



# Rhetoric of dressing and impression in selected Nigerian political campaigns: A critical reading of Facebook public perception

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## Abstract

Rhetorical strategies are often used to arouse sentiments and persuade the electorate in political campaigns. Existing studies on political campaigns in the Nigerian context have offered limited scholarship on the significance of dressing and impression. This study, therefore, examines the use of dressing and impression management as rhetorical strategies in political campaigns in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. Data obtained from select Facebook texts between November 2022 and January 2023 were subjected to qualitative analysis. The study adopts three theories: political impression management, multimodal discourse analysis and face work. The study identified the deployment of a major impression management strategy, dressing, as a means through which Nigerian politicians identify with the people. This strategy projected four cognitive frames as an innovative means of controlling public perception and vote canvassing by Nigerian politicians. The study concludes that the implication of these strategies was to identify with the different voter-audiences in order to win their support.

**Keywords:** Political campaigns, rhetoric, cultural identification, impression management, multimodality, Face

## Introduction

One of the most important components of democracy is political campaigns. Politics, or any form of contest for political power, cannot successfully be conducted without campaigns. While Chilton (2004, p.3) describes politics as "a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it", Bayram (2010, p. 24) views politics as the "struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice". Central to their theorisation of politics is the contest for leadership and control of the scarce resources. To facilitate this contest for power, different political strategies are deployed by political actors and their supporters. One of such potent strategies is the use of political campaign. Political campaign is the deliberate and conscious activities that are promoted by political parties, public office seekers and their supporters in order to win the support and votes of the electorate. It relates to the organised activities that seek to influence the decision of voters on who to vote for in an election.

During political campaigns, parties and their candidates deploy different methods

and techniques, including songs (Gena & Ottoh-Agede, 2022; Ottoh-Agede & Gena, 2024) public appearances, rallies, and the use of mass and social media platforms, to persuade voters to support their aspirations. These methods are regulated by enabling laws in order to ensure civility and the security of the candidates. In all campaigns, from ancient Greece to modern democracy, persuasion (the act of convincing somebody to believe something) has remained pivotal. Globally, political leaders rely largely on the power of persuasion to appeal to citizens in order to win their support. Based on this, politicians, through their discourses, have devised different intriguing ways of luring prospective voters.

Contemporary digital culture has offered new opportunities and sparked more effective campaign strategies in the world. In Nigeria, for instance, the 2023 general elections witnessed a paradigm shift which was evident in the deployment of an avalanche of campaign strategies mostly by the leading presidential candidates of the All Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP). In addition to the traditional use of posters, flyers, banners, radio and

television, social media such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, among others, became platforms for fostering political parties' ideologies.

Language, both verbal and non-verbal, is a convenient tool for political (re)branding. Political campaigners rely on its potency to implore and rally support. To this effect, Burns (1978, as cited in Charteris-Black, 2011, p.1) opines that "leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilise, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers". In order to achieve such task of mobilisation "in competition or conflict with others" leaders or potential leaders attempt to influence the impression of people about them and their political parties through impression management. Impression management is conceptualised as the process by which people try to influence and control how others perceive them. It is "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). They assert further that "the impressions people make on others have implications for how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them,

as well as for their own views of themselves..." (p.34). Implicated in their assertion is the fact that impression management influences people's perception of others. Impression management is not alien to electioneering in Nigeria. However, scholars have not yet given it the required attention, especially in the discourse of political campaigns. This study, therefore, investigates dressing as a form of impression management strategy in political campaigns from a pragma-discourse perspective with a view to unravelling the perception of such strategy by a virtual community – the Facebook users.

### **Situating the problem**

In the wake of the 2023 general elections, the ruling All Progressives Congress opted for a Muslim-Muslim ticket. Accordingly, a significant number of Nigerian electorates on the (social) media, especially, expressed their disapproval of the choice of Kashim Shettima as a Vice-Presidential candidate to the APC Presidential candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who himself is a Muslim from southern Nigeria. Tinubu and the APC believed that such a political strategy gives the party the political advantage it needs over other candidates. This is because northern Nigeria has one

of the highest percentages of the electorate who are mostly Muslims, and Nigerian politics is sometimes influenced by ethno-religious sentiments. This choice did not sit well with some of the electorate, especially the Christian group. Thus, the media became the medium to express this displeasure.

Some Nigerian Facebook users claimed that the country was drifting into ethno-religious polarisation and intolerance in recent times, just as most of the armed conflicts and acts of terrorism are said to be induced by ethnicity and religion (Ottoh-Agede & Agede, 2016). In view of that, the APC needed to do more to pacify the aggrieved section of the Nigerian electorate who are religiously sentimental. This became necessary because "a good knowledge of a people's dispositions or natural propensities would school one on the best way to communicate with them" (Njoku, 2023, p.2). In order to win the support of the Nigerian electorate, the presidential candidates of the various political parties, especially the APC, the PDP, and the LP, resorted to the use of impression

The Fig. 1 indicates that three strands of rhetorical appeals to reason are (logos), emotion (pathos) and integrity (ethos). The effect of these appeals is to create, to a large extent, the right thinking,

management strategies such as the showcasing of some religious and cultural dressings.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to examine the rhetoric of dressing and its influence on public perception in selected Nigerian political campaigns, with a specific focus on Facebook as a platform for shaping and disseminating political images and messages. By analysing the clothing choices and the pattern of their use by politicians during their campaigns, this study seeks to understand how these visual elements contribute to creating impressions and narratives that resonate with, or influence the electorate. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on political communication, visual rhetoric, and public perception in the context of Nigerian politics, while also offering practical insights for political actors and observers.

