

# **STRUCTURED-DELIBERATIVE GOSSIP AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: A REFLECTION ON PRESIDENT TINUBU'S GOVERNMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The research paper explored the origins and key concepts of structured-deliberative gossip and political communication by assessing the nature of involvement of government in originating gossip, appraising the use of gossip by government as a probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria, discussing the practical considerations involved in implementing structured deliberative gossip by exposing practical cases of same in Nigeria and exploring the nature of involvement of government as manufacturers of gossip. The research was anchored on Habermas' theory on communicative action and the structured deliberative gossip theory. The study adopted the quantitative analysis method. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, pie chart and mean were used to analyze and present data. The major finding of this study is that some government policies are founded on gossips and some pieces of information perceived as rumours had been deliberately used for policy formation. The work therefore recommended that the Nigerian government at all levels should strive for transparency, open communication and objectivity on issues of national interest to proactively exonerate herself from any form of gossip traced to government; and also promote whistleblowing by providing protection for individuals who expose gossip sponsors.

**KEYWORDS:** Deliberative Communication, Gossip, Political Communication, Public Opinion, Participation

## INTRODUCTION

Structured deliberative gossip refers to the informal conversations and discussions that take place within government circles regarding policy decisions, political strategies, and other matters of public interest. These conversations often involve elected officials, government officials, staff members, lobbyists, and other stakeholders. While some of these discussions may be harmless and serve as a way for individuals to share information and insights, others may involve spreading rumors or engaging in manipulation and backstabbing tactics. As such, deliberative gossip can have significant implications on how government decisions are made and how public policy is shaped (Jun, 2023). Deliberative gossip in this context refers to the sharing of political information and insights through informal and often confidential channels. It serves as a means of gathering intelligence, gaining a better understanding of the dynamics within the government and influencing decision-making processes (Kurtulus&Pember, 2023). This form of communication can provide valuable insights into the opinions, motivations, and interpersonal relationships among those in power. Structured deliberative gossip can have both positive and negative implications. On one hand, it can lead to better decision-making process by providing decision-makers with additional perspectives and insider insights. It can also serve as a mechanism for identifying potential problems, raising concerns, and facilitating problem-solving within government circles (James & Cooper, 2023).

In the age of globalization, the media are potentially important sources of international and domestic referencing. Media can perform both negative and positive functions in regard to democracy, depending on the prevailing mode of power distribution and specific social and organizational contexts. The mass media assumes a more emancipatory role as the power structure becomes more decentralized or divisive (Kaul, 2021). The main concern of scholars and the general citizenry about the role of the mass media in the political process is to understand the contributions of information flow and media institutions to the functioning of democracy and its supportive institutions. For ill or for good, the role of the mass media has become pivotal to the democratic process and citizens' participation in it. Though the complex nature of democracy cannot be reduced to the issues of the mass media, but as Oso (2020) once observed, the health of democracy is increasingly being linked to the health of a country's communication system. According to him, the dynamics of democracy are intimately linked to the practices of communication and societal communication increasingly takes place within the mass media. The link between mass media systems and politics is widely acknowledged and has been confirmed by a significant

amount of research. However, the degree of this link and the forms that it can take, vary significantly according to different national contexts (Ciaglia, 2023). This brings to bear the need for communication to be deliberate if it aims to engender political participation for citizens within a given context, especially by mass media practitioners.

The idea of deliberative gossip has specific connections to political science, and the idea of deliberative democracy. The potential force of deliberative gossip is not only that it can contribute to the formation of value and knowledge rather it can also contribute to meaning-creation and knowledge formation among citizenry. Deliberative communication on the other hand is also essential for good governance. Ideally, a range of political practices particularly, deliberative practices within democratic political systems break down inequalities to empower inclusion and promote mutual respect, enhance the epistemic quality of public opinion, and ultimately underwrite legitimate collective decisions. Beauvais (2020) asserts that the formulation of inclusion and mutual respect are the outcomes of deliberative communication. However, this pattern of communication can empower inclusion and promote mutual respect, which are the prerequisites for such communication to occur.

Despite decades of research, the unity of the concept on deliberative and political communication is often reflected in the definitions given to the very notion. Ramsey (2020) suggests that a model of political communication based on deliberative policy is supposed to generate legitimacy through a procedure of opinion and will-formation that grants publicity and transparency for the deliberative process; inclusion and equal opportunity for participation and a justified presumption for reasonable outcomes. Such a deliberative process, he argues, is already built into the everyday forms of communication that we all undertake. In the course of everyday, we listen to rational utterances, and weigh up their veracity; we are all interlocutors in the public sphere. Some groups of researchers interpret the concept as an effective political technology. According to this approach, it is considered that an election campaign is the main subject of research in especially political communication. The other point of view consists in the treatment of political communication as a function of the political system, as a functional element of the society, ensuring the correlation between other components (Grishin, 2021).

