

Appraisal Resources in Select WhatsApp Political Broadcast Messages in the 2015 Presidential Election Campaign in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines appraisal resources deployed by Nigerian online community to air their views, construe attitudinal meanings and steer public perception about the representations of presidential candidates during the 2015 election. Data were drawn from the WhatsApp broadcast messages of these online users on the representations of the two key contenders during this period namely, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) and Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The study applies the tenets of appraisal theory. The study reveals that in appropriating evaluative strategies, online text producers inscribe and invoke negative and positive instantiations to portray an ideological stance about the contenders. The study concludes that WhatsApp provides suitable platform for Nigerian electorate to challenge bad governance, monitor the unfolding events in the nation, actively participate in the Nigeria's nascent democracy and serve as change agents in 2015, and suggests that adequate attention should be paid to interrogating the evaluative strategies citizens appropriate during electoral processes to act as the social conscience of the nation.

Keywords: Appraisal resources, Evaluative phenomena, 2015 Presidential election, Muhammadu Buhari, Goodluck Jonathan, WhatsApp broadcast messages

Introduction

The digital world has broken down every existing wall between political gladiators and society, creating an avenue for freedom of expression for the citizenry. The emergence of social media has made it easy for people to unanimously express subjective opinions and comments against political gladiators in society without any fear of arrest. As observed by Kushin and Yamamoto (2010, p. 613), “[s]ocial media allow users to not only seek information but also interact with others through online expressions such as posting political commentaries on blogs and social network sites and sharing multimedia commentary.” As a result, a lot of interpersonal relations and evaluative processes occur on these platforms.

Today, virtual groups are able to perform interpersonal functions better than we have in real world. Through different social platforms, they intrude themselves into the context of situation, express their attitudes and judgements and seek to influence the attitudes and behaviours of others (Halliday, 2007). Hence, social media enable common ground and social interactions which to the citizens is a great achievement as such an opportunity makes them feel a sense of power over their political leaders. Social media garner the people with power to cut to size political figures. Little wonder it does not take more than 140 characters to damage a political campaign today. This means with the help of social media people can mar a political figure if they decide to ‘muscle the horse that threads the mill’ or make when they identify with the pains and concerns of the people.

The use of social media in the 2015 Nigeria presidential campaigns created a social platform for the faceless Nigerian masses to actively participate in the unfolding events that preceded the election, fearlessly air their views, react to issues, comment on the personality of the presidential candidates, chart the course of change for the nation and determine the destiny of the nation for the next four years. These in/actions of the people are known as evaluative phenomena and they have potential ideological functions they perform in discourse. Evaluation, as opined by Hart (2014, p. 43) is concerned with “the way speakers code or implicitly convey various kinds of subjective opinion in discourse and by so doing attempt to achieve some inter-subjective consensus of values with respect to what is represented”. The present study, therefore, seeks to examine the ideological functions of evaluation in selected WhatsApp broadcast messages of the Nigerian online community on the representations of two key contenders in the 2015 presidential election, namely Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

And interestingly, more than 1 billion people in over 180 countries use WhatsApp to stay in touch with friends and family, anytime and anywhere at no cost via a secure, reliable messaging and calling service which started as an alternative to SMS. Hence the service now supports sending and receiving a variety of media: text, photos, videos, documents, and location, as well as voice calls secured with end-to-end encryption, meaning that no third party including WhatsApp can read or listen to them, based in the idea of allowing people communicate anywhere in the world without barriers. This is significant considering the way and manner Nigerian online community appropriated WhatsApp platform to express their positive and negative feelings, sentiments and hopes about these two contenders during the election campaign period.

The Discourse of Election Campaigns in Nigeria

There is an overwhelming volume on the discourse of election campaigns in Nigeria. Election campaign discourse is a broad research area in the Nigerian political discourse studies that scholars have tried to investigate its principles and practices. Opeibi (2006) investigates negative political advertising in the Nigerian print medium. He presents a structural and functional description of the emerging trend in political campaigns in Nigeria with regard to negative advertising. With insights from the linguistic perspective, he observes significant linguistic features and rhetorical strategies of direct attacks political actors engaged in during election campaigns to malign their opponents. He posits that many political office seekers have neglected positive and issue-oriented discourse for negative advertising in the Nigerian election campaigns. In similar vein, Taiwo (2007) identifies political lampooning of the opposition as one of the major campaign strategies of Nigerian politicians during the 2007 general elections in Nigeria. Using morphological and lexico-semantic processes, he identifies some linguistic processes such as short-forms, blending, acronyms, metaphor, pun, conversion and allusion which the opposition creatively utilised to satirise politicians in Nigerian newspapers.

Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2009) carry out a stylistic analysis of the language of election campaigns in Nigeria. This study unveils the import of the aesthetic use of language in campaigns speeches. Considering the insinuations that many Nigerians believe that politics is an exercise laden with lies, deceits and propaganda, the study examines the nature of political campaign in Nigeria and reveals that it is characterised with propaganda through attack on party, exaggeration, vagueness and diatribes. Rhetoric in form of promises, religious allusions, repetitions, figurative expressions, coinages and Pidgin English are identified as the essential properties of the language of Nigerian political campaigns.