### **Conceptual framing: Rhetoric, persuasion and metaphor**

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establish credible intentions, and heighten some emotional impact through sound judgment in the audience (Ottoh-Agede, 2022). As a prominent term in this investigation, rhetoric, from Greek,

*rhêtotiké* is the art of speaking. In media studies, just like this one, rhetoric means the art of presenting effective communication, specifically, persuasive communication. Makay (1977, p.10) views rhetoric as a "hollow bombast or an artificial eloquent style, and a form of speaking that is without content; it is a dishonest or deceitful form of communication". In the light of these, it becomes imperative to assert that rhetoric is the use of different means to influence opinions. One of these is in the use of metaphors.

Metaphors are a vital component in political discourses. Through metaphors, things are given names that belong to something else (Aristotle's *Poetics*, as cited in Charteris-Black, 2011, p.31). Metaphor originally comes from the Greek word, *metapherein*, which means "to transfer" or "transport". According to Thornborrow and Wareing (2005, p. 79), "perceiving a metaphor as a kind of transport draws attention to the way a metaphor transports a concept from where it is normally located, to somewhere else where it is not usually found". They add that a "metaphor allows you to create correspondences in the world which did not exist before and allows new meanings to occur" (p.79). *Transferring* is underscored here to mean

reassigning meaning from one thing/concept to another; that is, a means of d[encoding] meaning through things. Hence, a metaphor is viewed as a linguistic process used to make a comparison between the attributes of one thing or person and something else (Thornborrow & Wareing, 2005, p.78); and it becomes relevant to the rhetorical frames identified in this study. Its conceptualisation in cognitive linguistics differs from literary stylistics (Ellah et al., 2022). This implies that even though the concept of metaphor appears simple to discuss in both cognitive linguistics and literary studies, identifying them is a complex venture.

It is against this creative milieu that Charteris-Black (2011) has posited that since meanings and word senses are not stable over time, it is best to define a metaphor as "a word or phrase that is used with a sense that differs from another more common or more basic sense that this word or phrase has" (p.31). This common or basic sense is its literal meaning or what is also referred to as "source domain", while the new sense, that is the metaphoric sense, is called the "target domain".

As a result of the above background, this study views a metaphor as a shift in the

literal meaning of a word or phrase by giving it a new sense that is different from its common sense. This shift in meaning has the capacity to evoke emotional appeals or responses, having affective meaning. Any word can be a metaphor; if the word arises from *how* language is used and the manner in which it is used (style), it then becomes a rhetorical strategy (Ottoh-Agede, 2022). It is to this end that metaphors are identified as a feature of discourse in this study.

### **Empirical studies on political campaigns**

Political campaigns are organised activities of politicians and political parties used to create political consciousness among the electorate. It is an organised effort that influences the decision-making process of a specific group (Adeagbo, 2022, p.19). Political campaign messages, which are verbal, non-verbal or multimodal, have over time enjoyed scholarly attention from various theoretical perspectives such as discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, and rhetoric. For example, Omezuwa and Ezejideaku (2008) focus on the language of political campaigns in Nigeria to show how political actors use propaganda to persuade the audience, discredit their opponents and win the support of the electorate. The study is related to this

study because it falls under the broad spread of political discourse, but differs from the present study because it is not based on social media texts. Sharndama and Mohammed (2013) explore political campaign posters in Yola metropolis of Adamawa State, Nigeria, from the standpoint of linguistic stylistics. The study reveals that political campaign posters in Nigeria are graphologically, lexically and syntactically distinctive. Their study, though a political stylistic discourse, concentrated on the use of posters, while the present study examines the rhetorical strategies of Facebook posts on political campaigns.

Clementson et al. (2016) apply the theories of language intensity and language expectancy to the study of presidential campaign messages. Their study converges with the present study in the area of political discourse but significantly diverges in focus and theoretical sets. Opeibi (2019) examines the influence of Twitter on party politics and election campaigns in Nigeria through the theoretical lens of Computer-Mediated Communication and Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis. Opeibi's study is related to this present study as both elicited data from social media. However, they differ in methodological approach.

