

Stances and Engagement in 'The Gang Up to Deal with Buhari'

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Abstract

Studies across the world have examined the activities of political actors and non political actors (the electorate) in different political contexts. However, in the Nigerian context, while the activities of the political actors have received much scholarly attention, there is dearth of literature on the activities of the electorate, especially as it relates to their deployment of the social media to engage political issues in the country. Thus, within the purview Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement theory, this study examines stances and engagement in the comments and posts on 'The gang up to deal with Buhari', which revolves round the candidacy of President Muhammadu Buhari in the 2019 Presidential Election, by Facebook 'friends' of Edmund Obilo, the anchor of 'State Affairs' aired on Splash F.M, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Data comprised thirty-four posts/comments purposively sampled from the over one hundred and fifteen comments of Nigerian electorate in response to the said post on Edmund Obilo's 'public opinion Facebook page'. Data were subjected to interpretive-cum-pragmatic analysis. Findings reveal two main stances on the post: 'Buhari must go' and 'Buhari will win 2019 Election'. These two views are expressed and vigorously pursued by the proponents with stance elements of hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self mention; and engagement tools as personal and possessive pronouns, questions and directives. The social media, particularly the Facebook, has proved to be a veritable platform for Nigerian electorate to express their opinions on the Nigerian political space.

Keywords: Muhammadu Buhari, 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria, Facebook 'friends', Edmund Obilo

Introduction

Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy, every four years has been observed to witness a lot of political activities, including cross carpeting, defection, subtle political rivalries, and coalition of political parties, among others in the Nigerian political arena. In response to these political developments, Nigerian masses are often busy analysing the political climate of the country, with some supporting the party in power for reasons best known to them, and another vehemently criticising her, especially when they feel the party has not performed up to expectation; while another group remains neutral. This trend has again repeated itself this year (2018), being the eve of another election year in the country, as many Nigerians have expressed different positions on the chances of the country's incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari, of reclaiming the seat in the 2019 Presidential Election. This becomes apparent in the reactions of many citizens of the country as evident in their online posts and counter-posts, particularly on Facebook on the performance of the current administration led by Buhari. One of such posts that have generated heated reactions from all and sundry on the social media is '*The gang up to deal with Buhari*' shared on the Facebook wall of Edmund Obilo, one of the ace contemporary Nigerian investigative journalists. Edmund Obilo, popularly known as the 'Radio Man', is the anchor of State Affairs, a famous socio-political programme aired on Splash 105.5 FM, Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria. The programme features politicians, activists, social commentators, and political analysts, among others. It is usually the practice of Edmund Obilo to post topical issues to which people react and comment on his social media space, particularly Facebook, Tweeter, and Instagram before inviting a political actor or a social commentator for interview on the issue on the programme. The quote that forms part of the title of this paper is one of such topical issues. This post, as well as the different stances expressed by authors of the comments and counter-comments on it, is considered worthy of scholarly engagement, especially considering the fact that existing studies on language use in the Nigerian political space have focused mainly on language use by political office holders, with little attention paid to how electorate in Nigeria deploy language on politics-related matters in the country.

Literature Review

Among the domains of language use that has enjoyed scholarly attention, particularly from Nigerian scholars, is politics. In this regard, one reckons with such works as Ayeomoni (2005), Adetunji (2009), Okpanachi (2009), Taiwo (2010), Alo (2012), Akinkurolere (2015) and Akinrinlola (2015), among others. Ayeomoni (2005) looks at the language of Nigerian political elite and submits their language features certain strategic linguistic choices which characteristically make it different from everyday language use. Adetunji (2009) investigates the inaugural speeches of Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Nigerian president, and George Bush, a former American president. He notes the duo deployed a number of pragmatic tools to assert meaning in their speeches. Okpanachi's (2009) study examines the national address of President Olusegun Obasanjo on the Labour Congress of 8th October, 2003 and concludes the speech is characterised by manipulative rhetorical cues.