Idiagbon (2010) investigates how feelings, emotions as well as ideological beliefs of individuals and groups were conveyed through linguistic expressions to manipulate the electorate. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, the author reveals how language was used to champion individual interests in political discourse. Patterns of language use in three different Nigerian presidential campaign speeches of the 2007 election were investigated in the study to unravel the hidden meaning relating to the social structures, identities and power relations between the electorate and political office holders. Through the manipulation of linguistic properties, such as topicalisation, passivisation, presupposition, mood system etc., the study explicates how political aspirants reconstructed and controlled people's thoughts and perceptions during election campaigns.

Ademilokun and Taiwo (2013) also examine different discursive strategies utilized in selected newspaper campaign adverts during the 2011 elections. They use the analytical tools of Critical Discourse Analysis to unveil the socio-political motifs and messages of campaign adverts. The study reveals how metaphorisation of party symbols, deployment of rhetorical questions, historical allusions, use of deictic pronouns for inclusion and exclusion, among other discursive strategies, are used by political actors to woo and persuade the Nigerian electorate.

Oyeleye and Osisanwo (2013) extend research in this area further by interrogating expression of ideologies in the media accounts of general elections in two Nigerian news magazines. Using a critical linguistic perspective, the study examines language and ideology in the print media with a focus on headlines and cover stories in relation to how they try to reflect the minds, feelings, opinions and attitudes of those with influence. It emphasises how the ideologies of the news magazines are promoted in the various discourses observable in their pages in relation to the Nigerian general elections of 2003 and 2007. The authors reveal that the discourse patterns that express ideological pursuits in the news reports are generally non-neutral. Although the study reveals different instances of evaluative phenomena evoked in the news reports whereby ideological polarization and ideological structures were deployed by members to emphasise their good deeds and de-emphasize their bad deeds through language, the study was carried out from the critical linguistic perspective. Also, focus was not on the electorate's reactions but rather on the grammar of representation of the political actors in election discourse.

It is evident from the review that a bulk of studies available on Nigerian political election campaigns border on print medium and campaign speeches within linguistic and critical discourse analytic purviews. The literature shows that a lot of research carried out in this area focuses on the rhetoric of political aspirants and their opponents. Although Idiagbon (2013) and Adegoju and Oyeboode's (2015) works tried to delve into some issues on evaluative phenomena evoked by Nigerian electorate in their studies, they did not foreground the concepts of affects and judgements in their works. For instance, Adegoju and Oyeboode (2015) examine the patterns of humour evidenced in the deployment of Internet memes in the 2015 online presidential election campaign discourse in Nigeria. The study focuses on how internet memes are used as communicative artefacts in the political parlance to criticize certain socio-political issues and express some public worries during the election period. The study applies Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model and compliments it with Neuendorf et al.'s taxonomy of theoretical perspectives on humour. Arguably, there is an underlying thrust of evaluation in the study, the focus of attention was mainly on the Internet memes as artefacts of political communication. Hence, the tenets of Appraisal Theory which the present study applies is a fresh approach to understanding the rhetorical dynamics of the campaign discourse.

There is, therefore, dearth of studies on the ways Nigerian electorate have implicitly expressed various kinds of subjective opinion about political aspirants in Nigeria. Scholars have not attempted to probe into the affective use of language by the Nigerian electorate during election campaigns. The social media have provided the Nigerian electorate a non-threatening atmosphere for them to intrude into the context of politics, express their attitude, place their judgements and attempt to influence the attitude and behaviour of others. Thus, this study interrogates different expressions of subjective opinions the Nigerian electorate made on WhatsApp about the two most active presidential candidates (Jonathan and Buhari) during the 2015 presidential campaigns in Nigeria.

Methodology

Data for the study were collected mainly from WhatsApp broadcast messages circulated during the heat of the election campaign particularly between January and February 2015. The data consist of verbal texts which were produced by Nigerians to express their affects and judgements on the candidate of their choice in the 2015 presidential elections in order to steer public perception. The data were purposively sampled to project positive and negative instantiations of appraisal resources the Nigerian electorate, via WhatsApp, used to (a) reflect the issues of performance in office, and (b) the yearnings of people for a president who would formulate and implement policies which would translate to 'better life' for the ordinary people. Thus, the data were restricted to the reactions and comments of the netizens on the campaign discourse of the two prominent presidential candidates in 2015 – Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC). Martin and White's (2007) Appraisal Theory serves as the theoretical underpinning for the study because it provides useful and appropriate grammatical tools for analyzing aspects of evaluation in discourse (Koller, 2011b).