### Theoretical orientations

This study is anchored principally on three theoretical orientations: political impression management theory (PIMT), Brown and Levinson's (1978/87) facework, and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). The study finds that a synergy of these theoretical perspectives has the potential to systematically unpack the underlying rhetorical and cognitive dimensions of the selected campaign messages. Hall's (1972) PIM framework is defined here as an act of making political candidates electable and capable. The sociologist, Peter M. Hall, in 1972 coined the term political impression management due to its ubiquity in political contexts where presidential candidates' appearance, image and speech/narrative, which are a key part of campaigns, are managed to give off an impression of winning an election (Katz, 2016). As earlier posited, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram and others have been radically engaged by politicians for soliciting votes. McGraw (2003) and Landtsheer (2004) opine that for the engagement of PIM, politicians and political parties should improve on the impression they make on the audience.

The politicians, the candidates, the political parties and their handlers are all co-creators of political rhetoric. Therefore, they are referred to as the managers of impression. It is the duty of the parties, the candidates and political consultants or handlers to create a particular image of their candidate that is sellable and marketable to persuade the voter-audience to consider the candidate they market as electable (Landtsheer et al., 2008, p.220). As a tool for analysing political texts, PIMT focuses on aspects of political communication, namely, linguistic and non-linguistic. For the linguistic communication, it involves the verbal message: speech and written texts by linguistically identifying with the host voter-audience (HVA). On the other hand, the non-linguistic communication comes in the form of appearance and dressing to conform to the cultural attire of the HVA. PIMT is, therefore, appropriate for application on textual analyses of political communication in this study.

Facework or face management theory by Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) is a "re-theorisation of Goffman's (1967) notion of face" (Ellah, 2020, p.65); it is conceptualised here to mean the "public self-image of a person" (Yule, 1996, p.60). Facework like PIMT presents a particular perspective that people want

others to have and hold about them. Yule (2010) defines it as an emotional social performance of self. It is an act of keeping a performance that people can see only through what is given off. The theory is a discourse study tool, founded under the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson in linguistics, and it is imperative to combine it with the theory of political impression management. Face, as in this study, is a metaphor for image or self-presentation. It could be restorative or preventive. Restorative facework sees to reinstating lost face, while preventive face is an act of safeguarding face loss or threat. Brown and Levinson's (1978, pp.61-2) categorisation of face as either positive or negative has been adopted in this study to analyse the strategies of impression management.

MDA is a multidisciplinary discourse approach that analyses multiple modes of communication of a text. LeVine and Scollon (2004, p. 2) posit that every text "is always and inevitably constructed across multiple modes of communication". Corroborating LeVine and Scollon's view, Ellah and Ekor (2018, p.5) state that "human communication does not exclusively depend on verbal language, but also on some semiotic properties which include pictures, colours

and other semiotic features" whose usages and interpretations are largely influenced by context. The main claim by MDA, therefore, "is that almost all texts constitute a hybridisation of different modes of communication; each of the modes of communication contributes distinctly to the overall construction and explication of meaning" (Uwen & Ellah, 2024, p. 3). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) draw from Halliday's (1978, 1994) meta-functions of language to also identify three meta-functions of visual grammar: representational, interactive, and compositional function. These three aspects of visual grammar are specifically applied to the analysis of the data for this study.

### Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive analytical approach, which involves "an inductive exploration of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories" (Nassaji, 2015, p.129). This approach is capable of handling "content and interpretative analysis" (Osisanwo & Akano, 2023, p.5) in virtual interactions about political campaigns. The data for this study consist of 35 Facebook randomly selected posts coalesced into 11 Plates based on the three leading presidential candidates of



APC, PDP and LP that were purposively selected for analysis. Facebook was chosen because it is one of the highly used social media platforms for political campaigns, and it provided a platform for Nigerian youth, who constitute a greater percentage of the voting population, to react to issues in the campaigns.

### **Research scope**

The data were collected between November 2022 and January, 2023 electioneering year. The rationale for the choice of data was based on the robust trending debates and conversations on impression management of the Nigerian politicians (NP, hereafter) and the voting impact these might have had on the outcome of the 2023 elections. Specifically, the data that were selected were posts and reactions that indexed the endorsement of men and women in religious garments such as bishopric attire/garment (BA/G, hereafter), people wearing select-cultural attire to culturally conform to the host voter-audiences, and political statements of popularity and slips. Selected comments based on the context of the situation (impression management) were analysed and described with particular focus on the give-off and self-presentation, which include assertiveness or defensiveness, and perception/reactions of the Facebook

audience towards the impression managed. The research design was qualitative, and so, the statistics of the data could not affect the study's outcome. Critical reading technique was deployed to identify and analyse rhetorical means, such as manifested in the use of metaphors, in impression management.

### **Data analysis and discussion**

The analysis reveals the use of dressing and identifying as a major impression management strategy in the selected data. This impression management strategy attracts four cognitive frames that are used together with pathos, ethos, and logos of the politicians in the Nigerian political context as a new means of controlling impression and canvassing to appeal to the electorate. The four cognitive frames are: (1) religious responsiveness frame (RRF). (2) Cultural and/or ethnic identification frame (CIF), (3) popularity statements and slips' frame (PSSF), and (4) body-fitness re/assertion and defensive frame (BFRDF)

#### **a. Dressing and identifying as an impression management strategy**

Dressing is an identity marker used to give off the background of the wearer. It has been used as a means to conform to different cultural experiences, and it is an

impression management strategy in Nigerian politics. Identifying as an IMS could be deceptive in politics since politicians, especially in Nigeria, mostly employ propaganda in their political campaign.

