

Discursive Strategies in Some Party Supporters' *Facebook* Pages during Nigeria's 2019 Presidential Election Campaigns

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Abstract

Facebook has become a popular space for election campaigns all over the world. Nigeria is not left out, as political participants turn to social media platforms to engage the electorate. This phenomenon has some effect on voting behaviour and the deepening of democracy in the country. The present study examines the use of *Facebook* for campaign purposes by selected political parties' supporters during Nigeria's 2019 presidential election campaigns. Specifically, it identifies and analyses the discursive strategies engaged by party supporters in order to reveal their ideological perspectives, and it relates the discourse features identified to Nigeria's socio-political context. The data for the study were obtained from the *Facebook* pages of the supporters of two major political parties – the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) – and two minor political parties – the Youth Progressive Party (YPP) and the African Action Congress (AAC). Fifteen posts each were selected from the *Facebook* pages of the PDP and APC supporters and 10 posts each from those of YPP and AAC. Using Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, the study reveals strategic uses of metaphorisation, pronominalisation, positive self-description and rhetorical questions. These strategies portray the ideological stances of resistance, polarisation (us versus them), (de)legitimation, victimisation based on an increase in call for revolutionary transformation from the opposition, mainly digital native youths. The study concludes that *Facebook* provides parties with a range of new capacities that can enhance their campaigns. In addition, *Facebook* provides a more inclusive space for mobilising young people to participate in politics. It also has the potential to be used to cause change in governance.

Keywords: discursive strategies, political discourse, *Facebook*, campaign, ideology, legitimisation, party supporters.

1. Introduction

Language is central to the conduct of politics and politics is one of the social domains whose practices are virtually exclusively discursive. Every political discourse has a foundation of the social representations shared by a social group (van Dijk 2006, p. 729). The use of language in political communication derives from the social belief systems or socio-culturally shared knowledge by the members of specific social groups. The communication of political ideas has been studied as discursive practices, and such ideas may include delivering political speeches at congresses and rallies, campaign speeches, debates in the media and other fora, party manifestos, political advertisements, interviews and parliamentary discussions. In the changing contexts of political campaign, the digital culture plays a significant role, such as offering platforms for political actors and their supporters to disseminate information to a large audience. According to Taiwo (2008), "language plays an important role in the process of

manifesting concrete political will and transforming it into concrete social action in discourse” (p.79 ff) and social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter* and *WhatsApp* have become part of this process in modern times. Ayoade (1982, p. 724), in discussing the importance of language in the political process, observes that “language is the conveyor belt of power. It moves people to vote, debate or revolt. It is, therefore, a central explanation of political stability or polarization.” Politicians often master the art of expressing influential power by deploying appropriate rhetoric to influence and persuade the masses to think, behave, or vote in a certain way.

Language in politics holds the key to the heart of the people, it locks and unlocks it, depending on how it is used. Political campaigns, typically carried out on raised platforms at strategic public spaces, have found their ways into the digital space. Apparently, the global sensitisation of the cyberspace for social, commercial, entertainment and political purposes has aided and promoted more than ever communication bond both locally and internationally. (Abubakar, 2012; Ibrahim, 2013; Ogundimu, 2013; Azmi *et al.*, 2018). Citizens are at liberty to express and advertise themselves, products, ideas, value, and opinion on these social media platforms without any limitation. Thus, a massive influx of social media sites exists for these purposes. The active use of *Facebook* in the 2008 United States Presidential campaign by Donald Trump brought political campaign to another level in the world. This has since become a trend in the political terrain world-wide due to its perceived advantages to the electorate and electoral processes.