Theoretical Framework

Martin and White's (2007) Appraisal Theory (henceforth, AT) is adopted as the theoretical orientation for this study. The theory provides a particularly useful and appropriate grammatical tool for analysing aspects of evaluation beyond modality in Critical Discourse Analysis (Koller, 2011b, p. 125). Martin and White (ibid) advance a grammar for appraisal which is more elaborate than Halliday's SFL interpersonal function because the grammar describes a more comprehensive system for the expression of subjective opinions and the realisation of inter-subjective positioning strategies. The model focuses particularly on exploring, describing and explaining the way language is used to evaluate, adopt stances, construct textual personas and manage interpersonal positioning and relationships. AT is the interpretation of evaluative meaning which borders on the speaker's feelings, estimations and their judgments on the values of various phenomena or experiences (Martin, 2000).

Hart (2014, p. 45) posits that the model exists as a meaning potential in the semantic stratum which is realised in the lexicogrammar through three foci which are: attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude, which is concerned with feelings, emotional reaction, judgement of behaviours and evaluation of things, takes the central position among the three domains. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse while graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred (Martin and White, 2007, p. 35). This study will focus on attitude which is one of the three systems of appraisal. Martin's (1995, p. 28) definition of appraisal succinctly puts the goal of this paper in focus. He posits that 'appraisal is a system of semantic resources for reacting emotionally (affect), judging morally (judgement) and evaluating aesthetically (appreciation) as well as resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations.

The system of affect focuses on the appraiser which is realised in three categories: Happiness, Security and Satisfaction; judgement focuses on other individuals with whom the appraiser shares his/her social environment which is realised in two major categories:

Social Esteem and Social Sanction while appreciation dwells on objects in the environment which the appraiser interacts with and this is further divided into: Reaction, Valuation and Composition. Generally, the notion of attitude in AT rests on two important parameters vis-à-vis: whether the categories are realised as positive/negative instantiations and whether they are realised in terms of a disposition/behaviour. This study therefore investigates how instances of these sub-systems (i.e., affect, judgement and appreciation) are ‘inscribed’ and ‘invoked’ (Hart, 2014, p. 47) in the data as evaluative phenomena to portray the ideological stance of the text producers about the two major presidential candidates in Nigeria’s 2015 presidential elections.

Analysis and Discussion

The producers of online discourse tactically deploy strategies for legitimation and de-legitimation realised through positive and negative instantiations of appraisal resources to represent certain socio-political issues that are germane to their concerns in the 2015 presidential election. The data are characterised with deep expressions of attitudinal meanings text producers conveyed about the two presidential candidates – Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan.

In Excerpt 1 below, the text producer through the use of acronyms tactically construes a negative attitude to Jonathan’s candidacy and a positive one to Buhari. The acronym JONATHAN which stands for ‘Just On Negative Assignment To Harm Nigerians’ is a negative instantiation of social sanction (a category of judgement) of condemnation of the candidacy of President Jonathan. With the nominal elements ‘negative assignment’ and ‘harm’, a negative judgement is passed to the electorate to invoke a note of warning about President Jonathan’s candidacy. The statement ‘Just On Negative Assignment To Harm Nigerians’, which fully spells out the president’s name creates the impression of ‘bad luck’ lurking at the door of Nigerians if he was mistakenly voted in. The premise for this argument is prepared by the self-assertion of what the people must do in the 2015 presidential election which is ‘We must VOTE rightly in 2015’. The first person plural pronoun ‘We’ in the text is used as a discursive strategy to positively represent the downtrodden Nigerians who probably have been at the mercy of perceived poor leadership of President Jonathan. The linguistic resources used here construe a positive attitude of social esteem. The statement ‘We must VOTE rightly in 2015’ is a positive instantiation of the ability of the electorate to choose rightly during the election. To reinforce their significance as the only determining factor in the 2015 election, the discourse producer uses indefinite pronoun “SOMEONE”. The pronoun ‘SOMEONE’ is probably used to be evasive and to invoke a negative affect in order to tactically adjudge the person of President Jonathan as lame and inconsequential in the election.

Excerpt (1)

We must VOTE rightly in 2015.
If SOMEONE is;
J = Just
O = On
N = Negative
A = Assignments
T = To
H = Harm
A = All
N = Nigerians
THEN we must also find someone who will
B = Bring
U = Us
H = Hope
A = And
R = Remove
I = Incompetence
CHANGE in 2015...is inevitable

Contrasting the attributes of the APC presidential flag bearer – Buhari with that of PDP's (Jonathan), in order to gain the support of the electorate, the discourse producer moves from the realm of negative instantiation of social sanction which includes passivity, obscurity and bad luck to the realm of pro-activity, vigilance and positive revolution whereby the Nigerian citizenry get on the move to search for that personality that would bring positive change to their world. That personality is subtly and positively [re]presented to the electorate in the person of BUHARI who supposedly will 'Bring Us Hope And Remove Incompetence'. The contrast in the choice of words used in the two acronyms is striking. While the first has negative instantiation realised by nominal elements such as 'negative assignment' and 'harm', the latter has a positive instantiation of approval as indicated in the collocate 'bring us hope and remove incompetence.' That serious socio-political issues are subtly created in the text and tactically brought to the consciousness of the audience by mere playing on the names of the contestants, using acronyms is rhetorically compelling.