Political communication plays a crucial role in democratic societies, as it facilitates the exchange of ideas, information, and values among citizens, political actors, and institutions. The effectiveness of political communication is often imperative for the functioning of a democratic system, as it shapes

collective decision-making, public opinion and policy outcomes. Within this context, structured deliberative gossip offers a unique perspective on fostering rational discourse and inclusive deliberation.

The study sets out to provide a comprehensive overview of structured deliberative gossip in the realm of political communication. By delving into the theoretical foundations, practical considerations, and potential implications of structured deliberation, the work tends to enrich our understanding of how structured deliberative gossip can influence and shape political communication dynamics.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Political gossip often spreads unsubstantiated rumors, false information, and personal attacks, which can mislead the public and create confusion. Political gossip can often divert attention away from crucial policy discussions and pressing societal problems. Instead of focusing on real issues such as healthcare, education, and the economy, people get caught up in scandals, rumors, and personal attacks, which leads to a less informed and engaged electorate. The rampant spread of political gossip can erode public trust in the political system and lead to increased voter apathy. When citizens feel that politics is simply a game of rumors and personal attacks, they may become disengaged and disillusioned, resulting in decreased participation in democratic processes.

The problem with structured deliberative gossip and political communication lies in its potential negative consequences for transparency, accountability, and the integrity of the political process. Addressing these problems requires the promotion of transparent and accountable forms of political communication within the government. Ensuring that decision-making processes are open, inclusive and based on accurate and verified information is crucial for maintaining public trust in government institutions and the democratic process. Onobe *et al.* (2023) aver that ideas and government policies are often exposed on step-motherly ration and exacerbated by gossip to test their popularity before being implemented in some government coffers. In addition, Monleon *et al.* (2022) proffer that any deliberative process that is devoid of factors that expand inclusiveness by experts and stakeholder perspective will reduce transparency when revealing implicit factors for lack of acceptance. By addressing this problem, the research will contribute to the advancement of democratic processes and the promotion of more inclusive and meaningful political discussions.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **Assess the nature of involvement of government in originating gossip.**

1. Appraise the use of gossip by government as a probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria.
2. Discuss the practical considerations involved in implementing structured deliberative gossip by exposing practical cases in Nigeria.
3. Evaluate the inherent dangers of government trading and sponsorship of gossip.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Political Communication**

The term political communication refers to both a set of professional practices and a multi-disciplinary field of study focusing on the interaction between the political media and public spheres. This entry introduces the main theoretical perspectives and trends in the study of political communication (Goncalves, 2018). Another view to the concept provides that political communication is a system of producing, distributing, processing, keeping and exchanging standardized information which can influence the realization of the political authority consisting of political actors, audiences, organization of investigation of audiences, and organizations creating the content of political communication (Grishin, 2021). Political communication can also be viewed as the creation, shaping, dissemination, processing and effects of information among actors from the political system, the media and the public (Soukup, 2020). Another dimension to political communication is that it is a complex communicative activity in which language and symbols, employed by leaders, media, citizens and groups, exert a multitude of effects on individuals and society, as well as on outcomes that bear on the public policy of a nation, state or community (Ochuloret *al.*, 2023). Ochuloret *al.*(2023) perceive political communication as the resolution of political conflicts through communication, which according to them could result in the dissemination of information about how people and government relate to foster understanding and peace in a society. Their position means that political communication is the way of transmitting information and updating about political decisions, policies, and events to the general public. This will allow politicians and governing bodies to share information on their objectives, achievements, and plans for their citizens.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Gossip promotion as a precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria

The promotion of gossip as a precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria presents several challenges and raises concerns about the integrity and effectiveness of the policy making process. Balashevych and Proskurnia (2023) contend that gossip is a wide spread phenomenon in interpersonal relationships, significantly impacting social dynamics and the emotional state of participants. Some may argue that gossip can provide valuable insights and information but its use as a primary source for policy formulation can lead to lack of reliability and accuracy. Gossip is often based on rumors, hearsay, and personal opinions, which can be subjective and unreliable (Negong & Mwabi, 2023). Relying on such information as a basis for policy formulation can result in flawed or misguided policies that do not address the real issues at hand. Policy makers need credible and evidence-based data and analysis to make informed decisions. Gossip can easily be distorted or manipulated for personal or political gain. Individuals with vested interests can spread false information or biases, leading policy makers to make decisions based on inaccurate or biased narratives which can undermine the public interest and create policies that primarily serve certain groups or individuals (Gosh & Hirnamay, 2022). Gossip is often shared informally and privately, bypassing the principles of transparency and inclusivity that are essential for effective policymaking. This approach excludes the wider public and stakeholders from participating in the decision-making process, limiting their ability to contribute diverse perspectives and expertise.