The introduction of the Global System for Mobile (GSM) communication by the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo was the beginning of the increase of Nigeria’s involvement in cyberspace communication (Taiwo, 2012). Most individuals in the country became mobile phone owners and communicate more freely irrespective of their location, distance and time. Much later by the late 1990s, communicating through the Internet started gaining popularity in the country. People started engaging social media sites for different purposes, such as connecting with friends, discussing, shopping, attending classes, cultivating relationships, and so forth (Laganas *et al.* 2017; Azmi *et al.* 2018; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Ramber, 2012). Nigerian Politicians make judicious use of the advantages offered by the new media to reach a wider electorate regardless of their location and status at any given time. This gives them the opportunity to present their goals, aspirations, manifestos and canvas for votes. Campaigns, either by the politicians or their supporters and other political activities trend mostly on *Facebook* because of its very high patronage by citizens. Access to new media has brought about their use for civic engagement, whereby there is more active participation of the public in the political process (Taiwo & Opeibi, 2016). Citizens get more involved in political discussions, become accurately informed about the candidates, their political parties, policies and values. These invariably help them to make decisive decision during the election.

While there have been studies on the discourse of social media political campaigns within Nigeria (Oyesomi *et al.* 2014, Opeibi 2016, Oamen 2018), none of such studies engaged the socio-cognitive approach. Also, the use of *Facebook* for political campaigns by supporters of

various political parties and their ideological perspectives has not been the focus of scholars, rather, existing works have focused largely on individual politicians' engagement of *Facebook* for campaigns. This present study identifies the discursive strategies employed in the *Facebook* campaigns of the supporters of two major political parties (People's Democratic Party and All People's Congress) and two minor political parties (Youth Progressive Party and Action) in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. It analyses the identified discursive forms to bring out the ideological stances of the supporters based on their socio-cognitive constructions and relates the entire discourse to the socio-political situation in Nigeria.

***Facebook* Political campaign as discourse**

Political discourse is any form of language use whether within a political setting or not for a political purpose, which can be by a politician or not. Political discourse includes campaigns, speeches, debates, manifestos, rallies and so on. Scholars have varying views on political discourse. Al-Faki (2013) views political discourse as discourse situation by any political actor written or spoken for a political purpose. Sharndama further describes it as discourse in any political forum. He submits that the language choice, style and lexicons are intentional and purposeful. The electorates are the target and the aim is to change their perspectives and influence their decisions. van Dijk, (1998) sees political discourse as a form of discourse within the field of politics. It involves discourses by politicians/political candidate, political party, government, political media and political supporters (Wilson, 2001).

A political campaign can be seen as an attempt by political organisations to garner public support through persuasive communication in order to influence public policy in their favour (Lilleker 2017). Campaigns are carried out the period right before citizens make a real political choice. As observed by Brady, *et al* (2006), campaign activities are seen to be linked with approaching deadlines of election days - they are more likely to register on voters' minds as the election day draws near. Using digital platforms for campaigns has attracted many scholars who have examined it in various forms. Some have looked at political rally campaigns, politically investigations, which have examined campaign songs (Ademilokun 2014, Osisanwo, 2020), political campaigns on *Twitter* (Opeibi 2019), political rally campaigns (Ademilokun 2015, Ademilokun & Olateju 2016) newspaper campaign advertisements (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013); and political campaign posters (Sharndama 2013).

Coming closer to the present study are categories of scholarship on social media political campaigns, especially *Facebook*, which has the highest patronage among the sites. Some examined the usefulness of *Facebook* political campaigns in aiding political communication among politicians, their supporters and citizens at large (Stier, *et al.* 2018; Anderson & Medaglia, 2009; Azmi *et al.* 2018). Others investigate the public perception towards *Facebook* usage. *Facebook* has been seen as a space that provides political parties with a range of new capacities that can enhance their campaigns in the sense that it allows parties to connect with voters wherever they are and build on existing networks through sharing, comments, and reactions (Dommett & Temple 2017).

Scholars also assessed the extent of political campaign on *Facebook* and the effect it has on the voters and voting behaviour.(Olley & Orewhere 2023; Kumar *et al* 2021). In addition, they explore the wide opportunity *Facebook* offers for the politicians to advertise themselves and political parties, present their manifestos, opinion, values and as well discredit other political candidates and their political parties (Masilo & Seabo 2015). These are with the singular aim of influencing the decision of the electorates on who to vote for. These scholars observe that *Facebook* and other social media enhance citizen's participation and allow politicians to reach a wider audience. They enable politicians to solicit for votes and influence the electorates, as well as allow the citizens to share their views and learn how best to take decisions on who to vote for. They submit that *Facebook* campaigns have increased political awareness and engagement being a contemporary space to mobilise citizens to participate in politics. Some limitation of *Facebook* campaign include being limited to people with internet facilities, especially in a nation like Nigeria with 38% of the population having access to internet (Liberini *et al.* 2015; Abubakar 2013; Onyekachi *et al.* 2015 Oyesomi *et al.* 2014).