Taiwo (2010) interrogates the use of metaphor in (Nigerian) political discourse and submits metaphorical expressions are deployed by Nigerian politicians to project certain ideological stances in their speeches. Alo (2012) is an engagement of the deployment of rhetoric by selected African political leaders. He notes that African leaders employ persuasive strategies to achieve their political goals. Akinkurolere (2015) looks at the inaugural speech of the Benue House of Assembly members in Nigeria. According to her, these legislators deployed lexical cohesive devices like synonymy, collocation and super-ordination, and repetition to achieve meaning in their speeches. Akinrinlola (2015) is a rhetorical engagement of the inaugural speech of President Muhammadu Buhari (Nigeria's president). He notes that the President expressed strong commitment and inclusiveness in the speech through verbal choices and pronominal items. Akinrinlola (2017) examines the use of impoliteness and pragmatic strategies by Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammad Buhari, the two major contenders in the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria. He observes that both made recourse to self justification, amplification of political ineptitude, expression of intellectual weakness, historicisation, branding, blaming, counter discourse and rhetorical questions in order to achieve their political goals.

Outside the Nigerian space, some of the scholarly works on political discourse include Jorda (2007), Michira (2014), Murphy (2014), Halim (2015), and Al-Dilaimy and Khalaf (2015), Mcclay (2017), Korhonen (2017) and Obiero (2017). Jorda (2007) examines the use of impoliteness devices in parliamentary debates in the British House of Commons. Michira (2014) is a critical-cum-descriptive analysis of linguistic persuasive strategies in the speeches of the presidential candidates in the 2013 Kenyan Presidential Election. Halim (2015) engages how electorate in Malaysia deploys Facebook to engage the political class and actors in the country. Al-Dilaimy and Khalaf (2015) focus on the analysis of impoliteness in "Opposite Direction" aired on Al-Jazeera Channel. They observe political interviews are characterised by profane and abusive language. Mcclay (2017) attempts a descriptive analysis of Trump's campaign speeches and demonstrates how Trump ideologically created the *us* versus *them* ideological stances in his campaign speeches. Korhonen (2017) examines how Trump deployed rhetorics to achieve his political goal. Obiero (2017) looks at how Trump deployed language to signify, produce and contest unequal power relations in his campaign speeches.

While, essentially, these studies have focused on language use by politicians and political officer holders; they have glossed over the investigation of how electorate, particularly in the Nigerian context, deploy language to project their opinions (stances), as well as engage the Nigerian political space; especially on the social media. This study considers this a vital lacuna in studies on political discourse in Nigeria that needs being addressed.

Analytical Tool: Hyland's *Stance and Engagement* Model

This study rests on Hyland's (2005) model of Stance and Engagement for data analysis and discussion. In their attempt to aptly discuss the notion of evaluation to represent people's feelings, perception, and judgements, different scholars have proposed concepts such as attitude (Halliday, 1994), appraisal (White, 2003), stance (Hyland, 1999), and metadiscourse (Hyland and Tse, 2004) to describe the phenomenon. As a later development, Hyland (2005) comes up with a model he calls *stance and engagement*. In his explanation of the concepts, he refers to them as rhetorical devices researchers employ in their writings to 'maintain social interaction between them and their audience, as well as present

persuading judgements' (Yang, 2014). According to Hyland (2005), while stance implies the manner in which writers/researchers present their voice(s) or identity(ies) when projecting their opinions, judgements and commitments (in their write-ups), engagement refers to how the researchers show acknowledgement of the presence of their audience and relate with them accordingly in the text. As observed by Hyland (2005), since stance is more research-oriented, it often relies on three elements of evidentiality (the writer's position or commitment to a particular view, aimed at influencing the reader), affect (writer's communication of attitude and feeling in his proposition) and presence (how the writer chooses to project himself/herself) (Hyland, 2005: 178). The trio are often expressed in a text via sub-elements as hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. Hedges are employed in a text to show the writer withholds commitment to a proposition, an expression of an opinion rather than a fact. Hedges come in form of adverbs such as probably, possibly, perhaps, may be, etc.), modals (may, might), prepositional phrases (kind of, sort of), among others (Hyland, 2005; Chilwa, 2015).

