

# Engagement as an Instrument of Authenticating Discourse Functions in Nigerian Newspaper Political Campaign Advertisements

Ayoola G. Oyekola\* & Dr. Rohizah Bt Halim\*\*

\*General Studies Department, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho Nigeria.

\*\*School of Language Civilization and Philosophy, Awang Had Salleh Graduate School, UUM, Malaysia.

Corresponding author:

Ayoola G. Oyekola mail id: [ayooyekola@gmail.com](mailto:ayooyekola@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*Engagement is one of the tripartite evaluative language processes in the Appraisal theory. The system involves how the authorial voice engages the external voice in his text. This study analysed how this sub-category of the appraisal was used to authenticate persuasion-induced discourse functions in political advertisements. The data of this qualitative study were obtained from paid advertisements of the two main political parties in Nigeria published in three newspapers - "The Nation" and "Nigerian Tribune" and "The Guardian". The advertisements of the two political parties were purposively selected because they were responsible for more than 75% of newspaper campaign adverts during the period of study (2015 & 2019 elections). The results of the study reveal that the "Engagement system" was used as a rhetorical tool to authenticate and give credibility to positive acclaims on self and support the negative claims made on the opponent. One can safely conclude that the engagement system is an invaluable linguistic resource in political interactional discourse. Language scholars in the field of persuasive rhetoric should give serious attention to this persuasive strategy. This is because it has practical implications for practitioners of political advertising and consultants on political campaign. While rookie copy writers could further develop the linguistic tool to craft and enhance persuasive power in political campaign texts, political actors could use the strategy to give credibility and legitimacy to the claims in their campaign discourse. This consequently bridges the hitherto credibility gap associated with political discourse.*

**KEYWORDS:** Evaluation, Engagement, Acclaim, Attack, political discourse functions.

## **1. Introduction**

In any political campaign discourse, “the pressure to communicate shared values to the public often leads politicians to feign values and engage in hypocrisy” (Jones, 2016, p.490). This brings to fore the rationale behind Hannah Arendt’s (1906 – 1975) assertion that “Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues and lies have always been regarded as justifiable tool in political dealings.” This assertion by the German political philosopher gives an incisive insight into the extent to which lying has proliferated political discourse and how the public perceive statements made by politicians. Affirming this position, Edelman (2015) declares that only 15% of the people in the world trust what political leaders says. In another study in the United States of America, Jones (2016) also asserts that only 45% of the Americans believe in what politicians say. The trio of Alterman (2005), Keyes (2004) and Krugman (2011) conclude that politicians lie with abandon and impunity

The fact that people do not trust politicians to tell the truth serves the truism that “they won’t believe what politicians say and, hence, no one will behave as the politician intends” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013, p.25). This lack of trust in political leaders could erode quality of democracy. What then should politicians do to make their messages credibly persuasive and believable in this era of post-truth politics?

The realization of a credibility gap in political discourse demands that political actors need to build their messages on solid foundation that could disabuse the minds of the public on this perception. This is an indication that the public’s legitimate basis for valuing truth is a crucial tool in political discourse persuasion. To achieve this, political actors adopt different linguistic strategies to give credibility to their assertions. “Engagement system” is one of such linguistic devices utilized by politicians to give credibility to their assertions. Despite the crucial role of this strategy could play in bridging the credibility gap in political campaign advertising texts, no study has focused on its value and usage in the Nigerian political discourse studies.

There is no doubting the fact that engagement has been explored in several studies. For instances, while Ansarin Tarlani (2011) paid attention to readers’ engagement markers, Yuliana and Gandana’s (2018) attention was on writers’ engagement markers. Hadid and Bagheri, on their own, also did a comparative analysis of engagement system in in two genres of discourse

(Literature and News) It is however observed that the concentration has been on the epistemic markers of the engagement system only. Attention has not paid on how the linguistic strategy of engaging external voices to bridge the credibility lacuna often associated with claims and assertions in political campaign advertisements. Asides from this fact, most of the investigations on engagement system have been carried out on academic discourse and not on political discourse where the present study finds its affordance. While others have exclusively focused on the engagement markers, mostly in academic discourse, this exercise explores the purpose of the engaged external voice in the construction of two discourse functions that featured in Nigerian political campaign advertisements. This study, therefore, bridges the gap by examining why and how this discursive strategy was deployed for authentication of the claims made in the political advertising texts of the two major political parties in Nigeria during the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections.

The significance of this study could be highlighted in a number of ways. First, it is valuable in extending studies in political communication. Second, it extends the findings provided in two distinct frameworks (Appraisal & Functional Theories). This is done by exploring the nexus between the engagement strategy (A system in Appraisal) as testimonial evidence that give credibility and legitimacy to assertions of acclaim and attack (Discourse Functions in Functional Theory) in political campaign advertising texts.

## **2. Literature Review**

The execution of politics is prominently constituted in language because there is hardly any political activity that exists without the use of language. This is affirmed by Chomsky's (2004) position that language is the currency of power of politics. Chilton (2004) also asserts that "politics cannot be conducted without language...". Accordingly, to comprehend the polity in a particular society, one needs to understand the language usage in the political discourse in such context. Thus, language use in relation to electoral matters constitutes an interesting aspect of political discourse and needs interrogation. The fact that "language must be seen (and analyzed) as a political phenomenon" (Pelinka, 2007, p. 129) has engendered extensive investigation into political discourse. And existing studies on political campaign messages in Nigeria have dwelt on strategies and structures used in electoral politics to the neglect of the engagement strategy deployed for the authentication of persuasive assertions. This study, therefore, strives to fill the identified vacuum.

A glance at the literature reveals that most of the studies on language use in various genres of Nigeria's political campaign advertising discourse focus discursive strategies (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013); interpersonal and ideational meanings (Ayoola, 2013; Batta, Batta, & Mboho, 2015); content analysis (Alawode & Adesanya, 2016); and negative advertising (Batta, Batta, Mboho, 2016; Izuogu & Umoren, 2017). It is evident that none of the extant literature in the Nigerian political campaign advertisements considers the crucial value of engagement strategy in the Nigerian political discourse. The subsequent section of this paper reviews some works on engagement strategy in interactional discourse.

### **2.1 Studies on Engagement Strategy**

Engagement system is one of the tripartite systems of Appraisal Theory which accounts for how writers/speakers engage and position themselves with external voice(s). And due to its crucial role in discourse, several linguistic investigations into its use in discourse have been undertaken by scholars like Ansarin and Tarlani-Aliabdi, 2011; Bagheri, 2012; Mori, 2017; Novi, Filtriati and Sutopo, 2019; Yuliana & Gandana, 2018. This section gives a synopsis of the literature.