In a bid to provide a kind of balanced appraisal of the personality of Buhari which was also a matter of heated debate preparatory to the presidential elections, the text below presents both the negative and positive sides of the acclaimed change agent and the implications of such contrasting attributes for Nigeria's political development.

Excerpt (2)

BUHARI means many things to different categories of people....
To the ELECTION RIGGERS, he is a coupist
To the less privileged NIGERIANS, he is an [sic] helper
To the CORRUPT, he is Mr. Jailor.
To the DRUG BARONS, he is a killer.
To the runaway thief, he is a crater.
To a dying Economy, he is a saviour.
To INDISCIPLINE, he is brutish.
To TERRORISTS, he is an enemy.
To the BROWN ENVELOPE JOURNALISTS like AIT, he is a dictator.
To his children, a daddy to be proud of.
To his wife, a worthy husband.
To the oil INDUSTRY, he is a refineries builder.
To DORA AKUNYILI, he is a caring boss.
To NIGERIA, he is a fixer.
To JONATHAN, KASHAMU, FFK, he is a nemesis.
To the PDP, he is a destroyer.
To the APC, he is the CHANGE.
To the ordinary PEOPLE, he is one of them.
Your behaviour determines your definition of BUHARI. To me and my family
he is the leader of much needed changes in Nigeria! GMB 2015 let the changes
for better Nigeria begins. God bless Nigeria!

The Excerpt (2) above is a possible response to some hate campaigns launched against Buhari by the ruling party – PDP during this period. The discursive technique of contrast is used in this text as an inter-textual reference to different “Hate Campaigns” displayed by PDP on the person of General Buhari with regard to some of the actions he took when he was the Military Head of state in 1983. One of such campaigns includes that of TV advert broadcast on AIT (Africa Independent Television) in Nigeria where a young girl was displayed as being rendered motherless by General Buhari who gave the directive that the girl’s mother (Gladys Iyama) caught as a ‘cocaine pusher’ should be executed by facing the firing squad. Iyama was the first Nigerian female to be executed this way by Buhari’s directive. The tone of the campaign discourse was that the case was not properly investigated and that the woman was not guilty but General Buhari being a mean leader despite all pleas to which Buhari turned a deaf ear and sentenced the woman to death. This and some other hate campaigns were used to malign the person of Buhari in order to distance the electorate from him in the 2015 presidential election.

Therefore, as a reaction to some of these hate campaigns, the text producer through the technique of contrast, deploys judgement in a highly interesting manner to convey moral evaluations of the APC presidential flag bearer and to creatively weave into one whole text different occurrences of absurdity, atrocity and reality in Nigeria as a state in order to campaign for BUHARI as that much needed change agent for Nigeria.

The text producer in Excerpt (2) employs judgement resources over and above affect specifically the resources that express social sanction. Buhari is appraised in terms of positive propriety in the text based on different categories of people he is in contrast with, for instance 'to the CORRUPT, he is Mr. Jailor' whereas 'to the less privileged NIGERIANS, he is an [sic] helper'. Contrast is used here as a discursive technique for legitimation to morally evaluate the person of BUHARI and present a clear dichotomy of his attributes to the electorate based on what he means to different kinds of people in Nigeria. This is reinforced in the expression:

Your behaviour determines your definition of BUHARI. To me and my family he is the leader of much needed changes in Nigeria! GMB 2015 let the changes for better Nigeria begins. God bless Nigeria!

Thus, expressions of negative propriety of social sanctions on the person of BUHARI, in terms of being 'a coupist', 'a Jailor', 'killer', etc., which are negative evaluations per se are deployed to paradoxically instantiate positive judgement. These are appraisal resources used to legitimise certain actions BUHARI had carried out in the past against some 'bad' persons in the country who have come up to negatively label him. Negative instantiation of propriety is deployed in the text to satirise the ruling party, lawless Nigerians as well as all manner of moral decadences Nigeria as a country is battling with. Social sanction, which is one of the two categories of judgement associated with acts of approval and condemnation (Hart, 2014), is used in the text to give consciousness to the minds of the electorate about the person of General Buhari who has been allegedly represented negatively by PDP as being callous, wicked, fanatic, unforgiving, cruel, etc.

