whose level of credibility and acceptance as a news organisation that thrives on the accuracy and objectivity of news report is not in doubt. According to responses from the collected data, the influence to participate and post comments on the webpage of some news organisation is because they follow journalistic ethos in the reporting of events and moderate activities on their commenting space. As a result, readers have the confidence that the community of commenters on this type of news platforms are genuine and civil. Also, the trust in a news organisation as a parameter for commenting and participating in the discursive sphere is related to the ability of a news organisation to moderate the online space in order the posting of false information and incivility as one of the interview participants RO 4 explains:

I rarely read news or post comment on a news website that lacks substance. Hmm. I only read information from credible news media on the internet like The Guardian, Punch, Channel news, NTA, and the rest. These are reliable organisations that will not entertain false information and will not allow their comment sections to dominated by the people I called online rascals. This gives me the confidence to comments on their websites (Interview 4, 2018).

Another participant reinforces the identification of ‘trust in news organisation’ as one of the factors that influence the posting of comments and participation in an online debate by readers. Participants RO 5 observed that:

I post comments on the news websites of news media organisation with a good history of credibility. These media organisations follow the rules and will never allow nonsense on their page. This gives me the confidence to comment and participate in any discussion on their webpages (Interview 5, 2018).

7.7.5 Theme 5: Anonymity

Anonymity is another theme identified from the analysis as one of the factors that influence audience willingness to post a comment and participate in online debate. Anonymity from the interviewees' responses encourages participation in the online discursive sphere as it reassures readers of his security, especially when such a reader post sensitive information which is capable of attracting the ire of the government. According to one of the interview respondents, any online news platform that allows commenters to remain anonymous while posting their comments encourages and energises readers willingness to be active in such online news website commenting space. A participant, RO 7, explains:

I am always motivated to post comments on the websites that do not ask for my identity or ... registration. It makes me feel free to express my open and correct position on matters. You know the Nigerian government is not happy for their activities to be criticised. Do you understand? Those who talked against them in public are traced and either arrested or brutalised. To avoid the ruthlessness of the government, I prefer to participate in a discussion on a site where I can hide my identity.

(Interview 7, 2018).

7.8 Research question 3: Do political economy factors influence online deliberation and the regulation of the commenting space by the news organisation?

The themes generated from the analysis of the interview data revealed that political economy trajectory of Nigeria has a significant influence on the way online news readers perceive and participate in online deliberation. The political economy of the online news media is part of and a reflection of the broader Nigerian political economy and its ideological stance. Therefore, the dominant discourse and regulation of the sphere connect to power relations, religion, ethnicity and commercialism. The subsequent paragraphs discuss the themes that emerged from the interview data relating to the research question.

7.8.1 Profit motive:

Most of the journalists interviewed explained that the news posted on their webpage is not significantly different from the physical copies. As such, the mechanism for processing the news for the physical copy is not different from the one applied for the online version. Also, the journalists in the interview said the posting and management of contents on the website, including the regulation of citizens' contribution are done with the consciousness of making the online news website profitable.

Some of the interview participants argue in their responses that the news media are sometimes selective in the type of news headlines and stories they post online for readers to read and debate. They explained that news websites do this for-profit motive as being sensational in their contents attract readers which increases traffic on their news sites and ultimately generates more advertisement revenue. RO9, a journalist interviewed, said:

Most of the stories on our website are not different from the physical copies except where the news event occurred after we have published. We monitor and regulate activities on our news websites for several reasons. First, we are a corporate entity and would not allow anything to tarnish our image. Second, we run expenses, including the maintenance of the website and the payment of staff. As such, we report news taking into cognisance, currency, impact, and what other competitors are reporting. We do this to put our website in good stead for advertisement and revenue and take off comments injurious to our image.

(Interview 9, 2018)

RO 12, another journalist, maintained the same position and responded that:

We cannot shy away from the fact that journalism is a business, and we are in it with other competitors. We here see our website as leverage to break the news before others and regularly update with fresh angles. Doing this makes our brand attractive to advertisers and even government agencies for patronage. I can tell you that this has increased our traffic tremendously, but of course, we are conscious of factual reporting and do not tolerate incivility by readers on our website. (Interview 12, 2018)

A journalist, RO14 who is the online news editor to one of the newspapers organisations, visited while conducting the semi-structured interview for the research also echoed the place of the profit motive and the need to increase website traffic but with a slight difference in explanation. The journalist responded:

We want to be sure that we are doing it right, and you know we also want to stand as an example for others, exemplary leadership. So, we do not allow the urge for money to override our sense of reasoning. I hope you get it. We do what is right, and in the course of doing what is right, we publish what we believe is true, which the public will also want to read. You know there are different levels of publication, we have the general news t and, we publish that. You have specialised news, and you post that. You must be factual and ensure that what you are pushing to the people is truthful. So, when you do all these things right, and you are known to do it right; obviously, people will follow you for that reason; you will have more traffic for that reason. So, for us, do it right first by following the ethic, and there will be an increase in traffic, advertisers' patronage that will push up the revenue. Because we have many people that are not doing it right these days. That is our joker of getting our traffic. (Interview 14, 2018).

The researcher in one of the follow-up questions asked non-journalists' that participated in the interview on how they viewed the way the online media platforms manage discursive activities on the online news websites. The participants produced some of the responses quoted below, and the researcher felt it is relevant to the issue of the influence of the political economy on the online space.

A participant, RO 8, explains that:

Most of the online news websites where we get our information from also have physical copies, and for most of them, there is little or no difference in what we see online and what we read in their physical copies. And you know very well that news publication is a business and media organisation must make a profit. So, they give to us in the form of news what will sell their papers by attracting advertisement and make their titles more popular. To me, what we see is what we react to in our debate online based on how the media portray the news. (Interview 8, 2018)

Another participant, RO5, supported the view of RO8 explaining that:

The need to be politically correct in content and attract patronage by government and advertisers is a problem facing the online newspaper and the space they provide for us to say our views. For instance, I am critical of some of the government policies, and most often, my comments do not get published. I challenged an editor of a popular newspaper with equally a popular online news website recently over my comments not getting published, and he said they do not want to incur

the wrath of the government and their shareholders who are pro-establishment, hence their refusal to allow on their comment section postings about the government that is critical. (Interview 5, 2018)

The researcher asked a follow-up question on the theme of the profit motive as necessitating for the moderation of online news websites commenting space. The responses from the participants revealed two opposing themes and explained two forms of moderation typical with the online news commenting section in Nigeria. The moderation systems are either human or machine/software moderation or both.

7.8.1.1 The need to protect the integrity and credibility of the online news websites

The first aspect of the participants' responses coded under this theme attest to the moderation of comments on the discursive space but explains that the reason for moderating the commenting section has no profit-making intention. Instead, according to some participants, the use of moderating mechanism helps to remove from the website, unwanted contents and preserve the integrity of the news media. Below are quotations from some of the interview responses that supported the position:

We do human moderation as we do not have software with keywords to sift out unwanted comments. If I have my way, I will cancel any form of moderation because it stifles some of the reasons for having a commenting space. Some of the reasons why we do moderation are to address unwanted adverts posted by commenters in the middle of comments. Also, some commenters are planted to do a hatchet job. This is so because our newspaper is believed to be owned by a politician, so we are often targeted by political opponents. Some people also find it as an excellent game to throw all the abuses they wanted, especially on Tinubu. For instance, if a commenter says Tinubu ole (thief), what has it got to do with the subject matter under discussion. People also use the platform to settle their quarrels even when it is not related to the subject matter. Ownership is exaggerated as people think because a politician owns a media house; he sits there and controls what goes on.

(Interview 15, 2018)

Another participant, RO9 explains:

Yes, we do both human and machine moderation. Let me tell you the ultimate reason is that, you know it is a mass medium or mass media, privilege has been given to certain people to put their content. But any content that will be detrimental to the ethics of the game, such must be removed. Let me put it well; some will put adult content, you know what I mean by adult content, some people want to advertise their businesses. They bypass or exploit your platform when you open your comment channel, and you will see people putting all sort of things there. People want to advertise their businesses, and they put adult content there, they do all variety of things. Some people even want to come in through that end as hackers to deceive others. So, for that reason, of course, you must protect your platform and followers. You know Tribune is a significant entity, if you have like a million followers on your platform, a user might not be able to command that, but once you have a huge following, we have to protect that platform and those following us. This also has to do with security, whether local or national security. If someone creates fake news on a platform that a million people can see at the same time, it could create a lot of damage, and you get it. Because they see it under a Tribune and it has not been removed, they may think probably it is true.

(Interview 9, 2018)

Participant RO 7 says:

Yes, because em, everybody, every professional news website should do that. Because it is a mass medium, so once someone posts information there, whether right or wrong, everyone sees it. So, the ones that are not meant to be there must be obvious, and we must sieve them out.

(Interview 7, 2018)

7.8.1.2 The need to ensure that comments are in line with the online news organisation corporate objectives and revenue strategy

The analysed interview data show that online news organisation does not only moderate comments section to maintain sanity and civility within the sphere. According to the analysis, the online media organisation also moderate comments to wield readers contributions that are incongruent with the overall corporate objectives of a news media organisation and capable of affecting their earnings. For instance, RO12 admits that:

Our news organisation is a big brand within the media landscape in Nigeria. We cannot afford to allow any form of comment that will tarnish our image and affect our acceptability and patronage. Yes, I will say we use both human and software moderation. Because of em... we have software that can also do some of these things for you that will naturally sieve sensitive content out of the platform. But you know that one is supportive. We have staff also that will read through, flip through, check and moderate. And that's what we do here because when you talk about moderation, it's like you are trying to safeguard your platform from being illegally used to disseminate information that should not be shared. So, we do both.

(Interview 12, 2018).

One of the journalists interviewed emphasised the importance of profit motive in the selection of news to be posted and the regulation of the comment section explains that:

Honestly, the commenting section of an online newspaper is supposed to allow the readers to express their views on issues. However, as part of our human moderation, we ensure that comments are not against what we stand for as a media organisation and the drive to protect our integrity as an organisation.

(Interview 14, 2018)

7.8.2 Ideological viewpoints

Ideological and socio-cultural underpinnings is another thematic pattern revealed through the analysis of the interview data to understand how Nigeria's political economy imperatives influence the Nigerian online news commenting space. One of the questions in the interview guide asked participants whether they can identify or explain fundamental factors in Nigeria that informed the participant about taking a particular position during a debate or posting of the comment. The analysis of the responses revealed that online news media have an impact on how readers post comments and participate in a discussion. This impact reflects in the way news organisation disseminates news

contents on their websites for readers to read and react to and, these news items are not free from editorial policy and other ideological standpoints of an online media organisation.

Sometimes, the ideological viewpoints reflect through religious and ethnic dichotomy, the house policy and the ideology of the media owners. For instance, the dichotomous maxim of labelling the press clusters in Nigeria such as the 'Lagos/Ibadan axis' and the 'Northern press' play an influential role in the tone of news reportage and since the news platforms examined in this study are the online versions of the mainstream media. The interview participants also read news and comment on the websites of these news organisations, and they are affected by the highlighted media idiosyncrasies. Therefore, the online news platforms determine what commenters debate on and by extension preconditioned the scope of participation. One of the interview participants, RO 13, states that:

I do not see any difference in the headlines and news of all these online news platforms and what we see in the physical copies of the mainstream media. Is it not the information they supplied us with that we deliberate on? Most of these news items have already been influenced in their production by the ideology and the need to make a profit by the news organisation. Tell me, is the news we frequently read not about the elites or those in government? The more we read about them, the more the news websites increase its traffic and popularity, thereby making more money. (Interview 13, 2018).

Like the participant, RO13 response, another participant responded that:

I believe that most of the issues we discuss in the commenting section and how we go about the discussion are influenced by the way the news media organisation set the agenda. Remember, the news usually revolves around the elite, and they control the media. So, we comment or argue with each other, and we often do it unconsciously from an exploited position using an economic imbalance of one geopolitical zone of the country against another or our religion and ethnic identities to insult one another. We do this while the elites are busy enriching their pockets. The funny thing is that most of the online media are culprits since their owners are part of the elites. (Interview 5, 2018)

Quoting from another participant, RO1 explained that:

It is a pity that our leaders have blindfolded our eyes with religious and ethnic issues to keep us busy while they siphon our resources. They use these issues to justify their political decisions and allocation of resources to ensure equity and guide against marginalisation in their words while they are busy looting. Hmm, I hope Nigerians wake up to reality one day that the elites are using us against each other. (Interview 1, 2018)

Also, RO2, another interviewee in the semi-structured interview, echoed the same opinion with RO1 and said:

I would say okay, religion, ethnicity, and what have you, they have a significant influence on the comment. Okay, fine, for instance, I am a Muslim now, if particular news is brought to my doorstep, there is a particular bomb blast bla bla bla, Muslims were involved. Ordinarily, I will be interested in joining the conversation on the matter. (Interview 2, 2018)

Another interviewee, RO 7, explains that the discursive platforms are filled with people who reason, talk and responded based on their religion, ethnic and other personal nuances.

That is very, very insane. I believe that they do not even know what religion is saying, that is why they are... Then in the same vein, let us say a particular tribe committed an erroneous crime, let us say for example the Igbo's now, okay, fine, people might say okay, I do not like Igbo, I do not like Hausa, because of that, they might react negatively. So, ethnicity, religion and the likes, they go a long way in affecting people's comments most of the time online.
(Interview 7,2018)

7.10 Conclusion

This section of the thesis presents the conclusion drawn from the analysis and results of the semi-structured interview data. The application of the method in the study provided the data and subsequently, the results to help provide answers to research questions two and three. The analysis of the data set collected for the method produced nine thematic patterns which formed the body of findings for this section of the data analysis and presentation. The key results from the section stated below are:

- Participation in online news commenting is part of social engagement.
- Online news commenting space enables citizens to serve as a watchdog on the media and highlight their inaccuracy.
- Through the intensity and virality of discourse on a public issue, online commenters influence the mainstream media to dig deeper and provide any fresh angle or twist to a topic.
- Citizens are motivated to participate in an online discussion by the need to express positions on public matters and also offer expert's opinion.
- Citizens are also motivated to join online news discussion due to the saliency and impact of a news story.
- The trust a citizen has in an online media platform motivates participation in online news commenting.
- The Nigerian political economy nuances influence online news commenting environment in Nigeria both in the platform regulation and the way commenters post comments.

7.11 Presentation of Survey Data and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of quantitative data collected for the research using survey monkey- an online survey collection website. Since the study adopted the mixed method of research, the survey data analysed in this section represents one of the research methods combined others being a semi-structured interview and content analysis. The aim of collecting survey data in this research is to provide a descriptive analysis and results of the study. Furthermore, the use of a survey complements data collected from other methods used in the study to have a good insight into achieving the objectives of the research and providing answers to the research questions.

A total of 228 respondents completed and returned the questionnaire, and the completion rate for the survey is 100% while the typical time spent on filling the survey was 7min:36 seconds. Also, the quantitative data collected used descriptive statistics in the analysis. Descriptive statistics analysis of data reveals the pattern and characteristics of data in a way that makes it meaningful to readers or users of research work. It is also a means of analysing extensive data to make it comprehensible (Vinet & Zhedanov, 2011). Descriptive statistics have four significant ways of analysing data: measures of frequency, measures of central tendency, measures of dispersion and measures of position. The researcher applied measures of frequency as the statistical tool for the analysis of quantitative data collected for this study. The Measures of frequency suffice where a researcher is interested in knowing how often respondents respond to items in the questionnaire. The data collected from the survey provide descriptive findings to some of the research questions raised for the study. The researcher presents the data below using the table and bar chart.

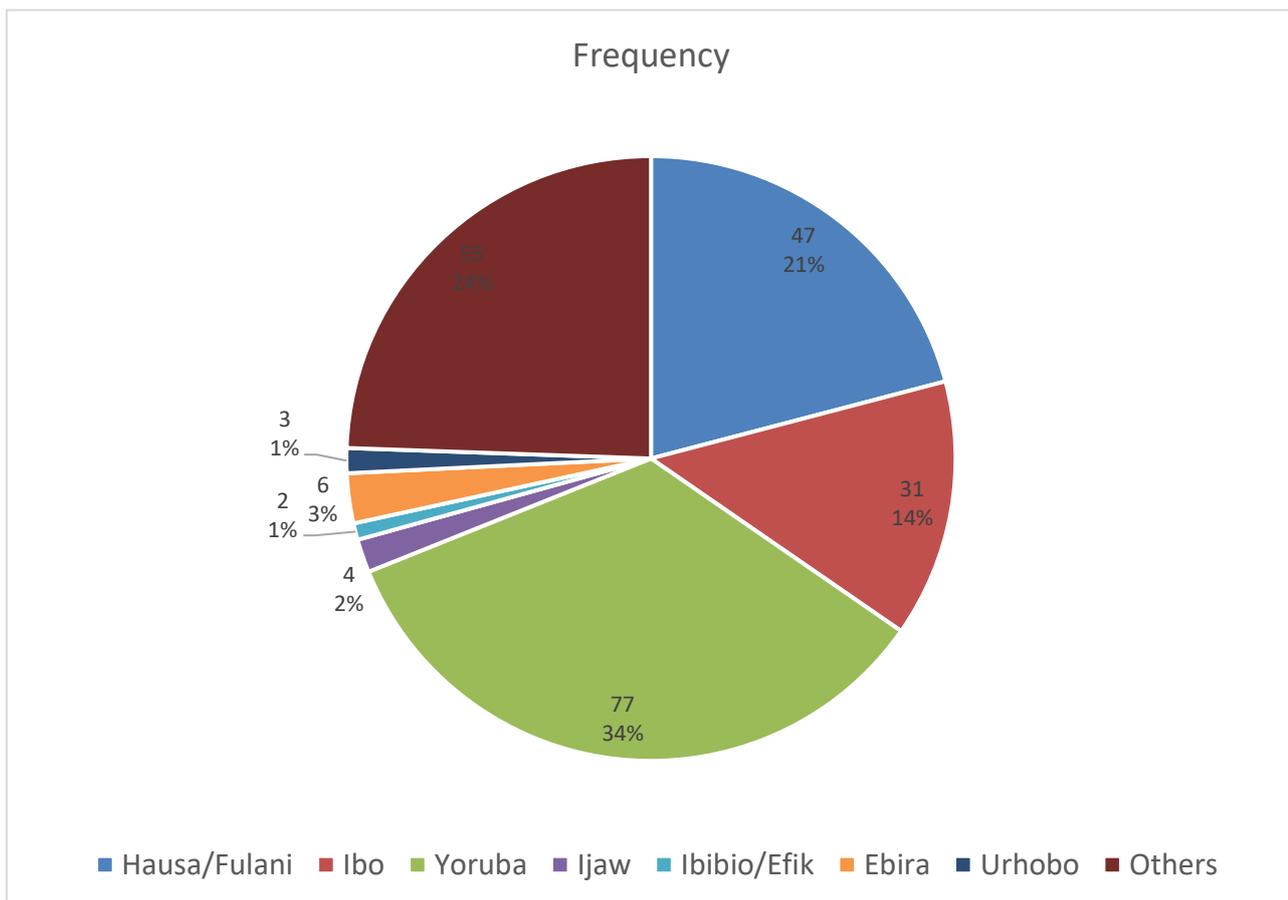
7.11.1 Structure of the Research Questionnaire

The questionnaire contains 22 items of both open and closed questions and is related to the themes unearthed up to the point of conducting the survey. Question 1-6 asked about ethnicity, religion, gender, age, occupation and education level of respondents. These questions provide a demographic description of the sampled population for the study. Question seven and eight asks whether respondents access news on the internet and the type of device they use for accessing information. The two questions are related, and both complement the theme of inclusion as part of the criteria for a public sphere as analysed in the content analysis data. The complementarity of the two questions enables the researcher to understand ease of access based on the device used and the way it impacts on participation. Kies (2010a) argues that measuring ‘inclusion’ as part of the public sphere criteria should include asking the citizens whether they access the internet. The data collected and analysed

from the two questions provided a descriptive analysis of access to the internet and therefore, the level of inclusion within the online space. Question 13 asks respondents whether they go through an identification or registration process online. Question 14 asked about how commenters identify themselves online. Question 16 asked if they know if the commenting space they contribute is being moderated or not. Question 17 asked respondents their preference between moderated and non-moderated online commenting platforms. These questions are equally related to the theme of inclusion and, through the analysis of data collected, provide an understanding of how moderation, non-moderation and the identification system on the commenting section affect access and participation in the discursive sphere.

7.12 Analysis

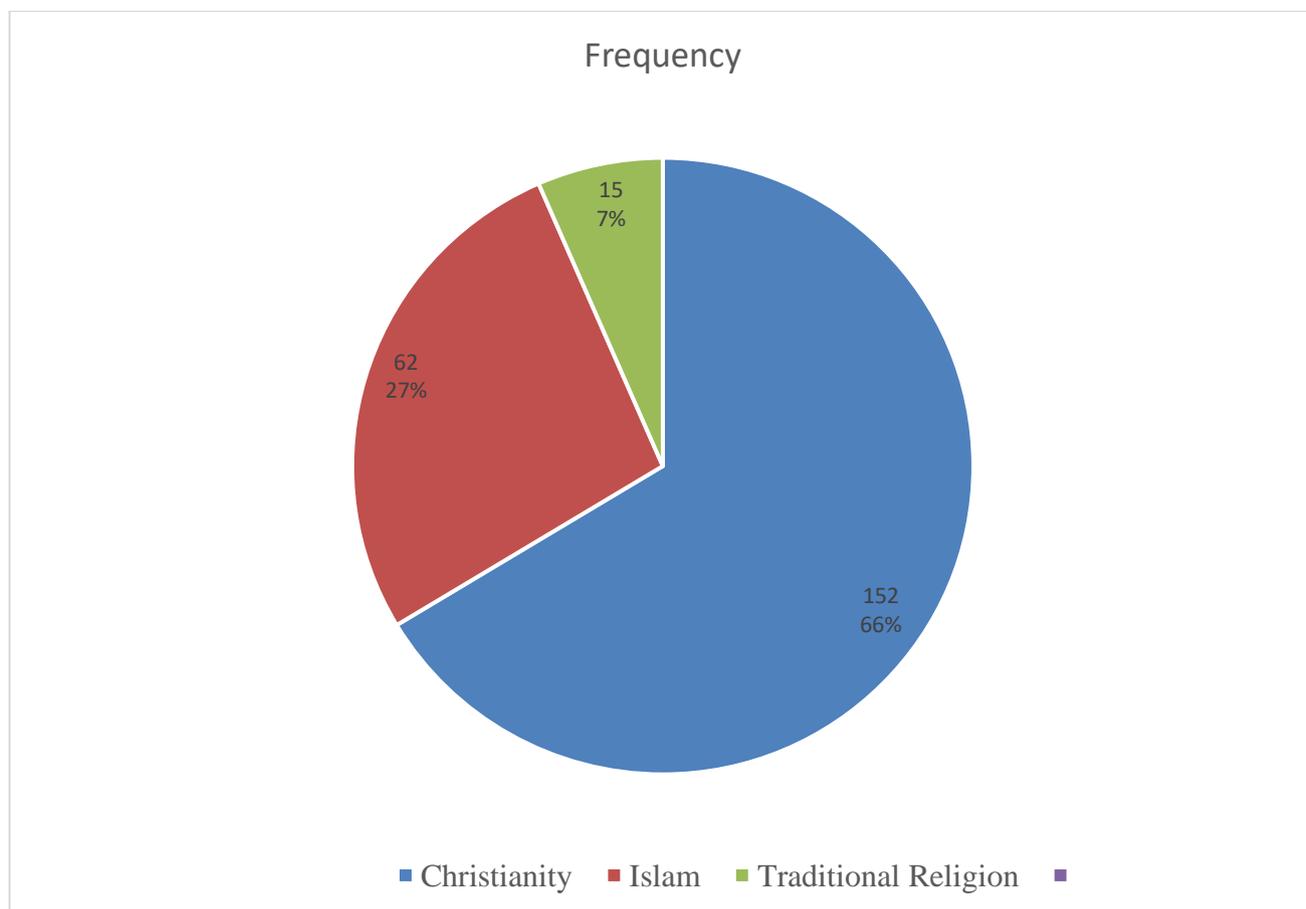
Figure 7.1 Ethnic distribution of the sample population



The pie chart represents the ethnic distribution of the sample population used for the study. The ethnic composition of the country is heterogeneous, and according to the United States Embassy in Nigeria (2012), the country has over 250 languages. From the analysis, as represented by the pie chart; therefore, the sampled population reflects 59 different ethnic groups and spread across the six

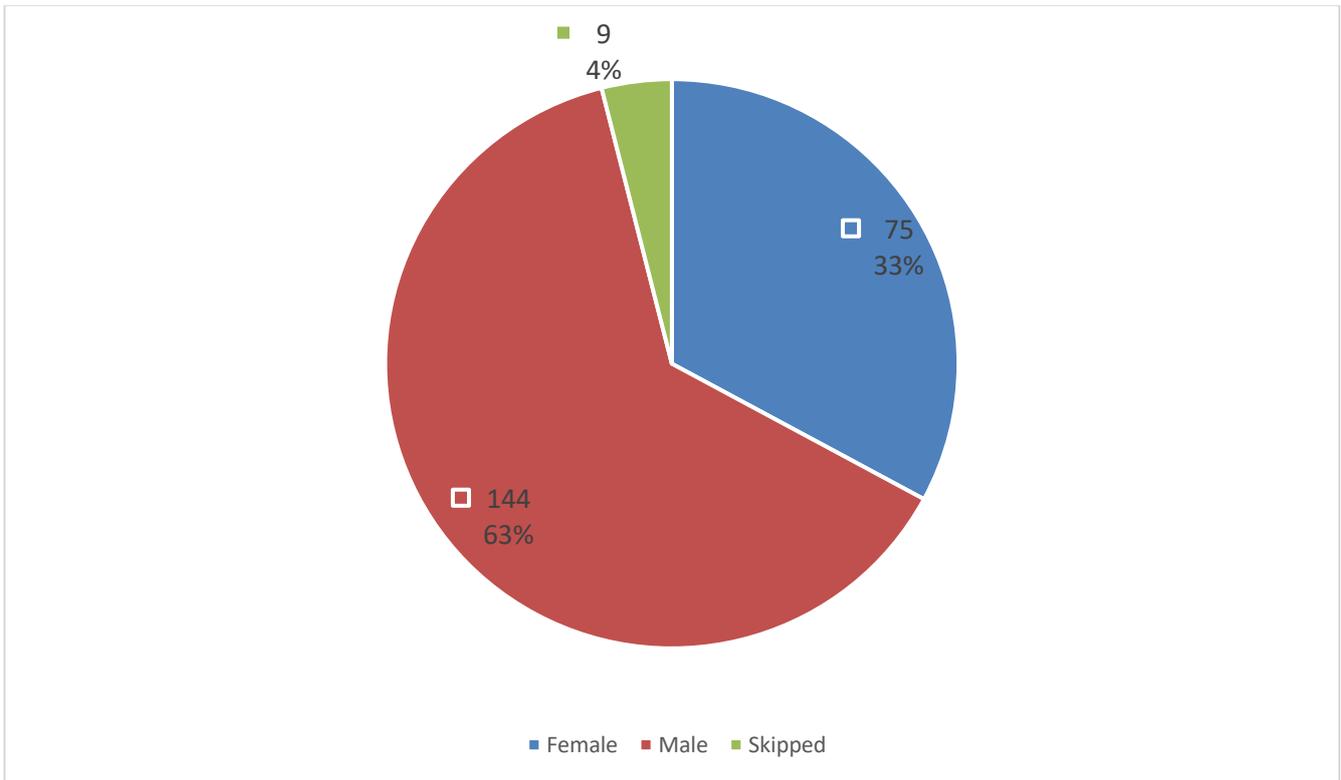
geopolitical zones in the country. The import of this analysis is relevant to the study because diversity in ethnic representation is crucial to any democratic deliberative platform in Nigeria as ethnicity is one of the critical factors that drive civil discourse in Nigeria.