Ansarin and Tarlani-Aliabadi (2011) explore the way academic writers use engagement markers to establish the presence of their readers over the past few years. This act of acknowledging the presence of their readers is termed imagining "a second voice" (Kroll, 1984, P.181) and it is achieved when an author uses explicit linguistic resources (i.e., reader engagement markers) to refer to readers. While this study focuses on the uses of engagement markers in academic discourse, the present study is focused on the purpose of engagement system in political discourse.

Using Hyland's (2005) interactional model of stance and engagement framework, the article examines the type and frequency of reader engagement markers in 60 applied linguistic articles. The sampled texts are made up of three groups of articles, viz., 20 English articles by native Persian applied linguists, 20 Persian articles by native Persian applied linguists, and 20 English articles by native English applied linguists. The findings of the analysis reveal significant differences in the way native Persian and English represent their readers. In addition, considerable differences are observed in categorical distribution of reader engagement markers. The focus in the work is mere statistics usage of engagement markers in these different genres of academic discourse. In essence, the study does not examine the linguistic process as the present exercise is doing.

In another study dealing with engagement strategy in interaction, Bagheri and Zenouzagh (2021) examine the potentials of face-to-face and computer-mediated conversation (CMC). In the investigation of two speaking modalities on students' engagement, the study sampled 30 Iranian male intermediate EFL learners based on their performance on Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and assigned into the research groups.

Using transcription analysis in face-to-face group and chat log analysis in CMC, the study assessed face-to-face and CMC groups engagement at verbal, paralinguistic and functional levels. The findings revealed that limited engagement has link with linguistic features such as pauses and hesitations, appeal for help, and silence in L1 use. Elaborate engagement was not associated with L1 use but was focussed on actual talk and strategic discourse management. The Chi-square statistics used in measuring the frequency of the linguistic resources indicated different proportions between limited and elaborate engagements in face-to-face and CMC conversations. The study is a statistical analysis of paralinguistic engagement markers in face-to-face group chat. Its attention on the differences between two types of engagement, markers does not focus on the purposive uses of engagement system in persuasive discourse that the present work focuses.

Yuliana and Gandana (2018) sees engagement as linguistic a resource that assists writer to clearly present voice and position in writing. This is achieved when writers make skilful use of Engagement resources to voice their alignment or disalignment with those of others in presenting a case. In proving this, they examined nine exposition texts written by university students of different proficiency levels to indicate how the writers' voice is constructed through engagement resources. The findings of the study reveal that, though all students in the sample could present a clear position, the difference in their proficiency levels was reflected in the different engagement strategies in their writings. Students who were more proficient in English were more successful in exploiting the resources necessary for constructing a well-argued text and showed a stronger sense of authorship.

Hadidi and Bagheri (2012) explore the use of the system Engagement within two genres of discourse, viz., Literature and News. The study draws a corpus of 20,000 words as sample from each of the genres, that is, prose fiction (English Literature) and news articles (News). This involved five cornerstones of short fiction and a collection of news articles from CNN, Reuters, BBC, Daily Mail and Yahoo News. The findings of the study reveal that the dialogic stances

adopted by the writers are geared towards achieving the stylistic effects intended by their various themes and motifs. This supports the idea behind the present study that engagement strategy enhances effectuation of the persuasion-induced discourse functions.

As observable from the reviewed studies above, engagement is an important linguistic instrument in different discourse genres. Aside from the fact that the concentration of the studies was on academic discourse and not on political advertising, it is also noticed that engagement discourse markers were the focus of most of the studies. This leaves lacunae on the use of engagement system in political discourse and how it is used to authenticate the discourse functions in political campaign discourse. And for this reason, the emphasis in this study is on how the value positions advanced by external voices were deployed to accentuate persuasion-induced functions of Acclaim and Attack in the Nigerian political campaign advertisements.

## **2.2. Reviewing the Underpinning Theories**

This study draws inspiration from two theoretical frameworks, viz., Functional Theory of political campaign discourse and Appraisal Theory. Since the study is on political discourse, it leans on functional theory of political discourse which stipulates that, candidates jostling for political leadership positions establish their competitive edge through: (a) *Acclaims*, (b) *Attacks* (c) *Defences*. Complementarily, this study also adopts appraisal theory which stipulates the functions of evaluative language use in discourse.

### **2.2.1 Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse**

Voting is a competitive game in electoral politics. To gain advantage in the electoral game, messages in political campaign advertising are creatively deployed by political actors either to present themselves positively or present opponents negatively to the public. Benoit's Functional Theory, which provides a pedestal for this study, gives a clue to how this is done in political campaign discourse. Benoit (2017, 2014) asserts that campaign discourse creates preferability through three persuasion-induced discourse functions. The foundational premises upon which persuasion-induced political discourse functions are anchored are: (a) Voting as a competitive phenomenon requires that a candidate must be perceived as *preferable* to opponents; (b) An individual candidate cannot be preferred to his opponent unless he is distinguished; (c) Political campaign messages are the means for establishing distinctions and



(d) Campaign discourse creates preferability through three discourse functions of acclaims (positive statements about oneself), attacks (criticisms of an opponent), and defences (refutations of attacks from opponents).

The focus of these discourse functions is usually on two main issues, viz., policy and character. Attacks or Acclaims on policy issues are subclassified into three forms: past deeds (failures or accomplishments), plans (campaign promises), and general goals (objectives). Statements of acclaim or attack on character are also grouped into three: leadership ability (experience in office), personal qualities (personality traits), and ideals (values or principles) (Benoit,2017).

### **2.2.2 Engagement System in Appraisal Theory**

As earlier mentioned, diverse language resources are used to influence the attitudinal behaviour of target audience in political discourse. These resources are usually underpinned and explicated in theories. One of such language resources is evaluative discourse process enunciated in Appraisal. There are three major categories of evaluative process in Appraisal Theory – Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Engagement system which is one of the tripartite systems of Appraisal Theory accounts for how the authorial voice engages and positions itself with external voice(s). The idea of engagement is influenced by the belief that, “All utterances are dialogic” (Fryer, 2013; Martin & White, 2005; Volosnov,1973). Since the thrust of this study is that the discourse functions and evaluation are intertwined, this study examines how engagement strategy is deployed to enhance the effectuation of persuasive purposes (as enumerated in Functional Theory of political campaign discourse) in political campaign advertising texts in Nigeria.