Boosters express writers' certainty about a proposition, their level of commitment to it, as well as a mark of solidarity with the audience. Boosters include such expressions as *certainly, clearly, obviously, surely, without/no doubt*, and much besides; and as submitted by Hyland (1999 and 2005), boosters can function to emphasise shared information, group membership and engagement with readers. Attitude markers indicate the emotions and feelings (affect) of the writer towards a proposition or an issue (or a topic). As opined by Hyland (2005), attitude markers can express frustration, importance, surprise, agreement rather than commitment. Self-mention has to do with the deployment of personal pronouns such as 'I', 'we', and 'us'; and the possessive adjective 'our' as indicators of proposition, affect and interpersonal information (Hyland, 2001; 2005).

As argued by Hyland (2005), engagement is more participant-oriented, with particular focus on how to bring the audience into the discourse to "anticipate their possible objections and engage them in appropriate ways" (Hyland, 2005: 182). It is made up of five main elements: reader's pronouns (*you* and *your*), personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives and questions. Although stance and engagement are two concepts that represent the writer/speaker and the audience respectively,

Hyland (2005) has argued they are as a matter of fact two sides of the same coin and can overlap, as both of them facilitate the interactional and interpersonal dimension of discourse.

Hyland's (2005) model of stance and engagement is considered appropriate for analysis in this study as it provides the necessary guide for the examination of points of view, (emotional) commitment and interactional strategies deployed by participants in online political discourse, particularly as it relates to the Facebook post titled 'The Gang up to Deal with Buhari'.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected from one hundred and fifteen comments on the topic 'The Gang Up to Deal with Buhari', by participants in the Facebook platform/page created by Edmund Obilo (a popular investigative journalist and social media influencer in Nigeria, where he entertains views and opinions on socio-political issues from which he generates interviews and discourses for his popular socio-political radio programme, *State Affairs*). The choice of Edmund Obilo's Facebook page for data collection was predicated on its vibrancy and activeness in engaging socio-political issues that attract the attention of all and sundry, particularly social commentators, political analysts and the general public. Thirty-four posts have been purposively sampled for analysis in this study for their richness in comments that depict the various stances maintained by Nigerians with respect to the candidacy of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019 Presidential Election, particularly in view of the recent development in the nation's political space where perceived aggrieved members of different political parties team up to form a coalition party to unseat him. Data were subjected to pragmatic-cum-interpretive analysis, particularly within the purview of Hyland's (2005) model of stance and engagement. Texts are presented as written by posters/authors.

Analysis and Discussion

This section of the study focuses on the analysis and discussion of the stance and engagement elements found in the comments/posts of Nigerian electorate on the topical post 'The gang-up against Buhari' on Edmund Obilo's Facebook page.

Evidentiality

Evidentiality in this study refers to the positions and views expressed and maintained by the participants in the topical discourse examined. As evident in the posts and comments of Nigerians on the topical post by Edmund Obilo 'the Gang-up to deal with Buhari' on his Facebook wall, two major positions dominate the Nigerian political space, particularly as it relates to the chance of Muhammadu Buhari being re-elected Nigerian president come 2019. These are 'Buhari must go' and 'Buhari will be elected in 2019'. The supporters of these two positions deploy various linguistic strategies in marshalling their views. The first part of our analysis will concentrate on the discussion of these two positions.

Buhari must go

The individuals that hold this position is not unaware of the fact that some Nigerians are sympathetic towards the president thus will go to any length to defend and support his second-term ambition. Hence, those who hold this view appear critical, judgemental and sardonic in their comments on the administration of the president, his personality and cabinet. There are notions among many individuals in the country that the present administration, as led by Buhari, has failed in her responsibilities and promises. Hence, there is no point giving her (and Buhari) another chance. These positions are projected in the posts presented below:

Post 1

His time is definitely up, he knows that himself, what a forceful rest they wanna give the General.....