Figure 7.2 Religion distribution of sampled population



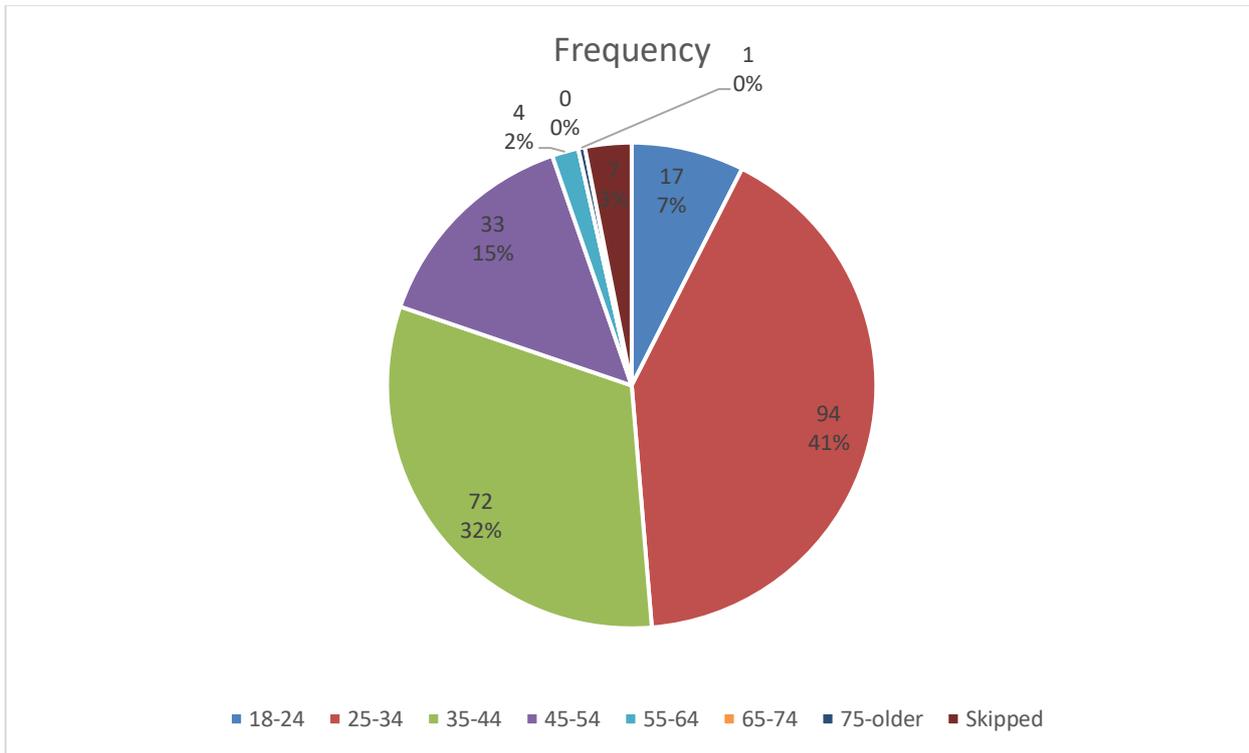
The frequency distribution, as shown from the chart indicates that the sampled population distribution for religion reflects the two major beliefs in the country and the traditional religion worshippers. Religion is one of the main issues that influence and conditioned human experience in Nigeria when it comes to public deliberation. The implication of this to the study is that in any online discussion, commenters often refer to their religion positions while asserting their opinions.

Figure 7. 3 Sex distribution of respondents



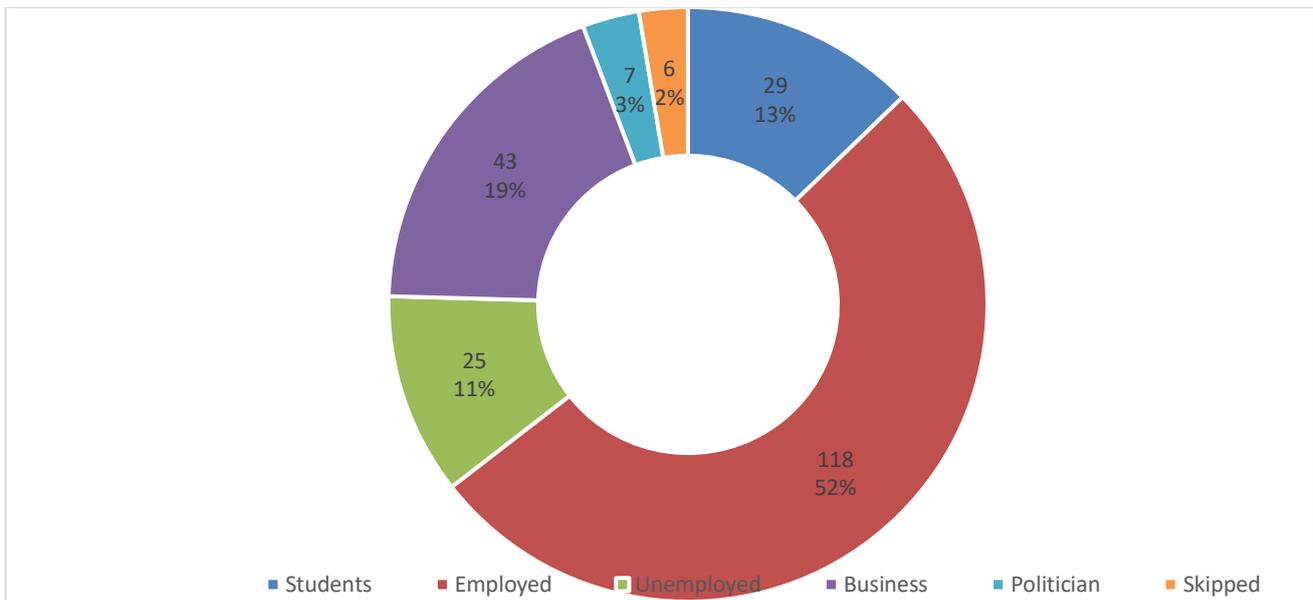
This pie chart represents the sex distribution of the respondents in this study. Nine respondents skipped this question item. The figure shows that the percentage of male respondents is 30% above that of the female respondents. A part of the interpretations of this result is that the male dominates the deliberative sphere in Nigeria. The pattern of the analysed data for the question item is also indicative of the literacy level between male and female in Nigeria and which also translates to internet usage. In Nigeria, the literacy level for male stands at 60% while female stands at 50% (Hootsuite, 2018). The low participation of females in online civil discourse is reflective of the stereotypical portrayal of women and socio-cultural factors in Nigeria regarding politics and public discourse. From a socio-cultural perspective, women in Nigeria identify with certain specific roles which are traditionally not related to politics and most time secondary to the roles played by men in the society. These roles traditionally associated with women, in the long run, affect the level of their participation in politics and civil discourse. As such, the scenario explained in this section inadvertently contributed to the difference in the sex distribution of respondents.

Figure 7.4 Age distribution of respondents



The pie-chart indicates the age distribution of the participants in the survey. The chart shows six age groups, and the age group gaps of between 25- 34 and 35- 44 constitute over half of the population (63%) that participated in the survey. What this implies is that the active users of the internet in Nigeria falls around these age brackets. These are age brackets in Nigeria where the majority who fall within are out of school, working, full of idea and actively engaged with discourse relating to the country. Also, the reason for the low participation of the older groups connects to the group low-level internet literacy. Therefore, the deliberative practice among the older groups is mostly offline as most people around this age group see the internet and activities around it as belonging to the younger generation.

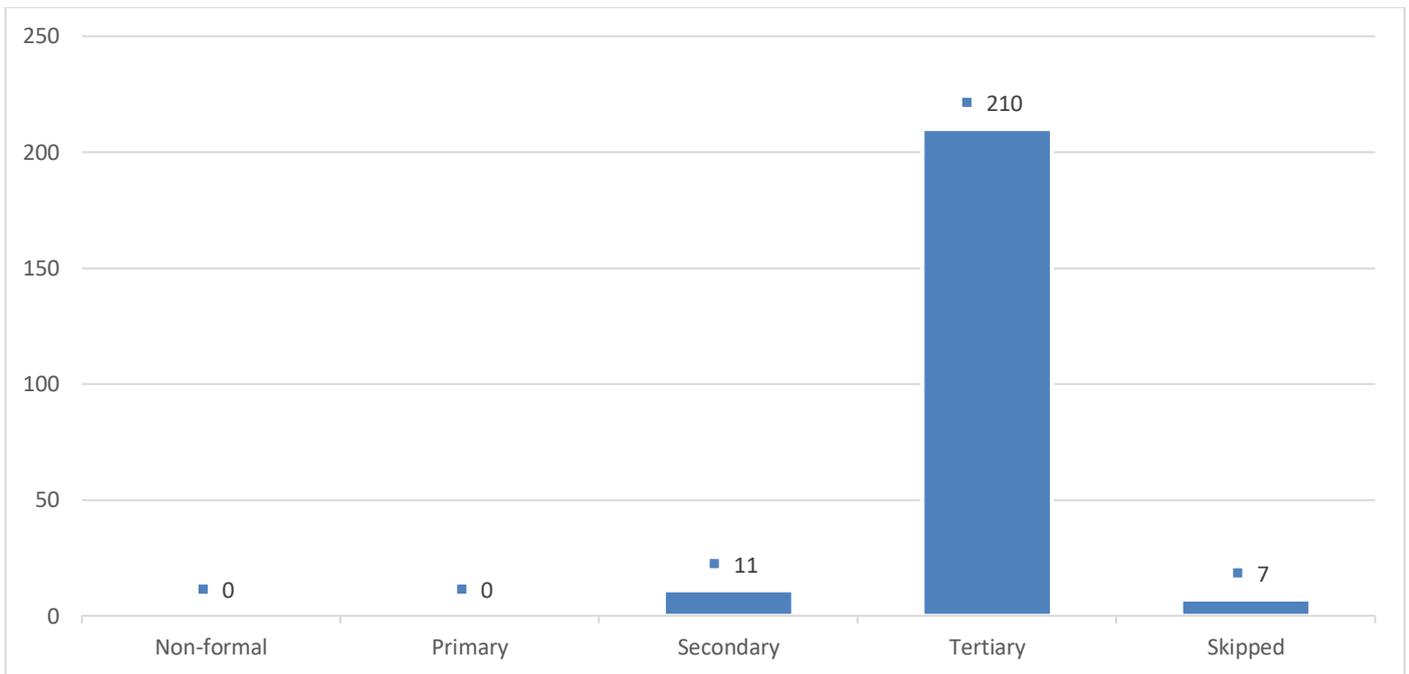
Figure 7.5 Occupational Status of Respondents



The pie chart indicates the occupational distribution of the sampled population. The data suggest that slightly above half of the people that participated in the survey are employed. When combined with both politician and business categories, it shows that 78% of the respondents are gainfully engaged in activities that sustain them financially. The implication from the data shows that most of the participants who comments within the online news commenting sites in Nigeria are those who are engaged in one activity or the other that sustains them financially.

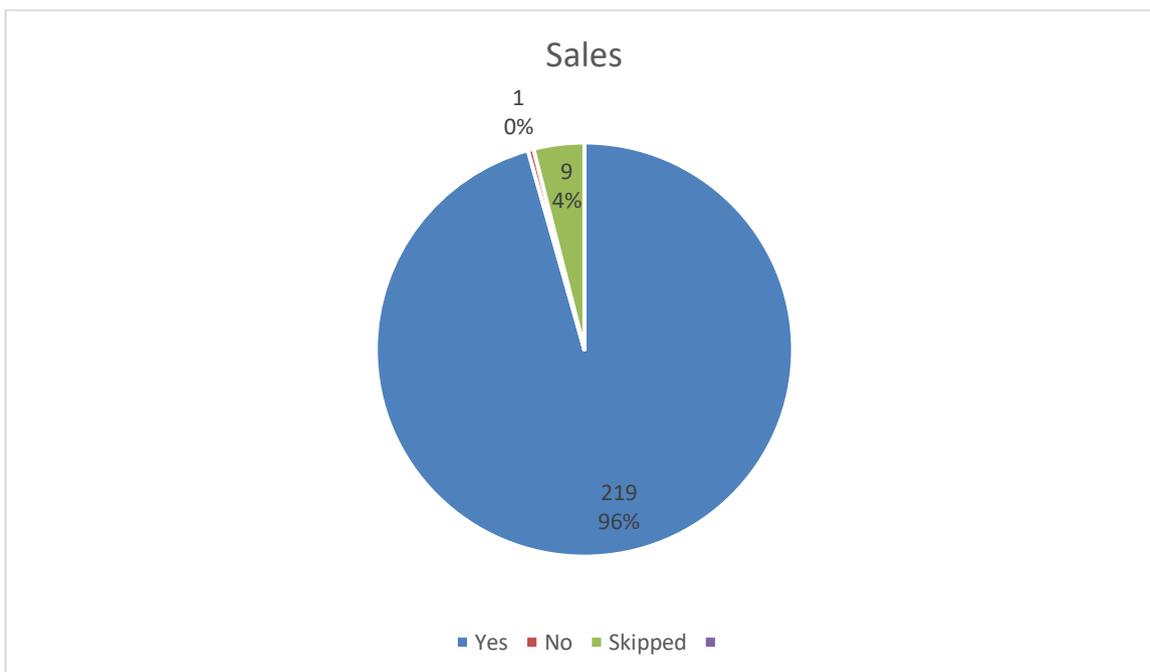
Therefore, this analysis is not far from an argument already put forward in the previous study which highlights economy as one of the factors responsible for citizens participation in politics and political discourse in Nigeria (Falade, 2014). More so, the constitutional provision for the entrance age into politics until recently in Nigeria was 35 years, and by so doing, most of the youths within the age bracket less than 35 years rarely participate in any public discourse relating to the Nigerian state and instead prefer issues on entertainment.

Figure 7.6 Level of Education



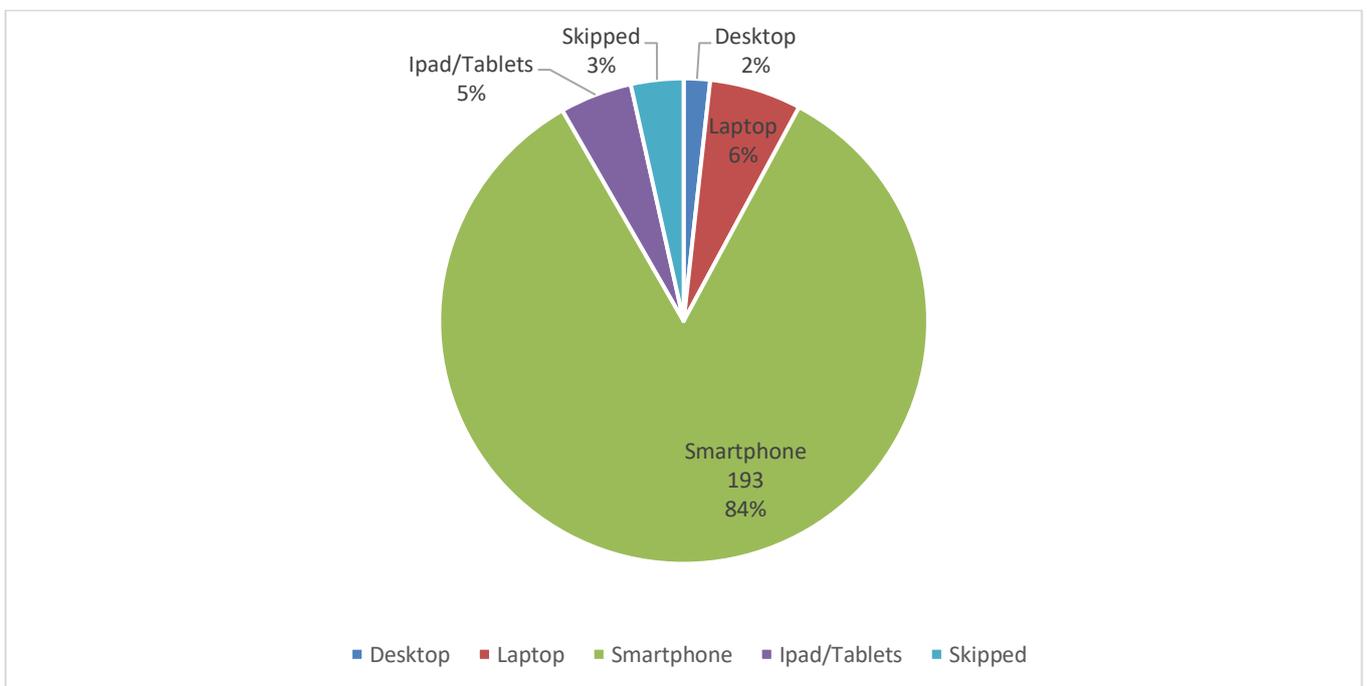
The data from the chart shows that a large percentage of the respondents have a tertiary education. The level of education in Nigeria often reflects in the pattern of technological adaptation and use and as a result, accessing the information on the online news platform. Subsequently, participation in online deliberation is done by the literate class in Nigeria.

Figure 7.7 Access to the news on the Internet



This question and the data collected complement the content analysis data analysed on the criteria of inclusion. The chart indicates that 96% of the respondents access their news on the internet. The question aimed to describe the level of inclusion in the discursive space. The results show a high percentage of internet access among the sample respondents. These statistics indicate that the level of inclusion within the deliberative sphere is high. Equally, access to smartphones and the ease at which to connect to the news websites anywhere equally contribute to the high number of people who access news on the internet. Also, readers' ability to express their opinion on any matter freely without being subjected to the gatekeeping style of processing information by the legacy media is one of the reasons for the growth in the number of people turning to the internet for information.

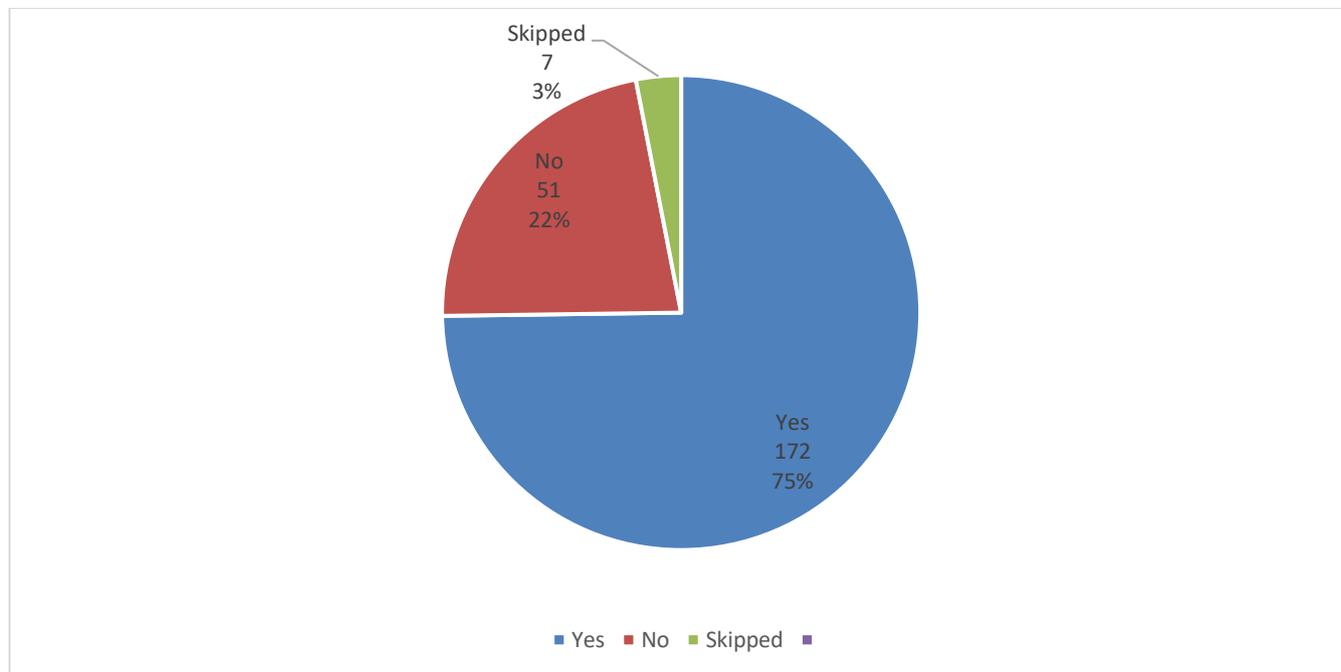
Figure 7.8 Type of device used for accessing news on the internet



The data in this chart shows the distribution of the various electronic devices used by people to obtain information on the internet. The chart showed that the percentage of people that use a smartphone to access news and information on the internet far outnumbers the total number of people using other devices: desktop computers, laptop computers and iPad/tablets put together. Also, this result corroborated a study on digital technology use in the Nigeria which in the analysis of the share of web traffic by devices puts smartphone use at 81% against desktop/laptops 16%, tablets 3% and other devices 0.01%, (Hootsuite, 2018). One of the explanations for the preference of smartphones by readers over other devices is its cheapness when compared to other devices. Another reason is its portability in the sense that unlike other gadgets like television, radio and laptops that are not easy to

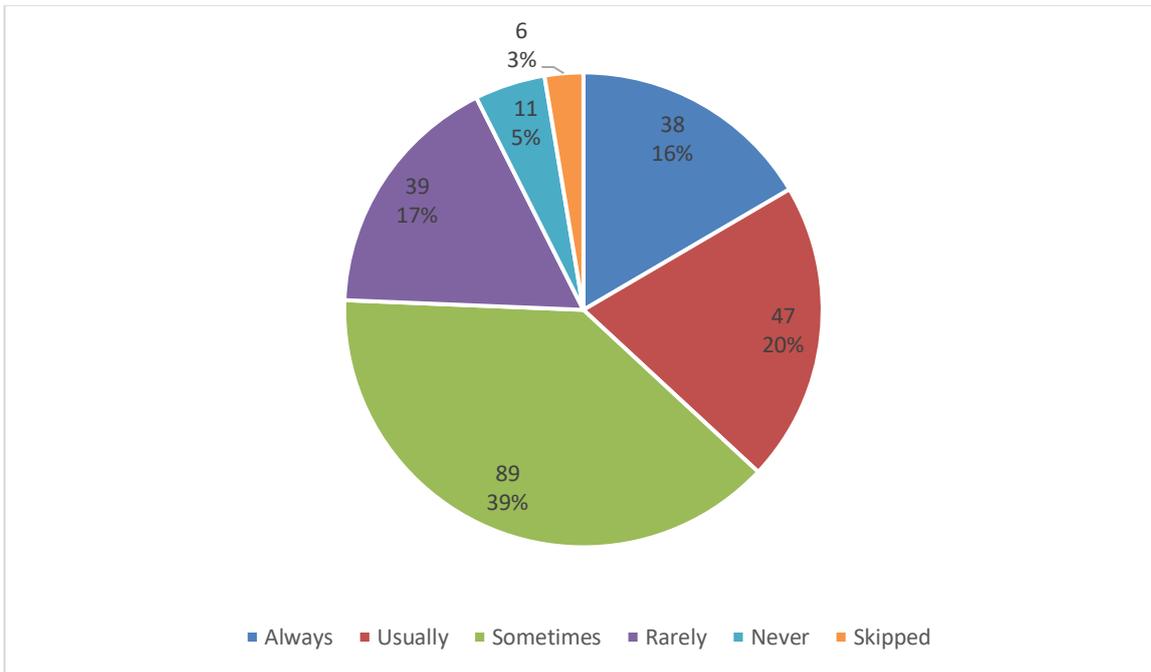
carry about, the smartphone is light, portable and provides information like the previously mentioned gadgets.

Figure 7.9 Readers reaction to and comment on the headlines/news on the online news websites



It is apparent from this chart that the majority (75%) of the respondents affirm that they react to and participate in the discussion about the news and information they have access to on the news platforms. Therefore, the online news environment has expanded the capacity of the people to not only read the news but react to the information by participating with others to deliberate on different issues. The data reveals that the population is increasingly becoming engaged with news and information, including civil discussion on the internet.

Figure 7.10 Frequency at which readers post comments and participate in online deliberation

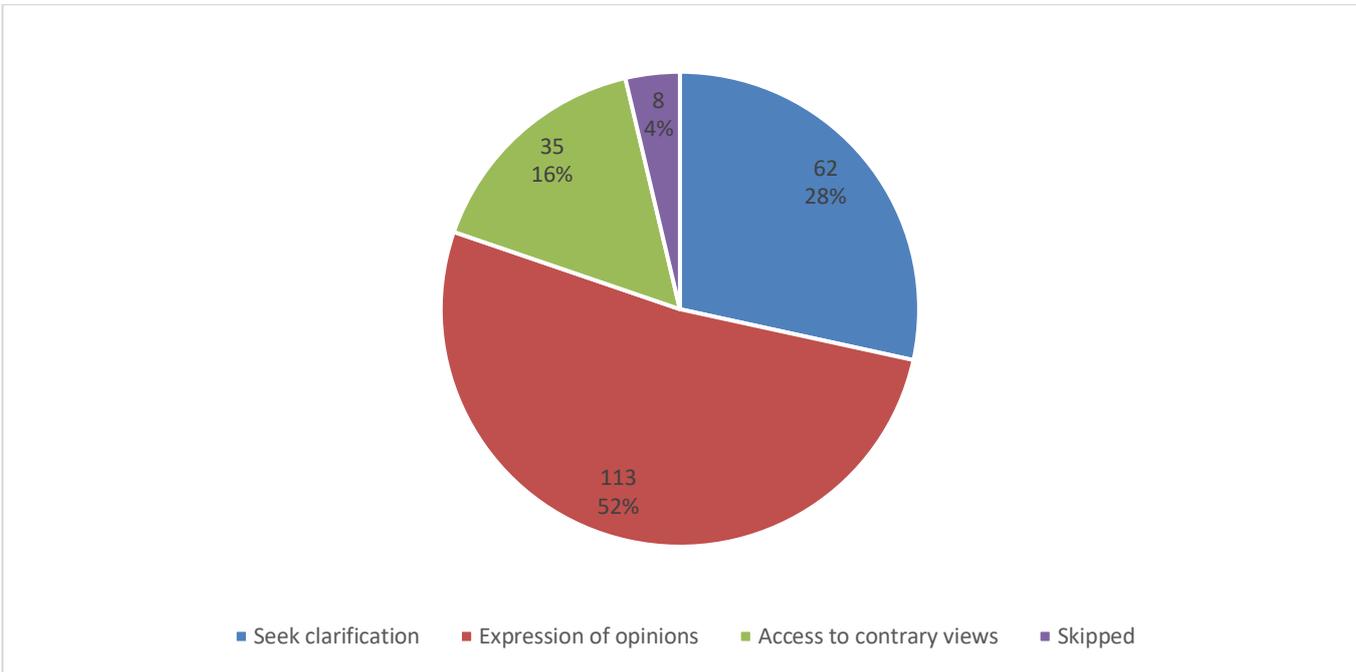
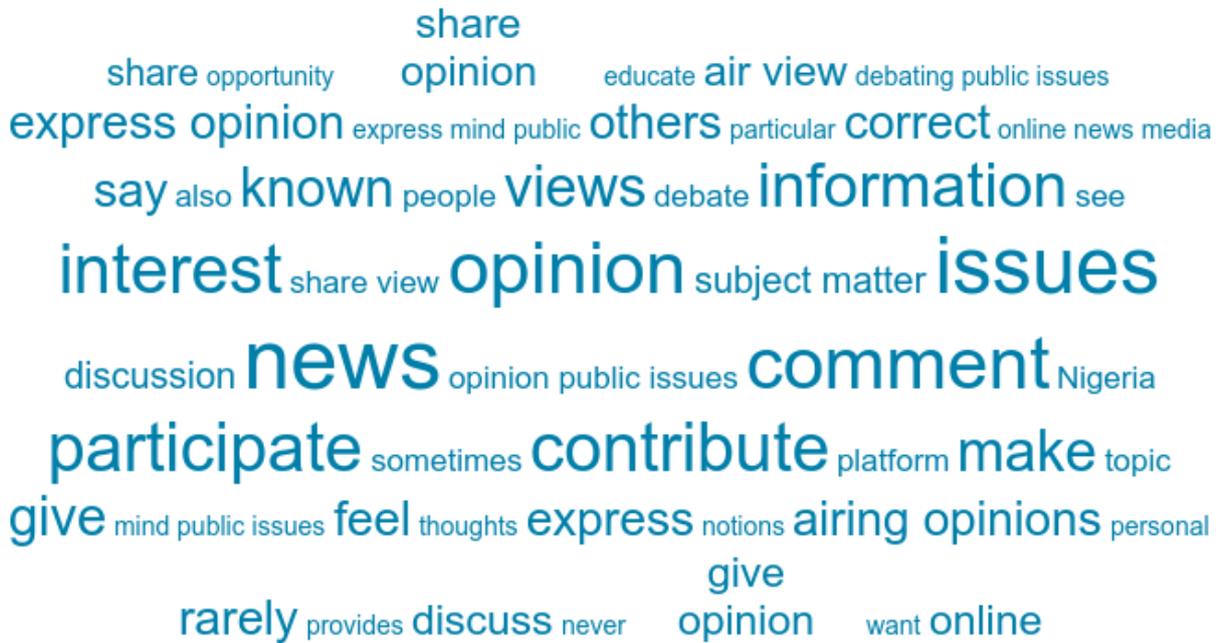


This chart is related to the analysed data in figure 9, and it seeks to establish the frequency and pattern of participation in the online news media deliberative space. Subsequently, the chart reveals the pattern and rate at which readers of news and information on the online news platforms post comments in reaction to a news report and engage others in a debate in the commenting space. What is interesting about the analysed data in this chart is that about 82% of the sampled population do post comments and participate in the civil debate online. However, the frequency of their participation is not the same. The chart, therefore, indicates that the online news platform commenting space in Nigeria is an active one with different patterns and level of participation by commenters.