The idea of Engagement system in this study is, therefore, premised on the fact that language users orient or align their voices to previous related voices. The question is: why do we do this in discourse? It happens because “all utterances occur as a background of other utterances on the same theme, a background of similar or contradictory opinions, points of views, and value judgements” (Bakhtin, 2010, p.281). It could then be asserted that communication, in written or oral form, is dialogistic since it orients itself with previous related voices (Fryer, 2013). In essence, when speakers/writers express their stance or feeling on an issue, they could incorporate facts from related voice(s) for the purpose of amplification or authentication (Martin & White, 2005). Based on these views, this study explores how political advertisers engage facts or principles from other voices to accentuate the persuasion-induced discourse

functions in political campaign advertising messages. The focus here is strictly on how political advertisers incorporate facts, values, or principles in other voices to authenticate their attacks or acclaims.

### 3. METHOD

This study content-analysed 20 paid advertisements of the two major political parties randomly selected from two national newspapers during the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria. Asides from the fact the newspaper outlets do not have influence on the content of the advertisements, the two newspapers were chosen because they have wide distribution throughout the country. More also, there was no discrimination against any of the two parties by the publishing houses. For instance, despite the fact that “The Nation” newspaper owner belongs to the rival APC, the advertisements of the PDP presidential candidate in 2019 were published in the newspaper. In addition, “The Nigerian Tribune” is currently the oldest surviving newspaper in Nigeria. The newspaper has, in the past sixty years, evolved to be the top in competitive Nigeria’s news media business. And for this, 75% of the samples analysed were from the newspaper.

These newspapers were sourced from the libraries of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso -Nigeria and Nigeria Tribune Newspaper, Ibadan- Nigeria. Twelve discourse function themes were identified to have been authenticated by external voices (i.e., engagement system was deployed for validation in them) in the sampled texts. These were purposively selected for analysis and discussion. Selection of these advertising texts is appropriate because they have been used to give validation to Acclaim and Attack assertions. And as claimed by Rossman and Rallis (2011), this kind of purposive sampling gives clear results. The texts’ messages are then unitised into themes of Attack and Acclaim because discourse is enthymematic (Benoit, 2017). In this instance, Acclaims favourably portrays the candidate and his policy issues while *Attacks* depicts the opposing candidate and his policy issues unfavourably. Eight themes of the acclaim and attack discourse functions engaged external voices as corroborating testimonies of authentication are analyzed in this study. Tables (4.1, 4.2, & 4.3) below present the demography of the sampled advertisements.



**Table 4.1** showing the demography of the Samples from Nigerian Tribune Newspaper:

| <b>Nigerian Tribune Newspaper</b> |        |            |
|-----------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Date of Publication               | Page   | Advertiser |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015     | 5      | APC        |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015    | 60     | APC        |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015    | 51     | APC        |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015    | 5      | PDP        |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015    | 7 & 52 | APC        |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> January, 2015    | 2      | PDP        |
| 22 <sup>nd</sup> January, 2015    | 7      | PDP        |
| 23 <sup>rd</sup> January, 2015    | 2      | PDP        |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> January, 2015    | 2      | PDP        |

**Table 4.2** showing the demography of the samples from “The Nation” Newspaper.

| <b>The Nation Newspaper</b> |
|-----------------------------|
|-----------------------------|

| Date of Publication             | Page        | Advertiser |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 17 <sup>th</sup> January, 2019  | 36          | APC        |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> January, 2019  | 35          | PDP        |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> January, 2019  | 39          | APC        |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> February, 2019  | 12          | PDP        |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> February, 2019 | 3, 27, & 28 | APC        |

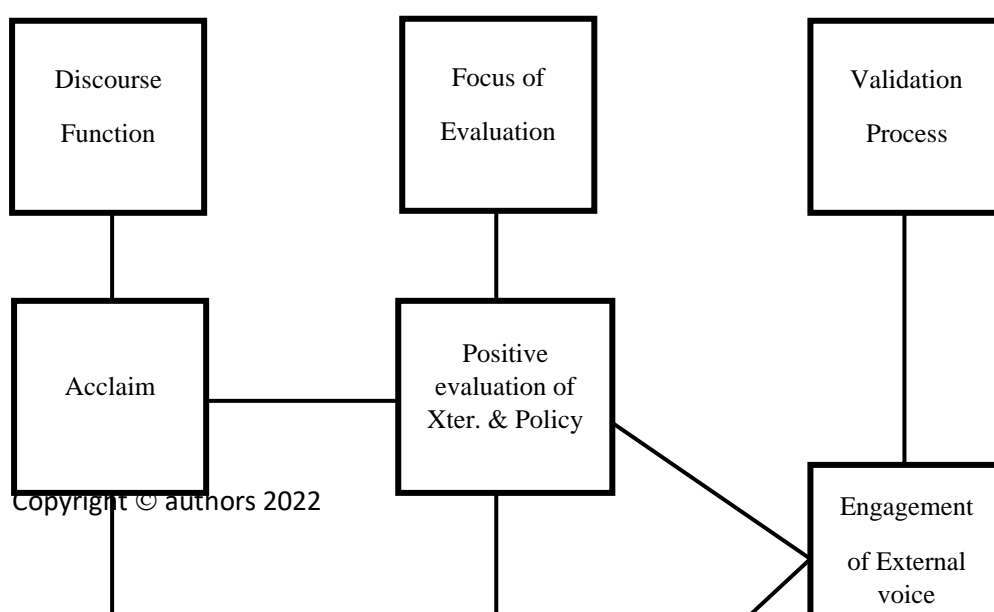
**Table 4.3** showing the demography of the sample from “The Guardian” newspaper

| The Guardian Newspaper         |      |            |
|--------------------------------|------|------------|
| Date of Publication            | Page | Advertiser |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> February, 2015 | 23   | PDP        |

Having determined the hortative expressions that constitute each of the discourse functions, I then consider how the engagement resources were used to accentuate the construed discourse functions. Therefore, in the fourth step, I examined how the advertisers engaged external voices to authenticate the assertions of acclaim and attack. In this, the advertising messages intertextualized credible sources to support the claims made.