In whatever form a campaign comes, it is seen as a discourse in which **language is used to express and reproduce ideologies**, such as values, beliefs and assumptions that shape how we understand and make sense of the world. This view ties the present study and the previous ones mentioned earlier together. However, in terms of focus, the present work differs because of its investigation of supporters' campaigns rather than those of candidates on *Facebook*. The study is of the view that supporters' discursive strategies might differ from those of candidates despite that they have similar goal of persuading and influencing the electorate in order to win their support. From the studies reviewed, it is clear that studies on the use of *Facebook* for campaign activities by party supporters are still unfolding and this present study is a major attempt to provide an understanding in this direction.

2. Theoretical Framework

Political discourse just like other forms of discourse, is not neutral. The discourse is based on the use of language to construct political actors as social beings who have allegiance to certain social spaces and express their values, norms, beliefs and experiences within the spaces. Human cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the social structure. Membership of a social group makes people to share socio-cultural knowledge of their world as well as attitudes, norms, values and ideologies of such world. van Dijk (2006) sees ideology as social cognition and political discourse as ideological. He believes political discourse is a unilateral phenomenon i.e. members of a political group possess a shared knowledge of the group which controls the individual discourses and other social practices of group members. It is the basis for a group's cooperation, organisation as well as management of intergroup relations, competitions and conflicts.

van Dijk (2006) further reiterates that political process is an ideological process. Actions, inactions and discourses of the group members are motivated by the shared principles and beliefs of the group. Groups differ in values, interests, status and policies, thus, there exists power tussle, struggle, competition, comparison and all forms of political gimmicks among

rival groups. The discourses at the group or individual level reinforce the shared value, principle and opinion governing the group. The text (spoken or written) usually spells out the policies and values upheld by the party through some discourse strategies. Political campaigners construct language to influence the minds of the hearers or readers on who to vote for.

Context is crucial in the production and understanding of a political text. It is the subjective understanding and interpretation of a political situation or mental model by members of a group (van Dijk 2009). Members of a group may have the same mental representation, each member speaks or writes based on their interpretation of the whole process and this is crucial in understanding the text. Political actors speak based on their mental model about a political process, such as campaigns. Context is as relevant to the production of a text as it is to its interpretation. Thus, political discourse structure does not only define political discourse but political context. Ideologies lie fallow until it is expressed in discourse, though, the most important thing is what, how, when, where and why the speaker utter such expression. This socio-cognitive perspective of van Dijk underlie the basis for analysing the the discourse of party supporters' campaigns on *Facebook* during the 2019 Presidential elections in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature as it relies on the data gathered to reveal the ideological perspectives of the political parties' supporters through posts from their *Facebook* pages. It relies on the discursive forms in the postings of the party supporters as meaning-making agents in the political campaign discourse. The goal is to understand their beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour, and interactions. The data selected were gathered using the purposive sampling method. The researchers carefully selected the postings focusing on strategies employed in order to reveal the ideological perspectives of the political parties'.

The primary data for this study comprised 50 purposively selected postings of political parties' supporters: 15 postings each from the *Facebook* pages of the supporters of All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and 10 postings each from the *Facebook* pages of the supporters of African Action Congress (AAC) and Youth Progressive Party (YPP), which featured between October 2018 and January 2019. The time frame was chosen because this period was the peak of campaign activities for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Thus, the postings of this period were considered very relevant for this study. The four political parties were chosen because their supporters engaged *Facebook* platforms quite extensively in campaigning for their candidates. This enabled the researcher to carry out an analysis of the deliberate discursive strategies employed by these supporters in order to bring out the ideological meanings based on their socio-cognition. In order to analyse the data, van Dijk's Socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis was employed.