Figure 7.11 Reason(s) for participation in the online commenting space and deliberation

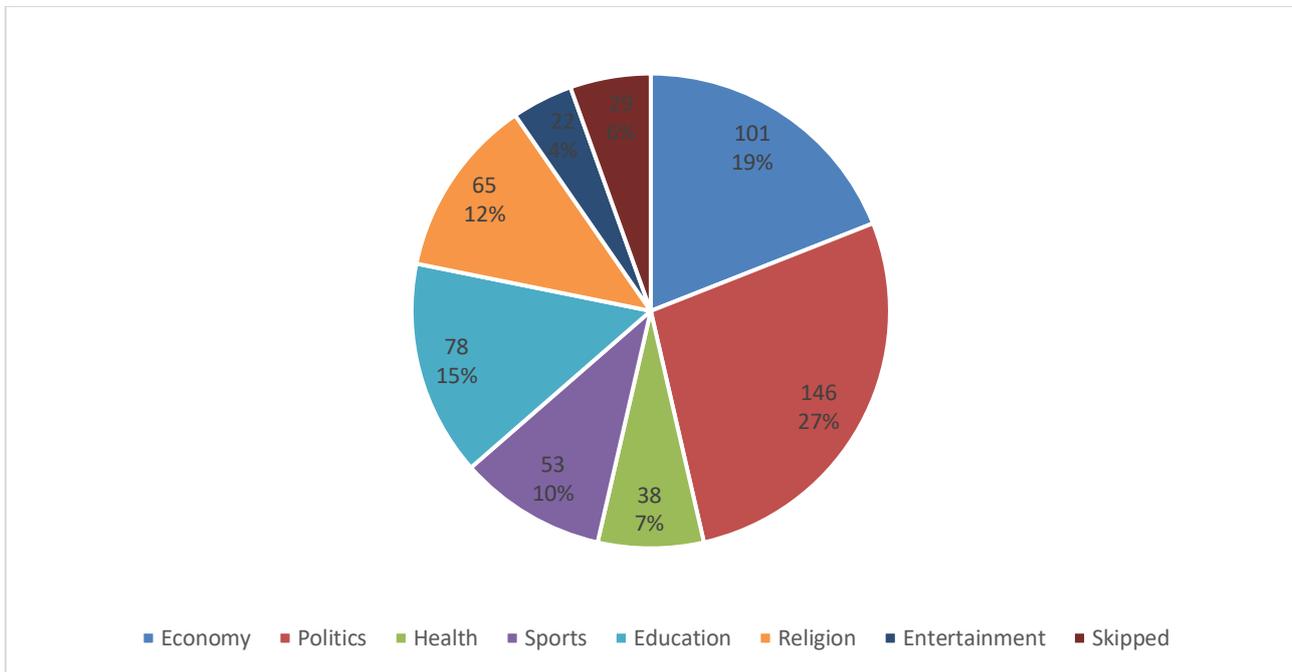
This question, together with the data collected from questions one, two and three, asked in the interview guide provided in complementary fashion answers to research question two. The researcher collected the data analysed in this chart were through the open-ended question. Also, the analysis of the data passed through two processes. First, the word cloud for the responses was generated and studied carefully in other to classify the pattern of responses. After the classification into categories, frequency analysis was applied for each of the groups. Below is the word cloud of the answers for the question.

Word Cloud for responses to question 11



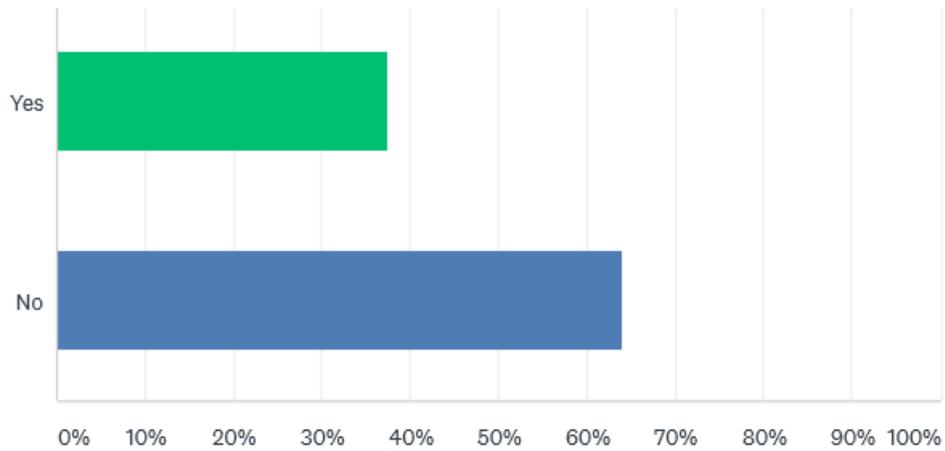
It is evident based on this chart that the key factors that influence an individual to post a comment and participate in discussion within the online news media deliberative space are the desire for the expression of positions on public issues.

Figure 7.12 Type of news, readers comment and deliberate on in the comment section of the online news website



The data in this chart reveals that the commenting space of the various online news platforms in Nigeria is dynamic and not restricted to a pattern. From the data, commenters' postings and deliberation on the different online news sites reflect multiple topics such as politics, religion, economy, health, education, sports and entertainment. As such, evidence from the survey indicates that the online news platform is unrestrictive in the type of discourse allowed but made it open in line with the available news content on the news website. Equally, it is apparent from the chart that news around politics attracts more discussion within the online deliberative sphere more than any other categories of news. Therefore, this is consistent with previous studies on the type of headline/news that attract comments the most on the online website and in which findings revealed that news around politics attracts more comments from readers especially during the electioneering period (Weber, 2014).

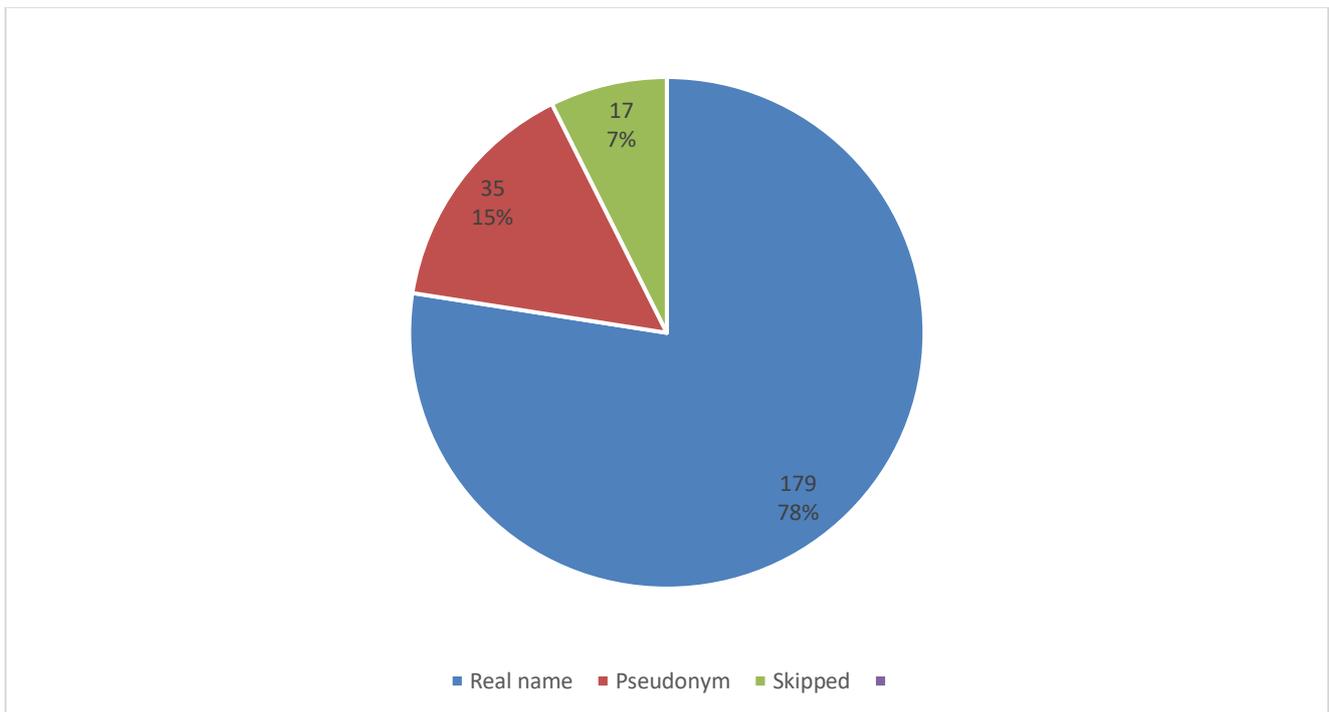
Figure 7.13: Whether there is no identification or registration process before posting comments or participating in deliberation.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	37.38% 80
No	64.02% 137
Total Respondents: 214	

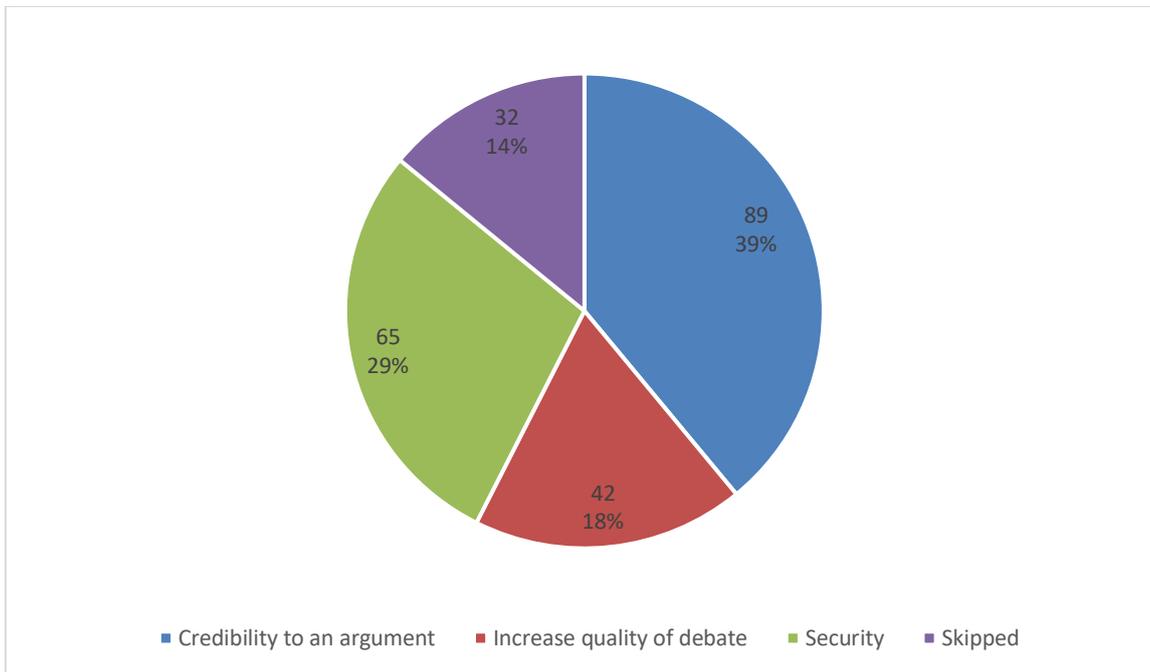
Commenters in the online news commenting section (64.02%) answered that the commenting section of the online news sites they participate in have features in place for commenters to identify themselves before participating in the online discourse. The remaining 37.8% explained that the discursive sphere they post comments to do not have any form of identification. This result implies that most of the discursive space are interested in the quality of the contents posted on their websites and want accountability and attribution to claims made on the deliberative sphere.

Figure 7.14: System of identification by commenters in the online news comment section



This chart is related to the analysed data in figure 13. It seeks to establish how commenters within the deliberative area of the online news media identify themselves before posting comments and participating in the civil discourse. The analysis of data in this chart shows that the most significant number of responses agreed they use their real name within the online sphere. At the same time, 35% of the sampled population preferred to use a pseudonym. The import of this data to the commenting space is that identification of commenters by their real names within the discourse space helps to promote civility within the online sphere. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that commenters who use their real name in the discursive space do not want anything to affect their personality negatively and want to be responsible people who conduct their activities online with all sense of civility. Also, most of the respondents believe that their actions online may affect their offline image since they use their real identity hence the need to be civil.

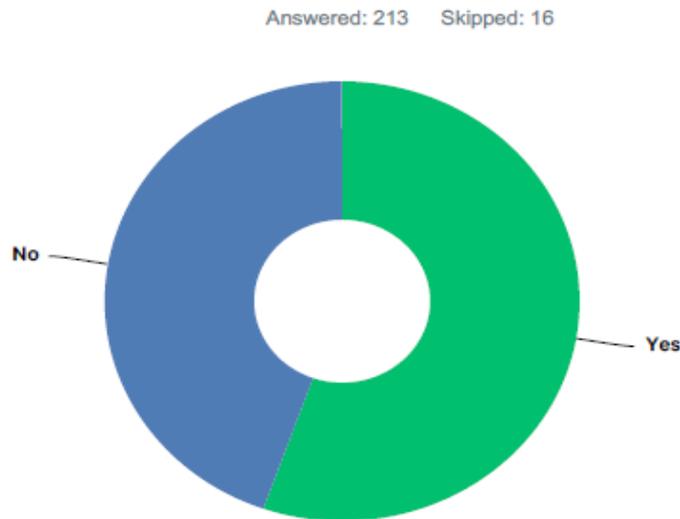
Figure 7.15 Reasons for the way commenters identify themselves in an online commenting platform



The researcher used the open-ended question format for the collection of responses. Subsequently, the researcher generated a word cloud for the data and coded the responses into categories. There is a connection between the analysed data in chart number 14 and the data analysed in this chart. As a result, this chart established the reason for the choice made by online news commenters in connection to how they identify themselves while participating in online deliberation or posting comments either through false name or real name. The analysis revealed that 39% of the sampled population affirmed that the use of a real name in an online commenting platform helps to confer credibility to an argument as the source of such claim is known and can be verified.

Also, the analysed data showed that 18% believed that using a real name in the online discourse platform increases the quality of debate. Adding this figure to the number of those who say that the use of real-name confers credibility on an argument, it shows that slightly over half of the sample believe the use of a real name in an online environment increase quality and reliability of a deliberation. However, 29% of the sampled population prefer the use of a false name because the usage of real name within the online forum has security implication on an individual commenter, which may affect the type of information he/she is willing to divulge within the commenting space.

Figure 7.16 Frequency of readers' participation in discussion between the moderated commenting platform and unmoderated commenting news sections of online news websites.

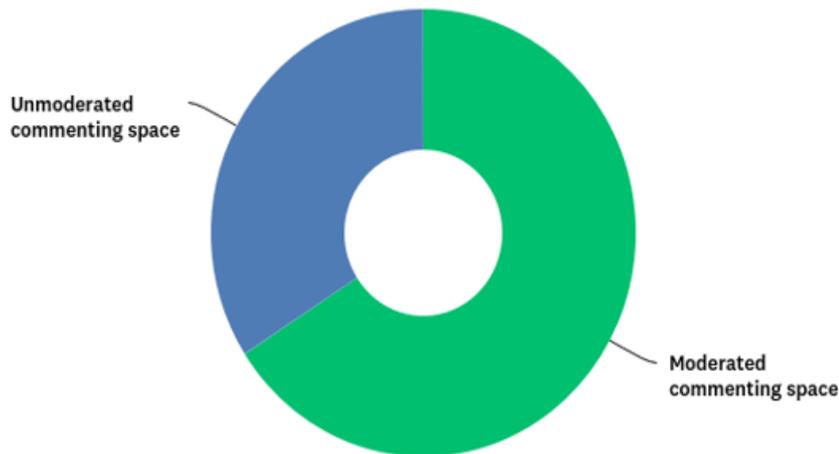


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	55.40%	118
No	44.60%	95
TOTAL		213

This chart shows that a moderated discursive space has more participants than unmoderated space. However, the difference in the rate of participation between the moderated and unmoderated websites is not very wide which shows that the two online sites do attract good numbers of participants in deliberation irrespective of the commenting platform regulation.

Figure 7.17 Readers’ preference between moderated and unmoderated online news comment section

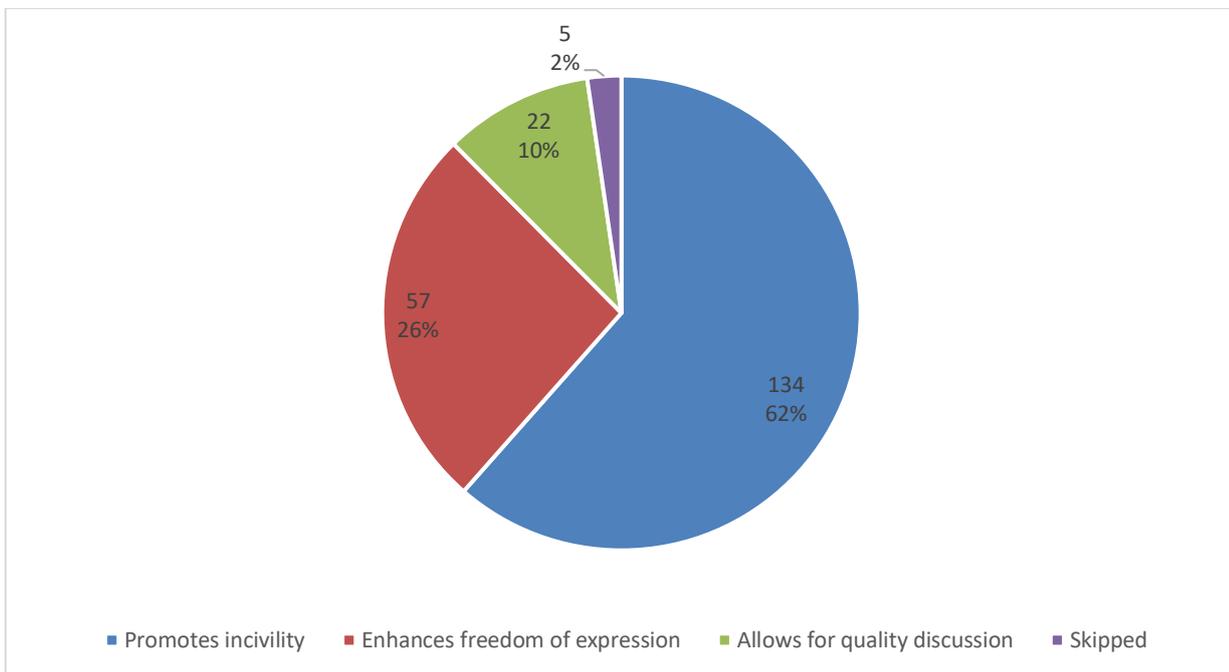
Answered: 217 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Moderated commenting space	65.90%	143
Unmoderated commenting space	34.10%	74
TOTAL		217

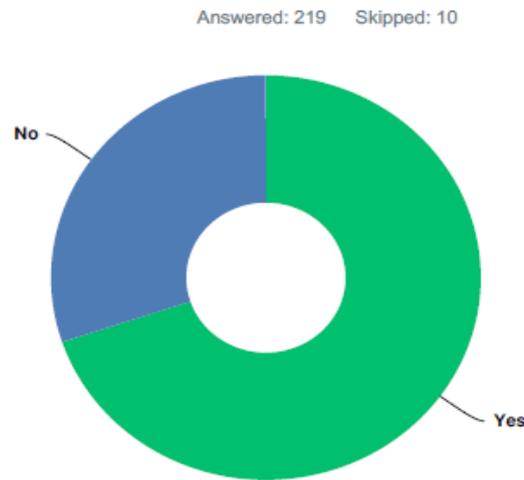
The chart revealed the online news readers and commenters preference between moderated and unmoderated discursive forum. Interestingly, the data shows that most of the respondents (65.90%) preferred the news websites that moderate comments posted in its discursive space to the news sites (34.10%) where deliberative space do not have any measure of moderation in place. Therefore, the analysis indicates that the preference for a moderated commenting space by commenters is because it helps to ensure civility and ensure that discussion stays about discourse.

Figure 7.18 Reasons for readers' preference between moderated and non-moderated online news comment section



The researcher collected the data analysed in the chart through open-ended question format. As usual, with an open-ended question format, word cloud for the responses was generated after which categorisation of the patterns that run through the respondents' reactions was codified and analysed. From the chart, therefore, 62% of the sampled population agreed that non-moderated commenting space of online news websites promotes incivility. 26% are, however of the opinion that their preference for non-moderated commenting space is because it enhances the freedom of expression. Another part of the data is the responses from 10% of the sampled population who agreed that moderated commenting sites promotes quality discussion.

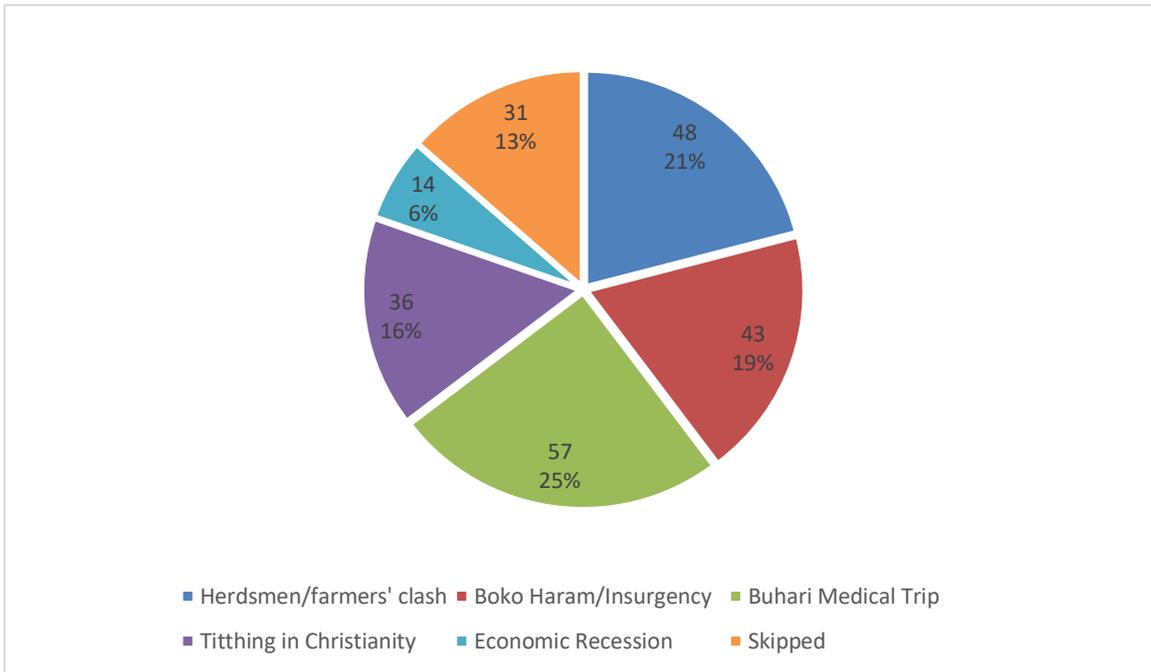
Figure 7.19 Whether commenters have participated in any discourse on issues relating to the government of Nigeria and its policies



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	69.86%	153
No	30.14%	66
TOTAL		219

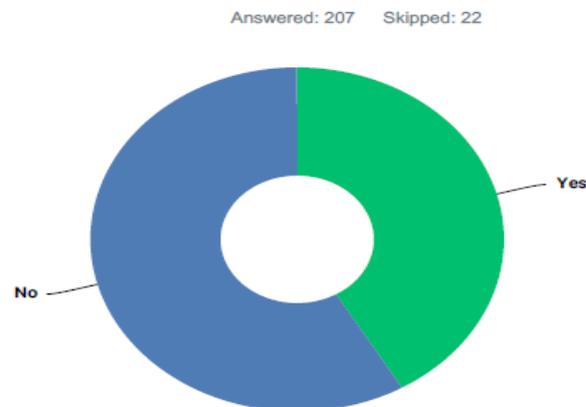
It is apparent from the data that over half of the sample population (69.86%) post comment or participate in discourse within the online news commenting platform. 30.14% agreed not to have posted a comment or participate in any online discussion. Therefore, and from the pattern of the analysed data, commenting platform of the online news media is gradually becoming a deliberative space for debating public issues among the Nigerian citizens.

Figure 7.20 Issues readers have commented on the most in the online news deliberation



As can be seen from the data above, readers comment and debate on a different range of issues within the online commenting space. Topics around the government, its policies and personality in government appear to be matters mostly discussed in the commenting sites based on the responses from the sampled population.

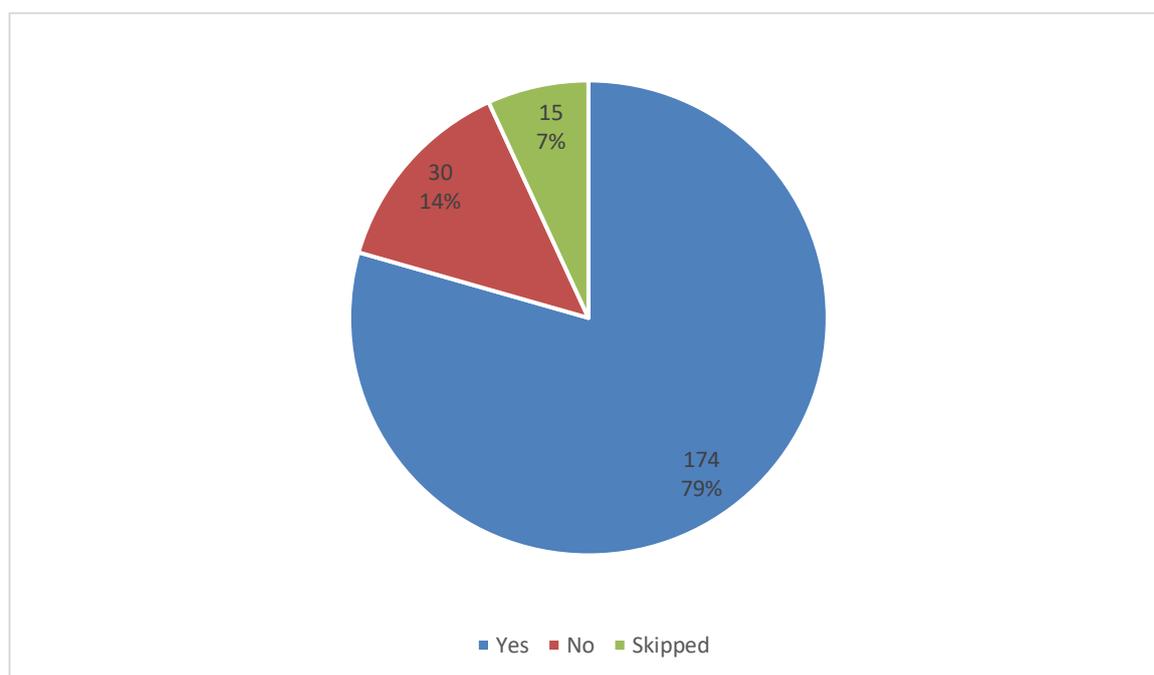
Figure 7.21: Knowledge of whether the direction of debates in the online deliberative sphere has, at any time, influence government decision on a public issue.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	41.55%	86
No	58.45%	121
TOTAL		207

The analysed data in this chart shows that 58.45% believe that readers' discussion and the direction of their discourse within the online commenting space does not have any form of influence on the decision taken by the government regarding the issue. On the contrary, 41.55% of the respondents think that the wave of opinion expressed in the online deliberative space do influence government decision on a public issue.