Post 2

Whether it's SDP or PDP or nPDP or rAPC,.... whatever the name, under whatever guise.... We don't care.Whatever that must be done to remove Buhari must be done, even if Satan is the PDP's flag bearer. This bloodshedding must stop. Gaskia.

Post 3

I like what am hearing, buhari must go, he is a blood sucking demon, the level of insecurity in the land is too much,I guess the President is enjoying the blood letting, no one is safe again, so buhari has become our common enemy that must be get rid off.

Post 4

All hands on deck to rid Nigeria of this unpleasant menace...this plague.

Post 5

PMB must leave. He just destined to fail in govt. He failed as military head of state and total failure as civilian president. Give him another chance might end a geographic entity called Nigeria.

In expressing stance as positioning and view point, the authors of the comments above take a rather cynical and critical approach in their description of the administration of Buhari and his personality, both as a civilian and military president. In Post 1, the author believes the time is up for the president 'to go' and he (the president) knows that but since he is not calling it quit himself, the coalition is a final whistle that forcefully signals the end of his administration as president of the country.

In Post 2, the author expresses his desperation at seeing Buhari 'going'. According to him/her, it does not matter how this is achieved, whether it is by party coalition or by any other means, all s/he wants is for Buhari to leave as Nigerian president. His/her submission is predicated on the belief that Buhari is silent about the spate of killings believed to be orchestrated by Fulani herdsmen in the country. In some quarters, it is believed Buhari's perceived silence on the nefarious activities of the herdsmen is a sign of solidarity by Buhari with the Fulani herdsmen, being Fulani himself. In the opinion of the people of this school of thought, the president is not doing enough to protect the lives and properties of the citizens of the country, hence he must leave. In Post 3, the author expresses happiness at the fact that there is a move to remove Buhari from office.

In *engaging* other participants in particular, and Nigerians in general in the discourse, the author of Post 3, very much like the author of Post 2, makes recourse to the shared knowledge among Nigerians on the killings and blood lettings that have been witnessed in some parts of the country, particularly in Benue and Plateau states, to which, Buhari has allegedly not been able to proffer solution. The author of Post 4 describes the administration of Buhari as an 'unpleasant menace' which every Nigerian

must come together to get rid of. The author of Post 5 further reinforces the position taken by others, describing the president as a failure, one who failed as military¹ Head of State and who has also failed as a civilian president. In his/her opinion, giving the president another chance to govern the country could be catastrophic, a development that might herald the end of the geographical space called Nigeria.

Buhari will be re-elected president

In response to the position of the camp that insists 'Buhari must go', those that share the view that Buhari will be re-elected vigorously pursue their view with the deployment of certain linguistic strategies. This group, very much like the opposing group, is cynical and spiteful in their comments. Generally, they hold the view that the insincerity on the part of the politicians behind the coalition formed against Buhari will eventually result in Buhari's victory as Nigerians have lost confidence in them as a result of their chequered political trajectory. This position is evident in the posts presented below:

Post 6

It's not yet over for PMB, his foot soldiers will now start to fund disintegration of 'cupp' and the ever loyal inec may not recognise cupp.the greed in Nigerians will also come to play among the parties in choosing the flag bearer

Post 7

Its a movement of Elites Debtors And Avengers politician and There is nobody yet who can beat Buhari Among their leading Aspirants. I have not seen any. As at Today In the 19 northern State , Buhari would Win 15,And win at worst 4 state in the South West, And 1 state In South South.. Its a Very Simple Arithmetic.

Post 8

It is a pity that what removed Jonathan from office that brought PMB to power is about to repeat itself.If he had been sensitive to security issues in Nigeria,this would not have happened.Anyway, Aso Rock is for all.We shall see come 2019,but I see him winning again with slight margin linked to that of Trump and Clinton

Post 9

Corruption united peoples party! CUPP! No coalition can remove buhari except God

Post 10

Am waiting for the person to lead that Cult group gang just created by some hoodlums and ex thieves who called themselves whatever names. In fact they can bring the remaining party in Nigeria under them I care less all I know is PMB remain masses choice come 2019 Awon ole jati jati. Ewon le ma Ku si eyin ti e o je ki Ilu wa lo siwaju.