4. Findings

This section discusses the discursive strategies identified in the *Facebook* posts by the supporters of the selected political parties in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. The discursive strategies deployed are positive self-representation, metaphorisation,

(de)legitimation, the use of pronominalisation and rhetorical questions. In addition, the ideological issues that emanate from the supporters' deployment of these discursive strategies will be discussed and be related to the socio-political situation in Nigeria.

4.1 Meaphorisation

Metaphors play a significant role in public discourse, since they feature in everyday language as identified in Lakoff & Johnson (1980). They signal and represent human's cognitive systems, that is, how humans think and perceive things, therefore enabling them to leap from the physical and literal to the abstract domain, an act which requires sophisticated associative skills. Political rhetoric is recognised as being characterised by the use of metaphor and such metaphors, as noted by Charteris-Black, "contribute to mental representations of political issues, making alternative ways of understanding these issues more difficult and in so doing 'occupy' the mind" (Charteris-Black (2011b:28). Metaphors are often used for ideological purposes, because they activate unconscious emotional associations. Scholars have shown that the use of metaphors in political rhetoric helps in the construction and shaping of political categorisation and argumentation (Taiwo, 2010; Ofori, *et al*, 2021). Dignonnet (2014) describes metaphor as the "keystone of political discourse". Below are some instances of the use of metaphors in the data:

Excerpt 1

When the President used all his life in public office building a reputation and a name, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar used all his life in public office to build mansions and acquire personal wealth. Now **Judgment Day** has come when the credential needed by the Nigerian people for the highest office are not the buildings and wealth but the simple quality of integrity (APC)

The phrase *judgement day* in Excerpt 1 above is a metaphor for the election day, the day Nigerians decide on their leadership. In this metaphor, used by supporters of APC, Nigerians are seen as the ones to judge through ballot papers the credentials of the two candidates. This religious metaphor of *judgement day* is significant, because it highlights the critical role of the electorate in elections, as the expected final deciders of those to rule them. It also highlights the power of the electorate. Since these are supporters of the party, they believe this is a very important strategy for persuasion and sensitising voters to come out and vote, rather than incitement to violence. In many of the campaigns for elections in Nigeria, the personal voters card (PVC) has been metaphorised as "a weapon", the "power to hire and fire elected officers". From this perspective, the PVC becomes the means of "judging" politicians.

Excerpt 2

Their latest desperate diversionary tactics is because even the most uneducated Nigerian has now understood that all the issues upon which the main opposition is campaigning are self-indicting issues, especially on the Economy and Security. The foundation for the challenges in these sectors, are firmly rooted in their 16 years of disastrous governance. President Buhari

has just started a re-building process. Nigerians should therefore brace up for six weeks of despicable lies from the **pit of hell** against the President and Vice President, to try to suggest to Nigerians that the President and his deputy are part of the league of looters to which they belong (APC).

Excerpt 3

It's time to walk the talk! Get your PVC, keep it safe and use it to bring about the revolution you've always wanted on election day.

#Sowore2019 #SoworeRufai2019 #AAC #TakeItBack #Action #PVC #RevolutionNow - AAC

PVC is also seen as a way of bringing about a revolution by the youth population in the country (Excerpt 3). Knowing the state of discontentedness of the young people about the nation, Excerpt 3 was a way of challenging them to do what they have “always wanted” through their PVC. Connecting PVC with judgement is a strong way of passing across the message to the youths on the potency of their PVC and how to use it to bring about a revolution without any crisis.

Still within the purview of religious metaphor, Excerpt 2 was meant to prepare the mind of the electorate for the antics of Nigerian politicians. The writer faulted some of the campaign promises made by politicians to the electorate and described them as *lies from the pit of hell* in order to delegitimise the opponents. Speaking for the APC, the author of the post believed members of the opposition parties were bracing up to tell lies against the president and his deputy in order to mis-represent them.