Even though the sources are disputable, the inclination to engage in gossip as an informal communication medium indicates that it is still highly regarded as one of the strategies for getting information instantaneously. Shaharuddin and Ahmad (2022) aver that the presence of gossip in day to day communication has made this practice a common phenomenon among the members of society. Gossip as a precursor for policy formulation can perpetuate existing power imbalances in Nigeria. Maio and Dinani (2023) believe that those with privileged access to information or in influential circles may have greater influence over policy decisions, while marginalized groups and voices may be ignored or excluded. This further widens social disparities and can lead to policies that do not adequately address the needs of the most vulnerable populations. To ensure a more robust and effective policy formulation process in Nigeria, it is important to promote evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and inclusivity. Policy makers, especially in Nigeria should rely on verified and reliable data, engage in open consultations with diverse stakeholders, and prioritize the public interest over

personal interest or biased narratives. This will help create policies that are well-informed, fair and responsive to the needs of all Nigerians. On the other hand, Ryan and Baer (2022) contend that gossip can serve as a way to gather information about community issues. For example, when people gossip about the prevalence of a particular issue such as teen pregnancy or substance abuse in a community, policy makers can take note of those concerns and develop policies that target the root causes of those issues. When gossip is focused on a particular issue or problem, it can serve as a signal that a policy change or intervention may be needed.

### **INHERENT DANGERS OF GOVERNMENT TRADING AND SPONSORSHIP OF GOSSIP**

The inherent dangers of government trading and sponsorship of gossip are significant and can have detrimental effects on governance, democracy, and societal trust. When government engages in trading or sponsoring gossip, it can lead to the deliberate spread of misinformation and manipulation of public opinion (Durdu, 2022). False or distorted information can be used to shape narratives, discredit political opponents, or create a favorable image for government. Such actions erode public trust and undermine the integrity of democratic processes. Kilonzi and Atikiya (2023) assert that gossip often thrives in an environment of secrecy and lack of transparency. When governments promote or participate in gossip, it can hinder transparency and undermine accountability mechanisms. Decision-making processes become opaque, thereby making it difficult for citizens to hold their representatives accountable for their actions. Sponsored gossip can contribute to the polarization of society, as it often seeks to reinforce existing political divisions and biases. By fueling rumors and spreading divisive narratives, governments risk deepening social tensions and eroding social cohesion.

Government involvement in gossip can undermine the role of independent media as a watchdog and reliable source of information. Khan and Chaudhary (2022) succinctly note that when governments trade or sponsor gossip, it can negatively impact the freedom of the press and reduce the influence of credible journalism. Engaging in gossip can divert attention from essential policy debates and real challenges facing the country. It can manipulate public discourse and shift the focus away from critical issues that require urgent attention and action. The dangers of government trading and sponsorship of gossip lie in the erosion of public trust, the manipulation of information, and the undermining of democratic processes (Nakamaru, 2023).

A government's primary responsibility should be to uphold transparency, accountability, and honest communication with its citizens.

Government trading and sponsorship of gossip can be highly detrimental to the political system and society at large. Individuals involved in government gossip can suffer significant reputational harm, and the resultant scandals can damage the credibility of government institutions. Kremnitze (2023) emphasizes that when gossip is prevalent in government circles, it can create an unhealthy and toxic work culture that can lead to low employee morale, high staff turn-over, and a lack of productivity. When government officials use gossip and hearsay rather than factual information to make decisions, it can create an atmosphere of uncertainty and harm public confidence in government institutions.

### **NATURE OF INVOLVEMENT OF GOVERNMENT AS MANUFACTURERS OF GOSSIP**

Manufacturing gossip involves intentionally creating false or misleading information to influence public opinion or shape political decisions. This type of behavior is unethical and can seriously damage the integrity of government institutions (Bazarova, 2022). Rumours and gossip can still circulate within government agencies and political circles. This can occur due to the highly competitive nature of politics, media attention, and the frequent exchange of information and opinions. Ben-Noun (2021) proffers that when these rumors are handled informally without accurate verification, they can quickly spread and cause damage to individuals and institutions. It's important for government officials to recognize the value of transparency, accuracy, and mutual respect in their communication with one another and with the public. Some governments may engage in gossip to divert attention from controversial issues or scandals that they wish to keep hidden. By spreading false or misleading information, they can shift public focus away from important matters. Some governments may use gossip as a tool to shape public perception, particularly during political campaigns or in times of crisis. By spreading rumors or false information about political opponents or specific events, they can sway public opinion in their favor.