Figure 7.22: Whether online news media commenting space can enhance and increase democratic deliberation among citizens



From this chart, by far the highest percentage of respondents (79%) believe that the deliberative space provided by online news commenting area have the potential to deepen democratic values, enhance the public sphere and increase democratic deliberation among citizens. Also, 14% of the sampled population shared a contrary view by agreeing that the commenting space cannot in any way enhance democracy or expand the space for civil discourse.

7.13 Conclusion

In this section and through the application of descriptive statistical tool of frequency distribution to the survey data, a graphic pattern of online news commenting environment showed a male-dominated discursive space in Nigeria including the evidence that most of the commenters that engaged in online debates possessed tertiary education qualification. In term of device that enables connection to the

internet, many readers who post comments and participate in an online discussion in Nigeria do so through their smart mobile phones. Furthermore, the highlights of the results are stated below:

- The need to express experts' opinion and knowledge on public issues serve as a motivating factor for participating in an online discussion.
- Readers post comments and debate more on political issues than any other subjects.
- Most of the commenters prefer to identify in the commenting space using their real names than pseudonyms.
- A moderated commenting space of online news websites attracts more comments and participation than an unmoderated news site.
- The direction of online discussion does influence the government reaction and response to a public issue.

Chapter Eight

Presentation and Explanation of Research Findings

8.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the analysed data collected for the three methods used in the study. As stated in the methodology chapter of the thesis, the researcher combined the qualitative and quantitative methods to collect appropriate data, analysed the data, provide answers to the research questions and meet the set objectives of the study. Therefore, the study combined content analysis, semi-structured interview and survey methods. It also used the sequential exploratory model of the mixed-methods research, which indicates that the researcher collected the data for the qualitative and the quantitative parts of the research at different periods. For the study, the researcher collected the qualitative data first before the quantitative data.

The researcher applied the theories of the public sphere and critical political economy theories in a complementary fashion. Public sphere theory is applied in the research to establish whether there is an existence of a discursive space based on the public sphere criteria and whether the space is democratic. Based on the analysis of the data collected for the study, the application of the public sphere analytical framework provided the mechanics for ascertaining whether the conditions for democratic deliberation exist in the discursive space and how they evidenced in the analysed data. However, the public sphere does not have the intellectual bite to explain how the material condition of production, power differentials and the relationship of inequality shape discourse on the platform. Therefore, the two theories applied in the study are mutually inclusive in the sense that public sphere theory maps things out to see the picture. At the same time, the critical political economy allows us to know why things are the way they are.

As stated in the section on triangulation in the methodology chapter, the presentation of the research findings reflects the triangulation pattern already specified. Therefore, the researcher checked the results of the findings to see whether they converge, diverge or complement each other. Also, and in this chapter, the researcher provided a conceptual model for the study of online news commenting space in Nigeria.

8.2 Summary of key findings of the study

- The comment section of the online newspapers in Nigeria, although it possesses some features of the public sphere is impoverished.

- Readers' motivation to participate in online news commenting websites is influenced by the desire to express personal opinions and expert's knowledge on public issues.
- Nigerian political-economic trajectories influence the online newspaper commenting space and conversation on it.
- There is inequality of access to the online news commenting space in Nigeria.
- Majority of commenters in the online news websites read and post comments with smartphones in Nigeria.

8.2.1 The comment section of the online newspapers in Nigeria, although it possesses some features of the public sphere is impoverished.

The findings discussed in this section resulted from the first research question set for the study. The researcher used the analysed data from the qualitative and quantitative method in a complementary way to explain the results. Overall, the findings revealed impoverished online news commenting space in Nigeria due to the deficit of some public sphere measurement criteria in the discursive space and are evident in the analysis.

Firstly, the finding revealed that the commenting space of online news media and the comments that passed through is not rational but dwell more on arguments based on emotions and other non-rational cues. This finding is consistent with previous related studies like Barnes (2018), Sustain (2017), Freelon, Lynch and Aday (2015), Aalberg, Alest and Curran (2010) that online news comments often fragments along dichotomy thereby making consensus and democratic deliberation impossible. The potential of online news sites to allow for arguments between commenters is one of the hallmarks of determining how democratic deliberations are. At the same time, all participants within the discursive space owe each other the moral duty to explain the rationale behind their positions during a debate (Kies, 2010a). Similarly, Dahlberg (2011) submits that discussion and arguments on an online forum must be critical and rational to reflect a public sphere. This finding also corroborated the previous studies of Al-Saggaf (2006), Benkler (2006) and Fenton (2016) whom all express reservations over the internet and its various platforms to offer a public sphere for democratic deliberation.

The application of criticality and rationality in a discourse involves placing an argument according to Dahlberg (2007, 2011) within a normative foundation upon which a justification of position can derive from, and the same evidence explored for counter-argument. However, within the context of the Nigerian online news deliberative sphere, deliberations are controlled by and laden with emotional outbursts and trolls. Therefore, the commenting space is dysfunctional and does not

portray an ideal public sphere. The three comments below are samples of arguments on the Herdsmen/farmers clash, and all the comments show lack of criticisable arguments that can be validated. The arguments as contained in these comments do not point to any form of evidence that can be used by other commenters to validate claims.

Samson (Vanguard)

The military is out to protect the Fulani herdsmen against cattle rustlers. Minister of Defence confirmed that. Inadvertently, the life of cattle is paramount to the detriment of lives and property of Nigerians murdered daily by Fulani herdsmen.

Chika (Vanguard)

Lol. Biafrans were part of Israelites 4,000 years ago. Do you even know the etymology behind the word "Biafra"? A brown spider don piss for your brain.

Tolulope (Vanguard)

Buhari is d masterminded of all d terror that is happening in d Nigeria from Boko haram, Fulani herdsmen and d innocent killings of Igbos. However, I know our God is not asleep!

Furthermore, the finding from the content analysis is corroborated by the analysed semi-structured interview data which showed that most of the comments in the online space contained arguments that cannot be substantiated and emotions and patronage rule space. One of the responses from an interview participant buttresses this:

On many occasions, most of our comments and exchange are an untrue and unfair representation of the correct angle of issues we often discuss. We insult, abuse and curse most of the time while we rarely touch the real issue. Since I have been contributing to online commenting, I have never experienced where all commenters agreed on an issue that is under discussion. (Interviewer 10, 2018)

Secondly, commenters understood the essence of their participation in online discursive space as the rate of topic relevance which indicates whether the commenter's comment is relevant to the subject of discussion is high. The high rate of topic relevance in the comments is due to the importance and the sensitivity of the two issues used as the research stimuli, which are both critical part of the national discourse. These two issues, especially the herdsmen and farmers clashes, have continued to dominate the country's space of public discourse so much so that the entire country is gradually becoming divided over the matter. Therefore, the finding supports the research outcome of Weber (2013), Stromer-Galley and Martinson (2009) that topics of news stories affect the coherence of an online discussion and topics with political issues have more discursive coherence than other discursive space where topics outside politics dominate the debate.

Thirdly, reciprocity within the Nigerian online commenting space is high as there are indicators from the comments analysed that commenters do react to the arguments made by other commenters. The

result shows that people are motivated to participate and discuss issues of mutual concern to them. Therefore, this revealed that the parameter of reciprocity as one of the indexes for measuring a discursive sphere for democratic deliberation based on the arguments of Habermas and other scholars is present in the Nigerian online commenting space. The finding supports Ruiz et al. (2011) and Rowe (2015) assertions that the reciprocity level of online news commenting is high. However, the finding is contrary to the results of Zhou et al. (2005) and Strandberg and Berg (2013) whom all found out that the reciprocity on the online news websites commenting space is low and limited.

Also, the research findings revealed comments that contain flaming contents are slightly higher when compared to comments that do not contain any form of insulting or hostile comments. The researcher premised the reason for interrogating the commenting platform for the evidence of flaming or non-flaming on the fact that the presence of either of the two in a commenting site is capable of reducing or enhancing the quality and the democratic features of online discursive space as argued by (Cho & Kwon, 2015; Dahlberg, 2007; Ksiazek et al., 2015, 2016; Murthy & Sharma, 2019; Watson et al., 2019). Therefore, the analysis indicated that flaming contents are notably higher within the commenting space of Premium Times and Sahara Reporters compared to the news sites of Daily Trust and Vanguard. Premium Times and Sahara Reporters are both online news platforms that do not have any off-line presence. At the same time, Daily Trust and Vanguard are both online news platforms of two prominent mainstream newspapers in Nigeria.

In the area of inclusion, the comparison of the findings from content analysis and the survey data revealed a different pattern. Findings from the content analysis data showed that access and participation within the online news commenting space in Nigeria is restrictive because the deliberative space has a system of registration and identification process which limits access. However, the results from the content analysis are not enough to conclude as other factors like access to the internet, access to hardware to enable connection and commenters view on registration and identification system are all critical to determining how the criteria of inclusion affect the deliberative space. The insufficiency of content analysis data to conclude on the criteria of inclusion according to Kies (2013) argument is to enable a holistic understanding of the criteria of inclusion within the online space requires the combination of qualitative and quantitative data. As a result, the researcher compared the findings from survey analysis of questions related to the theme of inclusion with the content analysis results. Question 7 indicated that 96% of the sampled population has access to the internet, and the data analysed for question 8 showed that 84 % access news on the internet through

smartphones. The findings of the data analysed in question 13 and 16 on the survey questionnaire revealed that 64.02% passed through a system of identification before participating in the online discursive platform. Also, 55.4% said the comment space has a moderation system in place.

Inclusion is one of the overarching conditions for a discursive space to be referred to as democratic and the public sphere of rational debate (Bohman, 2004; Dahlberg, 2011; Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010; Habermas, 1992; Poor, 2006). In this research, part of the survey findings showed that inclusion is positive concerning access to the internet and possession of gadgets that enabled connection to the deliberative space. However, at the level of participation in the deliberative space, inclusion is low due to the restrictive system of participation put in place by most of the online news commenting space sampled. Some of the identification processes include the provision of a photograph by a commenter on the news site or completion of a registration process that includes providing full details of a commenter's address. Also, findings show that most of the online news websites have moderation mechanism in place, which limits inclusion. According to Habermas (1992), a discursive space must give equal access for citizens to participate in a debate that affects all. However, where a discursive platform cannot guarantee this to all citizens, it implies such a platform is dysfunctional in the area of providing democratic deliberation.

Furthermore, the low level of inclusion in the online commenting space in Nigeria negates one of the principles of deliberative democracy, which promotes free access to and participation in public discourse. The identification system in the comment space can impinge on the democratic potentials of the online discursive space as citizens express caution in their posts and contributions to debates for fear of being hounded by government agencies.

From the analysis of the data, results show that discursive equality within the Nigeria online news commenting space is balanced and does not show any form of control or dominance by a person or group of people. Evidence from the analysis clearly shows that individuals did not dominate the thread of comment. Few commenters have more than five postings during the discussion in reaction to any of the headlines and news stories published by the selected online news sites relating to the stimuli used for the research. The evidence of discursive equality in the Nigerian online news deliberative space fulfils one of the conditions for democratic deliberation. This evidence supports Dahlberg (2007), argument that discursive equality guarantees an egalitarian and inclusive deliberative space.

The researcher applied the criterion of reflexivity to ascertain how conflict and disagreement are resolved within the commenting space. The criterion mainly analysed sampled comments to establish whether participants shift position after listening to a superior argument or verifiable facts. Findings reveal that the evidence of reflexivity in the discursive platforms of the four sampled websites is low. The analysis was influenced by the deductive reasoning approach, which allows for concluding matters based on the general perception or knowledge about a subject. In the case of Nigeria, key major factors - religion and ethnicity play a critical role in any national discourse. They have been issues that drive polarisation and disunity in the polity. It suffices to conclude therefore that the issues also manifest in the online discursive forum and influence the way average readers view and comment on a public issue, thereby making reaching a compromise or shifting of position in a deliberation difficult.

As part of the explanations concerning the state of the online commenting space in Nigeria, finding established there is evidence of pluralism within the discursive sphere in Nigeria. It is evident from the commenting section that commenters expressed different views on the subjects of debate. Several scholars have pointed to the divergence of opinion within a deliberative sphere as an indication of a commenting space being 'democratic' (Fuchs, 2006; Kies, 2010a; Tsaliki, 2002). However, and in the context of Nigeria online deliberative space, the divergence of opinion based on such markers like political, ethnic, religious affiliations and even gender orientation are not parameters to the success of a debate. Instead, the pattern of affiliation, non-affiliation and disaffiliation promote homogeneity of comments within the discursive space. This homogeneity can lead to a form of echo chamber in the discursive space, which is inimical to the spirit of the public sphere. This assertion supports the findings of Justwan, Baumgaertner, Carlisle, Clark, and Clark (2018) in their study of 'social media echo chambers and satisfaction with democracy among Democrats and Republicans in the aftermath of the 2016 US elections'. Their study found that an individuals' alignment with information that supports their worldviews leads to the formation of an echo chamber.

Furthermore, affiliation, non-affiliation and disaffiliation most often are influenced by the deep-rooted animosity and mutual suspicion among Nigerians embedded in the socio-cultural ferment of the Nigerian society. Also, the result indicates that online news commenting website commenting space contained a high degree of affiliation and disaffiliation comments. Of interest to this finding is that the affiliation and disaffiliation occurrences in the comments are related to the ideology,

geographical location and the readership base of the news media organisations including the personae the news items revolved around which is the President of Nigeria.

As earlier mentioned, one of the interpretations of these findings is the issue of readership base and the geographical location of the Daily Trust newspaper. Although the newspaper circulation is national in outlook, its coverage is more particular to the northern part of Nigeria as its publishing site, and headquarters is in Abuja and Kaduna, both in the Northern part of the country. Besides, the World Press Trends (2007) cited in Aliagan (2011) describes the Daily Trust media outfit as the mouthpiece for the North and a regional newspaper. Aliagan (2011) asserts that the Daily Trust newspaper has a large readership base in the North, the home region of the President. Accordingly, reactions and comments on the President within the online version of the newspaper are more of affiliation than non-affiliation or disaffiliation. Also, comments on the farmers/herder's clash on the commenting platform of daily trust reveal the same pattern of affiliation.

On the contrary, the results of the analysis of commenters' comments in the online deliberative space of the Vanguard news website, Sahara news and the Premium Times show different results that revealed a different perspective from the Daily Trust newspaper on the issue of pluralism within the online commenting space in Nigeria. Findings in the three newspapers revealed a high level of disaffiliation in commenters' comments. The newspapers have a higher readership in the south, and it influences the demographic composition of commenters and the direction of comments. For instance, most of the comments on the three platforms revealed strong disapproval for the President's medical trip and also shown discontentment towards the activities of the herdsmen against the farmers. The reasons for the high level of disaffiliation in the comments section of these online newspapers is not different from what was responsible for the high level of affiliation in the comments on the Daily Trust newspaper. They are grounded in the geographical location of the three online newspapers, including the ethnic and religious composition of their readership base and the area of their operations. Unlike the Daily Trust newspaper, one of the online newspapers, the Vanguard newspaper operates from Lagos in the southwestern part of Nigeria and belong to that division of the journalism profession in Nigeria referred to as the 'Lagos Axis'. The Premium Times publishes online and has its operational base in Abuja. Sahara Reporters is a diaspora online news media website that operates from the United States of America but has a firm footing within the homeland media space.

Besides, Sahara Reporters view itself as an online news organisation committed to exposing corruption and another societal ill, particularly in the arena of government in Nigeria. Therefore, a large portion of their news contents are devoted to exposing fraud and corruption practices within the government circle. Also, one factor that is common to the Vanguard newspaper, The Premium Times and Sahara Reporters online news platforms is in the ownership structure as the promoters of the three online news platforms are from the southern part of the country. Additionally, the evidence of disaffiliation is also affected by the mode of journalism practice and the news disseminated on online news websites. For example, Sahara Reporters' approach to news coverage and dissemination exposes corrupt practices. Therefore, the high level of disaffiliation on their commenting site connects to this position.

8.2.2 Commenters are motivated to participate in online news commenting websites by the desire to express personal opinions and expert's knowledge on public issues.

The desire to contribute to public discourse on Nigeria and the willingness to offer an expert's opinion according to the findings of the study are the motivating factors for participation. The two analysed data sets of semi-structured interview and survey complemented each other in order to explain the findings. Also, the analysis and findings revealed different themes discussed below:

Social engagement: As one of the findings from the analysed semi-structured data, the theme elucidates that the comment section of an online newspaper in Nigeria is a platform where citizens engage in social relations by interacting freely and discussing issues of common concern. Participants within the news sites are informal in their interactions and sometimes bring the various social cues they align with to support their positions. The finding is consistent with Chung and Chatfield (2011); Millen and Patterson (2002), Onayinka and Tsebee (2018); Pate & Wilson (2014), Tapia and Ortiz (2010), Milioni et al. (2012), Nagar (2011) and Purcell et al. (2010) who in their various studies assert that the online news media platform facilitates a space for social engagement among citizens. The social engagement within the context of this discussion is concerned with the presence of a virtual space where citizens have access to information and later engage in a civil discussion on public issues.

Also, further analysis of data to ascertain the participants' perception of the online news comment section revealed that the news commenting section to some is a means of externally checkmating the traditional media news contents by readers. This form of checkmating, according to participants come in the form of their responses which sometimes indicate or highlight the inaccuracy of news published by the news media. The analysed data for research question two, which seeks to establish the factors

that motivate participation in the comment section of online news media disclosed some key findings discussed below:

Motivation to express one's opinion on a public issue

This theme revealed that the knowledge of the fact that the commenting section of the online news websites provides the opportunity for people to engage virtually and relate with each other serves as a motivating factor for participation in the discursive sphere. From the interview responses, there is a commonality to which most commenters key into which is the need to express their opinions on public issues as they consider themselves as stakeholders within the democratic space in Nigeria. As a result, most commenters explained that one of the driving factors for commenting online is because they see their posting of comments and discussion with others as a civic responsibility towards the growth and development of Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga and Shah (2010); Koc-Michalska and Lilleker (2017); Mustapha, Gbonegun, and Mustapha (2016) that the online media enhances democratic participation and expression which ultimately lead to the production of individual social capital. Furthermore, the finding indicates that the urge to contribute professional knowledge or expertise around the topic of deliberation also influence participation in the commenting space. This angle of the result is consistent with the argument that deliberation should encompass the provision of expert knowledge around the topic of discussion which will help in the overall quality of the discursive sphere (Callahan, 2007; Cerovac, 2016; Parvin, 2018).

Another finding from the data analysis on what motivates citizens to participate in online news website deliberative space is the importance a reader attached to news content, and the relevance of the discourse around the subject matter. The emphasis attached to the topic of discussion affects the level of participation and contribution. Also, it has an impact on the question of reflexivity and reciprocity, which are some of the critical drivers in identifying online news commenting space as a deliberative space for civic debate. This finding aligns with Følstad and Lüders (2013) and Jennstål (2018) positions from the outcomes of their studies that saliency conferred on an issue or public matter influences participation in the online commenting space by the audience. The result is in congruence with the submissions of Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2010) and Tsagkias, Weerkamp, & De Rijke (2009) that the exclusiveness of news items and its prominence including the personality involved in such story can motivate commenters to participate in commenting and can also determine the number of comments.

The analysis of the semi-structured interview also revealed the themes of impact and trust in online news websites as some of the factors that influence participation and commenting in the online news commenting section. This finding is consistent with the previous results of Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, (2010) and Weber (2014) that news stories with the possibility of having a high impact on individuals and the society are likely to attract more reactions from the audience in the form of comments. Concerning the theme of trust, the sense of credibility a newsreader has about news media influences the participation of such a reader in the posting of comments and participation in the online commenting space. Citizens always prefer to post comments and participate in the online news platform of the mainstream media due to the high level of the trust reposed in them. This result supports the findings of Fletcher and Park (2017) who argue that people whose level of trust is low preferred social media to the mainstream media. They are however quick to restrict their findings to Northern Europe and assert that the result is not applicable in other states.

8.2.3 Nigerian political-economic trajectories influence the online newspaper commenting space and conversation on it.

The results showed that the material condition of production by the online news organisation, the commenters and the discourse on the commenting section of the news websites all conditioned the state of online news commenting space in Nigeria. According to one of the interview participants, most of the selected online news media for the study are merely online platforms of the mainstream media and their news contents are not in any way significantly different from their physical copy. The various ideological and news selection imperatives embedded in the news gatekeeping and structuring process replicate in the online platforms. Therefore, the news contents the commenters get exposed to on the online news websites are not value-free as they reflect the ideological positions and editorial style of the media organisation. Also, commercial consideration, the need to increase traffic on the news website and protection of the corporate image and ideology of the news organisation influence the way media organisations manage their online news platforms.

For instance, one of the reporters, RO 15, interviewed, explained that:

There is no significant difference in the news we post online and those that appeared in our physical publications. Whatever news values and editing process we apply for the print is equally applied to the online version.

As such, the audience is underserved concerning the choice of information they have access to as the online news media determine for the audience the ‘news to think about’. Furthermore, the online news organisation apart from the traditional news values on the selection of news also considered as the need to increase online traffic for revenue factor. The online news organisations do this by posting

news stories that are trending and also strives to provide in-depth analysis and fresh angle to beat competitors and attract more readership. The online media also edit and moderate comments, especially comments the online media see as capable of affecting its acceptance and revenue. An editor of one of the online news media organisations, RO 7 confirmed that:

Although, we try as much as possible in our publication to ensure high ethical standards. However, we cannot shy away from the fact that our organisation is not a charity institution. We incur bills and pay staff. For us to remain afloat, we need to make our online platform attractive to readers and also to advertisers. To do this implies breaking news, posting exciting stories and angles. For example, we have a section for opinion polls on our website, and this has proved to be so popular and has increased our online traffic.

The results also revealed that the online commenting space in Nigeria is an ideological turf. Therefore, most news websites moderate readers' comments to ensure that they conform to their policy and ideological stand. The commercial consideration of the online space supports the previous findings of Fuchs (2017), Mosco (2005) and Schneider (1997) arguments that profit motive and the quest for advertising revenue affect online news content and discourse. The two excerpts from the analysed semi-structured interview validate the discussion:

I do not see any difference in the headlines and news of all these online news platforms and what we see in the physical copies of the mainstream media. Is it not the information they supplied us with that we deliberate on? Most of these news items have already been influenced in their production by the ideology and the need to make a profit by the news organisation. Tell me? Is the news we frequently read not about the elites or those in government? The more we read about them, the more the news websites increase its traffic and popularity, thereby making more money. (Interview 13, 2018).

I believe that most of the issues we discuss in the commenting section and how we go about the discussion are influenced by the way the news media organisation set the agenda. Remember, the news usually revolves around the elite, and they control the media. So, we comment or argue with each other, and we often do it unconsciously from an exploited position using an economic imbalance of one geopolitical zone of the country against another or our religion and ethnic identities to insult one another. We do this while the elites are busy enriching their pockets. The funny thing is that most of the online media are culprits since their owners are part of the elites. (Interview 5, 2018)

This result echoes the findings of Vujnovic et al. (2010) that view the participatory affordance of the online media and its discourse section as an illusion because of the economic and revenue imperatives that impinge on the system. Research findings showed that the elements of the political economy of Nigeria resonate in the pattern of deliberation within the online news commenting space. It influenced the decision on the type of report to post on the platform and how space is regulated. The discursive space from the content analysis and the interview data indicate a sphere driven by power relations and contestations based on dichotomy. The dichotomy exists along ethnic, religion and geopolitical

divisions. This finding is in congruence with the argument of Taiwo (2007) that the media space in Nigeria is an ideological empire fuelled by power relations and contestations anchored on religion and ethnic sentiments. Religion and ethnicity are critical factors in the political economy of Nigeria, and they shape political decisions concerning the distribution of resources in Nigeria, and as such, are stimulants for class conflicts in Nigeria and the tools for the entrenchment and perpetuation of the elite hegemony. This finding echoes the assertion of Susen (2011) that:

The ideological nature of public discourses is embedded in the material organisation of social resources, and the symbolic resources of critique are always dependent on the social resources of power. The vertical structuration of society manifests itself in the interest-laden structuration of ideology: socially positioned subjects produce relationally contingent discourses. The hegemonic discourses generated within the bourgeois public sphere express the particular interests of the most powerful social groups.

The researcher validated the finding outlined above by comparing the results of content analysis, semi-structured interview and survey data. The content analysis finding revealed a conversational argument among the commenters conditioned by the imperatives of ethnicity and religious conditions. A large part of the texts analysed referred to ethnic and religious markers in a way that shows contestations, rivalry and struggles for dominance. Therefore, two extracts from the analysed texts on the two issues used as stimuli in the study indicate the argument of contestation below:

Burning Spear (Premium Times)

If Ijaw man Jonathan had left the shores of Nigeria-with the type of ailment troubling Bingo Fulani Buhari, who hails from the Niger Republic --But now thinks he is the President of the Fulani emirate--in Aso Rock---and not Nigeria---certain 9jas from the old regions of the country which Lord Lugard created-----in 1914 would have asked that Good Old Jonathan be impeached---or like Bakare once declared given the late Gaddafi treatment-----Meaning beaten to death--by Fulani officers from Mali-----and his remains thrown to the sharks swimming around the Ocean floors of our crude oil polluted sea waters in the South-south-----
-----The truth of the matter is that we have had enough of the RULE by the cursed spirit of Fulanis-----most of whom are not even Nigerians-----So why should Nigerians continue to fall for the biggest 419ners on earth--the Fulanis?-----From Balewa came the civil war-which left more than 3m humans dead----Shagari another Fulani ushered in of Bingo Buhari-----Yara Adua----also a Fulani-----died on the throne-----

Ifechinaci Ezeifeidi (Vanguard Newspaper)

This is just a clear ripping of the seed of corruption n tribalism soared by northern leaders. Overprotecting their people, making them feel untouchable. Before they were killing Igbos n Christians like rats now they do not even care who you are. Cos, they knew that nothing would happen.

The researcher also applied some aspects of the semi-structured interview data to validate the content analysis findings. Some of the questions in the interview guide elicit data from the participants by asking whether they are aware of any factor that influences their understanding of a news report,

comments by other commenters and the way they respond to the comments. Another question specifically for the media practitioners that participated in the semi-structured interview asked of the motives for moderating their online news commenting section. Finding from the analysed data corroborated the content analysis findings. It confirmed that religion and ethnicity played a vital influence in the way commenters interpret news contents and comments in the deliberative space. For instance, the two comments extracted from the interview corroborate this:

It is a pity that our leaders have blindfolded our eyes with religious and ethnic issues to keep us busy while they siphon our resources. They use these issues to justify their political decisions and allocation of resources to ensure equity and guide against marginalisation in their words while they are busy looting. Hmm, I hope Nigerians wake up to reality one day that the elites are using us against each other.
(Interview 1, 2018)

There are two trigger points for people. Ethnicity number one, religion number two. For the ethnicity, there is certain information or news that will generate many reactions when it comes to ethnicity, when it comes to Hausa vs Igbo now, many people comment because they want to let out their opinion. Likewise, religion, how come Christianity is this, how come Muslim is that people will react to that.
(Interview 7, 2018)

Furthermore, the finding confirmed one of the arguments of the political economy theory in the understanding of the Nigerian system and her discourse that the Nigerian political class and the elites foster on the citizens, divisive narratives of religion and ethnicity to alienate the masses and keep the latter in perpetual domination. This position supports Orji (2010) that power relations among the elites in Nigeria have resulted in the ‘ethnicisation’ of the public sphere in Nigeria and space for confrontations among the citizens. Therefore, the results of the semi-structured interview validate the finding already established from the analysis of content analysis method data that political economy imperatives are active in the Nigerian online commenting environment through the excerpts from the participants’ interview transcripts.