In Post 6, the author maintains the stance that, contrary to the notion expressed by those who maintain 'Buhari must go', it is not yet over for him. S/he takes this position and defends it by making reference to the shared knowledge of Nigerians on the practice among Nigerian politicians to deploy war chest in causing chaos, confusion, and ultimately disunity among opposition party members to achieve their political aim. The author of the post also maintains the view that there is the possibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which has often been alleged by Nigerians and politicians in the country of being partisan and hence can easily be bought over, particularly by the party in power, supporting Buhari in reclaiming the seat, come 2019. Sharing a similar view, the author of Post 7 posits Buhari will emerge winner in the election, describing the politicians behind the said coalition as 'political avengers and debtors' who do not have the political weight to prevent Buhari from winning the election. To further reinforce his/her view, the author of the post goes ahead to do a statistical analysis of what and how s/he believes Buhari will garner votes across the geo-political zones in the country.

As a way of demonstrating his/her engagement with other participants in the discourse, the author of Post 8 appeals to shared situational knowledge, particularly with reference to the circumstances that led to the defeat of the immediate past president of the country, Goodluck Jonathan, in the last election. In doing this, the author takes other participants in the discourse down the memory lane. It will be recalled that one of the major issues that were raised against Jonathan's administration and which is still believed among Nigerians led to his defeat in the 2015 General Elections, was security issue. Unfortunately, as noted by the author of this post, the

same scenario is repeating itself in Buhari's administration, a development which, as can be deduced from the post, should cause him to lose the election.

However, in his/her opinion, Buhari will emerge winner, even though it might be a slim victory. In his/her position, the author of Post 9 is categorical and definite no amount of coalition will stop Buhari from winning the 2019 election. S/he even 'mutilates' the name of the party that emerges from the so-called coalition as 'Corruption united peoples party' to show s/he does not have confidence in the party. In Post 10, the author re-echoes, in particular, the voice of the author of Post 9, and ultimately resorts to name-calling and insults on the politicians behind the coalition. Specifically, s/he refers to them as hoodlums, ex thieves and *ole jati jati* 'useless thieves'. In all these posts, the authors have not only projected their view that Buhari will win the coming election; they have also shown they are strongly supporting his candidacy, by being 'hard' on his opponents in their lexical choices.

Hedges

In the opinion of Hyland (2005), speakers or writers deploy hedges (such as perhaps, probably, possibly, etc.) to allow for the involvement and participation of the listener(s) or the reader(s) and to show that they are not making 'specific claims in terms of factuality and reality' (Chiluwa, 2015). In other words, the use of hedges by the speaker/writer shows his/her modesty and the belief that the other (listener/writer) has a view to express on the topic of discourse. As has been demonstrated in the way and manner the authors of the posts/comments considered express opposing opinions in their views with respect to the chances of Buhari winning the election or not, it is apparent these authors equally employ hedges in the projection of their opinions on the topic of discourse. The use of hedges to either speak for or against the candidacy of Buhari is evident in the posts below:

Post 11

...and the ever loyal inec *may* not recognise cupp. *As for me*, I don't *think* this merger will work, the people at the cupp are the same set of lotters of which I don't have ant believe, they can't take Nigeria any where. My fellow Nigeria youth please wake up

Post 12

The forthcoming elections will be keenly contested, there won't be tsunami as we had it 2015. This coalition should be welcomed by all Nigerians who wants progress for this country at this time, the government of the day is not better. We *may* have a better candidate from the the new coalition.

Post 13

I *personally* belief that until everyone of us come together to support whosoever that is at the helms of affair coalition or not nothing can work Buhari is still prefer above them all no one is happy about the situation of this country neither the president himself... Only God knows tomorrow they may promise heaven and earth but execution belongs to God and whatever that is on ground in tremes of revenue is what will be budgeted for until you are there yourself you may not know what it entails to be a leader.