In recognition of such deceptive tendencies, Oha (2022), in a blog post entitled "Garment and identification in Nigeria's preparation for the 2023 Presidential Election", raised some pertinent questions by quoting the popular English adage that "a cassock does not make a monk". In the blog post, Oha posits that wearing a monk's attire does not necessarily make one a monk. That such imitation may be a calculated ploy to deceive the electorate. For him, the motive behind the bishop's gear is to deceive Nigerians ahead of the 2023 presidential election, which he considers a criminal act. In this impression management strategy, all the four identified frames are deployed by political parties and their supporters in order to persuade the electorate and ultimately win their votes in the election. The frames are developed in turn.

#### **i. Religious Responsiveness Frame (RRF)**

Religious responsiveness frame is operationalised here to mean an act of responding to external religious

influence, and the ability to adjust appropriately. The reactionary and restorative measures, which are evident in the RRF of the political actors, are revealed in the appearance and identification of the alleged "fake hired" men and women to act as monks. This could also be seen as political dramatics. This dramaturgical representation is an impression management technique that some people have had to metaphorically refer to the "hired" as *Nollywood bishops*. Oha (2022) asserts that dramatics in Nigerian politics is not only limited to the use of alleged fake monks to appeal to and persuade the NE but also includes (i) the use of bombastic language to win popularity and applause, (ii) wearing garments that a host ethnic community is commonly identified with, (iii) managing to speak the variety of language the host community is known for, and (iv) employment of forms of exaggeration in the presentation of addresses.

For their command of authority and influence over their followers, bishops are responsible for moulding attitudes and changing opinions of congregants. It is based on this that the NP decide to utilise the office to manipulate the NE. Ottoh-Agede and Agede (2016) have argued that Africans generally, and Nigerians in particular, are very religious

people. It is due to their religiosity that some Nigerians, especially the Christians, were opposed to the APC's Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket. So, to keep control over the perception of the candidacy of two Muslims, the bishop's outfit is identified as a metaphor of Christian leadership for religious

impression management. The import of this RRF as a political impression management strategy is to dispel fear of religious bias and domination; to ultimately win the support of all Nigerians, especially the Christians. This technique is instantiated in Plates 1 and 2:



**Plate 1:** Politicians with "Bishops" in monk robes

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

In Plate 1, the visual resources show Mr. Peter Obi of LP, and some bishops as human-represented participants (RPs) walking towards a particular direction. At the representational level of interpretation, the Plate presents a picture of Mr. Peter Obi of LP, recognisable bishops (second image) and unrecognisable bishops (first image) in

priestly garments as the actors with the goal of wooing the electorate.

At the interactive meta-function level, the image is a *transactive* one because the RPs' gaze is directed at the viewers (electorate) in order to indicate the viewers' maximum involvement. Thus, it puts a demand on them to be concerned about the political situation in Nigeria.

Mr. Obi's smile portrays confidence and assurance to the electorate as a genuine person.

The choice of Mr. Obi's black attire is deliberate to present him as an elegant and sophisticated presidential candidate who is capable of changing the fortunes of Nigeria positively. Indeed, the bright and elegant appearance of the recognisable bishops with Peter Obi (henceforth PO) radiates confidence, which is proof of their authenticity, while the dull looks of the unrecognisable bishops communicate a lack of confidence, a proof of deception.

The Facebook users have assumed that, while one politician hired some unknown *god-men*, for a show, the other actually appeared before real men of God in recognisable faces – the bishops. Thus, PO is arguably presenting a preventive facework to counter what may be coming to him or to safeguard face loss or threat, and at the same time, presenting a restorative face to create an impression and show the other, in the person of Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT) that "real bishops" exist; and this is what they look like. While the BATians' give-off is dramaturgical and somewhat fake in representation, PO's give-off is more realistic and persuasive in this context.

The fake representation by the BATians as presented by the Facebook user threatens their (BATians') positive face because it presents them as deceitful, and as liars; while the presentation of PO with the alleged genuine bishops appeals to their positive face, a desire to be loved and approved of as real and truthful people. The ultimate intention here is to present PO as a better presidential candidate to be elected by the NE. More so, Tinubu's camp presents a restorative facework to reinstate their lost face, as well as reinforce that the Christian voting audience still tolerates his choice of a Muslim as a running mate.

The *non-persuasiveness* in the BATian logic continues to hold sway in the Plate 2, where the Facebook public makes some identification of the participants, as one was identified as "Jide of NURTW" (National Union of Road Transport Workers), Oshodi, Lagos. See the circled man in the image in Plate 2, and verified on Plate 5 (Image 1). The second image in Plate 2 presents a picture of active participants. One of the actors, who is dressed in a white caftan and a cap, is ostensibly a politician addressing some Christian religious leaders. This instantiates transactive reaction, since it can be inferred that the addressor (politician) is canvassing for support for

himself or his political party. The politician, in choosing to dress in white

clothes, wants to be considered pure, transparent and honest.