8.2.4. Inequality of access to the online news commenting space in Nigeria

The finding of the analysed survey data indicated inequality of access to the online news commenting space in Nigeria. Evidence from the analysed data revealed sex, age and educational pattern of imbalance. From the results of the analysis, 73% of the respondents representing the age of 25-44 involve actively in online news website activities, including commenting. This finding indicated that most of the participants are of young and middle age and slightly below the average age of participants in mainstream politics in Nigeria. This age group possessed more ICT skills than the other age group, and that explained for their active participation in the discursive forum. Also, the

research finding established that male dominate the discursive sphere as 63% of the commenters sampled are male. The finding also revealed that over 95% of commenters possess tertiary education. The findings, therefore aligned with Adut (2012) and Ryan (1990) assertions that within the public sphere, individuals do not participate in public discourse on the same level. The finding is also in line with Cuceu (2011) that the public sphere in the mould Habermas privileged men over women or male dominance in the discursive space.

The empirical evidence from the analysis, therefore, showed a closed discursive space and an indication of digital exclusion based on the demographic patterns of representation. The finding is not, however, conclusive as doing so would mean providing explanations on the factors that drive exclusion. However, this is outside the scope of this study. This position is strengthened by Adut (2012), and Ryan (1990) arguments that exclusion sometimes is not based on class, gender or digital literacy. Instead, ignorance, indifference to the subject of deliberation, and incivility of online commenting space can promote exclusion. Habermas (1992) argues that a commenting space should not exclude citizens from the sphere on account of any bias as equal participation promotes a functional democratic deliberative space. Also, following Fuchs (2006) recommendation of questions to raise in order to determine whether online commenting space reflects a public sphere, findings from the analysed data proved contrary as most of the criteria are not present in the online platform. Therefore, and in summary, findings showed that there is substantial evidence of digital exclusion of some class of people within the online commenting news space in Nigeria.

8.2.5 Majority of commenters in the online news websites read and post comments with smartphones in Nigeria.

The findings discussed in this section came from the survey, one of the research methods used in the study. The finding showed that most of the online news commenters in Nigeria participate in online debate through their smart mobile phone. The survey data analysed indicated that over 81% of the respondents use smartphones for posting comments and participate in the online new commenting environment. Therefore, it shows that the rate or level of political participation and the culture of deliberative democracy is increasing among Nigerians. The finding supports Campbell and Kwak (2010) that the use of smartphones for accessing news and information on the internet increases participation in civil discourse and political participation. However, generalising the finding must be approached with caution, mainly because of the question of literacy, the ability to use the gadget and the language of deliberation, which is English that can only be met by the educated citizens.

Therefore, connecting these conditions to the use of mobile phone raises the question of digital exclusion.

The portability and the mobility affordance of using mobile phones enable citizens to participate from anywhere overcoming the question of space, time and distance. This finding supports and is in line with the findings of Hermanns (2008) that the mobile phones help to encourage broader participation in the deliberation and also, in the mobilisation of citizens to participate in online commenting space. Another positive aspect of the broader use of the mobile phone within the deliberative space in Nigeria is that it serves as an alternative and cheaper means of connecting to the internet and participate in online debates. Consequently, it assists those who economically cannot afford expensive computers or laptops to be able to join and participate in an online discussion.

8.3 Explanatory Framework

One of the objectives of this study is to develop an explanatory framework of Nigerian online news commenting environment. Therefore, the researcher provides an explanatory framework for the understanding of online news commenting in Nigeria through a model labelled ‘the Integrative Model of Online News Commenting in Nigeria’. The explanatory model developed from the combination of the two theoretical components combined to form the analytical framework applied to the evidence gathered in the project and the findings that emerged from the analysis. The researcher’s reference to the model as ‘integrative’ derives from applying the two theoretical components of the analytical framework in a complementary pattern to provide analysis to the pattern of online news commenting practice in Nigeria. The combination of the two theories – the public sphere and critical political economy theories in the study provided the empirical basis and practical description of the state of online news commenting in Nigeria.

On the one hand, public sphere theory, through the application of its analytical criteria to the data generated, established the extent to which opinion expressed on the commenting platform reflect democratic deliberation. On the other hand, the critical political economy in the study explained how the material condition of the political economy of Nigeria, including the power relations related to discussions in the online newspaper commenting space. While the criteria of public sphere provided the tools to mark conversation out in order to see the picture and describe what is online, the critical political economy provided the mechanics that allowed the researcher to gain an appreciation of the underpinning characteristics of news comments.

The evidence generated from the data collected and analysed in the study revealed that some of the features of the criteria used for measuring commenting space for democratic deliberation are not evident in the discussions that passed through the sphere. As a result, the researcher concluded that the discursive space is impoverished. Also, the findings that evinced from the application of the critical political economy framework to the data generated in the study showed that the discursive space and the comments expressed on it reflect the features of political economy in Nigeria. Based on the fact that one of the objectives of this study is to provide an explanatory framework for understanding online news commenting environment in Nigeria, including the growing concerns over the potential of online news commenting to either unite or break the corporate existence of the country (Mohammed, 2019), as well as the gap in academic knowledge on the subject. The researcher from the evidence of the analysed data and results generated a model that provides an understanding of the state of online news commenting in Nigeria. It is important to emphasise that the model is exclusive to the online news commenting environment in Nigeria. As part of the researcher's contribution to knowledge, the model can serve as a reference point to any future study on the subject matter.

The application of the model has four components and two processes (see Figure 8.1). Components one and two are the analytical tools/criteria of the two analytical frameworks – the public sphere and critical political economy applied in the study for investigating the online news commenting. Component three represents online news commenting platforms. The first process applied the analytical frameworks from component one and two in a complementary fashion and interrogated comments and other activities within the online news platforms such as the moderation system in place. The essence of this is to determine whether the criteria are evident in the data generated and analysed. The second stage in the process involved the identification of the outcomes from the analysis of the data provided in component three. Therefore, component four represents the outcome of the analysis that takes place within component three, and this shows the state of online news commenting in Nigeria. The issues identified in the fourth components are the various outcomes that conditioned the understanding of online news commenting environment in Nigeria from the mutual interactions of the elements of the framework for analysis applied in the analysis

As confirmed from the data set analysed through the application of some of the public sphere criteria, the debates that pass through the online news commenting space in Nigeria are irrational and non-critical. To be able to claim the existence of a public sphere would require evidence of arguments

that are objective and verifiable. On the contrary, most of the comments in the commenting section are expressions of emotion and sentiments. Also, to explain the state of online news commenting in Nigeria, the model indicated that comments and discussions in the discursive sphere are influenced in no small extent by ethnic and religious sentiments. This outcome is related to the irrational and non-critical nature of the debates that pass through online news commenting space in Nigeria earlier discussed in the paragraph. Religion and ethnicity are at the centre of public discourse in Nigeria, and they condition citizens' approach and contributions to public debate, including the political economy arena in Nigeria. As such, most of the contributions in the online discursive space are laden with ethnic and religious sentiments. While the public sphere element of the model enabled us to know what constitutes irrational and uncritical debate, the critical political economy identified religion and ethnicity as the key drivers that promote irrational and emotive comments on the website. According to Kies (2010b), the criteria of reciprocity and discursive equality are essential for democratic deliberation. The two criteria determine to what extent commenters in a civil debate say on the subject matter, whether debaters are listening to each other and whether few individuals do not dominate a discussion. The evidence from the data analysis revealed that the current state of online news commenting environment in Nigeria contained a high level of reciprocity and discursive equality. While there are several platforms both offline and online that enable citizens to engage in discussion, the equal and democratic quality of such platform depends on the level of reciprocity and discursive equality observed on such platforms. Reciprocity and discursive equality are related to each other in several ways. They underpin the importance of equal opportunity in participation and the ability to listen to what other commenters have to say. Therefore, the model illustrates that interrogating online news commenting space in Nigeria for democratic deliberation requires ascertaining the evidence and level of reciprocity and discursive equality in the discursive space.

Another outcome of the model's application to the online news environment in Nigeria is the influence on moderation and regulation of the commenting space by commercialism. Ideally, online news commenting space should provide an unfettered and unfiltered space for citizens to deliberate on public issues. Evidence from the analysis, however, showed that the news platform moderates comments that pass through the online commenting space in Nigeria for revenue purposes. The majority of the online news platforms in Nigeria are online extensions of the mainstream media. Also, as the number of citizens that access news on the internet is increasing, together with companies embracing the internet as an advertisement platform, the online news platforms consider their website as revenue earners. Therefore, online news media consider their image and credibility as crucial. As

a result, readers' comments pass through different moderating systems in order to ensure conformity with the news media organisation's policy and avoid any comment capable of causing negative image. This aspect of the model points to the relevance of the political economy analytical framework for understanding the nature of online news commenting in Nigeria. As a complement to the public sphere framework, the model apart from the online platform 's ability to facilitate participation in the discourse, other factors mitigate against the democratic potential of online news commenting space in Nigeria relating to moderation based on revenue imperatives.

For an online deliberative space to be considered genuinely democratic, it must provide equal access and be non-discriminatory in any sense for citizens to participate in public discourse. Also, the promotion of equal access reduces marginalisation and raises the quality of online deliberation. As argued by Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019), assessing the democratic features of online media platforms require interrogating inequality in the pattern of usage and how such inequalities deepen social inequalities and deny the digital space of inclusive and quality deliberation. The evidence generated from the survey data analysis indicated the there is an imbalance concerning gender, age and educational qualification within the online discursive space in Nigeria. The imbalance skewed in the direction of male and citizens with tertiary level education. As such, the imbalance has a relationship with the criteria of inclusion and discursive equality which are some of the public sphere measuring indexes for ascertaining how democratic an online space is. Inclusion as a criterion insists that online discourse and decision agreed during deliberation is only valid and democratic where all the parties likely to be affected by the decision are involved in the deliberation. Discursive equality emphasises an equal level of participation. As a result, and based on the empirical evidence from this project, the nature of deliberation and any consensus reached cannot be described to be democratic and all-inclusive as it only reflects the world view of a specific class of the society. The model, therefore, suggests that assessing an online platform for how democratic it is should include examining the demographic participation in online news commenting in Nigeria. Online civility, mutual respect and non-aggression are some of the hallmarks of a quality democratic deliberative space.

As a result, the evidence of the highlighted features in an online discursive space encourage participation and also enhances civil deliberation. Flaming constitutes the use of foul and abusive language on other commenters or expressing aggression and intolerance towards another person's opinion. As pointed out by scholars, flaming and profane comments often discourage participation

and in some ways, have an adverse effect on online deliberation (O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Sheehan & Hoy, 1999; Turner, 2010). As part of the explanatory framework for analysing the online news commenting environment in order to establish its democratic nature, flaming is related to the high level of irrational and non-critical arguments in the online space. As earlier mentioned in this section and based on the evidence provided from the analysis of comments, most comments contained religious and ethnic sentiments with little evidence of rationality. As a consequence, commenters are insulted for taking positions contrary to the religious belief and ethnic identity of another resulting in a commenting environment that contained substantial evidence of flaming. The model is presented on the next page.

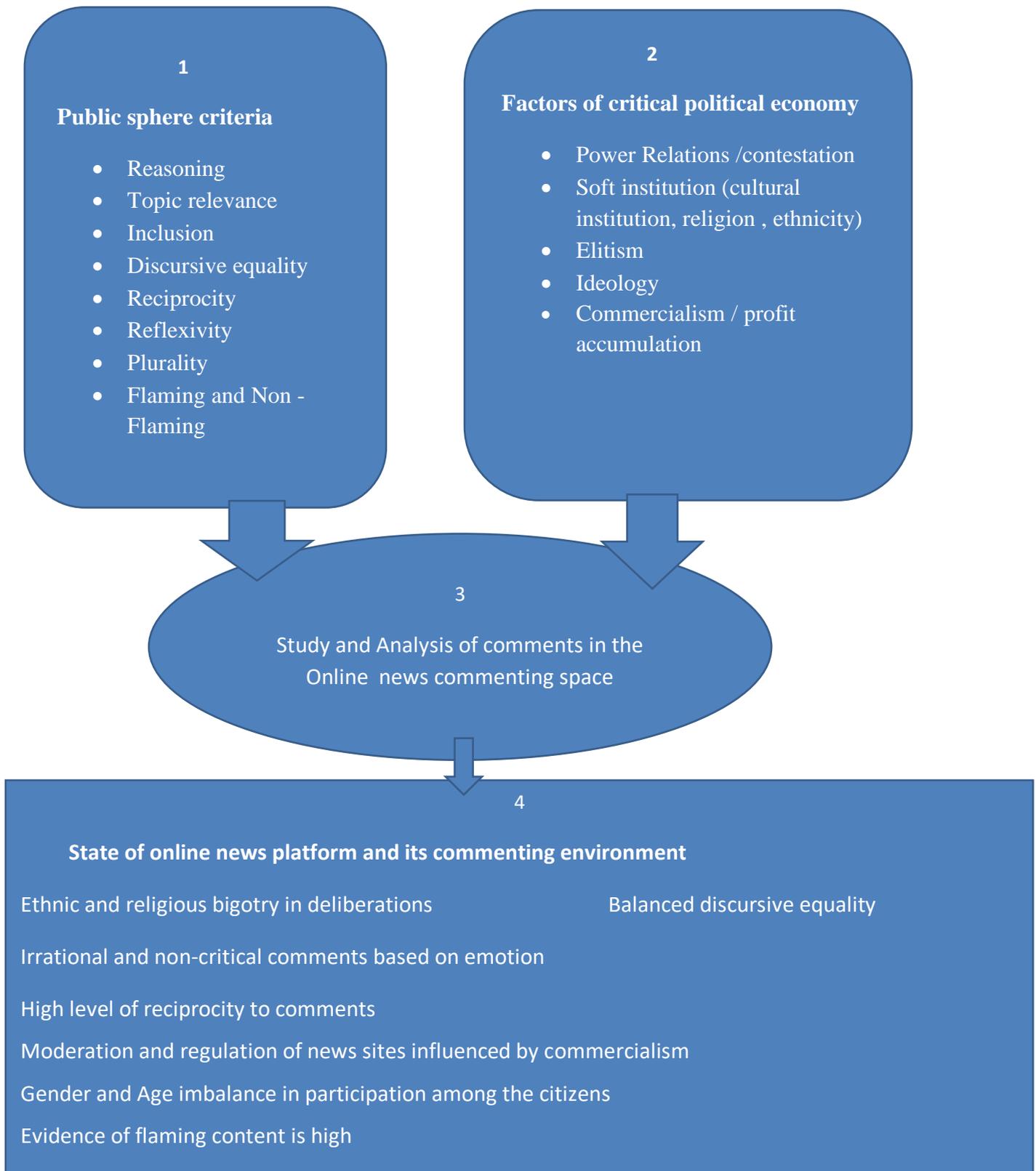


Figure 8.1 Integrative model for understanding online news commenting in Nigeria

Source: The Researcher

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter highlights and discusses the significant findings of the study. In the discussion, the chapter points out how the different data collected converge, complement or diverge in connection with the research findings. Furthermore, the researcher also linked the results to previous literature that are related to the findings. In the process, the researcher produced an explanatory model revealing the present state of online news commenting environment in Nigeria. The model explained how the two theoretical frameworks applied in the study can be explored to provide a holistic understanding of the state of online news commenting in Nigeria and how it impacts on democratic deliberation.

The next chapter concludes this thesis, and it highlights the significance of the research project. The chapter also presents implications, contributions to knowledge suggestions for further research and conclusion. The chapter also restates the research objectives and explains how they relate to research findings.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion: Understanding the online news commenting environment in Nigeria

9.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the conclusion to the study. It commences by rehearsing briefly what the study sought to do through the setting of its research questions and related objectives and comments on how the findings reported in the thesis has allowed the research objectives to be addressed. The chapter proceeds to highlights the core contributions t made by the project. After that, it sets out a series of practical recommendations on how to improve online news commenting practice in Nigeria and recommends areas for further work.

9.2 Research summary

The focus of this study has been to establish the extent to which online news commenting space in Nigeria bears a resemblance to democratic deliberative space. Accordingly, the researcher reviewed relevant academic publications on the topic and therefore identified the gaps this research directed its focus. Most of the related studies focussed on the public sphere potential of the online news commenting space and failed to consider other underlying issues such as political economy imperatives that impact on deliberation and the management of the discursive sphere. In order to address the gap established from the examination of extant literature, the research design, including objectives and research questions were tailored around providing empirical evidence as to the state of online news commenting in Nigeria and whether - and to what degree - the environment reflects a public sphere. The researcher combined the theories of the public sphere and the critical political economy as the framework of analysis in the research. The thesis used the mixed -method research approach and the project is situated philosophically within the paradigm of Pragmatism.

Using the herdsmen/farmers' clashes and the President's Buhari medical trips abroad as topic foci, the researcher collected comments around the issues for content analysis, conducted a series of interviews and administered a survey. Findings from the data analysis using the framework of the public sphere and the critical political economy indicated that the online news commenting space in Nigeria reflects a public sphere, but the sphere is impoverished. Building on the analysis and findings, the researcher developed an explanatory model referred to as 'Integrated Model for Understanding Online News Commenting in Nigeria'. As a consequence of the research findings and the explanatory model developed from the study, Section 9.4 of this chapter provides recommendations on how to improve online news and the commenting environment in Nigeria and suggests areas for future

research.

A concluding reflection on the study leads this researcher to claim that its research objectives have been realised. As one of the objectives, the researcher provided a critical account of academic literature on online news commenting practice with a specific focus on Nigeria. Al-Saggaf (2006) and Freelon (2015) argued that the comment section of the online newspaper enables a space for democratic deliberation. The outcomes of this study indicated that the online commenting space in Nigeria partially fulfils the criteria necessary for democratic deliberative space. The outcomes from the analysis of conversations taking place on the discursive news platforms showed that the evidence of rational and critical comments is low. Rational and critical comments are instrumental in arriving at a decision and reaching a consensus in democratic discourse (Aalberg et al., 2010; Dahlberg, 2007; Raphaël Kies, 2010a).

On the contrary, Nigerian online news commenting space is a territory dominated by sentiment, trolling, abuse, and irrational and illogical arguments (See pgs. 130,146,147,163). The news provision on the online news media, including the comment section based on the evidence provided in chapters seven and eight is not value-free. Consequently, its capacity to promote democratic deliberation, participation and digital democracy raise concerns. An ideal online commenting space requires rational and critical debate and at the same time, equal participation and inclusiveness. Evidence generated from the study showed a deliberative space that evinced digital intransigence and exclusion. Critical segments of the population, like the women and those without tertiary education, are under-represented in the commenting space. As noted by Papacharissi (2002) and Sparks (2010), for an online deliberation to be described as democratic, it requires equal participation and inclusiveness. Therefore, online commenting space in Nigeria promotes a skewed form of deliberation majorly populated by the educated class and dominated by men.

Furthermore, the researcher concluded that the impoverishment of the space has a connection to the influence of political economy factors and the absence/ inadequacy of some public sphere criteria within the commenting space. Evidence from the study has shown religion and ethnicity, which are parts of the fundamentals of the Nigerian political economy influenced discussion on the commenting space (see 147). As articulated by Suberu (1998), Udoakah (1990) and Sampson (2014), the questions of resource allocation and political decisions are influenced heavily by the factors of religion and ethnicity and the two issues are the driving force behind any public discourse in Nigeria. The research

has also proved that commercial considerations and the protection of the ideological position of a news media platform influenced the management of news contents and audience reactions in the online news platform in Nigeria (see chapters 7 and 8). The political economy of the mass media is a microcosm of the broader Nigeria political economy. As such, the process of news provision by the mass media, including the online media in Nigeria, reflects factors like elitism, ethnic and religious division and commercialism. These considerations are evidenced in the results of the semi-structured data analysis. The journalists from the news media platforms interviewed confirmed the moderation system they employ and the news content posted to have been influenced by revenue imperatives and the need to protect the corporate image of the news organisation (see Chapters 7 and 8). For instance, most of the mainstream newspapers see their online news media platforms as another source for income generation and an emerging news provision model and platform (pgs. 158-159). Therefore, online activities are taken seriously and monitored to avoid any offence capable of affecting the news media image negatively. Therefore, the researcher concluded that the online news commenting space is inadequate in the above core respects and thus fell well short of an ideal democratic deliberative space. The two issues – President Buhari’s medical trips and the herdsmen/farmers’ clashes - on which comments focussed in the discursive space more than ordinary discursive activities exposed the divisive nature of Nigerian society and how these issues influenced meaning production and interaction.

Even though the online news commenting platform is impoverished, the study has shown that the online discursive space is significant in the sense that it provides an alternative platform outside the traditional media for citizens to access information and discuss with each other in a deliberative pattern. For instance, the online comment section fulfilled some of the principles necessary for a democratic deliberation such as facilitating relative discursive equality. Here, there was no evidence of the dominance of discourse by a few commenters (see pages 49 and 150). Similarly, the online commenting sphere in Nigeria has good evidence of pluralism which is one of the significant criteria for labelling a discursive space as a public sphere as argued by (Fuchs, 2006; Raphaël Kies, 2010a; Papacharissi, 2004). Expression of diverse opinion in a deliberative space is evidence of the democratic state of the online space (Fuchs, 2006; Tsaliki, 2002). However, the researcher concluded from the evidence of data analysed and the results that the pattern of expression of diverse opinions by commenters in the online commenting space in Nigeria is unlikely to deliver any reliable degree of democratic deliberation. The divergent opinions are laden with religious, ethnic and political affiliation sentiments entrenched in individual’s predisposition to approaching a public discourse. As

such, the online news commenting space in Nigeria promotes commenting homogeneity and echo chamber activity rather than open and porous democratic deliberation (See chapter 7 & 8).

In a country where citizens hold the views of being disconnected from government and the mainstream media reportage reflecting the colouration of political patronage and elitism, the only way is to seek for an alternative media space (Dare, 2010; Kperogi, 2013). Also, there are feelings from the citizens that the mainstream media operates according to the house policy and commercial imperatives, which may restrict and dictate the type of information to publish. The research, therefore, confirmed that citizens regarded the online news platform as a space that enabled them to have social engagement with each other, including the expression of informed opinion on issues. The online news commenting space has expanded the scope of audience feedback and participation at the time of writing to include those who ordinarily would not have the opportunity but for the availability of the internet and smartphones. Regarding the means of participating in online discursive activities in Nigeria, the study found that 81% of online news commenting activities are done through smartphones (See pgs. 186-187). The study also found that online news commenting practice in Nigeria reflects digital exclusion as the uneducated, and many women do not participate in the discursive sphere (See pgs. 168,169,171,199-200).

In conclusion, this research has shown that online news commenting activities in Nigeria represents an alternative space for the citizens to express their opinions on public issues, albeit that these are problematic. As Grabowicz (2014) and Manosevitch and Walker (2009) assert, the online news commenting space provides space for social interaction and also for democratic deliberation. Reflecting on the news commenting space in Nigeria, based on the research findings, there are only some instances of a functioning democratic deliberative space. This evidence is reflected in the level of reciprocity, topic relevance and discursive equality in the analysis of the discursive space (see pgs. 128,129, 130). The influence of the features of the political economy of Nigeria on deliberation and regulation of the space and its inadequacies to fulfil some of the criteria for democratic deliberation made the sphere dysfunctional but, nevertheless of some significance, as already explained.

9.3 Research contributions to Knowledge

One of the critical reasons for conducting research is to be able to provide new knowledge. Therefore, the researcher provides below the significant contributions of the study to the body of research on online news commenting. Specifically, the project has:

1. Provided new knowledge on the online news commenting environment in Nigeria
2. Created an explanatory model of online news commenting
3. Provided suggestions and recommendations on how to improve the state of online news commenting in Nigeria. (see Section 9.4 below)

One of the areas the study contributed to knowledge in is new information on the online news commenting environment in Nigeria. Previous research on news commenting in Nigeria focussed on the discursive space and whether it reflects a democratic deliberation through the analysis of the commenting platform using the public sphere criteria. This study provided a novel approach to the study of online news commenting in Nigeria by combining the theories of the public sphere and critical political economy. Therefore, the researcher expanded the scope of analysis to include an investigation of underlying factors that influenced commenters, news provision and the management of the news websites, all of which ultimately conditioned online deliberation. Through the evidence of analysis provided in Chapter Seven and the discussion in Chapter Eight, the research provided new knowledge on the importance of political economy factors such as ethnicity, religion, power relations, and commercialism – specifically how they conditioned debates to reveal the present state of online news commenting in Nigeria.

The analysis and evidence generated from the application of the public sphere and critical political economy theories to the data set collected for the study led to the development of an explanatory model of the present state of online news commenting environment in Nigeria. The model combines insights from the two analytical frameworks of the public sphere and the critical political economy in the study of online news commenting space in Nigeria (see Chapter Eight). None of the previous studies reviewed by the researcher combined the two frameworks for the analysis of the online news commenting practice in Nigeria as applied in this research. The model provides a framework to engage with the commenting space, the moderation and administrative system so as map out ideas about how the factors of political economy such as the material conditions of production, relative inequality, religion and ethnic dichotomy impoverish the state of online news commenting practice in Nigeria.

As noted above, the third contribution to knowledge in this study provided practical recommendations and suggestions of how to improve the state of online news commenting practice in Nigeria, detail of which are contained in the next section of the conclusion chapter.

In conclusion, although the focus of the study is primarily Nigerian online news commenting environment, the researcher believes that the findings will impact on Africa and the global south in several ways. As the internet and its various benefits become more accessible in Africa, this study has shown that online discursive sphere and its propensity to promote democratic deliberation and participation can help bring more people from the periphery of political discourse to the centre. Africa, as a continent, has a youthful population which is gradually embracing the internet platforms for communication. At the moment, the percentage of the youth population in Africa under the age of 25 stands at 60% (Ibrahim, 2019). As this population advances in age and the rate of internet adoption increases, the focus of democratic discourse will shift from the traditional realm, which at the moment is restrictive and elitist, to an online environment that allows for a higher and less restrictive form of participation in democratic deliberation.

Another implication of the study for future scholarship within Africa and the global south is concerned with the question of using the public sphere solely as a framework for studying deliberative practices. The public sphere originates from the global north and basically, restricts analysis of a deliberative space to rational and critical elements of a discourse. This study, however, showed that to have a good understanding of a deliberative sphere will require studying the socio and political-economic factors peculiar to such an environment. These factors are influential in the production of text and negotiation of meanings among online news discursive space participants, especially in most African countries where multiethnic and cultural peculiarities are evident during a discourse. Therefore, this study provides a radical detour and a new analytic template for interested scholars on online news commenting environments in Africa. Here, the absence of rationality and criticality of debate within an African discursive setting does not signify an absence of a public sphere but rather points to an indication of different ferments within the polity.

9.4 Recommendations for improving online news commenting in Nigeria

1. Online news commenting practice in Nigeria has become a vital ground for opinion formation and influence. Its power to ignite mass action and generate fake and divisive narrative is not in doubt if not adequately managed. Evidence of the space encouraging incivility and driving irrational deliberation are contained in the results of this research. The thesis, therefore, recommends that in order to ensure civility and constructive deliberation, online news providers should install on their commenting section a feature that allows commenters to flag

any comment deemed uncivil, inappropriate or off the topic of deliberation. Although the researcher observed the evidence of the ‘flagging’ feature in some of the commenting space, all the online news media need to embrace the feature.

2. As the online news commenting platform becomes more visible within the media space in Nigeria, more people will migrate to online news space to access information and participate in a democratic discussion. The researcher thus recommends that the Nigerian government should liaise with online news providers in the country on how to regulate the online news platform to prevent or at least minimise the expression of inflammatory comments capable of threatening the peace of the country. Furthermore, the Nigerian Union of Journalists and other related associations connected to the provision of news online should expand their codes of ethics specifying the way to regulate online news commenting activities in Nigeria to achieve civility. The government should expand and strengthen the functions of the Nigerian Press Council to serve as an ombudsman where irregularities on the platform are reported and addressed. All the recommendations are readily achievable.
3. The researcher also recommends that the government and online news organisation through the various media platforms should sponsor public information advertisements enlightening the citizens on the importance of online discursive space to democracy and opinion formulation. The advertisements or commercials should also explain in simple, clear terms how uncivil behaviour and posting of offensive content during an online discussion can incite hatred and causing civil unrest. The public information advertisements should be done in such a way to reassure the citizens that their rights to expression of opinions are intact. Instead, the advertisements should serve as spotlights on the abuse of the right to freedom of speech through uncivil behaviour, which may hurt others and Nigerian society.