Post 14

My grouse here is that no credible candidates to wrestle power from buhari , he is still the man to beat in this election, but he should come out clear to let the masses know the cloud behind the massacre of lives n property in the north east part of the country, if he comes out clean believed me the masses will wipe sympathy for him and vote for him massively, he keeps telling the masses who are the most illiterate needs to know, despite this media propaganda by this conglomerate of looters brandishing themselves as saint *may* win the masses vheart at last, cause it has not being easy with the talakas the poor masses on the roads who formed the majority

Post 15

I have said it in 2015 that Buhari is not the Messiah that will take us to the promised land but as at that time we need a Moses that will take us out of Egypt, like biblical Moses I *think* PMB will be finish his assignment comes may 28, 2019.

Hedges, as deployed in the posts above, are clear manifestations of deference or respect for the opinion(s) of other authors/readers on this

platform. Perhaps this is against the backdrop of the understanding of the general notion that everyone is entitled to his/her opinion(s) which might not necessarily be acceptable to another fellow. In Post 11, the author hedges in his/her indictment of INEC as a 'biased' umpire that might frustrate the efforts of CUPP in their bid to unseat Buhari with the deployment of a modal auxiliary verb 'may'. This s/he does in order not to sound definite, and to exonerate him/herself from possible accusation from any other fellow who might not share his/her view on the notion. In Post 12, the author also deploys the use of 'may' to express the possibility of the new party which emerges from the coalition producing a credible candidate in the coming election. Just like the author of Post 11, this particular author carefully deploys this linguistic strategy to save his/her face from possible face threats that could have come from staunch supporters of Buhari if s/he had been definite about the ability/possibility of the new party to produce a credible candidate that could match Buhari in the election. The author of Post 13 employs the use of 'personally' to show that the opinion is just his/hers, and might not be acceptable to another fellow. The author of Post 14 initially expresses his/her optimism in the chances of Buhari winning the election. However, s/he shifts grounds and expresses the possibility, with the use of 'may', of the new party defeating Buhari on account of the hardship that is said to characterise his government. In other words, it might be easy for the new political party to convince the Nigerian electorate, who are largely poor, to vote for her, with a promise of better economy and life. In Post 15, the author hedges with the use of 'I think' in order not to sound factual in his/her submission that Buhari might lose the coming election.

Attitude markers

Attitude markers depict the emotional state of the speaker/writer (Hyland, 2005; Chilwa 2015). According to Chilwa (2015), attitude markers manifest in form of derogatory labelling such as fool, idiot, etc; adjectives such as happy, foolish, lazy, among others; as verbs such as win, kill, massacre, etc; and adverbs such as unfortunately, practically, absolutely, and much besides (Biber *et al.* 1999 ; Gales, 2010). In the comments and counter comments of Nigerians on the post 'The Gang-up to deal with Buhari', there are apparent instances of the use of attitude markers, either to speak in favour of the candidacy of Buhari or otherwise. Some of these are presented in the posts below:

Post 16

I only saw association of *looters, thieves* who are desperate to come back for their own selfish gains because no more free money...it will never be well with them because we are wiser...let them continue.

Post 17

Unfortunately we can't find them to stone them as they bid us do if they didn't deliver in 2 years. But to answer your question, Buhari's time was up long ago.

Post 18

Does it really make a difference having a coalition? It could best be described as a recycling of *political barracudas and rogues*. Political parties without principles, no conscience, no distinct manifesto and no clear structure. It's the same set of people "prostituting" all the while... I wonder why the pot is calling the kettle black.

Post 19

seriously Buhari is not our problem. These people are finding it difficult to steal money under his watch and so they decided to deal with him with every possible means. If we allow this people to come back, only God knows where Nigeria is headed.

Post 20

Let's wait and see but the sponsors of the coalition have their antecedents of abandoning the coalition if their interests are not protected. Tom Ikimi, Atiku, Shekarau etc all were sponsors of the coalition that brought APC in 2015 but they all left later. Can you imagine a coalition with Obasanjo and Atiku together...a coalition of *strange bed fellows*. We already know where this will end up.