Excerpt (2) above, therefore, could be taken as a kind of response to some of the 'hate campaigns' made by PDP to ironically eulogise and appraise the person of General Buhari in terms of what his person instantiates to different categories of people. To the 'good Nigerians' and all 'positive minded people like Late Prof. Dora Akunyili' Buhari has positive representation and reputation whereas to all the negative minded ones as well as corrupt Nigerians like election riggers, drug barons etc., the person of Buhari instantiates negative appraisal. Dora Akunyili was used as a signifier in this text to depict Buhari as a caring leader interested in the welfare of his staff. History tells us that Buhari released some amount of money for medical treatment of Akunyili abroad when he was the chairman of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PDF) during the Abacha Regime. The name of Akunyili in the excerpt is however strategic because it instantiates positive testimonial about the kind-heartedness of General Buhari. The technique adopted here is referred to as 'binary opposition in judgement' (Hart, 2014) and it is a clear strategy of self-legitimation (although carried out on behalf of Buhari) and Other-delegitimation which plays a vital role in justifying Buhari's past actions and ridiculing many of the insinuations PDP as a party made about him. Through appraisal, subjective evaluations are expressed to diagnose the state of affairs in the country in order to make certain interpretation prevail in the minds of the electorate preparatory to the 2015 presidential election.

In Excerpt (3) below, appraisal resources are employed by online political text producers to express affectual meaning about the person of President Jonathan in the 2015 presidential election. As earlier stated, the categories of affect are: (i) happiness, which concerns moods construed broadly as feelings of happiness or sadness; (ii) security, which concerns feelings of peace and anxiety; (iii) and satisfaction, which concerns feelings of achievement and frustration. We see different instantiations of these categories in the text.

Excerpt (3)

A plane was about to crash and there were only four parachutes in the plane. Meanwhile there were five passengers in it. The first passenger was Cristiano Ronaldo and he said: 'I'm the best footballer, I can't die now'. So he took one parachute and jumped out of the plane. The second passenger was Aliko Dangote and he said "I'm the richest man in Africa and I'm too young to die". So he took the second parachute and jumped out of the plane. The third passenger was President Jonathan and he said: "I'm the smartest president in the world so I can't die now, my people still need me". So he took one and jumped out of the plane. Then the remaining two passengers left were Pope Francis and a little school girl. The Pope said to the little girl "take the last parachute, I'll sacrifice my life for you". The little girl replied "No need for that. There are two parachutes left" The Pope asked "How come?" The little girl replied; "The Nigerian President took my school bag". (Emphasis ours).

In the excerpt above, the system of affect is used by the text producer to satirise the perceived cluelessness of Mr President (Jonathan), echoing some Nigerians' negative perception of President Jonathan before the 2015 presidential election. The mechanism of joke is used in this text as an appraisal technique to illustrate a scenario whereby a lass is depicted as being smarter and more vigilant than the Nigerian President who mistakes a girl's school bag for parachute. The text begins with an explanation of a tragedy that is about to occur – a plane crash. Through this, negative instantiations of anxiety are expressed in the verbal elements such as 'there were only four parachutes in the plane', 'there were five passengers', 'can't die now', 'took the parachute and jumped out of the plane', etc. However, the first two passengers Cristiano Ronaldo, Aliko Dangote, were able to judge correctly despite the tension, pressure and anxiety to take parachute, President Jonathan is appraised negatively as being dumbed.

The text producer vents some venom of hatred and sadness here about the person of President Jonathan whose many decisions as regards certain issues in the country have been judged inappropriate by some individuals and political groups in the country. The statement made by President Jonathan in the text which says, 'I'm the smartest president in the world so I can't die now, my people still need me', is a negative instantiation of achievement expressed to make a mockery of President Jonathan's assertion.

Ironically, the so-called smartest president eventually turns out to be the most foolish who could not differentiate between an ordinary school bag and parachute. The text is used to make a mockery of the person of President Jonathan and debase him as an unworthy and incompetent leader who is not fit for another term in the office. Placing him side by side with an ordinary school girl further denigrates his person and worth as a leader. Thus, negative instantiations of happiness, security and satisfaction are used as appraisal resources in the text by the online text producer to vent their feelings of hatred about Mr President's passive nature and express their resentment, sadness and frustration about his leadership style.

Reinforcing the fact that PDP as a party as well as its presidential flag bearer has lost face with the people no matter what they do, some online text producers employ different appraisal resources in Excerpt (4) below as a form of 'White Paper' against PDP to evaluate the party since its emergence as the ruling party in Nigeria, judge it and place social sanctions.

Excerpt (4)

Prayers for GEJ & PDP Supporters
Jonathan/PDP promised us electricity.

*If you're a Nigerian living in the dark and you said you want to continue with PDP/GEJ's government, you will remain in the dark for the rest of your life.
Jonathan/PDP promised us Security.

*If you're a Nigerian living without an adequate security and you said you want to continue with PDP/GEJ's government, you will continue living in fear.
Jonathan/PDP promised to create jobs for all Nigerians.

*If you're a Nigerian, jobless or without a good job and insist you want to continue with PDP/GEJ's government, You will remain jobless for the rest of yourself.
Jonathan/PDP promised Health care reform.

*If you're a Nigerian with no access to quality health care and you said you want to continue with PDP/GEJ's government, you will remain living in sickness
Jonathan/PDP promised qualitative and competitive education.