Gossip can be used as a means to discredit or undermine critics, opposition leaders, or activists who pose a threat to the government's authority (Akhtor & Husnain, 2020). Spreading rumors or false information about these individuals can harm their credibility or reputation and weaken their influence. Gossip can be a part of internal power struggles within a government, within different factions or individuals spreading rumors or false information about each other either to gain advantage or undermine rivals.

Deffuant and Bertazzi (2018) buttressed that it is important to note that engaging in gossip is generally seen as unethical and manipulative. It erodes

trust in government institutions, undermines democracy, and can have negative consequences for the overall well-being of society (Gholipouret *al.*, 2021). The involvement of government in gossip can take different forms, depending on the context and specific circumstances. Some government officials may spread rumors or gossip that is circulating in the media or public. In some cases, officials may use their platform to dispel rumors or provide a counter-narrative. In other cases, government officials may use gossip or hearsay to gather information about potential threats or security concerns. This type of gossip is often used in intelligence gathering, and can help officials get a sense of the political landscape or other strategic information (Agbolagh *et al.*, 2021).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The research is anchored on Habermas' theory of communicative action and the structured deliberative gossip theory. Jürgen Habermas is a German philosopher and social scientist who developed the theory of communicative action in the 1980's. The theory is a response to the crisis of legitimacy that characterized the modern social and political systems. Jürgen Habermas' theory on communicative action is a sociological and philosophical approach that emphasizes the importance of communication and its role in social life. The theory posits that communication is the primary means by which people come to an understanding of each other and the world around them, as cited in Chriss (2022). According to Habermas, social interactions are based on two types of communication; strategic and communicative. Strategic communication is goal oriented and seeks to influence others through instrumental reason, or by calculating the most effective means to achieve a desired outcome.

Communicative action on the other hand, is focused on understanding and creating shared meanings through dialogue and consensus-building. Habermas argues that communicative action is preferable to strategic action in creating a just and democratic society. When individuals engage in communicative communication, they have an opportunity to express their beliefs and values, and to listen empathetically to the perspectives of others. Communicative action therefore promotes mutual understanding and can lead to the creation of shared meanings and values (Squeff & Bidinotto, 2020). The theory has been criticized for lack of consensus as to what the theory represents, when compared to other theories and rationality types. The question often brought forward in critiquing the theory is 'does the transition proposed by Habermas from other rationality types to the communicative one, concern an inter-paradigmatic theory or a paradigmatic leap?' (Athayde *et*

*al.*, 2021). The theory takes its leaning from the interpretative approach to knowing and is premised on the socio-psychological tradition of communication.

The structured deliberative gossip theory on the other hand was propounded by Onobe, Okocha and Etukudo in 2023. The theory suggests that anything that its meanings and curious identity of phenomenon could become apparent when investigated as a model for a means to an end, rather than the means, such as spins, lies, deception, gossip and rumour are veritable instruments used as scaffolding in political strategies. The theory is aimed at attempting to explicate political communication and audience control mechanisms common in most climes, especially in the economics that are post democratic and quasi democratic. The theory is rooted in consonance of collective reasoning and argumentation among free and perceived equal citizens and proposes that the livewire of gossip/rumor is the sign of first mandate and it is a veritable condition for political manipulation if information is rationed with tact. The theory also posits that every morsel of gossip/rumour, with coloration of authority's sponsorship, is an emissary of authority's agenda (Onobe *et al.*, 2023).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the quantitative analysis method. Data were collected on President Tinubu's government using various sources such as official government reports, public speeches, and news media articles. A survey questionnaire was designed to obtain quantitative data from a sample population of four hundred (400) people, using the purposive sampling technique from a student population of four thousand, four hundred and thirty-five (4,435) of the Plateau State Polytechnic, BarkinLadi (Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, 2023).

The research instrument used was a 36-item structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into six (6) sections, with section A bearing the demographic variables of respondents while sections B, C, D, E, and F addressed the research questions which were framed using a five (5) point Likert scale options of strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), undecided (U), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The distribution of the questionnaire was done face to face between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2023 and was limited to the student population of Plateau State Polytechnic, BarkinLadi. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, and mean were used to analyze and present data.