A critical look at the set of posts presented in this section of the paper reveals attitude markers such as 'looters and thieves, unfortunately, barracudas and rogues, seriously and strange bed fellows' are employed by the authors of the posts to express one view or the other on the topic of discourse. The author of Post 16 resorts to derogatory name-calling to berate the politicians behind the said coalition. In Post 17, the author

expresses regret over his/her inability to carry out the 'bidding' of APC that, as part of their campaign strategies in 2015, if after two years, the party fails to perform up to expectation, Nigerians should stone them (the APC party members). Apparently, the fellow is dissatisfied with the APC-led Buhari administration, which to him or her, is a 'failure'. In Post 18, the author displays his/her hatred for and disappointment in the brains behind the formation of the coalition party by calling them unprintable names 'political barracudas and rogues'. In Post 19, the author, employing the adverb 'seriously', expresses his/her emotional feeling that Buhari is not the problem of Nigeria and in the last post, the author categorically labels Obasanjo and Atiku (who are prominent agitators of the coalition party) as strange 'bed fellows', perhaps drawing on the shared knowledge of the subtle and later pronounced 'cold war' between the two during their tenure as president and vice president, respectively. To the author of this post, no 'good thing' can come out of the political 'friendship' between Obasanjo and Atiku; hence, their coalition project is as good as a failure.

Boosters

Boosters, according to Hyland (2005), make it possible for writers to present their work with assurance while achieving interpersonal solidarity; they are elements that depict speakers' or writers' certainty in what they say (Hyland, 2000:87). Examples of boosters are adverbs such as certainly, clearly, obviously, surely (Hyland, 2005). In the comments on the post 'The Gang-up to deal with Buhari', authors employ boosters with the intention of expressing their views about the candidacy of Buhari in the coming election. There are very limited instances of the use of boosters in the posts examined. However, the few instances do not deviate from the pattern that has been established in the posts examined thus far, as they depict the positions for and against Buhari. Examples are presented below:

Post 21

Truely, somethin urgently needs to be done to send Buhari back to Daura, Nigeria is currently upsidedown.

Post 22

Definitely every thing that has a beginning must have an ending. If Nigeria's leaderships have the right culture to life and governance, he shouldn't need to wait for election before he should leave office

for a better and competent hands. Not how far but how best that matters.

Post 23

as southwest belongs to pmb he will *definitely* win next election most importantly southwest votes has always been a decisive votes for presidential election in Nigeria.

In Post 21, the author deploys the use of 'truly' to express his/her position Nigerian electorate should ensure Buhari is not re-elected in 2019. The use of this word by the author of this post signals his agreement with the other voices who call for non-election of Buhari in 2019. The author of Post 22 employs the use of 'definitely' to also concur with the view that Buhari should not be re-elected. However, the picture is different in Post 23 where the author, using the adverb 'definitely', expresses his belief Buhari will win the next election.

Self-mention

According to Hyland (2001; 2005), self-mention has to do with the use of personal pronouns such as 'I' or 'we' (and 'us'), and the possessive adjective 'our' to mark proposition, affect and interpersonal information. There are several instances, albeit for different purposes, of the deployment of self-mention in the posts investigated in this study. Some instances are presented below:

Post 24

/ like what am hearing... / guess the President is enjoying the blood letting,

Post 25

Let's wait and see but the sponsors of the coalition have their antecedents of abandoning the coalition if their interests are not protected... We already know where this will end up... Buhari is not our problem...

Post 26

I think they are still few .Please form more parties. Yeyenatu!... This coalition or what they call themselves have nothing to offer Nigerians,we should allow PMB for continuation in 2019

Post 27

We are tired of all this political party, we need a young, fresh mind with good initiative may God help this country

Post 28

if we can see beyond wat all this same politician who as looted our money for self reason, i stand for PMB insha Allah... I urge the masses to form their coalition and fight back with PVC to be liberated, there was struggle for independence gotten in 1960 but now it is time struggle for liberation!