*If you're Nigerian and you witnessed the ASUU strike during GEJ administration that lasted almost a year and you insist on PDP/GEJ's government, good things will go on strike in your life.
Jonathan/PDP promised to Fight corruption.

*If you're a Nigerian and can see the level of corruption in the system but you insist on PDP/GEJ's government, your system will remain corrupt.
Jonathan/PDP promised to fight Injustice.

*If you're a Nigeria and you can see the level of injustice in the country but you said you want to continue with PDP/GEJ's government. Nigerian Police/Military will harrass you and no justice will be done.
If you're a True PDP/GEJ supporter and you can't say AMEN to this, shame on you.

I used to be GEJ No. 1 fan because I believed he was God sent but I discovered that he's not in any way different from the juntas we've had in the past if not worse than them. I will advice my fellow Nigerians to ignore politicians that can't come out to tell you what they have achieved in the office after 6 years they've been in government despite their promises but believe they can win peoples mind by playing ethnic and religion politics.
Vote for Change, Vote GMB/Osibanjo.

The folk culture of cursing as expressed in 'you will remain in the dark for the rest of your life', 'good things will go on strike in your life', 'you will remain living in sickness', etc., is deployed in excerpt (4) as a negative instantiation to construe a feeling of sadness about different degrees of disappointment Nigerian people experienced under the leadership. The text producer invokes the culture as a system of affect to denounce PDP as a party and reject outright President Jonathan's candidature in the 2015 election. As observed by Wachege (2012, p. 1),

curses and cursing are imbued with invaluable socio-cultural and religious benefits. A curse is a disturbing anguish in life and living. Curses conservatively guide, guard and influence the Africans in their socio-cultural and religious life ... which seems to add value not only to one's life as an individual but also to the community.

This culture, therefore, becomes instructive in Excerpt (4) above as the text producer resorts to cursing to vent their frustration and express their feelings of dissatisfaction with Jonathan's administration. In this text, negative instantiations of satisfaction and disappointments realized in a range of 'declaratives' and 'if-structures' such as

Jonathan/PDP promised Health care reform.

*If you're a Nigerian with no access to quality health care and you said you want to continue with PDP/GEJ's government, you will remain living in sickness.

Jonathan/PDP promised qualitative and competitive education.

*If you're Nigerian and you witnessed the ASUU strike during GEJ administration that lasted almost a year and you insist on PDP/GEJ's government, good things will go on strike in your life.

are used in the text to x-ray the entire national life of Nigeria under the leadership of Goodluck Jonathan/PDP and justify the social sanction of cursing placed on them. By thematising the conditional clauses in all the structures, expressions of social esteem of negative instantiations of capacity of Jonathan and his party are laid bare for their outright rejection by the electorate.

Expressions of satisfaction which is a sub-system of affect mainly occur as negative instantiations in the text to condemn, disapprove and reject Jonathan's candidacy. Tactically, the text producer places Jonathan and his party on a scale and draws a conclusion in terms of their performance in order to distance the electorate from electing him in the 2015 election. Appraising Jonathan/PDP across almost all the sectors from health, education, power generation, employment, to social justice and a host of others, the score card is abysmally poor as displayed in the text. And in a bid to wield the instrument of justice and mete out sanction to Jonathan and his party, which is encapsulated in cursing, the if-structure becomes a strategic appraisal resource.

In the dependent clauses which highlight the supposed catalogue of woes Jonathan's administration has supposedly visited upon Nigerians, the discursive strategy of invoking common knowledge/ground places the burden of morality known as social esteem on the electorate to assess the situation and thereby make an informed choice as to whom to vote for. However, in case the electorate choose to overlook such negative instantiations, the main clauses then invoke curses as negative instantiations of social sanction, replicating the woes in the subordinate clauses in the lives of the electorate who would act in defiance of the voting pattern being canvassed. Hence, the text producer resorts to curses as a weapon in the excerpt to coerce any dissenting voice into rejecting Jonathan's candidacy.

To set the premise for argumentation, the text producer expresses an attitudinal meaning of appreciation in the word 'fan' as a positive instantiation of what used to be his attitude to the person of Jonathan in the time past. Appreciation is a sub-system of attitude that allows speakers to aesthetically evaluate things including objects (material and semiotic) and processes (Hart, 2014, p. 50). Positive instantiations of appreciation are depicted in the linguistic resources 'No 1 fan', 'believe', and 'God sent' to depict the disposition of the text producer to Jonathan in the time past and present the premise on which the text producer is campaigning against Jonathan and his party.

Having appraised and considered their performance in office, the statement, “I used to be GEJ No. 1 fan because I believed he was God sent but I discovered that he's not in any way different from the juntas we've had in the past if not worse than them.” (emphasis ours) is given as a cause and effect (positive and negative instantiations). This is to justify why the text producer is turning his back on Jonathan/PDP and beckoning on other electorate to join her/him by voting for GMB/Osibanjo.

In retrospect, the text producer regretfully discloses her/his allegiance to Jonathan and expresses an attitude of dissatisfaction about her/his performance and behaviour toward the Nigerian people during his administration.