**Plate 2:** Politicians with "bishops" in monk robes

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

Also, in Plate 3, PO insists on managing and framing the religious responsiveness of the NE, as he is seen among another set of supposed real monks:



**Plate 3:** Politician(s) with "bishops" in monk robes

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures



The predominant rhetorical device here is ethos. It is used to appeal to the Christian voting audience (CVA), that while the other (BAT) hired unknown bishops, he, PO, needs not hire anyone since his acceptance by the monks is already shown and overwhelming,

too. The import of the rhetoric here is to establish credibility, and at the same time, create a sound judgment in the voters. Let us consider another instance in Plate 4, thus:



**Plate 4:** Politicians with "bishops" in monk robes and Facebook users' reactions

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

Plate 4 above combines semiotic and verbal resources to create meaning. In image 1 (Plate 4), the expressions "Bishop ke? This is Kamoru, my mechanic. When did he become a bishop?", the Facebook user expresses disbelief in the genuineness of the bishops in the picture. They (Facebook users) threaten the face-want of the APC and its presidential candidate through a bald-on-record strategy in the statement "what I ordered versus what I got". The overall intention of the user's identification of one of the bishops as "... Kamoru my mechanic", is

to present the APC and its presidential candidate as fabricators and fraudulent people who use alleged fake bishops to deceive the NE; especially most of the Nigerian Christians who are opposed to the Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket of the party. The unmitigated face-threatening act is further seen in Image 3 of Plate 4, where the Facebook user sarcastically criticises the APC-led federal government for claiming to be fighting corruption while they are neck deep in impersonation, deception and falsehood

as illustrated in their alleged hiring of fake bishops.

In Nigerian, and indeed most African cultures, red connotes danger; thus, people tend to avoid it. Therefore, by inscribing the sarcastic expression, "APC FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION: Impersonation, falsehood and deceit not counted!" on a red background, the Facebook user intends to inform the NE that the party, APC and its candidate should not be trusted because they are

dangerous, and do not mean well for the citizens.

In furtherance of probing the authenticity of the bishops, Conference of Concerned Christians of Nigeria's (CCCN) National President, Rev Bitrus Chollom and the secretary challenged the APC impression managers to produce the names of those they claimed were bishops who had come to endorse their presidential candidate. This was published in the online version of *Punch Newspaper*, as seen in Plate 5.



**Plate 5:** Politicians with "bishops" in monk robes and Facebook users' reactions

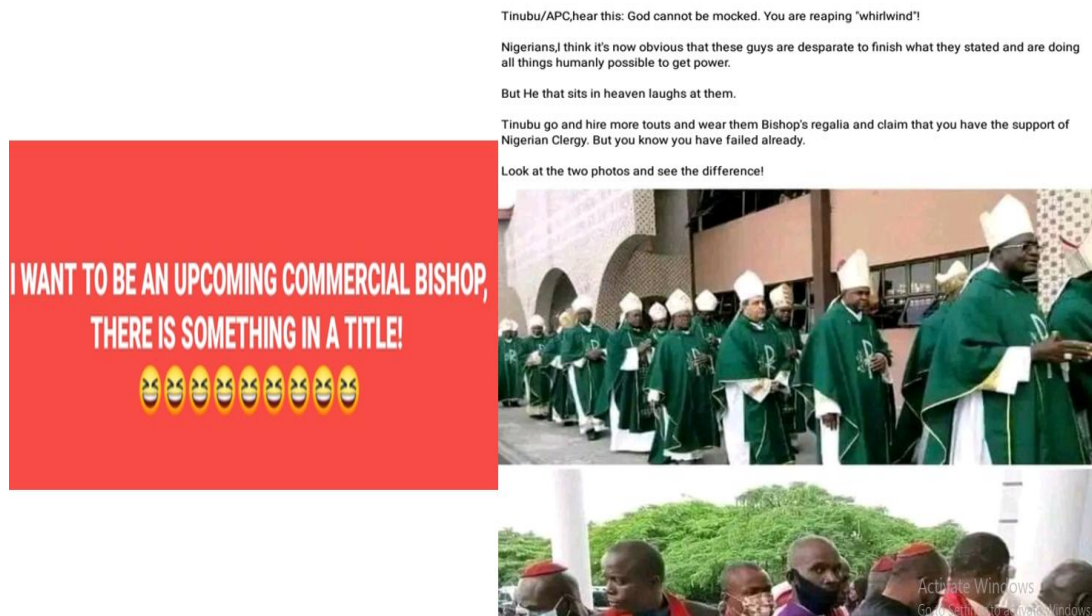
**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

To show that the Facebook audience was not persuaded by the dramatics of the bishopric endorsement, a Facebook user

accuses the APC of mischief thus: "People who sew bishop cassock for campaign will sew police uniform for election day!"