The conceptual idea of the *Engagement* system process for the authentication of discourse functions is represented in the diagram below (termed Figure 1.0):

Figure 1.0 showing conceptual ideas of Engagement as a Tool of Authenticating Persuasion-Induced Discourse Functions



#### **4.0 Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

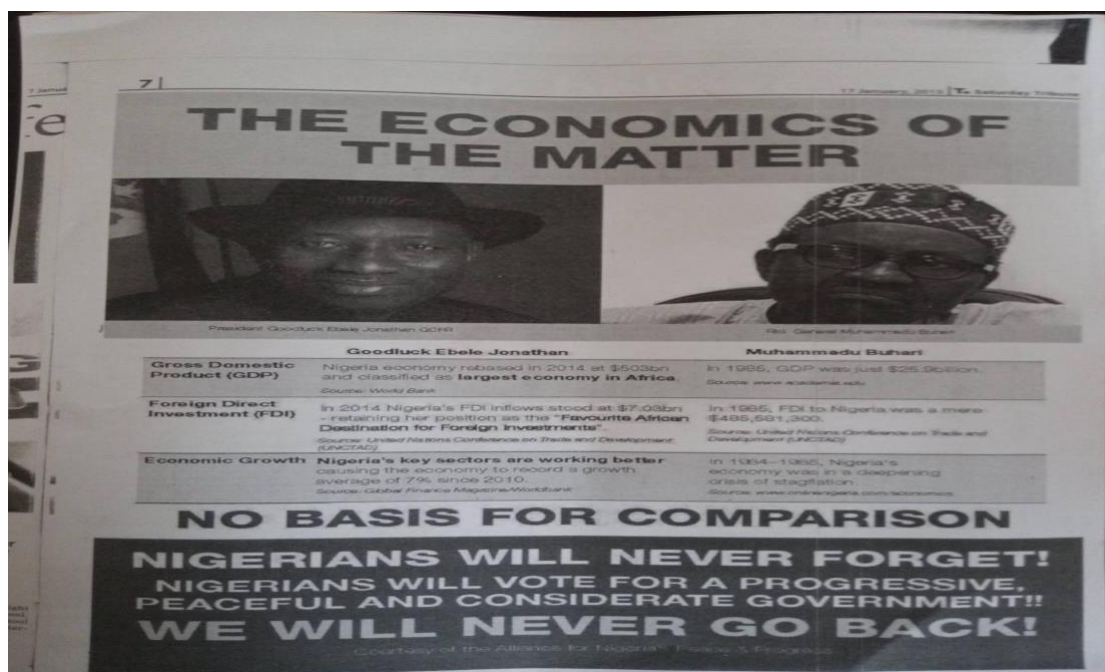
The primary aim of this study is to examine how engagement system was deployed in Nigerian political campaign advertisements to bridge the credibility gap and mistrust often associated with political campaign discourse.

A preliminary examination of the data revealed that two main discourse functions featured in the sampled campaign text messages i.e., positive self-presentation and negative other presentation. To make the advertising message effectively persuasive, the advertisers authenticate their assertions by engaging credible external voices that could convince the target audience. Let us now examine how engagement system was deployed for the authentication of both acclaim and attack discourse functions in the sampled texts

##### **4.1 Authenticating Acclaim through Engagement**

Electoral situations often demand that the electorate are given information about the antecedents of the aspirants for the electorates to decipher the suitability of candidates for the given position (Osisanwo, 2016). Therefore, acclaims are made to sell a candidate's strengths or advantages in terms of character and policy issues to the target-audience. This, at times, involves alluding to history on the achievements and track records of the aspirants which could assist the voters to form positive opinions about them. We start with PDP advertising text (i.e., Advert 1)

**Advert 1.** Capturing PDP's advertisement in the Nigerian Tribune 2015, Jan 17.



Adverts 1 was an instance of acclaim specifically meant to impress on the electorates the robust antecedents of the presidential candidate of Peoples' Democratic Party as against the "insipid" antecedents of All Progressives Congress presidential candidate in economic management. The advert entitled, "The Economics of the Matter" specifically compared the economic achievements during the tenures of President Goodluck Jonathan and General Muhammadu Buhari's military regime in 1984 and concluded that there was no basis for comparison. To prove that the assertions were not mere campaign propaganda, compelling and supportive evidence were provided by way of citing some authentic external voices. Here is the excerpt of the Acclaims:

**Table 4.4**

**The Economics of the Matters**  
**Goodluck Ebele Jonathan**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Gross Domestic Product (GDP)</b>    | Nigeria economy rebounded in 2014 at \$503bn and classified as <b>largest economy in Africa</b> .<br><i>Source: World Bank.</i>  |
| <b>Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)</b> | In 2014 Nigeria's FDI inflows stood at \$7.03bn retaining her position as the <b>"Favourite African Destination for Foreign Investments"</b><br><i>Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)</i> |
| <b>Economic Growth</b>                 | Nigeria's key sectors are working better causing the economy. To record a growth average of 7% since 2010.<br><i>Source: Global Finance Magazine/World Bank.</i>   |

*Source: Saturday Tribune, 17 January 2015 See Advert 1*

Acclaim is the discourse function of the extracted advert message. The thrust of the advert message was to inspire the public to have confidence in the economic policy management of President Jonathan who was running for the second term of office under the platform of PDP. In line with Grande's (2000) position that "... governing parties are likely to inspire confidence and trust or encourage shared pride in their achievements", the PDP advert flaunted series of Jonathan administration's economic success. To show that the acclaims were not mere fabrications or political propaganda, the advert cited favourable statistics from credible sources like the World Bank, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and Global Finance Magazine.

The first theme of acclaim was on GDP. GDP stands for Gross Domestic Product and it is the most commonly means of measuring the size of a country a country or a region. The advert did not only show how the administration rebased the economy but also revealed that the Nigerian economy under the watch of Dr Jonathan was rated the largest economy in Africa. The authenticity of the claim was anchored on the World Bank records.