Still on appraising PDP/Jonathan's rule in the last sixteen years in Nigeria, Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State in a viral video clip during the presidential campaign assesses the performance of the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan and his political party, the Peoples Democratic Party, using the metaphor of motion as an intertextual reference. The negative portrayal of the PDP is handled in the video in such a dexterous manner that its producers interject each negative statement the governor makes with strips (culled from another viral video too) of the emotional outburst of the wife of the President, Dame Patience Jonathan, at a meeting she called to address the issue of the kidnap of the Chibok girls.

Governor Rochas Okorocha presents PDP as a ‘one-chance’ vehicle with a five-gear lever. ‘One chance’ is a metaphor for public transport vehicles in major Nigerian cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Benin-City in which any passenger that boards them would be robbed of his or her precious belongings. In the process, he or she could be assaulted, hypnotised with supposed fetish objects, or driven off the course of his or her destination. In some extreme situations, the unfortunate passenger could be kidnapped and ransom demanded from family members or used for rituals. So, a one-chance vehicle in the Nigerian parlance is the riskiest public transport to board, as it sometimes turns out to be ‘a journey of no return’ for the passenger.

Portraying PDP as a one-chance vehicle, in Excerpt (5) below, is therefore a warning to Nigerians to beware of the party that would drive the metaphorical vehicle of the country for the next four years, giving the impression that Nigeria would be unsafe with PDP behind the wheels. With regard to the five gears of the said one-chance vehicle, it is said to have only one gear forward, the rest backward whereas in normal driving parlance, the reverse gear is only one. The metaphor of motion invoked in this political context in which four gears would walk in the reverse and only one gear would gain motion forward is a negative instantiation of judgement that portrays the party in a bad light. In an attempt to estrange the party from the electorate, the speaker now lists what the forward gear works for in Nigeria's national life and what the reverse gears too work for thus:

Excerpt (5)

PDP is a one-chance vehicle
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'Will you keep quiet?')
With five gears: one forward, four backward
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'continue')
Free education – reverse
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'no problem')
Rural roads – reverse
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'continue')
General Hospital – reverse
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'no problem')
Payment of teachers – reverse
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'continue')
Dualisation of roads – reverse
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'no problem')
Kidnapping – forward
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'chai!')
Corruption – forward
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'chai!')
'Tear the money' – forward
(Dame Patience Jonathan interjecting 'There is God o!')

From the foregoing, the PDP is presented as a party that has allegedly failed Nigeria and would have to give way to the opposition. The text producer does a critical evaluation of the Jonathan led government under the PDP umbrella and the score card as indicated in the text is unsatisfactory. Thus, negative instantiations of social sanction are invoked by Governor Okorocha to disapprove and condemn PDP led government and advocate for the abrupt end of their Sixteen Years rule in Nigeria. Through negative instantiations of reversal such as 'free education', 'rural roads', 'general hospital' 'payment of teachers', etc., he portrays the level of degradation of the important sectors in the Nigeria's national life. Thus, he subtly makes a case to the electorate not to cast their votes for the PDP in the next election.

On the contrary, he sarcastically invokes positive instantiations of negative behaviours that have thrived under PDP leadership such as: 'kidnapping', 'corruption', and money sharing. These seemingly despicable behaviours are presented by the text producer as the fort liners of the PDP supposedly Transformation Agenda by using the forward gear to represent them in the text. Okorocha strategically utilises appraisal resources in the above text to subtly campaign against, criticise, and condemn PDP led government. Thus the social of allusion of PDP to a 'one-chance vehicle' is a negative instantiation of affect that portrays insecurity and loss of confidence in its government. Hence, he tactically uses the metaphor of motion to x-ray important sectors of the Nigeria's national life in order to assess and disapprove the party's performance in the past sixteen years so that the electorate could be discouraged to cast their votes for him.

To further reiterate the fact that Mr President did not deserve a second term in office, Excerpt (5) below also reveals another strategic dimension, online text producers adopted during the 2015 presidential election to express attitudinal meanings:

Excerpt (6)

Are you saying President Jonathan's Transformation Agenda in Nigeria means:

- 1) A Refusal to Declare Assets by an Elected President contrary to the Provisions of the Nigerian Constitution?
- 2) Disappearance of 20 Billion Dollars from the Oil Revenue?
- 3) Shutting the Nigerian Refineries in order to keep stealing Nigeria dry through Petrol Import Subsidy Payment?
- 4) Seizure of the New Constitution produced at the recently concluded National Confab because it contains a clause that disqualifies Jonathan from standing for Re-Election?
- 5) Taking Bribe from Generator Plant Importers and blocking the Power Generation in the Country while the bogus funds for it disappears into Private Pockets?
- 6) Parading Multitude of imported Private Jets by a Third World Country where simple Refuse Removal is unaffordable and Teachers are being owed Salaries for many months?