Excerpt 4

Since their stuttering campaigns started, they have **felt the pulse of Nigerians** and realized Nigerians have not forgotten their misdeeds of 16 years whilst in office. - APC

It is a common belief that Nigerians have the tendencies to move on with life and hardly remember some of the past misdeeds of politicians. This sometimes explains why they keep voting the same set of people who have failed them in the past into power. Using the medical metaphor of *feeling the pulse* in Excerpt 3, the writer constructs the understanding that politicians typically measure the state of awareness and expectations of the electorate for elections by judging their mood, feelings and sentiments, which they latch on to when campaigning. This, coming from Femi Adesina, one of the presidential spokespersons, was targeted by the opposition PDP, which had ruled for 16 years before being displaced by the APC. The religious metaphors resonate well with the beliefs in the major religions about judgement and hell fire. They are also means of bringing the message cognitively closer to the electorate, since the message instantiates the belief systems of the electorate.

Excerpt 5

They will come with their lies every 4 years and will expect you to **sell your future for a few coins**. But this time, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. Youth, open your eyes, see through their tricks and lies, and vote wisely. AAC is the party, Omoyele Sowore is the answer - AAC

Excerpt 6

Nigerian youth, this#Elections2019 say no to **buy** and **see!** Vote #AACParty for a better Nigeria. (MIN – AAC - P. 5)

To depict the corruptive tendencies of the political class and the electorate in Nigeria, the act of vote selling and buying, which has become a norm during elections has also been constructed in the narratives in Excerpts 4 and 5. The minority parties harp on vote buying a lot in their campaigns, because of their awareness of the enormous resources the major parties have to buy votes from the electorate, which they do not have. Election periods in Nigeria have often been turned to periods of “merchandising”, when politicians and their parties, recognising votes as the ultimate currency of power, attract mostly poor Nigerians with money or other resources in exchange for their votes. Votes then become like commodities sold to the highest bidder.

Vote selling is cognitively linked with the future of the seller and this message is further heightened by the hyperbolic expression “for a few coins”. This is to highlight the implications of vote selling - that the paltry sum of money to be given in exchange for the votes cannot be compared with the future that would eventually be lost or compromised. AAC being a party of the youths, constructed the message and directed it to them, emphasising circumspection on their part when taking decision on their future.

The excerpts above shows how political party supporters deploy religious, medical and marketing metaphors to legitimise themselves and delegitimise their opponents. We can also see how power contestations in elections focus on prevailing social practices such as lies and vote buying.

4.2 Positive self-presentation

Discourse of political actors is usually juiced with the ideology of positive self-presentation, self in this case may refer to the candidate or the political party they represent. This ideology is commonly portrayed in political discourses and particularly displayed in many of the posts of the party supporters in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. The excerpts below representing posts from a major and minor party.

Excerpt 6

If you want a new President of Nigeria on May 29th, vote for Kingsley Moghalu of YPP. Moghalu, not Atiku, is the real alternative to Buhari in the

presidential election. For very fundamental reasons, Atiku can't win the election; but Moghalu can. - YPP

Excerpt 7

ATIKU: a victim of smear campaign and political propaganda. Atiku was in opposition as VP (2nd tenure) when Obasanjo was the President. Obasanjo's supporters called Atiku corrupt but they couldn't substantiate their claim. Atiku was in opposition when Yar'adua of blessed memory was the President. Yar'adua's supporters called Atiku corrupt but they couldn't provide evidence. Atiku was in opposition when Jonathan was the President. Jonathan's supporters called Atiku corrupt but they couldn't establish their allegation. Atiku is now the opposition leader at the time of Nigeria's anti-corruption crusader, President Muhammadu Buhari. Buhari's supporters are calling Atiku corrupt but are yet to provide any evidence against the man, ATIKU. If not because ATIKU is a complete gentleman who takes politics with absolute spirit of sportsmanship, he could've sued all these people for defamation of character (PDP).

Excerpt 6 is a bald-on-record strategy stating in clear terms who to vote and who not to vote for. In the post, names of aspirants were mentioned in order present a positive representation of the candidate of YPP as "the real alternative" to the candidates of the major parties – Atiku and Buhari. The deployment of the adjective "new" is a rhetorical strategy meant to create the need to do away with the "old", well known candidates and try out a new one, who the writer believes "can" win. The use of the deontic modal "can" here signifies ability and possibility, thereby directing people to explore the potentials of the candidate of YPP and make possible his victory in the election. The same modal with the negative tag depicted Atiku Abubakar as an outright "loser", seeing the contest between Muhammadu Buhari and Kingsley Muoghalu, who have been described as "the real alternative".