(Plate 5: Image 3). There are allegations of militarisation of politics and elections in Nigeria, that is, the wrongful use of the military by those in power to perpetrate election malpractices. It is on this premise that the Facebook user projects that the APC, which is the ruling party at the federal level, would mischievously deploy fake military personnel to facilitate election fraud on the election day. Again, this allegation of mischief, which comes as a warning, is inscribed on a red background to forewarn the electorate of the impending danger of voting for the party and its

candidates. The accusation of mischief is a deployment of Face-Threatening Acts without any redress to the APC's positive face. This buttresses the position of this study that most Facebook users were not appealed to by these political dramatics, as they see it as a violation of ethos kind of rhetoric – lacking credibility, and giving off the wrong intentions. Plate 5 (Image 1) also portrays the idiosyncrasies of not appealing to sound judgment, not presenting a credible thought and not being emotionally appealed to, as a Facebook user calls the bishops 'commercial bishop'. See Plate 6:



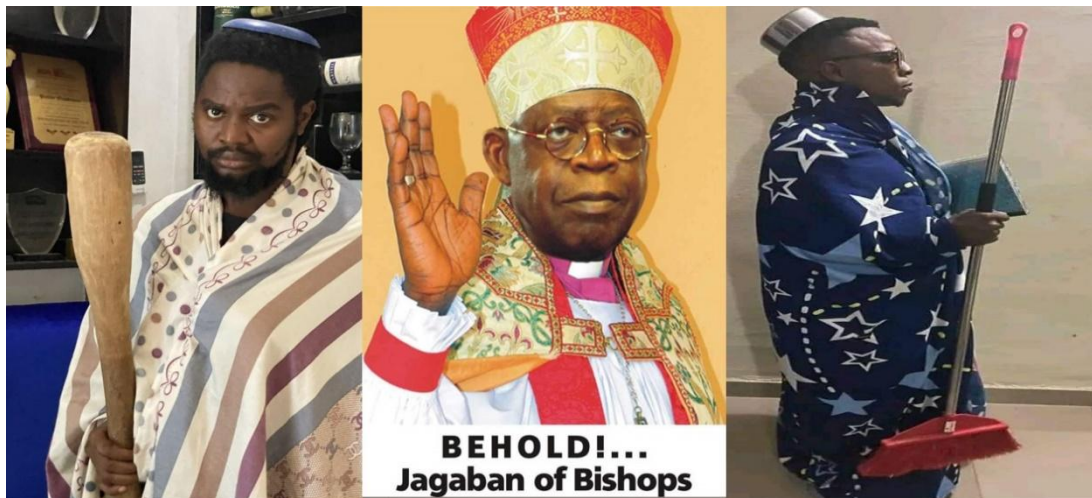
**Plate 6:** Bishop as a metaphor for commercialisation

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures



In the post "I want to be an upcoming commercial bishop..." in Plate 6, the Facebook user utilises a veiled language to condemn some religious leaders who have turned their calling into money-making ventures. The post, therefore, threatens not only the face of the fake bishops allegedly used by the APC, but also the entire fake "men and women of God" who extort their followers. The smiling face emoji in the post is scornfully used as an off-record strategy to further threaten the positive face of fake religious leaders, even outside the presented context.

The commercialisation metaphor is deployed to show that the FP is not in any way appealed to, or persuaded that the bishops who are among the CVA have endorsed the candidacy of BAT. Hence, the BATian strategy of manipulation and impression management may not work with this type of audience. As part of the signals that the FP has not been appealed to, there is a reactionary move made by the Nigerian Facebook public to caricature the bishopric's dramatics:



**Plate 7:** Reactionary postures of Facebook public on the bishopric attire

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

A photoshop expert has gone the extra mile to bring in a comic relief in the whole bishop endorsement process, as Tinubu has been photo-shopped into a cleric with the

inscription, "BEHOLD!... Jagaban of Bishops". The implication here is that there are doubts among the people, which implies that the impression was not well managed. See the Plate 8 for more illustrations



**Plate 8:** Reactionary postures of Facebook public on the bishopric attire

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

## ii. Cultural/ethnic Identification Frame (CIF)

Cultural/ethnic identification frame (CIF) refers to the postures politicians assume in a bid to identify with different ethnic groups in a particular country, in this case, Nigeria. As a culturally and ethnically diverse country, Nigerian politicians

during political campaigns make deliberate efforts to identify with all the cultural and ethnic groups as a political strategy to win the people's support. Such identification is mostly reflected in wearing the cultural attire of any ethnic group they visited during political campaigns. This is exemplified in Plate 9:



**Plate 9:** Identifying with the culture of HVA

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

The pictures in Plate 9 have only representative participants (actors) who, through their dressing, make meaning to the viewers in the context of political campaigns in Nigeria, which requires identifying with all cultures and people. The affordance of the picture, especially the shirt (popularly known as *Isi Agu* among the Igbo), cap and beads, enables the viewers to interpret that the actors seek cultural identification with the Igbo people of the southeastern part of Nigeria.