## Presentation of Findings

**Table 1: Demographic Status of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	%
Males	184	46
Females	216	54
Total	400	100
Age Range	Frequency	%
Under 18		
18-25	148	37
26-35	174	43.5
36-45	71	17.75
46 and above	7	1.75
Total	400	100
Educational Level	Frequency	%
No formal education		
Primary School		
Secondary school		
Tertiary education	299	74.75
Post graduate	101	25.25
Total	400	100
Occupation	Frequency	%
Student	316	79
Employed	84	21
Unemployed		
Total	400	100
Marital Status	Frequency	%
Single	303	75.75
Married	87	21.75
Divorced		
Widowed		
Prefer not to say	10	2.5
Total	400	100

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

From the table above, it shows that 46% of the respondents are males while 54% are females. From the frequency of the age range, 37% were between 18 to 25 years, while 43.5% were between 26 to 35 years of age. In addition, 17.75% of the respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 36 to 45 years and 1.75% were aged 46 and above. A total of 74.75 % of the respondents indicated that they were undergraduate students while 25.25% indicated that they had were post graduate students of the Institution.

The respondents indicated that 79% of them were students while 21% of them were students and employees at the same time.

The frequency table above also reveals that 75.75% of the respondents were single, while 21.75 % of them were married and 2.5% preferred not to reveal their marital status.

**Table 2: An assessment of the nature of involvement of government in originating gossip**

S/ N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	Some government policy decisions have their origins from gossips	151 (37.5%)	104 (26 %)	53 (13.25%)	40 (10%)	52 (13%)
2.	Gossip topics from the mass media and social media about government policies often have some elements of truth at the end of the day	97 (24.25%)	121 (30.25%)	94 (23.25%)	42 (10.25%)	46 (11.25%)
3.	Gossip issues impact on government policy decisions in Nigeria	89 (22.25%)	131 (32.75%)	48 (12%)	55 (13.75%)	77 (19.25%)
4.	Gossip issues purported to originate from government coffers impact on public trust and public opinion about government in Nigeria	98 (24.5%)	113 (28.25%)	47 (11.75%)	79 (19.75%)	63 (15.75%)
5.	Some gossip issues on the Nigerian mass media space have been traced to government officials.	59 (14.75%)	71 (17.75%)	11 (2.75%)	141 (35.25%)	118 (29.5%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 above shows the nature of involvement of government in originating gossip. 255 (63.5%) of the respondents affirm that some government policy decisions have their origins in gossip, while 218 (54.5%) of the respondents

avow that gossip topics from the mass media and social media about government policies often have some elements of truth at the end of the day. 220 (55%) believe that gossip issues impact on government policy decisions in Nigeria, while 211 (52.75%) aver that gossip issues purported to originate from government coffers impact on public trust and public opinion about government in Nigeria. 259 (64.75) do not believe that gossip issues on the Nigerian mass media space have been traced to government officials. Consequently, findings show the nature of involvement of government in originating gossip.

**Table 3: An appraisal on use of gossip by government as probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	Gossip issues have become a valuable source of information for government in Nigeria in making some policy decisions	115 (28.75%)	178 (44.5%)	15 (3.75%)	50 (12.5%)	42 (10.5%)
2.	Gossip issues serve as basis for some policy formulations by government in Nigeria	91 (22.75%)	121 (30.25%)	25 (6.25%)	89 (22.25%)	74 (18.5%)
3	Government in Nigeria under Tinubu have benefitted from gossip monitoring in policy formulation.	97 (24.25%)	148 (37%)	10 (2.5%)	84 (21%)	61 (15.25%)
4.	The mass media in Nigeria today has played an active role as a channel for disseminating government-related gossip to the public	124 (31%)	159 (39.75%)	17 (4.25%)	52 (13%)	48 (12%)
5.	Gossip issues under President Tinubu’s watch has complemented traditional methods of policy analysis in most government decisions today.	86 (21.5%)	118 (29.5%)	49 (12.25%)	68 (17%)	79 (19.75%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 above appraised the use of gossip by government as a probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria. 293 (73.25%) of the respondents maintain that gossip issues have become a valuable source of information for government in Nigeria in making some policy decisions, while 212 (53%) believe that gossip issues serve as basis for some policy formulations by government in Nigeria. 245 (61.25%) affirm that government in Nigeria under Tinubu have benefited from gossip monitoring in policy formulation, while 283 (70.75%) admit that the mass media in Nigeria today has played an active role as a channel for disseminating government related gossip to the public. 204(51%) confirm that gossip issues under President Tinubu's watch has complemented traditional methods of policy analysis in most government decisions today. The findings portray the use of gossip by government as probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria.