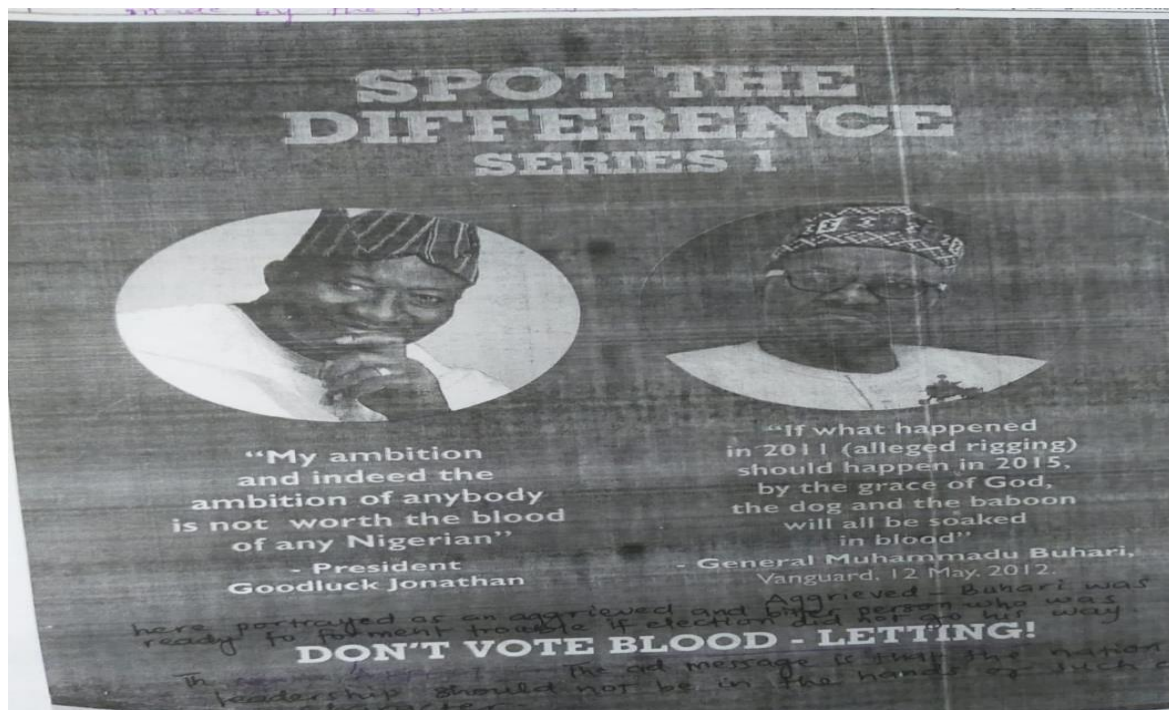
Another acclaim in the same advert text eulogized the PDP-led administration on Foreign Direct Investment. This has to do with business investment by an entity based in another country. The acclaim here presented Nigeria as the "Favourite African destination for foreign investment". The favourable ripple effects of such investment are likely to be employment opportunities, robust economy, and socio-economic well-being of the people. This could be seen as another plus for the PDP presidential candidate. To prove that the acclaim was authentic, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reports was cited. The external voice quoted (i.e., UNCTAD) is a part of United Nations secretariat dealing with trade, investment, and development issues and could be regarded as a reliable source of testimony. The reference to such an important organisation's favourable reports on Nigeria's economy was used for reputation management. It was meant to prove that Jonathan had indubitable capacity for outstanding economic management.

The third exemplification of the use of *Engagement* system to authenticate acclaim discourse function (See table 4.4) was a reference to Global Finance Magazine/World Bank reports. The advertisement cited these two authorities' as credible testimonials to support the Acclaim on the positive economic growth during the PDP presidential candidate's tenure. All these were intended to persuade the voters on the credible economic management prowess of the

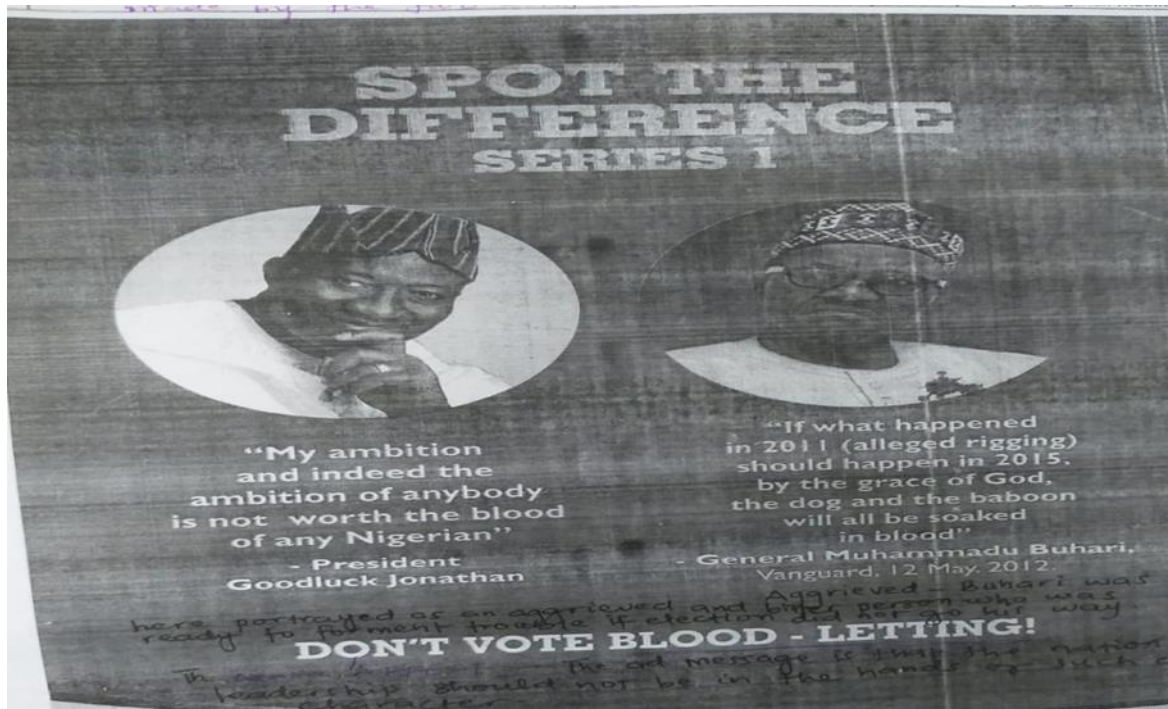
candidate. This shows how political advertisers in Nigeria deploy values of Attribution (an *Engagement* rhetorical process) to authenticate acclaim discourse function.

Another PDP advert (See advert 2) evaluated the personality traits of the two major gladiators in the 2015 presidential election. In the advert, the People's Democratic Party evaluated the two major contenders by comparing utterances previously made by the two main candidates on their attitudes towards electioneering conflicts or violence. The acclaim discourse function in the comparative advert was heaped on Jonathan while the attack was focused on Buhari (This is discussed under attack discourse function in section 4.2).