9.5 Suggestion for future research

This study provides an understanding of the online news media commenting space in Nigeria and how much it reflects the public sphere to enable democratic deliberations. The review of the literature suggested that existing work in the area required further development, particularly studies that attempt to establish the democratic deliberative features of comment sections of online newspapers. However, this research has not in any way covered or exhausted all that needs to be known about online news commenting practice in Nigeria. As a result, this section suggests areas for further work.

This study limited its scope to online news websites platforms, the majority of which are online news versions of the mainstream media. Future study in the area should extend to social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to ascertain whether deliberation on the platforms reflects democratic deliberation. In this study, results indicated a form of closed discursive space where particular segments of the population are under-represented in the commenting space. The scope of the study did not provide any in-depth analysis of the factors responsible for the under-representation of women and uneducated in the discursive space. Therefore, the thesis encouraged further work that focusses on the factors that promote underrepresentation and inequality and how such affect the quality of deliberation in the online news commenting space.

The news matters used for the collection of data in this study are highly political and have a connection to ethnic nationalities and government. The researcher suggests that future research in the area can concentrate on public matters that are not political to understand how the analytical framework used in this study might respond to data that may be collected for content related to these matters. Examples include sports, public health and education issues.

9.6 Conclusion

The thesis focussed on the online news commenting space in Nigeria to ascertain the evidence of democratic practice concerning deliberation that takes place in the space. The study anchored its analytical framework on the theories of the public sphere and critical political economy for the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative and the quantitative data sets collected for the research. Both theories were applied in a mutually reinforcing pattern in the thesis. The public sphere theory was used in the thesis to determine whether the online commenting space in Nigeria reflected the conditions for democratic deliberative space. The critical political economy complemented the public sphere analytic framework by explaining why the online space is the way it is and the underlying values responsible for the state of the sphere. In the process, the study generated empirical evidence that produced an explanatory model referred to as the 'Integrative model for understanding online news commenting in Nigeria'. The model describes the state of online news commenting practice in Nigeria (See model in chapter 8, section 8.3).

In some ways, and as pointed out by the study, the online news commenting space in Nigeria reflects the social and economic fundamentals of Nigerian society. The online discursive space in Nigeria is problematic in several ways and from the evidence generated in the study does not reflect an ideal

public sphere and democratic deliberative space, or anything like it. Some of the reasons behind the impoverished state of the online discursive space are due to the broader social and political economy conditions in Nigeria and the somewhat tense and even tenuous nature of her 'corporate' existence. Despite the dysfunctionality of the online news commenting space, there are nevertheless fragments of hope which suggest some capacity to bring future change to public discourse. If achieved, this will no doubt be hard-won but undoubtedly worth the endeavour.

References

- Aalberg, T., van Aelst, P., & Curran, J. (2010). Media systems and the political information environment: A cross-national comparison. *International Journal of Press/Politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161210367422>
- Abubakar, A., & Abubakar, Y. (2015). An assessment of the managerial challenges of the Daily Trust newspapers. *Maiduguri Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (MAJASS)*, 12(1), 25–50.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319914357>
- Adebanwi, W. (2016). *Nation as a grand narrative: The Nigerian press and politics of meaning*. University of Rochester Press.
- Adeyanju, A. (2013). Mass media and public opinion: formation, process and uses. In U. Pate, C. Nwabueze, & I. Idiong (Eds.), *Politics, culture and the Media in Nigeria* (pp. 183–204). Stirling Horden publishers.
- Adomi, E. E. (2005). Internet development and connectivity in Nigeria. *Program*, 39(3), 257–268.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00330330510610591>
- Adut, A. (2012). A theory of the public sphere. *Sociological Theory*, 30(4), 238–262.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112467012>
- Agbaje, A. (1993). Beyond the state: Civil society and the Nigerian press under military rule. *Media, Culture & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344393015003008>
- Agbese, D. (2017, November 3). Fulani herdsmen: here are the statistics. *The Guardian Newspaper*. <https://guardian.ng/opinion/fulani-herdsmen-here-are-the-grim-statistics/>
- Ahearn, C. (2009, December 11). *How will journalism survive the internet age?* Reuters.
blogs.reuters.com
- Ahiabenu, K. (2014). Using technology to promote good governance and economic transparency in West Africa. In *Occasional Paper*.
- Aiyede, E. R. (2009). The Political economy of fiscal federalism and the dilemma of constructing a developmental state in Nigeria. *International Political Science Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512109105636>
- Ajebode, A. (2010). *Yesterday's guerrilla pressmen in today's democratic Nigeria: Dissatisfaction and disillusionment*. <https://www.ascleiden.nl/pdf/PaperOjebode.pdf>
- Ajiboye, E. (2016). Ideological discourse analysis of the functions of feedback comments on online reports of socio-political crises in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Language Studies*, 1(2).
- Akinfeleye, R. (2003). *Fourth estate of the realm or fourth estate of the wreck: imperative of social responsibility of the press*. <http://196.45.48.106:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/575>
- Akinola, O. (2014). Federalist deliberative democracy in Nigeria: challenges and prospects. In *Democratic Deliberation in Deeply Divided Societies*.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137357816_7

- Akinwale, Y. (2018, May 8). President Buhari beats Yar'Adua's record – makes 172-day medical trips in two years. *International Centre for Investigative Reporting*. <https://www.icirnigeria.org/President-buhari-beats-yaraduas-record--makes-172-day-medical-trips-in-two-years/>
- Aksoy, A., & Robins, K. (2003). The Enlargement of meaning: social demand in a transnational context. *Gazette*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00165492030654004>
- Al-Saggaf, Y. (2006). The online public sphere in the arab world: The war in Iraq on the Al Arabiya website. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00327.x>
- Albert, I. . (2008). Whose deliberative democracy? A critique of online public discourses in Africa. *12th General Assembly of Codestrial*.
- Albrecht, S. (2006). Whose voice is heard in online deliberation?: A study of participation and representation in political debates on the internet. *Information Communication and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180500519548>
- Aliagan, I. Z. (2011). Newspaper readership pattern in Ilorin. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 3(5), 451-466., 3(5), 451–467.
- Alimi, M. M., & Matiki, A. J. (2017). Translanguaging in Nigerian and Malawian online newspaper readers' comments. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2016.1241255>
- Amuwo, A. (2010). Between elite protectionism and popular resistance: The political economy of Nigeria's fractured state since juridical independence. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2010.512739>
- Andrejevic, M. (2009). Critical media studies 2.0: an interactive upgrade. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 1(1), 35–51. https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc.1.1.35_1
- Andrew, S., & Halcomb, E. J. (2009). Mixed methods research for nursing and the health sciences. In *Mixed Methods Research for Nursing and the Health Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316490>
- Arendt, H., Benhabib, S., Bohman, J., Dewey, J., Elster, J., Fraser, N., ..., & Lippmann, W. (2010). *The idea of the public sphere: A reader*. Lexington Books.
- Asen, R. (2015). Critical engagement through public sphere scholarship. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101(1), 132–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2015.999983>
- Atkinson, R. D., Castro, D., Andes, S. M., Ezell, S. J., Hackler, D., & Bennett, R. (2012). Innovation policy on a budget: driving innovation in a time of fiscal constraint. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1722870>
- Atton, C., & Mabweazara, H. (2011). New media and journalism practice in Africa: An agenda for research. *Journalism*, 12(6), 667–673. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405467>
- Awoloye, O. M., Siyanbola, W. O., & Oladipo, O. F. (2008). Adoption assessment of Internet usage amongst undergraduates in Nigeria universities - A case study approach. *Journal of Technology Management and Innovation*, 3(1), 84–89.

- Ayo, C. K., Mbarika, V. W., & Oni, A. A. (2015). The Influence of trust and risk on intention to use e-democracy in Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*.
<https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n6s1p477>
- Ayres, L. (2008). Ayres, L. (2008). Semi-structured interview. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. (Vol. 2, pp. 811–813). Sage Publications.
- Baber, W. F., & Bartlett, R. V. (2001). Toward environmental democracy: rationality, reason, and deliberation. *Kansas Journal of Law & Public Policies*, 11, 35–64.
- Bächtiger, A., Setälä, M., & Grönlund, K. (2014). Towards a new era of deliberative mini-publics. In *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*. Ecpr Press.
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=IZuCBAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA225&dq=deliberative+mini+publics+Kimmo+Grönlund+,+André+Bächtiger,+Maija+Setälä&ots=Ww2J0VdbpI&sig=BXJEVJ6G8CkUzKNPlgXkEbIvYvc>
- Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D., & Morlino, L. (2011). Legitimacy. In *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, (Vol 1, pp. 1415–1426). Sage Publications.
- Balnaves, M., Donald, S. H., & Shoemith, B. (2008). (2008). *Media theories and approaches: A global perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barnes, R. (2018). Uncovering online commenting culture: Trolls, fanboys and lurkers. In *Uncovering Online Commenting Culture: Trolls, Fanboys and Lurkers*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70235-3>
- Barton, M. D. (2005). The future of rational-critical debate in online public spheres. *Computers and Composition*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2005.02.002>
- Batorski, D., & Grzywińska, I. (2018). Three dimensions of the public sphere on Facebook. *Information Communication and Society*, 21(3), 356–374.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1281329>
- Beciu, C., Ciocea, M., Mădroane, I. D., & Cârlan, A. I. (2018). IntraEU labor migration and transnationalism in media discourses. A public problem approach. In A. I. C. Camelia Beciu, Mălina Ciocea, Irina D. Mădroane (Ed.), *Debating migration as a public problem: National publics and transnational fields*. Peter Lang.
- Benkler, Y. (2006). The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom. In *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20455766>
- Berger, G. (2002). Theorizing the media—democracy relationship in Southern Africa. *Gazette*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485020640010201>
- Bessi, A., & Ferrara, E. (2016). Social bots distort the 2016 U.S. Presidential election online discussion. *First Monday*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v21i11.7090>
- Best, T. (2011). *The vital role of the ethnic media in the 21st century world*. Carrib.
- Boczkowski, P. J., & Mitchelstein, E. (2010). Is there a gap between the news choices of journalists and consumers? A relational and dynamic approach. *International Journal of Press/Politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161210374646>

- Boczkowski, P. J., & Mitchelstein, E. (2012). How users take advantage of different forms of interactivity on online news sites: Clicking, e-mailing, and commenting. *Human Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2011.01418.x>
- Bohman, J. (2004). Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy. *After Habermas - New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, 184.
- Bolaño, C. R. S., & Vieira, E. S. (2015). The political economy of the internet: Social networking sites and a reply to Fuchs. *Television and New Media*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476414527137>
- Borcuch, A., Piłat-Borcuch, M., & Świerczyńska-Kaczor. (2014). The influence of the internet on globalisation process. *Journal of Economics and Business Research*, 18(1), 118–129.
- Bosch, T. (2010). Digital journalism and Africa online public spheres in south. *Communicatio*, 36(2), 265–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2010.485374>
- Boxell, L., Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. (2017). Is the internet causing political polarization? Evidence from demographics. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w23258>
- Bozdag, E., Gao, Q., Houben, G. J., & Warnier, M. (2014). Does offline political segregation affect the filter bubble? An empirical analysis of information diversity for Dutch and Turkish Twitter users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 41, 405–415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.028>
- Braun, J., & Gillespie, T. (2011). Hosting the public discourse, hosting the public: When online news and social media converge. *Journalism Practice*, 5(4), 383–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2011.557560>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bryman, A. (2003). Research methods and organization studies. In *Research Methods and Organization Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359648>
- Bryman, A. (2018). Quantitative and qualitative research: further reflections on their integration. In *Mixing methods: qualitative and quantitative research*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315248813-3>
- Bulut, E. (2016). Social media and the nation state: of revolution and collaboration. *Media, Culture and Society*, 38(4), 606–618. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716643013>
- Burgess, J. (2017). Convergence. In L. Ouellette & J. Gray (Eds.), *Keywords for media studies*. NYU Press.
- Callahan, K. (2007). Citizen participation: Models and methods. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 30(11), 1179–1196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690701225366>
- Campbell, S. W., & Kwak, N. (2010). Mobile communication and civic life: Linking patterns of use to civic and political engagement. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 536–555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01496.x>
- Canevero, M. (2018). Democratic deliberation in the Athenian Assembly: procedures and

behaviours towards legitimacy. *Histoire, Sciences Sociales*.

- Carlos, R. J., & Victor Sampedro. (2018). The Digital public sphere: An alternative and counter hegemonic Space? The Case of Spain. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 23–44. <http://ijoc.org>.
- Carpini, M. D., Delli Carpini, M. X., Carpini, M. D., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2004). Mediating democratic engagement: The impact of communications on citizens' involvement in political and civic life. *Handbook of Political Communication Research*, 357–394.
- Castells, M. (2015). *Network and outrage and hope: Social movement in the internet age*. Polity Press. Polity Press
- Castro, F. G., Kellison, J. G., Boyd, S. J., & Kopak, A. (2010). A methodology for conducting integrative mixed methods research and data analyses. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689810382916>
- Cenite, M., & Zhang, Y. (2010). Recommendations for hosting audience comments based on discourse ethics. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2010.512826>
- Cerovac, I. (2016). The role of experts in a democratic society. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 7(2), 75–88. <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs20162.75.88>
- Chambers, S. (2013). The Many faces of good citizenship. *Critical Review*, 25(2), 199–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2013.843874>
- Chappell, Z. (2010). A tension between ideal and practice: Re-evaluation of micro and macro models of deliberation. *Representation*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2010.499697>
- Chilton, S., & Cuzzo, M. S. W. (2005). Habermas's theory of communicative action as a theoretical framework for mediation practice. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 22(3), 325–348. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.106>
- Cho, D., & Kwon, K. H. (2015). The impacts of identity verification and disclosure of social cues on flaming in online user comments. *Computers in Human Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.046>
- Christians, C. G., Glasser, T. L., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K., & White, R. A. (2009). Normative theories of the media: Journalism in democratic societies. In *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.47-1837>
- Christopherson, K. M. (2007). The positive and negative implications of anonymity in Internet social interactions: “On the Internet, Nobody Knows You’re a Dog.” *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23(6), 3038–3056. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2006.09.001>
- Chung, K. S. K., & Chatfield, A. T. (2011). An empirical analysis of online social network structure to understand citizen engagement in public policy and community building. *International Journal of Electronic Governance*, 4(1–2), 85–103. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEG.2011.041709>
- Ciumasu, I. M. (2010). Turning brain drain into brain networking. *Science and Public Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.3152/030234210X489572>

- Coe, K., Kenski, K., & Rains, S. A. (2014). Online and uncivil? Patterns and determinants of incivility in newspaper website comments. *Journal of Communication*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12104>
- Cohen, R. (1996). Diasporas and the nation-state: from victims to challengers. *International Affairs*.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2625554>
- Coleman, S., & Blumler, J. G. (2009). The internet and democratic citizenship: Theory, practice and policy. In *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818271>
- Coleman, S., & Götze, J. (2001). Bowling together: Online public engagement. *Redalyc.Uaemex.Mx*, 1–5.
- Coleman, S., & Moss, G. (2012). Under construction: The field of online deliberation research. In *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2011.635957>
- Colin, R., & Kieran, M. (2016). *Real world research* (4th ed.). John Wiley and Sons.
- Colleoni, E., Rozza, A., & Arvidsson, A. (2014). Echo chamber or public sphere? predicting political orientation and measuring political homophily in Twitter using big Data. *Journal of Communication*, 64(2), 317–332. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12084>
- Collier, D., & Levitsky, S. (1996). Democracy “with adjectives”: conceptual innovation in comparative research. *Working Paper - Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1997.0009>
- Collins, E. (2018). Social media and scholarly communications: the more they change, the more they stay the same? In *The Future of Scholarly Communication*.
<https://doi.org/10.29085/9781856049610.009>
- Conole, G., & Dyke, M. (2004). What are the affordances of information and communication technologies? *Alt-J*, 12(2), 113–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0968776042000216183>
- Crawford, K., & Gillespie, T. (2016). What is a flag for? Social media reporting tools and the vocabulary of complaint. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814543163>
- Creeber, G., & Martin, R. (2009). *Digital cultures: Understanding new media*. Mc Graw Hill Education.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design* (Fourth Ed). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2011). Choosing a mixed methods design. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Method Research*.
- Cropf, R. A. (2007). The wealth of networks. How social production transforms markets and freedom: by Yochai Benkler. In *Social Science Computer Review* (Vol. 7).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439307301373>
- Crouse, T., & Lowe, P. . (2018). Snowball sampling. In B. B. Frey (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of educational research, measurement, and evaluation* (pp. 1–3). Sage Publication, Inc.
<https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781506326139>

- Cuceu, C. (2011). Milestones in the critique of the public sphere: Dewey and Arendt. *Journal for Communication and Culture*, 1(2), 99–110.
http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/docview/1151783405?accountid=15182%5Cnhttp://sfx.scholarsportal.info/york?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&genre=unknown&sid=ProQ:ProQ:philosophersindex&atitle=Milestones+in+t
- Cunningham, S. (2001). Popular media as public ‘sphericules’ for diasporic communities. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4(2), 131–147.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/136787790100400201>
- Curato, N. (2012). A sequential analysis of democratic deliberation. *Acta Politica*.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2012.15>
- Curato, N., & Ong, J. C. (2015). Inclusion as deliberative agency: The selective representation of poor women in debates and documentaries about reproductive health. *Television and New Media*, 16(6), 576–594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476414554401>
- Curran, James, Coen, S., Aalberg, T., Hayashi, K., Jones, P. K., Splendore, S., Papathanassopoulos, S., Rowe, D., & Tiffen, R. (2013). Internet revolution revisited: A comparative study of online news. *Media, Culture and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713499393>
- Curran, James, Fenton, N., & Freedman, D. (2012). Misunderstanding the internet. In *Misunderstanding the Internet*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203146484>
- Curran, James, & Witschge, T. (2010). Liberal dreams and the internet. In *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280010.n7>
- Dahl, R. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. Yale University Press.
- Dahlberg, L. (2007). Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: From consensus to contestation. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807081228>
- Dahlberg, L. (2011). Re-constructing digital democracy: An outline of four “positions.” *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810389569>
- Dahlgren, P. (2005). The internet, public spheres, and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation. *Political Communication*, 22(2), 147–162.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933160>
- Daily Times. (2017). *Nigerian Newspapers History and models*. Daily Times.
<https://dailytimes.ng/nigerian-newspapers-history-models/%0D>
- Daramola, I. (2006). *History and development of mass media in Nigeria*. Rothan Press Limited.
- Dare, S. (2007). *Guerilla journalism: Dispatches from the underground*. Xlibris, Corp.
- Dare, Sunday. (2010). The Rise of citizen journalism in Nigeria – A case study of Sahara Reporters. *Reuters Institute Fro the Study of Journalism*, 1–74.
- Davidson, A. (1987). E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics (Verso, London, 1985). In *Thesis Eleven*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/072551368701600118>

- Davidson, S., & Elstub, S. (2014). Deliberative and participatory democracy in the UK. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856X.12001>
- Dayan, D. (2002). Particularistic media and diasporic communications. In Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds) (Ed.), *Media, Ritual and Identity* (p. 280). Routledge.
<http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ink8heriXAcC&pgis=1>
- Denscombe, M. (2010). The Good research guide for small scale research projects. In *Open University Press*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0017540>
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). The Research Act: A theoretical orientation to sociological methods. In *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2092290>
- Dermont, C. (2016). Taking turns at the ballot box: Selective participation as a new perspective on low turnout. In *Swiss Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12194>
- Díaz-Noci, J., Domingo, D., Masip, P., Lluís Micó, J., & Ruiz, C. (2012). Comments in news, democracy booster or journalistic nightmare: Assessing the quality and dynamics of citizen debates in Catalan online newspapers. *The Official Research Journal of the International Symposium on Online Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/intimm/dxu027>
- Dontsov, A. I., & Zotova, O. Y. (2013). Reasons for migration decision making and migrants security notions. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 86, 76–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.08.528>
- Downey, J. (2014). Flux and the public sphere. *Media, Culture and Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713517732>
- Downey, J., & Fenton, N. (2003). New media, counter publicity and the public sphere. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444803005002003>
- Downie, L., & Schudson, M. (2009). The reconstruction of American journalism. *Columbia Journalism Review*.
- Dryzek, J. S. (2000). *Deliberative democracy and beyond: liberals, critics, contestations*. Oxford University Press.
- Dryzek, J. S. (2002). Discursive democracy in a reflexive modernity university. In *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/019925043X.001.0001>
- Dryzek, J. S. (2011). Du. In *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199562947.001.0001>
- Dugmore, H., & Ligaga, D. (2013). Citizen journalism in South Africa and Kenya: The quandary of quality and the prospects for growth. In *The Future of Quality News Journalism: A Cross-Continental Analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203382707>
- Duncan, A., & Williams, G. (2012). Making development assistance more effective through using political-economy analysis: what has been done and what have we learned? *Development Policy Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7679.2012.00568.x>
- Duyile, D. (1987). *Makers of Nigerian press*. Gong Communications.
- Duyn, E. Van, Peacock, C., & Stroud, N. J. (2019). The gender gap in online news comment

- sections. *Social Science Computer Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439319864876>
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., Lowe, A. (2002). *Management research: An introduction*. Sage Publications.
- Eatwell, J., Milgate, M., & Newman, P. (1991). *The world of economics*. Springer.
- Ebeling, M. (2006). After Habermas: New perspectives on the public sphere (Sociological Review Monograph). *Sociological Research Online*, 11(2), 108–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136078040601100204>
- Edozie, R. K. (2017). Pan-Africanism is Africa’s third way: The cultural relevance of African political economy. In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development*. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95232-8_48
- Eilders, C. (2006). News factors and news decisions. Theoretical and methodological advances in Germany. *Communications*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/COMMUN.2006.002>
- Ekeh, P. P. (1975). Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A theoretical statement. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500007659>
- Ekwo, U. (2012). *Diaspora media and citizen engagement in the digital age: Analyzing the impact of transnational journalism on democratization*.
- el-Nawawy, M., & Khamis, S. (2011). Political blogging and (re) envisioning the virtual public sphere: Muslim-Christian discourses in two Egyptian blogs. *International Journal of Press/Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161210390209>
- Elstub, S. (2010). The third generation of deliberative democracy. *Political Studies Review*, 8(3), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9302.2010.00216.x>
- Engel, U. (2015). *Improving survey methods: Lessons from recent research*. Routledge.
- Ercan, S. A., & Dryzek, J. S. (2015). The reach of deliberative democracy. *Policy Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2015.1065969>
- Falade, D. A. (2014). Political participation in Nigerian democracy: A study of some selected local government areas in Ondo State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: F Political Science*, 14(8).
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). A history of Nigeria. In *A History of Nigeria*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819711>
- Fasona, M. J., & Omojola, A. . (2005). Climate change , human security and communal clashes in Nigeria. *Human Security and Climate Change*, June, 21–23. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.2218.5928>
- Fenton, N. (2011). Deregulation or democracy? New media, news, neoliberalism and the public interest. *Continuum*, 25(1), 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2011.539159>
- Fenton, N. (2016). Post-Democracy , Press , Politics and Power. *The Political Quarterly*, 87(1), 81–85.
- Fenton, N. (2018). Fake Democracy: The limits of public sphere theory. *Javnost*, 25(1–2), 28–34.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1418821>

- Fink, A. (2003). *How to sample in survey* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Finlayson, G. (2005). Habermas: a very short introduction. *Oxford University Press*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192840950.001.0001>
- Fletcher, R., & Park, S. (2017). The impact of trust in the news media on online news consumption and participation. *Digital Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1279979>
- Flick, U. (2011). *Introducing research methodology: A beginner's guide to doing a research project*. Sage Publications.
- Følstad, A., & Lüders, M. (2013). Online political debate: Motivating factors and impact on political engagement. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Including Subseries Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence and Lecture Notes in Bioinformatics)*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40346-0-11>
- Foucault, M. (1980). Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings. In *New York*.
<https://doi.org/citeulike-article-id:798470>
- Fourie, P. (2007). *Media studies: Media history, media and society*. Juta & Co.
- Fox, J., & McEwan, B. (2017). Distinguishing technologies for social interaction: The perceived social affordances of communication channels scale. *Communication Monographs*, 84(3), 298–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2017.1332418>
- Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P., & Grimshaw, J. M. (2010). What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies. *Psychology and Health*, 25(10), 1229–1245.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440903194015>
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, 25/26, 56–80.
- Freedman, D. (2016). The internet of capital. In J Curran, N. Fenton, & D. Freedman (Eds.), *Misunderstanding the Internet* (pp. 85–116). Routledge.
- Freelon, D. (2015). Discourse architecture, ideology, and democratic norms in online political discussion. *New Media and Society*, 17(5), 772–791.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813513259>
- Fuchs, C. (2010). Class, knowledge and new media. *Media, Culture and Society*, 32(1), 141–150.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443709350375>
- Fuchs, C. (2012). Class and exploitation on the internet. In *Digital Labor: The Internet as playground and factory*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203145791>
- Fuchs, C. (2006). *eParticipation research: A case study on political online debate in Austria* (No. 1).
- Fuchs, Christian. (2017). *Social Media: a critical introduction* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Fylan, F. (2005). Semi-structured interviewing. In *A Handbook of research methods for clinical*

and health psychology semi-structured interviewing.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780198527565.001.0001>

- Galletta, A., & Cross, W. E. (2013). Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication. In *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*.
<https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-2430>
- Galliers, R. D. (1992). Choosing information systems research approaches. In R. . Galliers (Ed.), *Choosing information systems research approaches. In information systems research: issues, methods and practical guidelines approaches*. Blackwell Scientific Publication.
- Garner, R., Hansen, M. H., & Crook, J. A. (1993). The Athenian democracy in the age of Demosthenes: Structure, principles and ideology. *The American Historical Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2167090>
- Gastil, J. W. (2008). Political communication and deliberation. In *Political communication and deliberation*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483329208>
- Gates, B. (1995, December 6). To make a fortune on the internet, find a niche and fill it. *Seattle Post Intelligence*.
- Gaudio, R. P. (2014). Trans-Saharan trade: The routes of “African sexuality.” In *Journal of African History*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853714000619>
- Gerhards, J., & Friedhelm, N. (1993). 'Structures and functions of modern publishers. In W R. Langenbucher (Ed.), *Political Communication* (pp. 52–88). Braumüller.
- Gerhards, Jürgen, & Schäfer, M. S. (2010). Is the internet a better public sphere? comparing old and new media in the USA and Germany. *New Media and Society*, 12(1), 143–160.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809341444>
- Gerring, J., Ziblatt, D., Van Gorp, J., & Arevalo, J. (2011). An institutional theory of direct and indirect rule. *World Politics*, 63(3), 377–433.
- Gerrish, K. (2005). The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues, 2nd edition. In *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (Vol. 51, Issue 5). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2005.03538_2.x
- Gewertz, D., Errington, F., & Clifford, J. (1998). Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3034525>
- Gibson, R., Lusoli, W., & Ward, S. . (2005). Online participation in the U.K: testing a “contextualised” model of internet effect. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 7(4), 56–83.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Veenstra, A., Vraga, E., & Shah, D. (2010). Digital democracy: Reimagining pathways to political participation. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19331680903316742>
- Gilder, G. (1994). *Life After Television*. Whittle Direct.
- Gillmor, D. (2004). We the media: The rise of citizen journalists. *National Civic Review*.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/ncr.62>

- Gitlin, T. (2003). *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New left*. University of California Press.
- Gitlin, Todd. (1998). Public sphere or public sphericules? In *Media, Ritual, and Identity*.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory. 1967. *Weidenfield & Nicolson, London*.
- Glen, C., & Royston, M. (2009). Digital cultures: Understanding new media. In *Mc Graw Hill*. Open University Press.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Digital_cultures.html?id=MTnhAAAAMAAJ
- Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (1978). Theories of communication and theories of society. *Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027800500308>
- Grabowicz. (2014). *The transition to digital journalism*.
<https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/digital-transform/>
- Graham, T. (2015). Everyday political talk in the Internet- based public sphere. In *Handbook of Digital Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782548768.00024>
- Graham, T., & Wright, S. (2014). Discursive equality and everyday talk online: The impact of “superparticipants.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(3), 625–642.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12016>
- Graneheim, U. H., Lindgren, B. M., & Lundman, B. (2017). Methodological challenges in qualitative content analysis: A discussion paper. *Nurse Education Today*.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2017.06.002>
- Grönlund, Å., & Wakabi, W. (2015). Citizens’ use of new media in authoritarian regimes: A case study of Uganda. *Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1681-4835.2015.tb00479.x>
- Grossman, L. . (1995). *The electronic republic: Reshaping democracy in the information age*. Vikings.
- Grusky, D., & Piketty, T. (2018). Capital in the 21st Century. In *Inequality in the 21st Century* (pp. 43–48). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499821-9>
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1998). The landscape of qualitative research theories and issues. In *Competing paradigms in qualitative research*.
- Guerra, P. H. C., Jr, W. M., Cardie, C., & Kleinberg, R. (2013). A measure of polarization on social media networks based on community boundaries. *Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, Weinberger 2011*, 1–10.
- Gunter, B. (2015). News and the net. In *News and the Net*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315682525>
- Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (2009). *Why deliberative democracy?* Princeton University Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. MIT Press.