The first picture in Plate 9 is an image of Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, a former Governor of Kano State who, at this time, is vying for the position of President on the platform of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) in the 2023 general elections. As a Fulani man from Kano State, Kwankwaso is seen here in Igbo cultural attire, which ordinarily does not enjoy his patronage. The second picture on the first row is Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the APC Presidential candidate, who, even though is from the south, is not of Igbo extraction. He is a Yoruba man, and would ordinarily not patronise Igbo

cultural wears. The same goes for Mohammadu Buhari (former president of Nigeria), the first image on the second row of the Plate 9, and EL-Rufai (former governor of Kaduna State) who are both Fulani people, the second person on the second row and the last, the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar (a former Vice President of Nigeria, and a Fulani, too) who are not seen on other days wearing the Igbo attire even where the Igbo people and culture is seen as the third largest in Nigeria. These attires show some form of identification which

is meant to create a persuasive impression in the voter audience, especially the HVA, that their cultural identification goes beyond just receiving their votes. There is conformity rhetoric here, with the goal of identifying with, and conforming to the HVA's cultural and ethnic senses. Also, the choice of Igbo cultural attire by non-Igbo politicians is a polite behaviour since it demonstrates the acceptance of the culture and people of the Southeast by other Nigerians. Here are other examples in Plate 10:



**Plate 10:** Identifying with the Igbo and Hausa cultures  
**Identifier:** Online pictures

### iii. Popularity statements and slips frame (PSSF)

The candidates of the three major political parties for the presidential

elections employed some stylish statements and committed some verbal slips that have become identifiable with them in the Nigerian socio-political

sphere. Some of the statements and slips are discussed below:

- i. **Agbado and ewa** (Tinubu's PS): This is used to refer to a means of ameliorating Nigeria's suffering and curbing insecurity. Tinubu uses *agbado* (a Yoruba word for corn) and *ewa* (beans) as the food that the soldiers would be fed on to be able to fight insurgency in Nigeria. To make a mockery of this statement, FP uses the statement to connote impending or looming suffering if Tinubu is elected.
- ii. **Emilokan**: This is a popularity statement (PS) interpreted from Yoruba as "it is my turn", in which Tinubu emphasises the need to be elected as president, with the claim that it is now his turn to be president after previously supporting the elections of President Buhari.
- iii. **Go and verify** (Obi's PS): As a preventive measure, Obi urges the NE to investigate his claims, his education, age, and political leadership in Anambra State, where he was Governor for 8 years, and he simply tells the electorate, "Go and verify". Unlike

Tinubu's age, which the FB and the other candidates questioned its authenticity, Obi keeps the popularity statement going, "go and verify" when he talks about his age, and even goes as far as mentioning the names of those he attended school with.

- iv. **No Shi-shi rhetoric** (Obi's PS): Peter Obi, who has been part of the political leadership in Nigeria, having served as a governor of a state, knows the possibility and implications of vote buying. As he claims that Nigeria's bad leadership and governance have persisted because the NE sell their votes and as a result, cannot hold their leaders accountable for not fulfilling their campaign promises. It is on this premise that he forms an *ethosic* (credible) intention by appealing to the NE that he will not give money (*shi-shi*), a metaphor for vote buying. This has its source domain in the Nigerian currency, and a target domain for the selling and buying of votes.
- v. **PDAPC** (Tinubu's slip): This is a slip that may have resulted from the most prominent thought or



talked about in the unconsciousness of the person who made the slip, Tinubu. In an attempt to pray for the blessings of God upon his party, the APC, the most talked about party or his most dreaded opponent's party slipped in, and he ended up conflating the two dominant parties: the APC and PDP.

- vi. This is a town hall different from... *balablubulaba* (Tinubu's slip)

From the SD – PDAPC, a Nigerian online photo editor has reacted to Tinubu's slip by conflating the two logos of the APC and the PDP. The impression this gives off is that the slip is not an unintended one, but rather, a glimpse into the unconscious. As the Freudian theory holds, occasional slips may have been an orchestration of what is in the mind. Slips

reveal the underlying state of the mind. They depict what is lurking around the mind of the user (Ottoh-Agede & Igono, 2024). This sits well with some popular opinions of some NE that the PDP and the APC are the same party, cut from the same cloth; hence, the same party parading as different. More to this argument would be the fact that most of the politicians in the APC are defectors from the PDP, hence the popular opinion.

In response to the slip, and as a restorative facework, the APC, through its social media impression manager Femi-Fani Kayode (FFK), reacts as seen in Plate 13. The restorative text reads: "Bible says, pray for your enemies and show them love and kindness for it is like heaping coals of fire on their heads: in doing so the Lord will REWARD you", "I am glad that BAT prayed for PDP in Jos"



**Plate 11:** New logo design and the impression

**Identifier:** Facebook posts

There is a restorative face presented in the text by FFK, which is to manage the impression resulting from Tinubu's slip. This slip might have been from what was earlier suggested, a revelation of the unconscious, or a memory loss, or anxiety or other medical factors responsible for the slip, or a form of pretense to gain the acceptance of "the king makers", all of which are beyond the purview of this study. His face-saving strategy draws from an intertextual reference to *The Bible*. This reference is deliberate, not just to redress his principal's psycho imbalance as it may appear, but also to

show that although the APC is presenting two Muslims as their presidential and vice-presidential candidates respectively, Christianity is also practiced among members of the party. For which purpose he quoted *The Bible*; more so, equating the same PDP whom they pray for as evil, and therefore their enemies.