**Advert 2.** Nigerian Tribune, Wednesday 21, January 2015.







To show to the public that President Jonathan was a man of peace, the advertisement quoted Jonathan Facebook account statement thus: “My ambition and indeed the ambition of anybody is not worth the blood of anybody”. This portrayed Jonathan as a man of virtue who values the lives of the citizens much more than his political ambition. Thus, the advertisers engaged Jonathan’s utterance as character evidence to authenticate the acclaim discourse function. This is because character evidence gleaned from one’s utterances is a substantive issue in character evaluation. Corroborating this view, Remez (2010) posits that spoken expression of an individual suggests his/her traits.

#### 4.2 Authenticating Attack through Engagement system.

Just like findings in previous studies (e.g., Meirick, 2002; O’Cass, 2002 & Pinkleton, 1998), some of the sampled adverts aimed at discrediting the opposition candidates. The content of such adverts’ messages was not only couched to create awareness about the opponent’s weaknesses and shortcomings for the public, but the assertions therein were also validated by credible external voices. For instance, during the 2015 electioneering campaigns, the PDP advertisements (See Advert 1), the advertisers exposed the weaknesses of the main opposition candidate, Buhari, in economic management. The advert engaged some credible authorities as testimonials to strengthen the negative assessment of the APC presidential candidate’s economic management prowess. The excerpt is presented below:



**Table 4.5    *The Economics of the Matters***

**Muhammadu Buhari**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Gross Domestic Product (GDP)</b>    | In 1985, GDP was just \$25.9billion<br><i>Source: <a href="http://www.academia.edu">www.academia.edu</a></i>  |
| <b>Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)</b> | In 1985, FDI to Nigeria was a mere \$485,581,300.<br><i>Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)</i>   |
| <b>Economic Growth</b>                 | In 1984 – 1985, Nigeria’s economy was in a deepening crisis of stagnation.<br><i>Source: <a href="http://www.onlinenigeria.com/economics">www.onlinenigeria.com/economics</a></i> |

**Source:** Saturday Tribune, 17 January 2015

The excerpt above (culled from Advert 1) was an attack on APC candidate (Muhammadu Buhari) in the 2015 presidential election. This negative advertisement by PDP dug into the archive to bring back to memory the poor economic situation of the country during the military regime of General Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of the opposition party (APC). From the excerpt above, the advertisement message alluded to reports from [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu) to criticise and condemn the APC presidential candidate on economic management. The use of the word, “just” in the clause, “In 1985, GDP was **just** \$25.9 billion” was an indication that the GDP was too meagre. This was an indictment on Buhari’s knowledge on economic management. The attack claim was fortified and made authentic by reports from UNCTAD, an institution under United Nations. Another indicting insinuation was that the economic policy under Buhari’s administration was not favourable to foreign investment, and, by implication, the poor situation could be repeated if Buhari was voted in as president of Nigeria. The third attack on economic policy was on economic growth of Nigeria during the APC presidential candidate’s tenure as a military head of state. To knock Buhari off economic management pedestal, the advertising message declared that the administration mismanaged Nigeria’s economy into disaster. The supporting evidence quoted is this:

*“In 1984 – 1985, Nigeria’s economy was in deepening crisis of stagnation.*

*– Source:     [www.onlinenigeria.com/economics](http://www.onlinenigeria.com/economics)”.*

The time frame mentioned, “1984-1985”, the period Nigeria’s economy was described as wallowing “in deepening crisis” was the time frame of Buhari’s military regime. The attack discourse function was made credible because the verdicts of poor economic state did not

emanate from the advertisers themselves but from indisputable credible sources. This was to show that the attack statements were not mere fabrications but facts.

Engagement strategy was also used as the instrument of achieving authenticity in the attack made on the character of the APC presidential candidate in the 2015 campaign advertisement. While trying to portray Buhari as a religious extremist, the PDP advert quoted the statement he had made in August 2001 at a seminar organised by the Supreme Council of Sharia in Nigeria that he would continue to agitate for the total implementation of *sharia* in Nigeria. In the advert Buhari was accused of trying to turn Nigeria, a multi-religious nation, to a sharia state. The attack discourse function theme is extracted from Advert 3:

**Advert 3**, Nigerian Tribune, Monday 26 January, 2015, pg. 52.



It is believed that characteristic traits of a person are nested within his/her utterances (Remez, 2010), people are often judged by the utterances they make. The PDP condemned a controversial statement made by Buhari on total enforcement of sharia throughout the multi-religious nation. In the quoted statement the APC presidential candidate was quoted to have said:

*“I will continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria.... God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the sharia in the country”. (Sunday Tribune, 11 January 2015).*

The quoted statement presented Buhari as a candidate who lacked the requisite quality to manage the different interests and tendencies inherent in a multi-religious nation like Nigeria. The disposition towards a total implementation of *sharia* law in the country amounted to adoption of Islam as the state religion contrary to the provisions enshrined in section 9 of 1999 Nigerian constitution which states that the government of the federation or state shall not adopt any religion as state religion. To prove that the accusation was not a mere fabrication or propaganda, the advertisers (i.e., PDP) quoted the promise that Buhari made at a religious function. Thus, the advert was impressing on the public that his voice suggested his negative disposition towards people of other religions.

Another example of attack theme in the PDP advertisement is extracted from advert 2. The closing remarks of advert message, “Don’t vote blood-letting!”, projected Buhari as a violence prone candidate. To substantiate this negative judgement, the advertisement quoted a speech credited to General Muhammadu Buhari by Vanguard newspaper’s report on May 12, 2012. As reported by the newspaper, the APC candidate threatened to foment trouble should the 2015 presidential election not be in his favour. The advert message quoted Buhari as saying:

*“If what happened in 2011 (alleged rigging) should happen in 2015,  
by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon will be soaked in blood”*  
–General Muhammadu Buhari, Vanguard, 12 May, 2012.

*(Source: Nigerian Tribune, Wednesday 21 January 2015).*

The use of the maxim: “...the dog and the baboon will be soaked in blood” is indicative of violence and bloodletting. No wonder the advertisers cautioned that the voters should be wary

of voting blood-letting. By implication, voters were being warned that voting for Buhari was tantamount to blood-letting.