Self-mention in political discourse, particularly as observed in the comments of Nigerians on the topical post examined, is deployed to signal personal and group identities by the participants. Studies like Ajayi and Filani (2014) and Ajayi (2017), for instance, have examined the pragmatic use of pronouns to establish personal, in-group and out-group identities. Following from position of these studies, we argue in this paper that personal pronouns such as *I*, and *me*, as observed in our data, are deployed to signal the individualistic identities of the authors of the posts in which they are found. This is evident in posts 24, 26, and 28. However, the use of 'we' pronoun as observed in our data is a marker of in-group identity. It is used by post authors to solidarise with the Nigerian masses, and ultimately to distinguish between the Nigerian political class and the electorate. As evident in the posts presented above, among others, the inclusive 'we' is pragmatically deployed by the users to canvass and garner support to put up a common front against the political class by the Nigerian masses. This is evident in posts 25, 27 and 28.

Engagement

Hyland (2005) observes engagement shows how researchers reckon with the presence of their audience and relate to them accordingly in the text. It deals with bringing other voices into a text (Zappavigna, 2011). As stated earlier, it is made up of five main elements: reader's pronouns (e.g you

and your), personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives and questions. There is scant deployment of Engagement by the participants in the online interaction on 'The gang up to deal with Buhari'. As evident in the posts presented below, reader pronouns, directives and questions and appeals to shared knowledge are four tenets of engagement found in our data, although the last element (appeals to shared knowledge) has been discussed where deemed relevant in the discussion on stances. The deployment of the first three elements, is considered together in this section of the study since we have posts in which two or three of them feature together.

Post 29

Features reader's pronoun, question, and directive

- a. Then I ask *you*, *what is the relevance of all the parties on paper coming together. Who among them can even win their ward in a transparent election?*
- b. *...would groupings be a solution to Nigeria's problems?*
- c. *if PBM under perform as claimed, why the coalition?*
- d. The question is are they fighting for us or for their purse?
- e. Use your brain get your pvc ready.

In Post 29a, the pronoun 'you' refers to participants in the interaction who express hope in the coalition party. The questions posed to them in the latter part of the excerpt are apparently not such that demand answers from these participants, but such that border on the integrity and the political weight of the politicians sponsoring the coalition party. In a similar vein, the author of Post 29b queries the possibility of the coalition proffering solution to the problem of Nigeria. The question in 29c is such that indirectly suggests Buhari is not actually underperforming as claimed by the brains behind the coalition party. This is aimed at challenging the position of those with the view that Buhari has failed in his statutory responsibilities as Nigerian president. The question in 29d is aimed at correcting the notion that the coalition will be beneficial to Nigeria and Nigerians. The Post in 29e combines reader's pronoun and directive to call on Nigerians to exercise their voting right in 2019 election with their Permanent Voter's Card.

Conclusion

This study has attempted an exploration of stances and engagement in online political discourse among Nigerians, especially as it relates to the Facebook post 'The Gang up to Deal with Buhari' posted on the wall of Edmund Obilo, an ace radio presenter in Southwestern Nigeria. Applying Hyland's (2005) model of stance and engagement to analyse comments and posts of followers on this platform, the study observes there are two stances maintained by Nigerians on the candidacy of the incumbent president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari: *Buhari must go* and *Buhari will win*. Participants maintaining these two opposing views deploy stance elements of hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention to express their views. Similarly, engagement devices of such as personal and possessive pronouns, questions, and directives are deployed by the participants in this online interaction. Following from the observation made from these posts and similar ones, particularly with respect to Nigerian political space, it is no gainsaying that the social media, especially the Facebook, has become a vibrant 'political platform' Nigerian electorate deploy to engage and express their thoughts on the Nigerian politics. Thus, this study is a significant addition to scholarship on social media and political discourse, as it has demonstrated how the social media can be deployed by electorate to air their political thoughts. It will be interesting to see how other social media platforms such as Instagram, Tweeter, among others are deployed for same.

Notes

1. Buhari was Nigeria's military Head of State between 1983 and 1985.

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