**Table 4: Cases of use of gossip in decision making by Nigerian government**

S/ N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1.	The purported Ministerial list earlier circulated on the social media before the release of the authentic Ministerial list in Nigeria had some elements of truth	92 (23%)	123 (30.75%)	24 (6%)	88 (22%)	73 (18.25%)
2.	The rumoured increase on pump price of fuel to N617 turned out to be true	114 (28.5%)	151 (37.75%)	18 (4.5%)	70 (17.5%)	47 (11.75%)
3.	The alleged fallout of President Tinubu with Governor El-Rufai of Kaduna state became obvious in his rejection by some Nigerian Senators during the Ministerial screening.	96 (24%)	158 (39.5%)	18 (4.5%)	81 (20.5%)	47 (11.75%)
4.	The rumoured increase in tuition for Federal Universities on assumption of office of	98 (24.5%)	132 (33%)	31 (7.75 %)	88 (22%)	51 (12.75)

	President Tinubu had some elements of truth.					
5.	The alleged increase in income tax by President Tinubu had been authenticated.	93 (23.5%)	155 (38.75%)	17 (4.2%)	73 (18.25%)	62 (15.5%)
6	Gossips surrounding the outcome of the Presidential Tribunal has been authenticated.	80 (20%)	187 (46.5%)	24 (6%)	56 (14%)	53 (13.5%)
7	The alleged fallout between President Tinubu and President Buhari has been made manifest in President Tinubu’s appointments.	93 (23.5%)	147 (36.75%)	20 (5%)	78 (19.5%)	62 (15.5%)
8	The gossip allegation on the cashless policy implemented by CBN at tail end of Buhari’s administration as a deliberate aim to stop Tinubu from becoming President has been confirmed by the arrest of the immediate past Governor of the Central Bank, Godwin Emiefele	89 (22.25%)	140 (35%)	34 (8.5%)	75 (18.75%)	62 (15.5%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 above reveals the cases of use of gossip in decision making by Nigerian government. 215 (53.75%) of the respondents contend that the purported ministerial list earlier circulated on the social media before the release of the authentic ministerial list in Nigeria had some elements of truth, while 265 (66.25%) maintain that the rumored increase in pump price of fuel to N617 turned out to be true. 254 (63.5%) believe that the alleged fallout of President Tinubu with Governor El-Rufai of Kaduna State became obvious in his rejection by some Nigerian Senators during the ministerial screening, while 248 (62.25%) affirm that gossips surrounding the outcome of the Presidential tribunal has been authenticated. 240 (60.25%) maintain that the alleged fallout between President Tinubu and President Buhari has been made manifest in President Tinubu’s appointments. 229 (57.25%) professed that the gossip allegation on the cashless policy implemented by CBN at the tail end of Buhari’s administration as a deliberate aim to stop Tinubu from

becoming President has been confirmed by the arrest of the immediate past Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Godwin Emiefele. Findings show the cases of use of gossip in decision making by the Nigerian government.

**Table 5: Government as the manufacturer of gossips**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1	Nigerian government deliberately supports gossips in the media and public domains	84 (21%)	148 (37%)	10 (2.5%)	83 (20.7%)	75 (18.75%)
2	Nigerian government officials who propagate gossips have the backing of government	71 (17.5%)	164 (41%)	33 (8.25%)	77 (19.25%)	55 (13.75%)
3	Government uses its engineered gossips to gauge public pulse and reactions	82 (20.5%)	151 (37.75%)	38 (9.5%)	72 (18%)	57 (14.25%)
4	Gossip sponsorship is one of government pre-policy formulation testing and feedback mechanisms	95 (23.75%)	147 (36.75%)	32 (8%)	74 (18.5%)	52 (13%)
5	Gossip is an important part of the political communication tool box of the Nigerian government	92 (23%)	132 (33%)	19 (4.75%)	84 (21%)	73 (18.25%)
6	Government never reprimands its officials who thrive in promoting gossips	88 (22%)	146 (36.5%)	25 (6.25%)	78 (19.5%)	63 (15.75%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 5 above harps on government as the manufacturers of gossips. 232 (58%) of the respondents contend that the Nigerian government deliberately supports gossips in the media and public domains, while 235 (58.5%) held that Nigerian government officials who propagate gossips have the backing of government. 233 (58.25%) believe that government uses its engineered gossips to gauge public pulse and reactions, while 242 (60.5%) maintained that gossip sponsorship is one of the government's policy formulation testing and feedback mechanisms. 234 (58.5%) affirm that government never

reprimands its officials who thrive in promoting gossips. Findings show the involvement of government as manufacturers of gossip.