Tell us why Transformation in Nigeria means 2 Billion Dollars from the National Budget for President Jonathan 365 days Household Meals despite being paid his Annual Salary.

Ironic sarcasm is used in Excerpt 5 above to do a critical appraisal of the in/actions of Mr President across some sectors in Nigeria. Through the strategy of rhetorical question, the text producer criticises, disapproves and condemns the notion of Transformation Agenda proposed by Jonathan. Negative instantiations of veracity are used in the text to sensitise the electorate's consciousness to the president's/PDP's slogan for national development tagged 'Transformation Agenda'.

Instead of standing out as an embodiment of honesty and integrity which would have portrayed him as a positively driven transformation agent/leader, all the six items presented as cardinal points on his 'Transformation Agenda' as listed above portray him as the chief culprit in misappropriation of fund as well as abuse of office. Such issues as the refusal of Mr President to declare his assets contrary to the provision of the constitution, poor disposition of government to ensure functional refineries in the nation as well as allegedly taking bribe from generator plant importers to prevent functional power supply are all negative instantiations of propriety used to present Mr President as a corrupt, an incompetent and inadequate leader.

Affect as a sub-system of attitudinal meaning runs through this text to catalogue various degree of negative realities and condemnable actions of President Jonathan and his administration. Through negative instantiations of social sanction encapsulated in rhetorical questions, the text producer insinuates that mediocrity and indiscipline thrive and go unchallenged under the nose of Mr President. Conversely, negative instantiations are tactically deployed in the excerpt as evaluative processes to call the attention of the electorate to certain critical issues they need to properly appraise and think deeply about before going to the polls in 2015.

Further, drawing on intertextual reference to medical discourse, the country is appraised as being in a diseased condition and it would need an antidote that would be provided by the APC. In the Nigerian medical world, particularly in local pharmaceutical dispensary, there is a drug by the name APC, a form of analgesic. So, playing on the name and some other coinages revolving around the name of the APC standard bearer and his running mate, this humorous campaign text is gripping:

Excerpt (7)

Anyone infected with a virus that has been ravaging Nigeria in the last 6 years should visit any of the APC drug stores nationwide and ask for Buharimycin and Osinbajoquin tablet. It cures all ailments including cluelessness, poverty, impunity etc. Place your order ASAP [as soon as possible] on or before 14th Febuhari. Thanks.

The representation of Goodluck Jonathan's regime as a virus in the land is a negative instantiation of propriety used by the discourse producer to condemn PDP and poison the minds of the electorate against the party. In contrast, in a positive self-representation manner which is an attitude of appreciation, APC is symbolically configured as a drug store that has the antidote to the metaphorical diseases in the land. Interestingly, the figure of the presidential aspirant of the party Buhari is couched in medical terms with the coinage 'Buharimycin' and that of his running mate Osinbajo as 'Osinbajoquin' as positive instantiations of appreciation and propriety of their candidacy. The '-mycin' and '-quin' endings in the respective names have intertextual reference to (local) medical parlance and reinforce the positive affect the discourse producer has toward the political duo. The three sub-systems of attitude – affect, judgement and appreciation – intertwine in the text above to express an attitudinal meaning. Be that as it may, the rhetorical function is to positively instantiate the standard bearers of the opposition party as therapists to the electorate while the ruling party is negatively instantiated as a virus that has metaphorically infested the land with ailments such as 'poverty', 'impunity', etc., as a result of which the electorate would have to vote out the party.

Conclusion

So far in this paper, we have considered instances of attitude expressed on WhatsApp broadcast messages circulated by Nigerian electorate during the 2015 presidential election. Through the application of Appraisal Theory, we have been able to unravel different layers of attitudinal meanings online text producers instantiated during the election period about Jonathan and Buhari's candidacies. WhatsApp provides text producers a non-threatening atmosphere to easily air their voices and emotion about the state of event in the nation. This enables them to effectively manifest the three sub-systems of attitude which are affect, judgement and appreciation. The platform serves as a leverage whereby the electorate sit in the position of the judge to serve as the social conscience of the society.

The appraisal resources utilised in the texts provide instances of inscribed and invoked judgements. Through instances of specific items inscribed in the text, certain judgements are invoked to prompt some value positions that are not explicitly marked out in the evaluative phenomena. Such positions, however, form part of the ideological backdrop for analysing the texts. Thus, negative instantiations of effectual meanings and judgement are largely used in the data especially against Jonathan/PDP to expose their failure, condemn, discredit, and dislodge them in the election.

Online text producers also used positive instantiations of affect, judgement and appreciation to legitimise Buhari's candidacy and some of his actions during his reign as the Military head of state. Through binary opposition in judgement a critical strategy of legitimation (of Buhari) and Other-delegitimation (of Jonathan) plays a crucial role in justifying the condemnation and outright rejection of President Goodluck Jonathan. This reveals the critical dimension of Appraisal Theory as an effective social linguistic framework to interrogate ideological functions of evaluative processes in discourse.

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