Although Atiku's opponents have always used negative moral evaluation to vilify him, his supporters constructed him as a "complete gentleman" with "absolute spirit of sportsmanship", which portrays a positive presentation of the man as a right candidate to vote for. The positive attributes given to Atiku is a persuasive strategy by his supporters. One of the ways to persuade the electorate is the coinage of the word "Atikulate" which means shifting one's allegiance to Atiku with the goal of supporting him to win the election. Positive self-representation is depicted in Excerpt 7 where the candidate of PDP, Atiku Abubakar is presented as "a victim of smear campaign" and "a complete gentleman" based on his role as a candidate who had consistently been in the opposition. The writing is to legitimise Atiku as an honest Nigerian who having been vilified by past ruling parties as corrupt, yet without any evidence to prove it. This supporter, in a bid to positively construct Atiku Abubakar and legitimise his candidacy and that of the party, presents him as a victim of smear campaign – a premeditated effort by those opposed to him to undermine his credibility.

For the youths, social media is a convenient space for campaign and that is why YPP and AAC were essentially able to sustain their campaigns through it. Their lack of resources was also a factor that restricts them to social media. For the young people, *Facebook* affords them the potential to greatly reduce resource costs and offer them the efficiency of disseminating political campaign material to the large population of the youth in Nigeria. The focus of the *Facebook* Supporters' campaign is the youth population and the goal is to ensure that the youth are mobilised through social media to take over power through the ballot box.

Excerpt 8

A revolution has started in Nigeria. Fueled by anger, it is birthed from a genuine discontent with the system and the cycle of gerontocracy being forced on Nigerians in every election cycle. It's not enough to have a revolutionary anger however, that anger should inspire you to change your objective condition. Try us! We are the alternative!!!

#SoworeRufai2019 #TakeItBack #Action #AACParty #RevolutionNow #ABetterWay

From Excerpt 8, part of self-presentation is alterity in which AAC is seen as a party for the young and an alternative to gerontocracy, which characterised the candidature for the two major parties, both being above 70 years. From this perspective, young Nigerians are spurred to get angry and be inspired to cause a revolution by voting for Sowore, a younger person in his late 40s.

4.3 Pronominalisation

Pronominals were deployed not just for referencing, but to show inclusion and exclusion and also fundamental beliefs and perceptions of the supporters of the political parties. They encode certain ideologies which can only be decoded through careful observation. Quite a number of pronominal forms were observed in the posts of the supporters of the political parties and some of them were used to explicate how pronominals can be used to express ideologies in social media campaigns.

Excerpt 9

It is impossible for these leaders to give what they don't have and having been responsible for destroying our past, they cannot be trusted with the future **we** deserve (YPP).

Excerpt 10

This is why **we** agitate for freedom and justice in Nigeria. This is the reason behind the endless fundraising – that **we** might have a country that works for the lowliest to the most exalted Nigerian. That our rights might matter and **we** are in a position to have them upheld and our faces not be crushed in the mud of oppression (AAC).

The first person plural pronoun *we* is typically an inclusive pro-form, which includes the writer (supporter(s) in this case) and the party they represent. The supporters made use of the inclusive *we* to identify with the party they belong to and for solidarity. It also shows that the writer serves as voice for their political parties. They speak from the shared mental representation of the party. For instance, supporters of the two parties where Excerpts 9 and 10 were taken were projecting the voice of the young people and expressing their frustration in leadership and at the same time, believing that they could bring about a “a new Nigeria”.

The posts portrays the Nigerian people as victims of bad leadership in which the rulers are portrayed as “destroyers” of their past and their “oppressors”. Here the ideology of negative other representation is seen in Excerpt 10, where “they” (the leadership) lack what it means to give good governance and people who “cannot be trusted with the future”. The ideology projected in Excerpt 10 with the expression “a country that works for the lowliest to the most exalted Nigerian” is egalitarianism which emphasises social equality – that is, equal treatment of people in the society. The features of egalitarianism as it relates to democratic practice are inclusion, fair allocation of power and resources as well as fair treatment of persons. In addition, upholding the human rights of people. All these, the youths and many Nigerians perceived to be absent in Nigeria and which can be regained through the ballot box. However, in Excerpt 11 below, the issue in focus are ‘restructuring’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘participation’, which are also germane issues in the Nigerian political discourse.