**Table 6: Dangers in government trading and sponsorship of gossips**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1	Political gossip can lead to unnecessary tension and eventual crisis in the society	82 (20.5%)	173 (43.25%)	21 (5.25%)	71 (17.75%)	53 (13.25%)
2	Gossip can lead to loss of trust and confidence on Governments intentions, no matter how genuine they may appear to be.	96 (24%)	182 (45.5%)	14 (3.5%)	62 (15.5%)	46 (11.5%)
3	Gossip originating from Government coffers can overheat the polity	123 (30.75%)	222 (55.5%)	0 (0%)	28 (7%)	27 (6.75%)
4	Sponsorship of gossip by Government can lead to loss of integrity of Government from electorates.	131 (32.75%)	159 (39.75%)	7 (1.75%)	59 (14.75%)	44 (11%)
5	Government trading in gossip before policy formulation denotes lack of initiatives.	89 (22.25%)	173 (43.25%)	18 (4.5%)	77 (19.25%)	43 (10.75%)
6	Government trading and sponsorship of gossips can create divisions and lead to social discrimination in the society.	114 (28.5%)	148 (37%)	18 (4.5%)	68 (17%)	52 (13%)
7	Government trading and sponsorship of gossips can lead to the spread of misinformation which can eventually lead to breach of national security.	117 (29.25%)	167 (41.75%)	12 (3%)	72 (18%)	32 (8%)

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 6 above explores the dangers in government trading and sponsorship of gossips. 255 (63.75%) of the respondents maintained that political gossip can

lead to unnecessary tension and eventual crisis in the society, while 278 (69.5%) aver that gossip can lead to loss of trust and confidence in governments intentions, no matter how genuine they may appear to be. 345 (86.25%) professed that gossip originating from government sources can overheat the polity, while 290 (72.5%) held that sponsorship of by government can lead to loss of integrity of government from electorates. This was followed by 262 (65.5%) who affirmed that government trading and sponsorship of gossips can create divisions and lead to social discrimination in the society. 284 (71%) affirmed that government trading and sponsorship of gossips can lead to the spread of misinformation, which can eventually lead to breach of national security. Findings reveal the danger in government trading and sponsorship of gossips.

## **DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS**

The first objective of this study research to assess the nature of government involvement in originating gossip and also appraise the use of gossip by government as a probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria. Findings from the research has established that some government policy decisions have their origins from gossips, and that gossip topics from the mass media and social media about government policies often have some elements of truth at the end of the day. Subsequently, investigations from respondents also shows that gossip issues have a way of impacting on government policy decisions in Nigeria, and that gossip issues purported to have originated from government quarters impact on public trust and public opinion about government in Nigeria. The research findings also indicate that some gossip issues on the Nigerian mass media space have been traced to government officials. This position is in alignment with the tenets of the structured deliberative gossip by Onobe, et al. (2023) that provides for an attempt to explicate political communication and audience mechanisms common in most climes. The position of the tenet of this theory denotes that certain controlled and structured communicative patterns open for public consumption with an aim to test the reactions and pulse of public opinion without necessarily having a foundation anchored on facts has been deployed severally by government for political gains and provision for direction on public policy matters. The implication of this finding is that some information often perceived as rumors have been deliberately used by government because it has a way of engendering public opinion and shaping the direction of policy formulations for government as a strategy to gain public trust.

The second objective of the research investigation was to explore the use of gossip by government in Nigeria as a probable precursor for policy formulation in Nigeria. From the research findings, it has been established that gossip issues have become a valuable source of information for government in Nigeria, in making some policy decisions, and gossip issues also serve as basis for some policy formulations by government in Nigeria. Findings also imply that government in Nigeria under Tinubu have benefitted from gossip monitoring in policy formulation. The mass media in Nigeria today, from the revelation of findings have played an active role as a channel for disseminating government-related gossip to the public. It was also substantiated by the research that gossip issues under President Tinubu's watch has complemented traditional methods of policy analysis in most government decisions today. These findings are in alignment with one of the assumptions of the theory on communicative action that proffers that strategic communication is goal oriented and seeks to influence others through instrumental reason, or by calculating the most effective means to achieve a desired goal. These result findings succinctly imply that gossip has inadvertently become an alternative tool for the Nigerian government today as a conduit for the dissemination of gossip inclined messages via the Nigerian mass media, and therefore, this places government as the forerunner and antecedent of most government related gossip issues, especially as found within the purview of the mass media in Nigeria today.