Another negative evaluation of the APC presidential candidate by the ruling party (PDP) was focused on his age and health situation. These were factors that could incapacitate him from being the president that the country deserved. To support the attack, the advertisement engaged the values in three external voices. First, the advertisement text cited a report in *New Telegraph* of June 2014 which stated mounting concerns over the candidate's frail health. The frailty was adduced as the reason for the candidate's frequent overseas trips for medical treatment. It was insinuated that frail health had incapacitated him from playing active roles in the party campaigns during the 2015 presidential electioneering campaigns. The advertisement further fuelled grave doubts about his health by citing an online report ([www.osundefender.com](http://www.osundefender.com)) that Buhari collapsed on stage at his campaign rally in Calabar on 7 January 2015.

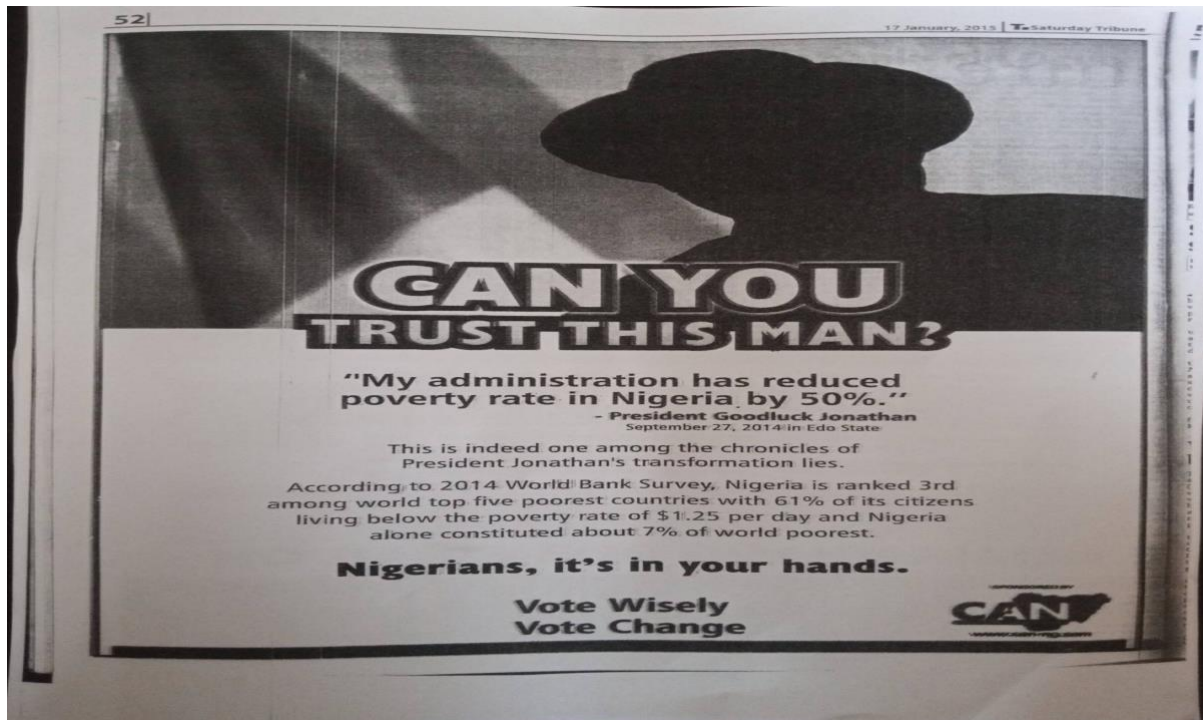
In order to authenticate the attack, the advert referenced a statement credited to an iconic ruler on the continent of Africa, Nelson Mandela, on the issue of age and participation in politics. This was reported by "*Independent*" newspaper on the February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1995. This testimonial value-branding approach used societal values and beliefs system that have strong heritage to enhance affective attachment with the target-audience. Mandela's words are seen as a guideline which should be followed in many respects. Latching on the credibility of Mandela, the PDP engaged his position that a man of his age should not be meddling with political affairs to support the "non-eligibility". The quoted statement reads thus: "*In 1999 I will be 79... I don't think a [man of my age] should be meddling with political affairs*"

(Source: *The Guardian*, Friday, February 6, 2015, pg. 23).

The tacit suggestion in the advertisement is that Buhari who was also in his late 70s should have wisely toed the line of Mandela not to contest for political office of the president at his age.

The All-Progressives Congress (APC) also deployed the *Engagement* strategy in their campaign advertisements to authenticate truism in the statement of attack on the PDP candidates during 2015 and 2019 presidential elections, respectively. In APC Advert (See Advert 4), President Jonathan's personality was attacked. The advertisement message portrayed the incumbent president and the presidential candidate of People's Democratic Party (PDP) as a liar. The advertisement engaged the statement credited to President Jonathan on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in Edo State in which he stated as follows:

**Advert 4**, Saturday Tribune, 17 January, 2015, pg. 52.

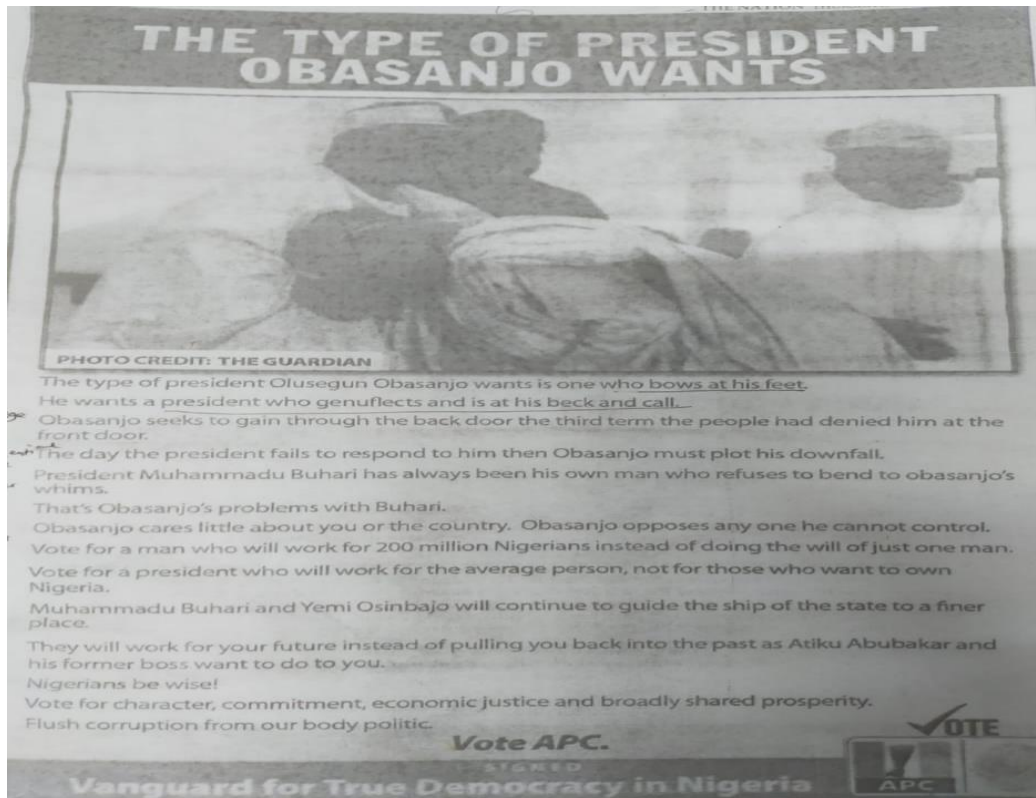


The rhetorical question in advert 4 was used to evoke deep reflection on the claim by PDP presidential candidate who was the incumbent during the 2015 presidential election that his administration had reduced poverty rate in Nigeria by 50%. To counter the statement and authenticate the falsehood in his statement, the advert referenced a report credited to the World Bank that the 2014 World Bank Survey ranked Nigeria 3<sup>rd</sup> among world's top-five poorest countries. It was also stated in the reports that 61% of her citizens were living below poverty rate of \$1.25 per day. Furthermore, it was reported that Nigeria alone constituted about 7% of the world poorest. The disclaimer cast doubt on the sincerity of the PDP presidential candidate during 2015 presidential election and, consequently, introduced cautious distrust into the minds of the public about him. The engagement of records of reports from such credible global organisation lent credence to the attack team and thus authenticate the discourse function as statements of fact that were devoid of political propaganda.

Engagement system was also deployed to substantiate attack discourse function in another APC advert during the 2019 presidential election (See advert 5).



Advert 5, "The Nation", Thursday, February 14, 2019, pg. 28.



The PDP presidential candidate during the 2019 election was Alhaji Abubakar Atiku. He was the vice-president between 1999 and 2007. He was part of the aggrieved members of PDP who switched camp from the party to form the APC. He, however, returned to the PDP prior to the 2019 elections and won the ticket as its presidential candidate. In advert 5, the APC advert engaged the words of Atiku's former boss, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in his book, "My Watch" to attack his (i.e., Atiku's) candidature. The alluded comment defined Atiku as a corrupt, dishonest, and disloyal individual. The engaged external voice quoted is presented thus:

*Atiku as I know him... "Atiku Abubakar, my Vice- President, first showed his hand and his character.... What I did not know, which came glaringly, later, was his parental background, which was somewhat shadowy, his propensity to corruption, his tendency to disloyalty, his inability to say and stick to the truth all the time, a propensity for poor judgement... his*

*lack of transparency, his trust in money to buy his way out on all issues and his readiness to sacrifice morality, integrity, propriety, truth and national interest for self and selfish interest”.*

**Source:** *The Nation, Thursday, February 14, 2019, pg. 28.*

The attack on the candidature of the PDP presidential candidate in 2019 was anchored on moral values. Judgement on moral values can include consideration of honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, and fiscal responsibility. In the excerpt above, all these virtues were insinuated to be absent in the person of Atiku. The proof of the candidate's inadequacy to meet the required standard for the exalted position of president in Nigeria was anchored on the assessment of his behavioural practices, habits, and goals by an external voice who happened to have had the opportunities of observing his demeanours closely for eight years. The strength of the statement issues from the fact that it came from Atiku's former boss, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former president.

## 6. Conclusion

As asserted earlier, scholars believed that there is a credibility gap in political campaign discourse. This affects the audience believability in politicians and consequently democratic process. Perhaps to address this gaping lacuna, political actors would try to find means of infusing fidelity into the campaign discourse assertions. The issue broached in this exercise is how political actors infuse credibility in their campaign texts through intertextuality. This rhetorical technique occurs either implicitly or explicitly. We however focus Engagement system. This category of intertextual figure involves direct quotation of an external voice that helps in shaping and deepening the author's message.

This study therefore investigates how engagement system was deployed to deepen the credibility of the acclaim and attack discourse functions in the 2015 and 2019 presidential campaign advertisements of the two main political parties in Nigeria. While previous studies have explored the semantic imports of the engagement markers, mostly on academic discourse, this study explores how the advertisers used of the engaged external voices in complimenting and authenticating the persuasion-induced discourse functions in their campaign texts. Just like findings in previous studies, it is revealed in the study that the sampled adverts aimed at



creating awareness for the public about the opponent's weaknesses whilst promoting the sponsoring candidate's strengths and policy plans and implementations. The indication of this polarization (i.e., us–them categorization) is that people are classified as either having good attributes or bad attributes. These two persuasion-induced discourse functions featured prominently in the sampled texts.

Having realized that trust and credibility lacunae exist in the modern media-centered democratic campaign claims, Nigerian political advertisers often try to present themselves as credible and honest campaigners. They adopt different rhetorical stratagem to fill the missing link of trust between politicians and the electorates. This treatise shows how the two main political parties (APC &PDP) in Nigeria engaged external voices as testimonial evidences to authenticate the assertions of attack and acclaim in their advert messages in the 2015 and 2019 presidential electioneering campaign in Nigeria. The analysis reveals that acclaim and attack assertions were interlaced with facts and figures from credible international organizations like 'The World Bank', United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and Global Finance Magazine among others to prove reasonable fidelity in their claims. Asides from this, the authentication was also made credible by quoting iconic leaders like Mandela and Obasanjo evaluative assertions on issues and individuals. Perhaps to prove that individual characteristic traits are nested within his/her utterance, the utterances of the candidates being appraised were used to back up the assessment assertions.

This exercise has exposed how engagement system is being deployed as rhetorical strategy to compliment advertisers' intended messages in the Nigerian political campaign texts. The strategy is not only deepening the persuasive meanings of the advert message, it also serves to provides a verifiable channel through which the public see those who wants to rule them and consequently assist them to make a right decision in the choice of their leader. This is important because outright lies and propaganda have proliferated the ranks of political talks and consequently made the public to become sceptical of politicians' messages of persuasion. This study therefore identifies one of the effective approaches deployed by Nigerian political actors to ascertain the reliability of their opinion in their political campaign adverts and consequently build trust into the country political process.

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