#### **iv. Body-fitness re/assertion and defensive frame (BFRDF)**

Having had previous presidents of Nigeria undergo sick leaves for ill-health, starting from the Yar'dua administration and the immediate past Buhari's, and knowing the negative economic implication of

their absences to the economy, Nigerians thought it was wise to elect a President that was physically fit enough to run the affairs of governing the country. As part of the rhetoric sold to the electorate, body fitness was at the frontline. The Gym/sports' metaphors

See what happened on salah day. He can't even sit on mat and pray like others and he want to rule a country like Nigeria. TUFIAKWA.



**Plate 12:** Body-fitness reassertion and defensive metaphors

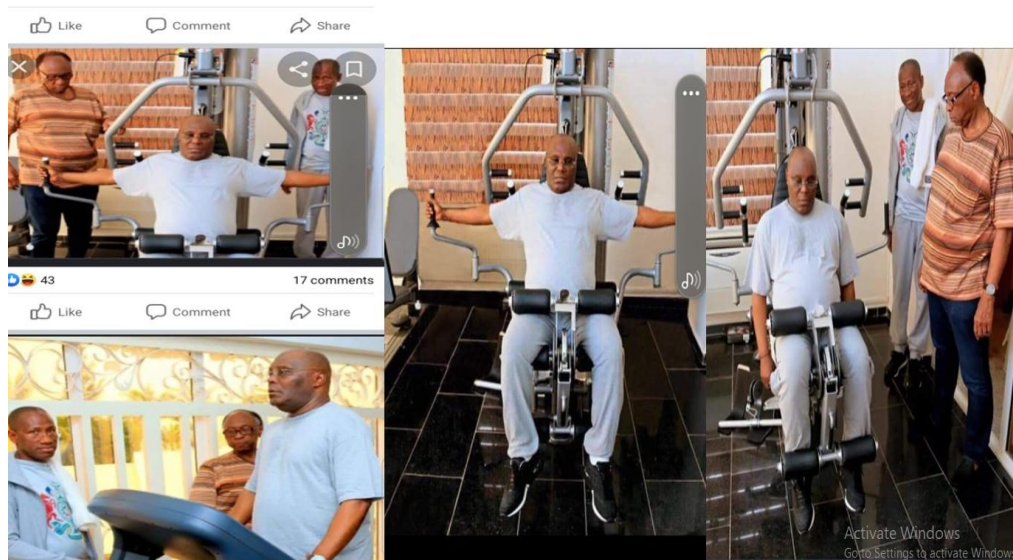
**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

The first picture in Plate 12 shows participants who are carrying out their religious obligation without involving active viewers. Thus, they are limited to "items of information" or "specimens in a display case" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.119). Tinubu's backstage is foregrounded in order to restore his lost face on his health status. There had been diverse negative reports making the rounds on social media about him. One of which was the posture he took in the

candidates whose fitness was questioned came out to debunk it, and those who wanted to persuade otherwise also showed their ability in fitness exercises, as the images below portray:

picture during prayers in the mosque, as shown in the first image in Plate 12. Because of the doubts about his health status, the impression managers threw in a plan to restore his lost face. This plan has two implications: on the one hand, as a restorative measure, his managers published his backstage life on the front stage; on the other hand, it was a rhetorical strategy meant to reset the minds of the electorate.





**Plate 13:** Body-fitness reassertion and defensive metaphors

**Identifier:** Facebook pictures

Contrary to Tinubu's restorative strategy, Atiku takes a reactionary/preventive posture that shows that while the NE doubts the health of Tinubu, he is fit. The narrative in Plate 13 depicts a positive face act, as Atiku comes out to demonstrate his fitness. The implication is in what he wants others to think of him, and to communicate this backstage, brought out to the front stage by his manager to show the NE that Atiku is physically fit for the office of the president of Nigeria. This is to fine-tune the impression they want the NE to hold of Atiku. This is also a body language, posturing Atiku's ability and strength for what is to come.

## Conclusion

It has been demonstrated in this study that Facebook has become a crucial social media tool for political communication, especially in the discussion of political campaigns in Nigeria. The study has identified one main impression management strategy: dressing and identifying as an impression management strategy, with four frames to project the strategy. These have been developed by political actors in the Nigerian political sphere to create some appeal. The study has also demonstrated that impoliteness in the data is achieved through accusation, criticism and condemnation, while politeness is

achieved through face-saving strategy of biblical reference, and symbolic acceptance of other cultures and people through dressing. The study concludes that all the political participants/actors in the data sampled may have significantly managed the impression of the electorate to control their perception of them with manipulated images, or stage-managed symbolic impressions and roles, as against what is obtainable in different natural settings.

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