- Habermas, Jürgen. (1992). Further Reflections on the Public Sphere. In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1994). Three normative models of democracy. *Constellations*, 1(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.1994.tb00001.x>
- Habermas, Jürgen. (2001). Constitutional democracy: A paradoxical union of contradictory principles? *Political Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591701029006002>
- Hall, R. (2013). Mixed methods: In search of a paradigm. In *Conducting Research in a Changing and Challenging World*.
- Hall, S. (2012). Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’? In *Questions of Cultural Identity*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n1>
- Halpern, D., & Gibbs, J. (2013). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Computers in Human Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.10.008>
- Harding, P., & Hansen, M. H. (1990). The Athenian Assembly in the Age of Demosthenes. *Phoenix*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1088336>
- Hassid, J., & Repnikova, M. (2016). Why Chinese print journalists embrace the Internet. In *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884915592405>
- Hauser, G. A. (1999). *Vernacular voices: The rhetoric of publics and public spheres*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Haussler, T. (2018). *The media and the public sphere: A deliberative model of democracy*. Routledge.
- Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy*. Polity Press.
- Henderson, W. (2012). John Ruskin’s political economy. In *John Ruskin’s Political Economy*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203024263>
- Hendriks, C. M. (2006). Integrated deliberation: Reconciling civil society’s dual role in deliberative democracy. *Political Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00612.x>
- Herbst, S. (2010). Rude democracy: Civility and incivility in American politics. In *Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.48-4153>
- Hermanns, H. (2008). Mobile democracy: Mobile phones as democratic tools. *Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2008.00314.x>
- Hesse-Biber, S., & Reay, D. (2014). Future Directions in Difference Research: Recognizing and Responding to Difference in the Research Process. In *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384740.n30>
- Hindman, M. (2009). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Hlavach, L., & Freivogel, W. H. (2011). Ethical implications of anonymous comments posted to online news stories. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*,

26(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2011.525190>

Holub, R. C. (1991). The structural transformation of the public sphere. Habermas Jürgen. Tr. Burger Thomas with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989. Pp. xix + 301. *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics and Literatures*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1040820700000627>

Hongladarom, S. (2007). Information Divide, Information Flow and Global Justice. ... *Ethics in the Context of the Global Information Society*.

Hootsuite. (2018). *Digital 2018: Nigeria*. 40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.solener.2006.08.015>

Howard, P. N., Woolley, S., & Calo, R. (2018). Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2018.1448735>

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

Hüller, T. (2007). Amy Gutmann, Dennis Thompson: Why deliberative democracy?: Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2004, 256 S., £ 37,95. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-007-0039-0>

Ibrahim, M. (2019). *Africa's first challenge: the youth bulge stuck in 'waithood.'* Mo Ibrahim Foundation. <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2019/africas-first-challenge-youth-bulge-stuck-waithood>

Ikime, O. (1980). *Groundwork of Nigerian history*. Heinemann.

Ikpebe, E. (2019). Nation as grand narrative: The Nigerian press and the politics of meaning, by Wale Adebani. In *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* (Vol. 49, Issue 3). University of Rochester Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjz018>

Information Systems. (2016). Oxford Reference - A Dictionary of Computer Science. *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199688975.001.0001>

Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design: From Theory to Practice. *Field Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05282260>

Jackson, K. M., Pukys, S., Castro, A., Hermosura, L., Mendez, J., Vohra-Gupta, S., Padilla, Y., & Morales, G. (2018). Using the transformative paradigm to conduct a mixed methods needs assessment of a marginalized community: Methodological lessons and implications. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 66(September 2017), 111–119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.09.010>

Jagboro, K. (2005). Computerization of academic libraries: a case study of Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. *Lagos Journal of Library and Information Science*. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljlis.v1i1.35473>

James, H., & Couldry, N. (2011). “Rethinking convergence/culture. *Cultural Studies* 25.4/5 (2011): 473– 86, 25(4/5), 473–486.

- Jamshed, S. (2014). Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy*. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-0105.141942>
- Jebril, N., Stetka, V., & Loveless, M. (2013). M. and democratisation (Reuters I. for the S. of J. R. R. I. for the S. of J. (2013). *Media and democratisation*.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- Jennstål, J. (2018). Deliberative participation and personality: The effect of traits, situations, and motivation. *European Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773918000024>
- Jibril, A., & Targema, T. S. (2017). Online readers' comments and national unity. In V. Ayedun-Aluma (Ed.), *Digital media, new order? emergent practices in the Nigerian media environment* (pp. 170–193).
- Johannessen, M. R. (2013). *Social media as public sphere : a stakeholder perspective*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TG-01-2015-0003>
- John W, C., Vidki L, C., & 大谷、順子. (2010). Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research=人間科学のための混合研究法. In *Sage*.
- Johnson, K. A. (2011). Citizen Journalism, Agenda-Setting and the 2008 Presidential Election. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*.
- Johnson, P., Buehring, A., Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2006). Evaluating qualitative management research: Towards a contingent criteriology. *International Journal of Management Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2006.00124.x>
- Journalism, I. (2018). *INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN AFRICA : AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF NON-PROFIT INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICA* by Ntibinyane Ntibinyane Sponsor : Anglo American (Issue June).
- Justwan, F., Baumgaertner, B., Carlisle, J. E., Clark, A. K., & Clark, M. (2018). Social media echo chambers and satisfaction with democracy among Democrats and Republicans in the aftermath of the 2016 US elections. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2018.1434784>
- Kalathil, S., & Boas, T. C. (2019). Wired for Modernization in China. In *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule*.
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. In *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Kalu, K. A. (1996). Political Economy in Nigeria: The Military, Ethnic Politics and Development. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02094502>
- Kang, H., Lee, J. K., You, K. H., & Lee, S. (2013). Does Online News Reading and Sharing Shape Perceptions of the Internet as a Place for Public Deliberations? *Mass Communication and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2012.746711>
- Karim, K. H. (2003). The Media of Diaspora. In *The Media of Diaspora*.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203380642>

- Kerlinger, F. N. and Lee, H. B. (1986). The Foundation of Behavioural Research. In *Foundation of Behavioral Research*.
- Kessler, C., & Rother, S. (2016). *Democratization through migration?: political remittances and participation of Philippine return migrants*. Lexington Books.
- Kies, R., & Jansen, D. (2004). Online Forums and Deliberative Democracy: Hypotheses, Variables, and Methodologies. ... *Conference on Empirical Approaches to Deliberative*
- Kies, Raphael. (2013). *Online deliberation: state of the art* (No. 1).
[https://orbilu.uni.lu/bitstream/10993/30829/1/kies-working paper.pdf%0D](https://orbilu.uni.lu/bitstream/10993/30829/1/kies-working%20paper.pdf%0D)
- Kies, Raphaël. (2010a). Promises and limits of web-deliberation. *Promises and Limits of Web-Deliberation, 2016*, 1–188. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230106376>
- Kies, Raphaël. (2010b). Promises and Limits of Web-deliberation. In *Promises and Limits of Web-deliberation*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230106376>
- Knights, M., & Cooks, C. (2013). *Social media for Journalists: principles and practice*. Sage Publications.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Johnson, B. K. (2014). Selective Exposure for Better or Worse: Its Mediating Role for Online News' Impact on Political Participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12036>
- Koc-Michalska, K., & Lilleker, D. (2017). Digital Politics: Mobilization, Engagement, and Participation. In *Political Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1243178>
- Koçan, G. (2008). Models of Public Sphere in Political Philosophy. *EUROSPHERE Online Working Paper Series*, 32.
- Kolawole, M. (2017). Internet access in Nigeria: mobile phones, issues, and millennials. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10(10), 153–163.
- Kondracki, N. L., Wellman, N. S., & Amundson, D. R. (2002). Content analysis: Review of methods and their applications in nutrition education. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046\(06\)60097-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60097-3)
- Kperogi, Farooq A. (2016). Networked Social Journalism: Media, Citizen Participation and Democracy in Nigeria. In *Participatory Politics and Citizen Journalism in a Networked Africa: A Connected Continent*. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137554505_2
- Kperogi, Farooq Adamu. (2013). Webs of resistance: The citizen online journalism of the Nigerian digital diaspora. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 73(9-A(E)), No Pagination Specified.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Ksiazek, T. B. (2016). Commenting on the News: Explaining the degree and quality of user comments on news websites. *Journalism Studies*, 0(0), 1–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1209977>
- Ksiazek, T. B., Peer, L., & Lessard, K. (2016). User engagement with online news:

- Conceptualizing interactivity and exploring the relationship between online news videos and user comments. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814545073>
- Ksiazek, T. B., Peer, L., & Zivic, A. (2015). Discussing the News: Civility and hostility in user comments. *Digital Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.972079>
- Kuyper, J. (2015). Democratic Deliberation in the Modern World: The Systemic Turn. *Critical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2014.993891>
- Laclau, Ernesto; Mouffe, C. (2013). Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics. In *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Lafont, C. (2015). Deliberation, participation, and democratic legitimacy: Should deliberative mini-publics shape public policy? *Journal of Political Philosophy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12031>
- LaHurd, C. S. (2018). Fifty years of American polarization and the changing roles of faith communities. *Dialog*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12373>
- Lai Mohammed. (2018, December 13). Fake news, biggest threat to 2019 polls. *Vanguard Newspaper*.
- Lampe, C., & Resnick, P. (2004). Slash(dot) and burn: Distributed moderation in a large online conversation space. *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings*.
- Latzer, M. (2013). Media convergence. In *Handbook on the digital creative economy* (pp. 123–133). EE Publishing.
- Lebech, A. (2002). *Democratic Communication in the Internet in Denmark*.
- Lee, C. W. (2011). Five assumptions academics make about public deliberation, and why they deserve rethinking. *Journal of Public Deliberation*.
- Lee, E. J., & Tandoc, E. C. (2017). When News Meets the Audience: How Audience Feedback Online Affects News Production and Consumption. *Human Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12123>
- Leung, L. (2009). User-generated content on the internet: An examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809341264>
- Levin, M. (2012). Academic integrity in action research. *Action Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750312445034>
- Lewis, J. M. W., Williams, A. J., Franklin, R. A., Thomas, J., & Mosdell, N. A. (2008). The quality and independence of British journalism. *Cardiff University*.
- Li, N. (2019). Nigeria's Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict and Peace Building. *Journal of Environmental Science and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.26502/jesph.96120049>
- Liu, X., & Fahmy, S. (2011). Exploring the spiral of silence in the virtual world : Individuals ' willingness to express personal opinions in online versus offline settings. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811414448>

href="http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p297660_index.html">http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p297660_index.html

- Løvlie, A. S., Ihlebæk, K. A., & Larsson, A. O. (2018). User Experiences with Editorial Control in Online Newspaper Comment Fields. *Journalism Practice*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1293490>
- Lowrey, W., & Anderson, W. (2006). The Journalist Behind the Curtain: Participatory Functions on the Internet and their Impact on Perceptions of the Work of Journalism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00261.x>
- Lu, Y., Heatherly, K. A., & Lee, J. K. (2016). Cross-cutting exposure on social networking sites: The effects of SNS discussion disagreement on political participation. *Computers in Human Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.01.030>
- Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (2013). Media studies' fascination with the concept of the public sphere: Critical reflections and emerging debates. *Media, Culture and Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712464562>
- LUO, H. (2012). *Introducing Research Methodology: A Beginner's Guide to Doing a Research Project by FLICK, UWE*. The Modern Language Journal. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2012.01382.x>
- Lupia, A. (2011). Can online deliberation improve politics? Scientific foundations for success. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1154649>
- M. Todd Bradley. (2011). African perceptions of democracy. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ajpsirx11.003>
- Mabweazara, H. M. (2014). Readers comments on Zimbabwean newspaper websites. *Digital Journalism*, 2(1), 44–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2013.850200>
- Mabweazara, H. M. (2015). Mainstreaming African digital cultures, practices and emerging forms of citizen engagement. *African Journalism Studies*, 36(4), 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1119486>
- Madakam, S., Ramaswamy, R., & Tripathi, S. (2015). Internet of Things (IoT): A Literature Review. *Journal of Computer and Communications*, 03(05), 164–173.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jcc.2015.35021>
- Mallet, J. (2011). *Mallet, J. (2011). African diaspora playing an important role at the polls*. Social & Strategic Assessment, LLC.
- Manning, P. (2001). *News and news sources: a critical introduction*. Sage Publications.
- Manosevitch, E., & Walker, D. (2009). Reader comments to online opinion journalism: a space of public deliberation. *10th International Symposium on Online Journalism*.
- Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., Thompson, D. F., & Warren, M. E. (2012). A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139178914.002>

- Mansbridge, J., Hartz-Karp, J., Amengual, M., & Gastil, J. (2006). Norms of deliberation: An inductive study. *Journal of Public Deliberation*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315248592-7>
- Mansell, R. (2004). Political economy, power and new media. *New Media and Society*, 6(1), 96–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444804039910>
- Marshall, S. (2007). *Jurgen Habermas and the public sphere*. <https://www.media-studies.ca/articles.htm>
- Martin Wobst, H. (2010). Diaspora and heritage: A perennial source of conflict. *Museum International*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2010.01729.x>
- Mason, J. (2006). Six strategies for mixing methods and linking data in social science research. In *Real Life Methods*.
- Mayer-Schönberger, V., & Cukier, K. (2013). Big Data: A Revolution that We Transform How We Live, and Think. In *Zhurnal Eksperimental'noi i Teoreticheskoi Fiziki*.
- McBride, K. A., MacMillan, F., George, E. S., & Steiner, G. Z. (2019). The Use of Mixed Methods in Research. In *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_97
- McChesney, R.W. (2013). *Digital disconnect: How capitalism is turning the internet against democracy*. New Press.
- McChesney, Robert. W. (2013). How can the Political Economy of Communication Help Us Understand the Internet? *Digital Disconnect*, 63–95.
- McDermott, L. (2018a). Online news comments as a public sphere forum: Deliberations on Canadian children's physical activity habits. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690216644444>
- McDermott, L. (2018b). Online news comments as a public sphere forum: Deliberations on Canadian children's physical activity habits. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 53(2), 173–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690216644444>
- McNair, B|. (2008). Votes! *M/C Journal*, 11(1). <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/21%0A%0A>
- McNair, Brian. (2017). An introduction to political communication: Sixth edition. In *An Introduction to Political Communication: Sixth Edition*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750293>
- McNeilly, K. (2016). After the Critique of Rights: For a Radical Democratic Theory and Practice of Human Rights. *Law and Critique*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-016-9189-9>
- McQuail, D. (2010). *Mass communication theory* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mendelberg, T. (2002). The deliberative citizen: Theory and evidence. *Political Decision Making, Deliberation and Participation*.
- Mendonça, R. F. (2015). Assessing some measures of online deliberation. *Brazilian Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-38212015000300021>

- Mertens, D. M. (2010). Transformative mixed methods research. *Qualitative Inquiry*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410364612>
- Milioni, D. L., Vadratsikas, K., & Papa, V. (2012). Their two cents worth': Exploring user agency in readers comments in online news media. *Observatorio*.
<https://doi.org/10.7458/obs632012591>
- Millen, D. R., & Patterson, J. F. (2002). Stimulating social engagement in a community network. *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/587119.587121>
- Miragliotta, N. (2012). Politicians, Twitter, and the limits of the virtual political public sphere. *Social Alternatives*.
- Mkinen, M., & Kuira, M. W. (2008). Social media and postelection crisis in Kenya. *International Journal of Press/Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319409>
- Mohammed, L. (2019). *Unregulated social media will trigger national conflagration*. Sahara Reporters. <http://saharareporters.com/2019/11/15/lai-mohammed-unregulated-social-media-will-trigger-national-conflagration>
- Mohsin, A. (2013). A Manual fro Selecting Smapling Techniques in Research. In *Economic Policy*.
<https://doi.org/10.1227/01.NEU.0000349921.14519.2A>
- Moira Maguire & Brid Delahunt. (2017). *Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and...: Discovery Service for Trinity College Dublin (University)*. AISHE-J.
- Møller, J., & Skaaning, S. E. (2013). Regime types and democratic sequencing. *Journal of Democracy*. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2013.0010>
- Morgan, D. L. (2007). Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained: Methodological Implications of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292462>
- Morgan, D. L. (2014). Pragmatism as a Paradigm for Social Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(8), 1045–1053. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413513733>
- Morley, D. (2001). Belongings: Place, space and identity in a mediated world. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136754940100400404>
- Morozov, E. (2011). Whither Internet Control? *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), 62–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0022>
- Morse, J. M. (2003). Principles of mixed methods and multi-method research design. In *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research*.
- Mosco, V. (2005). From the myth of cyberspace to the political economy of computer communication. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 7(1972), 49–67.
- Mouffe, C. (1999). Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? In *Social Research*.
- Moyo, D. (2009). Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in zimbabwe's 2008 election. *Journalism Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700902797291>

- Mu, A. (2019). 濟無No Title No Title. In J Calhoun (Ed.), *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling* (Vol. 53, Issue 9, pp. 1689–1699). MIT Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Mudhai, O. F. (2004). Researching the impact of ICTs as change catalysts in Africa. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.3368/ajs.25.2.313>
- Murthy, D., & Sharma, S. (2019). Visualizing YouTube’s comment space: online hostility as a networked phenomena. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818792393>
- Mustapha, A. R. (2012). The public sphere in 21st century Africa: Broadening the horizons of democratisation. *Africa Development*. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ad.v37i1>
- Mustapha, L. K., Gbonegun, V. O., & Mustapha, M. L. (2016). Social Media Use, Social Capital, and Political Participation among Nigerian University Students Usos dels mitjans de comunicació social, capital social i participació política entre els estudiants universitaris de Nigèria. *Trípodos*, 39, 127–143.
http://www.tripodos.com/index.php/Facultat_Comunicacio_Blanquerna/article/viewFile/384/438
- Mutsvairo, B. (2016). Participatory politics and citizen journalism in a networked Africa: A connected continent. In *Participatory Politics and Citizen Journalism in a Networked Africa: A Connected Continent*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137554505>
- Mutsvairo, B., & Ragnedda, M. (2019). Does Digital Exclusion Undermine Social Media’s Democratizing Capacity? In *New Global Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2019-0035>
- Mutz, D. C., & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051452>
- Myers, G., & Lampropoulou, S. (2012). Impersonal you and stance-taking in social research interviews. *Journal of Pragmatics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.05.005>
- Nagar, N. (2011). The Loud Public: The Case of User Comments in Online News Media. *Online Journalism Symposium*.
- Naidoo, V., & Schutte, C. (1999). Virtual institutions on the African continent. In G. Farrel (Ed.), *The Development of Virtual Education: A Global Perspective* (pp. 89–124). Open learning institute, Canada.
- Napoli, P. M. (2008). Toward A Model of Audience Evolution: New Technologies and The Transformation of Media Audiences. In *Donald McGannon Communication Research Center*.
- National Communication Commission. (2016). *Subscriber statistics*. www.ncc.gov.ng/statistics-reports/subscriber-data%0D
- Negroponte, N. (2010). From being digital to digital beings. *IBM Systems Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.1147/sj.393.0417>
- Nielsen, C. E. (2014). Coproduction or cohabitation: Are anonymous online comments on newspaper websites shaping news content? *New Media and Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813487958>

- Norris, T. (2010). Consuming schools: Commercialism and the end of politics. In *Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2013.846968>
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327–344.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401305>
- Nunn, N, & Wantchekon, L. (2008). The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the evolution of mistrust in Africa: An empirical investigation. *Paper, 68th Annual Meeting of the ...*
<https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.101.7.3221>
- Nunn, Nathan. (2008). The long-term effects of Africa’s slave trades. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1162/qjec.2008.123.1.139>
- Nwala, T. U. (2005). A Critical Assessment of the Parliamentary Model of Democracy. *The Question of Democracy: Direct Or Representative?*, 76.
- Nwosu, I. (1996). The role of the press in transitory Nigeria. In O. Dare & A. Uyo (Eds.), *Journalism in Nigeria* (pp. 20–30). NUJ.
- Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2010). De-Westernizing media theory to make room for African experience. In *Popular Media, Democracy and Development in Africa*.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843260>
- O’Reilly, M. (1996). Internet addiction: A new disorder enters the medical lexicon. In *CMAJ*.
- O’Sullivan, P. B., & Flanagin, A. J. (2003). Reconceptualizing “flaming” and other problematic messages. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444803005001908>
- O’Toole, G. (2014). *Politics Latin America*. Routledge.
- Obadare, E. (2016). Africa emergent public space. *Current History*, 115 (781)(781), 188–192.
- Obadare, Ebenezer. (2006). Playing politics with the mobile phone in Nigeria: Civil society, big business & the state. *Review of African Political Economy*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03056340600671340>
- Oboh, G. E. (2016). Reflecting on the Nigerian Media, Elections, and the African Democracy. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016666886>
- Odoh, S. I., & Chilaka, F. C. (2012). Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria : A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Worsening Incidence of Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in. *Oman Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.12816/0002246>
- OECD. (2014). Society at a Glance 2014: OECD Social Indicators. In *Society at a {Glance}*.
https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2014-en
- Ogbeidi, M. M. (2012). Political leadership and corruption in nigeria since 1960 : a socio-economic analysis. *Journal of Nigeria Stusies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2016.1226151>
- Ogola, G. (2015). Social media as a heteroglossic discursive space and Kenya’s emergent alternative/citizen experiment. *African Journalism Studies*, 36(4), 66–81.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1119490>

- Ogundipe, S., & Oluwole, J. (2016, April 15). Nigeria loses \$14 billion annually to herdsman-farmers clashes. *Premium Times*. <https://premiumnewsnigeria.com/2019/07/26/nigeria-loses-14b-yearly-to-farmers-herders-clashes-says-fayemi>
- Ogunsiji, M. A. (1989). *An introduction to print journalism*. Nelson Publishers.
- Ojo, E. O. (2003). The mass media and the challenges of sustainable democratic values in Nigeria: Possibilities and limitations. *Media, Culture and Society*, 25(6), 821-840+843. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443703256006>
- Oke, K. (2013). The colonial public sphere in Nigeria, 1920-1943. *Stichproben- Wiener Zeitschrift Fur Afrikastudien*, 13(25), 29–56.
- Okon, P. E. (2015). Community media and media policy reform in Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa. In *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315717241>
- Okoro, N. (2012). Mass Media in n Nigeria : An Exploratory Analysis. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 7, 1–6.
- Oladepo, O. T. (n.d.). *The Digital Public Sphere : Developing a Culture of Democracy in Contemporary Nigeria* By A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the.
- Oladipo, O. (2001). Knowledge and the African Renaissance. *Philosophia Africana*. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philafricana20014117>
- Olasupo, O., Oladeji, I. O., & Ijeoma, E. O. C. (2017). Nationalism and Nationalist Agitation in Africa: the Nigerian Trajectory. In *Review of Black Political Economy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12114-017-9257-x>
- Olayiwola, A. . (2014). A comparative political analysis of poverty and inequality in Nigeria. *Journal of Political Sciences and Public Affairs*, 2, 138.
- Olorunnisola, A. A. (2004). African Media, Information Providers and Emigrants as Collaborative Nodes in Virtual Social Networks. *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie*. <https://doi.org/10.4314/asr.v4i2.23226>
- Olson, K. (2014). Deliberative democracy. In S. W. Rosenberg (Ed.), *Jurgen Habermas: Key Concepts* (pp. 140–155). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2019.060106>
- Olukoyun, A. (2004). Media Accountability and Democracy in Nigeria, 1999–2003. *African Studies Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002020600030456>
- OLUTAYO, O. A. (1999). The Igbo Entrepreneur in the Political Economy of Nigeria. *African Study Monographs*.
- OMD, M. (2019). *Mediafact 2019*. /www.mediafactsbook.com
- Omotola, J. S. (2010). Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. *African Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adq040>
- Omu, F. I. . (1978). *Press and politics in Nigeria (1880-1937)*. Longman.