The third objective of the study was to consider and evaluate the practical considerations involved in implementing structured deliberative gossip by exposing some practical cases in Nigeria that have their origins from gossip. The study was able to trace and establish from respondents that the purported Ministerial list earlier circulated on the social media before the release of the authentic Ministerial list in Nigeria had some elements of truth. It was also discovered that the rumored increase in pump price of fuel to N617 per liter, turned out to be true. The alleged fallout of President Tinubu with Governor El-Rufai of Kaduna state became obvious with the rejection of that latter by some Nigerian senators during the Ministerial screening. The alleged increase in income tax by President Tinubu had been authenticated by the implementation of same. This includes the fact that gossip surrounding the outcome of the Presidential Tribunal has been authenticated with the recent ruling of the Tribunal in favor of President Tinubu. The alleged fallout between President Tinubu and President Buhari has been made manifest in President Tinubu's recent appointments. The gossip allegation on the cashless policy implemented by the Central Bank of Nigeria, (CBN) at the tail end of Buhari's administration as a deliberate aim to stop Tinubu from

becoming President has been mostly agreed to contain some elements of truth by the arrest of the immediate past Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Godwin Emiefele. The authentication of these assertions is in line with one of the assumptions of the structured deliberative gossip theory which holds that anything that its meaning and curious identity of phenomenon could become apparent when investigated as a model for a means to an end, rather than the means, such as spins, lies, deception, gossip and rumour, which are veritable instruments used as scaffolding in political strategies. By implication, gossip issues revolving around government officials assumed to be from government coffers has a way of digressing societal discussions and deliberations from more important matters that could portend dire consequences and implications in the long run.

The fourth objective of the study was to evaluate the dangers in government's trading on and sponsorship of gossips. The finding brought to the fore the fact that political gossip can lead to unnecessary tension and eventual crisis in the society. Political gossip can also lead to loss of trust and confidence on governments intentions, no matter how genuine they may appear to be. Gossip originating from government can overheat the polity, it can lead to loss of integrity of government from electorates, and it can denote lack of initiatives. Government trading and sponsorship of gossips can create divisions which may lead to social discrimination in the society; it can equally lead to the spread of misinformation which may eventually lead to breach of national security. One of the assumptions of the structured deliberative gossip theory is that the livewire of gossip or rumor is the sign of first mandate and it is a veritable condition for political manipulation if information is rationed with tact. Gossips, especially those with political undertones could have negative implications and a threat to societal stability if perceived from a wrong dimension or misinterpreted by society. This presents a red flag for gossip issues, especially those with political implications.

## **CONCLUSION**

Structured deliberative gossip and political communication are essential elements in modern political discourse. They provide a means of engaging citizens in debates and discussions about important issues, though mostly not anchored on facts, especially those traced to gossip, while also allowing them to give voice to their opinions through the mass media. By creating spaces for deliberation and gossip, political actors can foster more informed and engaged citizenry while also building trust and strengthening democratic institutions. However, it is important to ensure that these spaces are truly

open and inclusive, allowing all voices to be heard and taken into account. With careful attention and management, structured deliberative gossip and political communication can help to promote a more vibrant and responsive democracy if handled correctly.

Structured deliberative gossip may still be susceptible to the spread of misinformation or unsubstantiated claims. Without proper fact-checking or verification processes, false rumours or inaccurate information can still be propagated, potentially leading to negative outcomes in political decision-making. Moreover, the effectiveness of structured deliberative gossip relies heavily on the willingness of participants to engage constructively and respectfully. If individuals are unwilling to listen to opposing viewpoints or if the process becomes dominated by a certain group or agenda, the benefits of deliberation and diverse perspectives may be lost.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study conclusively advanced the following recommendations:

1. Policy formulation by government should be anchored on extensive research and empirical evidence from past experiences in order to establish policies that are devoid of hearsays and gossips for the general populace.
2. The Nigerian government at all levels should strive for transparency, open communication and objectivity on issues of national interest without recourse to personal attacks on individuals to avoid unnecessary digression from matters of national interest.
3. The Nigerian government needs to proactively exonerate itself from any form of gossip traced to government in a bid to exhibit government's sincerity in tackling gossips emanating from rumors alleged to come from government.
4. The Nigerian government can promote whistle-blowing by providing protection for individuals who expose sponsors of gossip. This can encourage individuals and organisations to report instances of gossip sponsorship, thereby reducing its prevalence.

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