Excerpt 11

We are committed to **restructuring** the country to give the South East and every region in Nigeria more **autonomy** and voice in the affairs of the country. Together, **we** will bring more progress to our people (PDP).

This excerpt is from PDP, a party that had ruled for sixteen years before APC took power from it. Their focus on the issues above is just to tow the lines of issues dominating political discussions in Nigeria. Promising to give ‘restructuring’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘participation’ is trying to win the heart of the common people who are yearning for all these in the nation.

Another notable use of pronominal in the posts of the party supporters is the use of the second person singular and plural pronoun *you*. The instances of its use in the posts vary. The pronoun *you* in some instances referred to the electorate, in other instances, to the opposition and some indefinite personalities.

Excerpt 12

REASONS WHY YOU SHOULDN'T VOTE FOR BUHARI

You can see from the way he introduced one of the candidates recently as the Presidential candidate. People around him quickly whispered that he is the gubernatorial candidate, but Buhari quickly shouted, the senatorial candidate. A nature to governance. vote for Buhari would be a vote for the greedy cabal. As Aisha Buhari would say, do we have men in this country?

If **you** don't change this administration the Nigerian people are the losers. Until that can be done Nigerian politicians would never respect the masses and we have no power. An incompetent, unaware and insensitive administration like the Buharis administration must be changed by the power of the masses. This is the right time to do it. - PDP

In Extract 12, *you* is an indefinite (generic) pronoun, which could be anyone who ever gets to read the post, including the members of the group, as we can see in Extract 12. However the second use of the pronoun is more restricted to the electorate, who are challenged to change the administration. The campaign emphasised the reasons for calling for a vote against Muhammadu Buhari as: his inattentiveness, incompetence and insensitivity to governance. In addition, the consequences of not changing the administration is also stated – “Nigerian politicians would never respect the masses”. This post again underscores the power of the masses to change any administration through their votes.

Excerpt 13

2019 AND THE NIGERIAN MIDDLE CLASS

You can't be short of a reason to support Moghalu. **You** can support him because of his hard work. **You** can support him because of his brilliance. **You** can support him because of his vision for the country. **You** can support him because **you** have always wished someone like him would become president of Nigeria.

And **you** can support him because he needs your support in his quest to provide the transformational and inspirational leadership for the country.

You can support him by donating to his campaign. **You** can support him by mobilising electoral support for him from your circle of influence.

Thank **you** for your awakening.

Vote KINGSLEY MOGHALU for President. Vote YPP. (MIN – YPP P. 8)

In Extract 13, focus is placed on Kingsley Muoghalu, the Presidential candidate of YPP, one of the minor parties. *You*, here refers to anyone and everyone who may identify with the party. Giving reasons why anyone should support him, such as: hard work, brilliance, vision and competence, transformational and inspirational leadership, the writer also called for donation to his campaign fund and mobilisation for support for him. While this post does not typically compare the candidate with another for positive representation of him, it inherently presents him as the candidate who Nigerians have always wished to be their president based on his credentials, and one who can bring about the desired transformation.

Excerpt 14

- a) Since **their** stuttering campaigns started, **they** have felt the pulse of Nigerians and realized Nigerians have not forgotten **their** misdeeds of 16 years whilst in office.

- b) **They** have decided to run a campaign of “we-are-all-corrupt” rather than defend **their** sordid records of merciless looting of the public purse, which has brought us to where we are today.
- c) The aim is to push Nigerians to equate an Alhaji Atiku Abubakar with President Muhammadu Buhari on matters of corruption. **They** want to deceive Nigerians to think that the 2019 elections is really a choice between two “corrupt” persons.
- d) By repeating the lies a million times, **they** aim to get Nigerians to begin to give some serious thought to the lies. This is how the “Jubrin from Sudan” story started, before even some well-exposed and educated Nigerians were nearly converted on that issue.