- Onimode, B. (1985). Nigeria: The dynamics of the challenge of underdevelopment. In M. O. Kayode & I.B. Usman (Eds.), *In MO Kayode and IB Usman The Economic and Social Development of Nigeria*.
- Onuoha, G. (2012). Contemporary Igbo Nationalism and the Crisis of Self-Determination in Nigeria. *African Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2012.668292>
- Orji, N. (2010). Governing “ethnicised” public sphere: Insights from Nigeria. *Africa Development*, 35(4), 165–178.
- Osabu-Kle, D. T. (2000). The politics of one-sided adjustment in Africa. *Journal of Black Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002193470003000403>
- Osaghae, E. E. (2006). Colonialism and civil society in Africa: The perspective of Ekeh’s two publics. *Voluntas*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-006-9014-4>
- Oso, L. (2012). Press and Politics in Nigeria: on Whose Side? *Lagos State University 47th Inaugural Lecture*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.placenta.2010.11.003>
- Ott, D., & Rosser, M. (2013). The electronic republic? The role of the Internet in promoting democracy in Africa. In *The Internet, Democracy and Democratization*.
- Oyedele, O. . (2015). User-generated contents on online news media: An internet-driven freedom that undermines national development. *Journal of Communication and Language Arts*, 6(1), 83–112.
- Oyedemi, T. (2015). Participation, citizenship and internet use among South African youth. *Telematics and Informatics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2014.08.002>
- Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, B., & Adeya, C. N. (2004). Dynamics of adoption and usage of ICTs in African universities: A study of Kenya and Nigeria. *Technovation*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-4972\(02\)00170-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-4972(02)00170-0)
- Oyeleye, L., & Osisanwo, A. (2013). Expression of ideologies in media accounts of the 2003 and 2007 general elections in Nigeria. *Discourse and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513486224>
- Oyero, O., Oyeyemi, K. D., Usaini, S. and, & Omole, F. (2017). Identity politics and Nigerian 2015 Presidential elections: a discourse analysis of feedback comments on selected online reports of political issues. *International Conference on Education, Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1372–1374.
- Ozohu, S. ., & John, A. . (2018). “Those speculating about my health are mischief makers”: Contextualizing newsreaders’ comments on President Buhari’s illness. *Journal of Communications, Media & Society*, 5(1), 66–79.
- Pallavi Dhakal. (2011). *An attempt to understand the role of the mass media in society through the concept of “hegemony*. Talking Communication. <https://palv.wordpress.com/2011/01/20/an-attempt-to-understand-the-role-of-the-mass-media-in-society-through-the-concept-of-hegemony/%0D>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere. *New Media & Society*, 4(1), 9–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614440222226244>

- Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media and Society*, 6(2), 259–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444804041444>
- Pape, S., & Featherstone, S. (2005). Newspaper journalism: A practical introduction. In *Newspaper Journalism: A Practical Introduction*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446215593>
- Parham, A. A. (2005). Internet, Place, and Public Sphere in Diaspora Communities. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.0.0020>
- Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: what the internet is hiding from you*. Penguin.
- Parkinson, J., & Mansbridge, J. (2012). Deliberative systems: Deliberative democracy at the large scale. In *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139178914>
- Parvin, P. (2018). Democracy without participation: A new politics for a disengaged era. *Res Publica*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1>
- Pate, U., & Wilson, J. (2014). Interactive and the evolving social media platform in online newspapers in Nigeria. *ORBICOM Meeting*.
- Pateman, C. (2012). Participatory democracy revisited. In *Perspectives on Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711004877>
- Pavlik, J. V. (2016). Journalism and new media. In *Journalism and New Media*. <https://doi.org/10.7312/pav11482>
- Pennington, M. (2003). Hayekian political economy and the limits of deliberative democracy. *Political Studies*, 51(4), 722–739. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0032-3217.2003.00455.x>
- Pennington, M. (2010). Democracy and the deliberative conceit. *Critical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2010.508632>
- Perloff, R. . (2013). *The dynamics of political communication: Media and politics in a digital age*. Routledge.
- Perpetua, N., Chimaobi, C., & Uche, I. (2018). Prevalence of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities*.
- Persily, N. (2017). Can democracy survive the internet? In *Journal of Democracy*. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0025>
- Phillips, D. C., & Burbules, N. . (2000). *Postpositivism and educational research*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Polletta, F., & Lee, J. (2006). Is telling stories good for democracy? Rhetoric in public deliberation after 9/11. *American Sociological Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100501>
- Poor, N. (2006). Mechanisms of an online public sphere: The website slashdot. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00241.x>

- Premium Times. (2011). *About us*. Premium Times. www.premiumtimesng.com/about
- Price, V. (2006). Citizens deliberating online: Theory and some evidence. *Online Deliberation: Design, Research, and Practice*.
- Purcell, K., Rainie, L., Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel, T., & Olmstead, K. (2010). Understanding the Participatory News Consumer. *Pew Internet {&} American Life Project*.
- Quandt, T. (2018). Dark participation. *Media and Communication*.
<https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i4.1519>
- Raphael Ojebuyi, B., & Salawu, A. (2019). Partisanship and selective reporting in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of elections. *African Renaissance*, 15(4), 75–98.
<https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2018/v15n4a4>
- Rasmussen, T. (2014). Internet and the political sphere. *Sociology Compass*, 8(12), 1315–1329.
- Rawls, J. (2001). *The law of peoples: with "The idea of public reason revisited"*. Harvard University Press.
- Redden, J., & Witschge, T. (2010). A new news order? Online news content examined. In *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age*.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280010.n11>
- Reichardt, Charles, S., & Rallis, S. F. (1994). The Relationship Between the Qualitative and Quantitative Research Traditions; Qualitative and Quantitative Inquiries Are Not Incompatible: A Call for New Partnership. *The Qualitative-Quantitative Debate: New Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1670>
- Richens, P. (2009). The Economic Legacies of the "Thin White Line": Indirect Rule and the Comparative Development of Sub-Saharan Africa. *African Economic History*, 37, 33–102, 37, 33–102.
- Ritzer, G. (2015). Prosumer Capitalism. *Sociological Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tsq.12105>
- Robles, J. M., & Córdoba-Hernández, A. M. (2018). Commodification and digital political participation: The “15-M movement” and the collectivization of the internet. *Palabra Clave*.
<https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2018.21.4.3>
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2015). Real world research: A Resource for Users of Social Science Research Methods in Applied Settings. In *Wiley*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2010.08.001>
- Rodny-Gumede, Y., Milton, Viola C., & Mano, W. (2017). Rethinking the link between media and democracy in the post-colony: one size does not fit all. In *Communicatio*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2017.1341943>
- Rosenberg, S. W. (2006). *Types of democratic deliberation: The Limits and potential of citizen participation*. UC Irvine: Center for the Study of Democracy.
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6jn728k5>
- Rosenberry, A., & Vicker, L. . (2017). *Applied mass communication theory: a guide to media practitioners* (2nd editio). Routhledge

- Rowe, I. (2015). Civility 2.0: a comparative analysis of incivility in online political discussion. *Information Communication and Society*, 18(2), 121–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.940365>
- Rozumilowicz, B. (2002). Democratic change. In M. E. Price, B. Rozumilowicz, & Verhulst (Eds.), *Media Reform. Democratizing the media, democratizing the state*. Routledge.
- Ruiz, C., Domingo, D., Micó, J. L., Díaz-Noci, J., Meso, K., & Masip, P. (2011). Public sphere 2.0? The democratic qualities of citizen debates in online newspapers. *International Journal of Press/Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211415849>
- Ryan, M. . (1990). *Women in Public: between banners and ballots, 1825-1880*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Salami, Y. . (2009). The Political Economy of Nigeria and the Continuing Agenda of Re-colonization: A Challenge for Critical Knowledge Production. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol 3, No 3, 3(3).
- Salgado, S. (2012). THE WEB IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES: Exploring the possible influences of the Internet in the democratization processes. *Information Communication and Society*, 15(9), 1373–1389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.647044>
- Sampson, I. T. (2014). Religion and the Nigerian state: Situating the de facto and de jure frontiers of state - Religion relations and its implications for national security. *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwt026>
- Sanders, L. M. (1997). Against deliberation. In *Political Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591797025003002>
- Sandywell, B. (2015). On the globalisation of crime. In *Handbook of Internet Crime*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843929338.ch3>
- Santana, A. D. (2016). Controlling the conversation: The availability of commenting forums in online newspapers. *Journalism Studies*, 17(2), 141–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.972076>
- Saward, M. (2001). Making democratic connections : political equality, deliberation and direct democracy. *Acta Politica*.
- Scammon, D. L., Tomoaia-Cotisel, A., Day, R. L., Day, J., Kim, J., Waitzman, N. J., Farrell, T. W., & Magill, M. K. (2013). Connecting the dots and merging meaning: Using mixed methods to study primary care delivery transformation. *Health Services Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12114>
- Schaffner, B. F., Macwilliams, M. C., & Nteta, T. (2018). Understanding white polarization in the 2016 vote for President: The sobering role of racism and sexism. *Political Science Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12737>
- Scheufele, D. A. (2001). Creating informed deliberation: The role of impact surveys in community decision making. In H.P Susan (Ed.), *Communication impact: designing research that matters*. Rowan & Littlefield.
- Schiller, H. . (1986). *Information and the crisis economy*. Oxford University Press.

- Schkade, D., Sunstein, C. R., & Hastie, R. (2010). When deliberation produces extremism. *Critical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2010.508634>
- Schmitter, P. C., & Karl, T. L. (1993). What Democracy is... and is not. In L. Diamond & M. F. Plattner (Eds.), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Schneider, S. M. (1997). Expanding the public sphere through computer-mediated communication : political discussion about abortion in a usenet newsgroup. *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*.
- Scholl, H. J. (2013). Electronic government: 12th IFIP WG 8.5 International Conference, EGOV 2013, Koblenz, Germany, September 16–19, 2013; Proceedings. *Electronic Government Research: Topical Directions and Preferences*.
- Scott, R. (2013). Indirect rule in tropica Africa: up close and personal. *Journal of Historical Biography*, 14, 101–119.
- Seib, P., & Janbek, D. M. (2010). Global terrorism and new media: The post-Al Qaeda generation. In *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203845370>
- Seidman, S. (1989). The public sphere. In S. Steven (Ed.), *Jurgen Habermas on society and politics*. Bacon Press.
- Seng, M. ., & Hunt, G. . (1986). The press and politics in Nigeria: A case study of developmental journalism. *Boston College Thirld World Journal*, 6(2), 85–110.
- Shah, D. V., McLeod, J. M., & Yoon, S. H. (2001). Communication, context, and community: An exploration of print, broadcast, and internet influences. *Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365001028004005>
- Shapiro, A. L. (1999). *The control revolution: A century foundation Book*. New Affairs.
- Sheehan, K. B., & Hoy, M. G. (1999). Flaming, complaining, abstaining: How online users respond to privacy concerns. *Journal of Advertising*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1999.10673588>
- Sherrick, B., & Hoewe, J. (2018). The effect of explicit online comment moderation on three spiral of silence outcomes. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816662477>
- Shirazi, F. (2008). The Contribution of ICT to Freedom and Democracy: An Empirical Analysis of Archival Data on the Middle East. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1681-4835.2008.tb00243.x>
- Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(1), 28–41.
- Shittu, M. (2013). Nationalist movement's trends in \ncontemporary Nigerian government and \npolitics. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*.
- Siapera, E., & Veglis, A. (2012). The Handbook of Global Online Journalism. In *The Handbook of Global Online Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118313978>
- Simon, D. H., & Kadiyali, V. (2007). The effect of a magazine's free digital content on its print circulation: Cannibalization or complementarity? *Information Economics and Policy*.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoecopol.2007.06.001>

- Simpson, S. (2004). Explaining the Commercialization of the Internet: A neo-Gramscian contribution. *Information, Communication & Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118042000208898>
- Skjerdal, T. (2016). Why the Arab Spring Never Came to Ethiopia. *Participatory Politics and Citizen Journalism in a Networked Africa: A Connected Continent*, 77–89.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137554505_5
- Skjerdal, T., & Gebru, S. (2020). Not quite an echo chamber: ethnic debate on Ethiopian Facebook pages during times of unrest. *Media, Culture and Society*, 42(3), 365–379.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719895197>
- Skjerdal, T., Gebru, S., Ahva, L., Ogola, G., Mabweazara, H. M., Atton, C., Mabweazara, H. M., Mabweazara, H. M., Bosch, T. E., Nyika, N., Benecke, G. Von, Brokensha, S. I., Conradie, M. S., Mutsvairo, B., Ragnedda, M., Ragnedda, M., Mabweazara, H. M., Paterson, C., Doctors, S., ... Ahva, L. (2015). New media and journalism practice in Africa: An agenda for research. *African Journalism Studies*, 36(4), 66–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1119486>
- Smith, G. (2009). Democratic innovations: Designing institutions for citizen participation. In *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609848>
- Sparks, C. (2010). The Internet and the Global Public Sphere. In *Mediated Politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511613852.005>
- Spoehr, D. (2017). Fake news and ideological polarization: Filter bubbles and selective exposure on social media. *Business Information Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266382117722446>
- Springer, N., Engelmann, I., & Pfaffinger, C. (2015). User comments: motives and inhibitors to write and read. *Information Communication and Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.997268>
- Stacks, D. ., & Hocking, J. . (1998). *Communication research*. Longman.
- Statista. (2015). *Number of Twitter users in the United States from 2013 to 2019*. 2019, 2019.
<http://www.statista.com/statistics/232818/active-us-twitter-user-growth/>
- Steenkamp, M., & Hyde-Clarke, N. (2014). The use of Facebook for political commentary in South Africa. *Telematics and Informatics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2012.10.002>
- Steensen, S., & Ahva, L. (2015). Theories of journalism in a digital age: An exploration and introduction. *Digital Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927984>
- Stern, B. L., Green, P. E., Tull, D. S., & Albaum, G. (1989). Research for Marketing Decisions. *Journal of Marketing Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172616>
- Stone, C., Trisi, D., Sherman, A., & Chen, W. (2014). A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*.
- Storm, L. (2008). An elemental definition of democracy and its advantages for comparing political regime types. *Democratization*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701846301>

- Stratton, J. (1997). Cyberspace and the Globalization of Culture. *Internet Culture*, 253–275.
- Street, J. (2010). *Mass media, politics and democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stromer-Galley, J. (2007). Measuring deliberation's content: A coding scheme. *Journal of Public Deliberation*.
- Stroud, N. J., Van Duyn, E., & Peacock, C. (2016). *Survey of commenters and comment readers*. mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ENP-News-Commenters-and-Comment-Readers1.pdf%0D
- Stroud, Natalie Jomini, Scacco, J. M., Muddiman, A., & Curry, A. L. (2015). Changing deliberative norms on news organizations' facebook sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 20(2), 188–203. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12104>
- Su, W. (2016). A virtual public sphere and its limitations – microblog, online civic engagement in China and its interplay with the state. *Journal of International Communication*, 22(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2015.1076734>
- Suberu, R. T. (1998). States' creation and the political economy of Nigerian federalism. In and G. H. Kunle Amuwo, Adigun Agbaje, Rotimi Suberu (Ed.), *Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria*. Spectrum Books.
- Susen, S. (2011). Critical Notes on Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere. *Sociological Analysis*.
- Sustein, C. . (2017). *#republic:divided democracy in the age of social media*. Princeton University Press.
- T. S. Onayinka, A. K. Tsebee, A. A. (2018). Situating Nigeria Newspapers online Readers' Comments within Habermas's Public Sphere. *Babcock Journal of Mass Communication*.
- Tador, M. (1996). History of the Nigerian press. In T. Momoh & G. Omole (Eds.), *The press In Nigeria*. Nigerian Press Council.
- Taiwo, B. R. (2007). Language, Ideology and Power Relations in Nigerian Newspaper Headlines. *Nebula*.
- Talisse, R. B. (2013). A pragmatist philosophy of democracy. In *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203940242>
- Tapia, A. H., & Ortiz, J. A. (2010). Network Hopes. *Social Science Computer Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439309335169>
- Targema, T. S., & Suntai, D. I. (2018). New media and democracy in Nigeria: An appraisal of the opportunities and threats in the terrain. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Africanos*. <https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.78013>
- Tashakkori, Abbas, & Teddlie, C. (2003). The past and future of mixed methods research: From data triangulation to mixed model design. In *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*.
- Taylor, C. (1993). Modernity and the rise of the public sphere. *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 14, 203–60. <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Taylor93.pdf>

- Tenenboim, O., & Cohen, A. A. (2015). What prompts users to click and comment: A longitudinal study of online news. *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913513996>
- Toba Paul, A. (2019). The Role of Social Media in Voter Education in Nigeria. *Scientific Journal of Research & Reviews*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.33552/sjrr.2019.01.000511>
- Toepfl, F., & Piwoni, E. (2015). Public Spheres in Interaction: Comment Sections of News Websites as Counterpublic Spaces. *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12156>
- Toffler, A. (1980). The third wave: The corporate identify crisis. In *Management Review*.
- Trey, G. A. (1991). The Structural transformation of the public sphere [MIT Press]. In *Radical Philosophy Review of Books* (Vol. 4, Issue 4). <https://doi.org/10.5840/radphilrevbooks1991411>
- Trygg, S. (2012a). Is Comment Free? Ethical, editorial and political problems of moderating online news. *Polis Journalism and Society*, 1–27. <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/POLIS/documents/IsCommentFree-PolisLSETrygg.pdf>
- Trygg, S. (2012b). Is Comment Free? Ethical, editorial and political problems of moderating online news. *Polis Journalism and Society*.
- Tsagkias, M., Weerkamp, W., & De Rijke, M. (2009). Predicting the volume of comments on online news stories. *International Conference on Information and Knowledge Management, Proceedings*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1645953.1646225>
- Tsagkias, M., Weerkamp, W., & De Rijke, M. (2010). News comments: Exploring, modeling, and online prediction. *Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Including Subseries Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence and Lecture Notes in Bioinformatics)*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-12275-0-19>
- Tsaliki, L. (2002). Online forums and the enlargement of public space: Research findings from a European project. *Javnost*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2002.11008802>
- Turetsky, K. M., & Riddle, T. A. (2018). Porous Chambers, Echoes of Valence and Stereotypes: A Network Analysis of Online News Coverage Interconnectedness Following a Nationally Polarizing Race-Related Event. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617733519>
- Turner, D. D. (2010). Comments Gone Wild: Trolls, Flames, and the Crisis at Online Newspapers. *Mimeo*.
- Udanor, C., Aneke, S., & Ogbuokiri, B. O. (2016). Determining social media impact on the politics of developing countries using social network analytics. *Program*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PROG-02-2016-0011>
- Udoakah, N. (1990). International media systems. In E. Akpan (Ed.), *Communication arts: Principles and applications* (pp. 288–299). Modern Business Press.
- Udoakah, N. J. (2017). *The political economy of Nigerian Journalism*.
- Ugwumba, E. (2018). Conflict Trends - Understanding the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria.

Conflict Trends, 3, 40–48.

United States Embassy in Nigeria. (2012). *Nigeria fact sheet*. January, 1.

Vanguard newspaper. (2018). *All about us*. Vanguard Newspaper.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/about/%0D>

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7>

Vaughan, O. (2016). Religion and the Making of Nigeria. In *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373872>

Vinet, L., & Zhedanov, A. (2011). A “missing” family of classical orthogonal polynomials. In *Journal of Physics A: Mathematical and Theoretical* (Vol. 44, Issue 8). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1751-8113/44/8/085201>

Visser, P. S., Krosnick, J. A., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2000). (2000). Survey research. In H. (Eds.), (p. 223–252). Cambridge University Press. In T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (pp. 223–252). Cambridge University Press.

VL, P. C., & Badiee M. (2010). Research question in mixed method research. In A Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural science* (2nd editio, pp. 275–304). Sage Publications.

Vromen, A. (2008). Building virtual spaces: Young people, participation and the Internet. *Australian Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361140701842581>

Vujnovic, M., Singer, J. B., Paulussen, S., Heinonen, A., Reich, Z., Quandt, T., Hermida, A., & Domingo, D. (2010). Exploring the political-economic factors of participatory journalism: Views of online journalists in 10 countries. *Journalism Practice*, 4(3), 285–296.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512781003640588>

Waisbord, S. (2003). Media Populism: Neo-Populism in Latin America. In M. et Al (Ed.), *The media and neo-populism: A contemporary comparative analysis* (pp. 197–217). Praeger.

WAN-IFRA. (2016). *Online comment moderation: emerging best practices A guide to promoting robust and civil online conversation*. www.wan-ifra.org/sites/default/files/field_article_file/AFPENG_online_excerpts_final.pdf%0D

Watson, B. R., Peng, Z., & Lewis, S. C. (2019). Who will intervene to save news comments? Deviance and social control in communities of news commenters. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819828328>

Weber, P. (2014). Discussions in the comments section: Factors influencing participation and interactivity in online newspapers’ reader comments. *New Media and Society*, 16(6), 941–957.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813495165>

Webster, P. F. (2002). Theories of the Information Society. In *Theories of the Information Society*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426265>

- Wellman, B., Quan-Haase, A., Boase, J., Chen, W., Hampton, K., Díaz, I., & Miyata, K. (2006). The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2003.tb00216.x>
- Wiklund, H. (2005). A Habermasian analysis of the deliberative democratic potential of ICT-enabled services in Swedish municipalities. *New Media and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444805056013>
- Wilhelm, A. G. (1998). Virtual sounding boards: How deliberative is on-line political discussion? *Information, Communication & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691189809358972>
- Willems, W. (2012). Interrogating public sphere and popular culture as theoretical concepts on their value in African Studies. *Africa Development*.
- Wiredu, K. (1996). Time and African thought. In *Time and temporality in intercultural perspective*.
- Wise, K., Hamman, B., & Thorson, K. (2006). Moderation, response rate, and message interactivity: Features of online communities and their effects on intent to participate. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00313.x>
- Witschge, T. (2008). Examining online public discourse in context: A mixed method approach. *Javnost*.
- Wojcieszak, M. E., & Mutz, D. C. (2009). Online groups and political discourse: Do online discussion spaces facilitate exposure to political disagreement? *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01403.x>
- www.speedtest.net. (2020). *Speed test global index*. Speed Test Global Index. www.speedtest.net/global-index
- Yang, J. H., Rojas, H., Wojcieszak, M., Aalberg, T., Coen, S., Curran, J., Hayashi, K., Iyengar, S., Jones, P. K., Mazzoleni, G., Papathanassopoulos, S., Rhee, J. W., Rowe, D., Soroka, S., & Tiffen, R. (2016). Why Are “Others” So Polarized? Perceived Political Polarization and Media Use in 10 Countries. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12166>
- Young, I. M. (2001). Activist challenges to deliberative democracy. In *Political Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591701029005004>
- Young, I. M. (2016). Inclusion and Democracy. In *Readings in Planning Theory: Fourth Edition*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119084679.ch19>
- Yusuf, A., & Odunuga, Y. (2018, March 18). We started Daily Trust Newspaper in one room. *The Nation*. thenationonlineng.net/started-daily-trust-newspaper-one-room/%0D
- Zaid, B. (2016). Internet and democracy in Morocco: A force for change and an instrument for repression. *Global Media and Communication*, 12(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766515626826>
- Zappen, J. P. (2004). The rebirth of dialogue: Bakhtin, socrates, and the rhetorical tradition. In *The Rebirth of Dialogue: Bakhtin, Socrates, and the Rhetorical Tradition*. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.42-4416>

Zelizer, B. (2009). Journalism and the academy. In *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203877685-10>

Ziccardi, G. (2013). Resistance, liberation technology and human rights in the digital age. In
Resistance, Liberation Technology and Human Rights in the Digital Age.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5276-4>

Appendix 1 Ethical Approval Letter



Research, Innovation and Academic
Engagement Ethical Approval Panel

Research Centres Support Team
G0.3 Joule House
University of Salford
M5 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 7012

www.salford.ac.uk/

14 June 2017

Dear Adeyanju,

RE: ETHICS APPLICATION AMR1617-16 – Online news commenting in Nigeria as a space for democratic deliberation: An analysis of selected online news sites.

Based on the information you provided, I am pleased to inform you that your application AMR1617-16 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/ or its methodology, please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting A&M-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Newbery', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Samantha Newbery
Chair of the Arts & Media Research Ethics Panel
Lecturer in Contemporary Intelligence Studies
School of Arts and Media
Crescent House, CH210
University of Salford
Salford M5 4WT
t: +44 (0) 161 295 3860
s.l.newbery@salford.ac.uk

Appendix 2 Semi-Structured Interviewee Information Sheet

Online news commenting in Nigeria as a space for democratic deliberation: An analysis of selected online news sites

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in the semi-structured interview, which is part of my data collection for my PhD research project. The interview will involve asking you questions relating to the topic of my research, and you are free to respond to the questions as you see fit. However, before you accept, it is important you read the information contained in this document and ask questions to clarify issues that are not clear to you. The study is investigating the nature of comments made by readers on the Nigerian online news sites. Its particular concern is on how opinion formation in online news commenting occurs and its implications for Nigerian public debate.

Purpose of the study

This research project is part of the requirements for the award of a PhD in media and cultural studies. As a result, the study is purely educational. However, the researcher intends to recommend the findings of the study to policymakers and online news organisation to improve on policy formulation. The results of the research may also be published in future as part of my academic publications.

Why have I been invited?

The participants for the project were invited for the following reasons of which you fall into one of the categories:

- a. You are a public office holder who manages the social media platform of the government and also monitors online news sites on behalf of the government;
- b. You are a staff of a news organisation that has online news presence;
- c. You read the news on the internet and react to news stories online through commenting.

Do I have to participate?

The decision to participate in the research is solely yours. Should you agree to participate, you will be required to sign a consent form. Your participation is voluntary, and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

Duration of the interview

The interview will last for 30 minutes approximately.

Confidentiality of your response

Your anonymity will be strictly protected. Your name and the recorded information will not be disclosed to any person as it will be stored in a password-protected environment. The data will be used strictly for the research.

Results of the study

The results of the study will form part of the thesis to be submitted by the researcher to his school. Your name will not be mentioned in the report.

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

Title of Research Project: Online news commenting in Nigeria as a space for democratic deliberation: An analysis of selected online news websites

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

Date:

Questions:

1. What is your understanding of online news commenting?
2. Why do you post comments or react to news/information online?
3. Are there factors in your opinion that influence the way people comment on online news platforms?
4. Do you think those who comment/react to news story online-based their arguments on verifiable facts or evidence?
5. As a person who read news online and posts comments in reaction to a news story or other readers' comments, do you think factors like religion, ethnicity and level of education reflect in a reader's posting/comment?
6. As a citizen, do you comment regularly or react to comments about government policies and programs on online news platforms?
7. Can you recall any decision taken by the government on an issue that was influenced by the comments of citizens online?
8. Which online news media is your favourite site for reading news and posting comments?
9. Why do you prefer the news website you just mentioned to others?
10. Are the news contents on your news website significantly different from your print version? (media)

11. Do you subject news stories intended for your news websites to the same editorial process as the print version? (Media)
12. Do you moderate readers' comments on your news websites? (media)
13. If you do, what type of moderation do you have in place? Human moderation or Machine (software) moderation powered by a specific algorithm? (media)
14. Why do you moderate readers' comments? (media)
15. Does the need to increase traffic on your website and revenue in the form of advertisement influence your judgement of what news story is posted on your website and how you moderate comments? (media)

Appendix 4 Invitation Letter



Dear Sir,

Invitation letter for the participant in a semi-structured interview

I am conducting a semi-structured interview as part of my PhD research to investigate whether comments made by readers on the Nigerian online news sites are democratic, and the part that opinion formation in online news commenting plays in Nigerian public life.

As a person who shared one or all of the below criteria, you have been chosen to give information on the subject:

- a. You are a public office holder who manages the social media platform of the government and also monitors online news sites on behalf of the government;
- b. You are a staff of a news organisation that has online news presence;
- c. You read the news on the internet and react to news stories online through commenting.

The duration of the interview will be approximately 30 minutes. Your response to the questions will be kept confidential, and your anonymity is guaranteed. The information recorded from the interview will be stored in a password-protected environment.

Your participation will be highly appreciated as your contribution to the research and findings of the study will further assist in the understanding of online deliberation and its effect on democracy and the public sphere.

If you are interested in participating, please kindly suggest a day and time suitable to you for the interview.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adeyanju Apejaye', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Adeyanju Apejaye

E-mail: A.Apejaye@edu.salford.ac.uk; adeyanju.apejaye@gmail.com

Mobile number: +447440147329, +2348039656954

Appendix 5 Survey questionnaire

Introduction

I would like to invite you to complete this questionnaire which is part of my PhD research project. The questionnaire contains closed and open-ended questions relating to the topic of my research. You are free to respond to the questions as you see fit.

Purpose of the study

The study is investigating the nature of online news sites commenting space as a public sphere for democratic deliberation. Its particular concern is how opinion formation in online news commenting occurs and its implications for Nigerian public debate. This research project is part of the requirements for the award of a PhD in media and cultural studies. As a result, the study is purely educational. However, the researcher intends to recommend the findings of the study to policymakers and online news organisation to improve on policy formulation and the deliberative space in Nigerian journalism. The findings of the research may also be published in future as part of the researcher's academic work.

1. What is your ethnic identity?

Hausa

Ibo

Yoruba

Ijaw

Ibibio/Efik

Ebira

Urhobo

None of the above, please specify

2. What is your religion?

Christianity

Islam

Traditional

Others

Other (please specify)

3. What is your gender?

Female

Male

4. What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65 to 74

75 or older

5. Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

Employed

Student

Business

Unemployed

Politician

Other (please specify)

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

No formal education

Primary School

Secondary School

Tertiary Education

7. Do you access news and information on the internet?

Yes

No

8. What type of device do you use in accessing news and information on the internet?

Desktop computer

Laptop computer

Smartphone

Ipad/Tablet

9. Do you react to news/information read on the online news websites through posting comments and engaging in discussion with other readers?

Yes

No

10. How frequently do you post comments and participate in online news discussion platform?

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

11. Why do you participate in the commenting section of online news media platforms?

12. What category of news/information do you usually comment on or deliberate with other readers in the online news media commenting space?

Economy

Politics

Health

Sports

Education

Religion

Other (please specify)

13. Do you go through any registration or identification process before being allowed to post a comment in an online news site?

Yes

No

14. How do you identify yourself within the online discussion platform?

Real name

Pseudonym (fictitious name)

15. Please explain the reason for your choice of answer

16. Is there any indication on the online news website you access information from and post comments to that their commenting space is moderated?

Yes

No

17. Tick the one you prefer between moderated and unmoderated online news commenting space

Moderated commenting space

Unmoderated commenting space

18. Explain the reason for your choice of answer to question 17

19. Have you participated in an online discussion on a public issue/s in Nigeria?

Yes

No

20. Give an example of a public issue you posted a comment on or participated in a discursive forum on the issue online

21. Can you say that the direction of online debates on the issue mentioned in question number 20 influenced the government's decision on the matter?

Yes

No

22. In your opinion, do you think the commenting space of online news media can enhance and increase democratic deliberation among citizens?