Typically, politicians use *they* and *their* to distance themselves or the group they represent from others. This alterity is usually done with negativity towards others. This is clearly seen in the castigation of the campaign of PDP by an APC supporter. The text highlights the negative deeds of PDP in their 16 years as the ruling party, most especially corruption of political office holders, which both parties have been trading blame on.

Excerpt 15

President Buhari has shown signs that he is not in charge of his administration but a group of dangerous and selfish power mongers control him. These individuals have been linked with massive corruption by people who know **them**. **They** have turned the presidency into **their** cash cow. It is not the PDP that said that. It is not the Shiites that confirmed that. It is Aisha Buhari, the President’s wife. She told Nigerian men to interfere in the affairs of her husband and save him as most of the men she had complained to, went to the cabal and collected monies or went begging for favors. Does Buhari look like he is in charge of anything? Of course NO in capital letters. I have said that the man is not mentally fit to be president. That’s why **they** have caged him and ensured he doesn’t talk to the media.

On the other hand, *they* and *them* are used for exclusive others. As can be seen in Excerpt 14, the pronominals refer to the so-called cabals who surround the President and manipulate him to do their biddings. These influential persons are said to make the President to be seen as not being in charge of governance. The existence of a cabal around the President had been a rumour until his wife, Aisha Buhari raised the issue and claimed that a cabal has created so much problems for her husband, to the point of disconnecting him from the millions of Nigerians who voted for him in the 2015 presidential elections. Aisha’s claim became the evidential used by the writer to support the existence of this cabal.

4.4 Rhetorical Questions

The use of rhetorical questions is a strategy to influence and control the thoughts of the electorate. (Ademilokun & Taiwo 2011). Writers’ intention for its use is usually to channel the

mind of the people towards a particular information or message in a discourse. Rhetorical questions also draw the awareness of the people to the main claim of the writer in order to influence the readers' mind. The use of rhetorical questions abound in the posts of People's Democratic Party's supporters. The reason for this may be linked to the position of the party as the major political opponent of the ruling party, hence, the ploy to undermine the achievements of the ruling party. Below are the rhetorical devices in the posts.

Excerpt 16

Does Buhari look like he is in charge of anything? (PDP)

Extract 17

Where is Nigeria under Buhari heading to? Do we look like we are heading anywhere? Nigeria is adrift. People are adrift. Nothing seems to be working. Pray to God you don't get sick today, the healthcare is in complete disarray. If you get seriously sick and cannot afford London, India, Germany, Egypt, like the likes of President Buhari and his new comrade, Orji Uzor Kalu, then you are dead. In fact the hardship hits the common man the more. Propel (sic) die more nowadays from common diseases because treating them has become do expensive and there is no money to treat them S everything has skyrocketed, even with the total neglect of the health sector. **Is it the EDUCATION sector you want to talk about?** It has completely been neglected. **What sector can you confidently talk about?** They would say Agriculture. **What Agriculture when half the farmers in Nigeria are in refugee camp?** (PDP)

Extract 18

Now **what is the masses benefiting from this administration? Is it hunger and poverty you want to now call improvement?** (PDP)

The rhetorical questions are both polar and wh- in nature and they presented President Muhammadu Buhari as incompetent, incapable, inhuman, and lacking direction. They presented the failure of the administration in all the sectors, including, education, economy, agriculture, health. They point at the failure of every system in the country. All the questions seemed to direct the attention of the electorates to a thoughtful consideration of all the points raised.

Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate the discursive strategies deployed in the *Facebook* campaigns of political party supporters and the ideologies built into these strategies. Deploying van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, the study reveals that the discursive strategies deployed by the supporters of the political parties include metaphorisation, positive self-representation, pronominalisation and rhetorical questions. These discursive strategies highlight ideological stances of polarisation, (de)legitimisation, victimisation and actor description. While there is an obvious polarisation between the ruling party and the opposition

ones, a more visible polarisation on *Facebook* is the one between the youths, representing the relatively newer parties (AAC and YPP) championing revolutionary change and the older ones (APC and PDP). The deployment of *Facebook* for political campaigns by party supporters has provided a more inclusive and relatively cheaper space for the young people to promote and garner support for younger and newer candidates who may not have the financial might of the older candidates.

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