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Framing Political Persuasion: Discourse Analysis of Peter Obi's 2023 Presidential Campaign Messages on YouTube

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Abstract

Background: The 2023 Nigerian presidential election marked a significant shift in the country's political landscape, heralding a period of electoral disaggregation where traditional party loyalty was superseded by policy-driven and candidate-centred decision-making. While socio-psychological factors are often cited as primary drivers of voter choice, these influences are fundamentally mediated through language and strategic framing on digital platforms.

Objective: This study examines the persuasive frames and discursive strategies employed by Peter Obi during the 2023 presidential campaign to influence voters and construct a credible political identity.

Methodology: Adopting a qualitative descriptive-interpretative design, the research applied qualitative content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically utilising Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Van Dijk's ideological square. The data comprised 47 campaign speeches and interviews obtained from YouTube, selected for the platform's extensive reach and dominance in the Nigerian digital space.

Results: The analysis revealed that Obi employed 13 distinct discursive strategies to present the ruling and previous governments negatively through corruption and responsibility frames. Conversely, he utilised the frames of stewardship, competence, nationalism, and the industrial revolution to present himself and his party in a positive light, successfully constructing an identity

defined by honesty and credibility. The findings indicate that positive framing exerted a more significant persuasive influence on the electorate than negative framing.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the persuasiveness of political campaign messages is predicated on the strategic framing of issues within the specific context of an election. By aligning political issues with the audience's socio-economic experiences and interests, candidates can effectively reshape voter attitudes toward governance.

Keywords: campaigns, framing, Peter Obi, political messages, persuasion.

Introduction

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was spectacular. It provoked intelligent inquiries into the factors shaping voters' choices of candidates. The election shifted the political structure of Nigerian electioneering campaigns, heralding the beginning of electoral disaggregation in the country. That is, a reduced impact of party identification as an important and only determinant of voters' choice of candidates as it was thought to be. Rather, voting choice was guided by political issues/policies (McAllister, 2016; Bukari et al, 2022). Voters saw themselves as independent of party loyalty, and many, especially the youth, cast a split ballot—a Labour Party candidate for one office and a candidate of another party for another rather than voting for one party across the board.

Commentators argued that the massive voter turnout, especially among youth, in the 2023 presidential election was due to the introduction of BVAS and iReV, the new Electoral Act, and the country's economic conditions. Some argued that Peter Obi's personality and achievements as a former governor were also factors at play. Thus, the campaign discourse was ineffective. This position is supported by evidence from socio-psychological studies indicating that campaign messages are ineffective at changing the attitudes of voters, especially decided voters, owing to prejudice (Brady et al., 2006; Hansen, 2011; Samuel-Azran et al., 2021). Hence, the conclusion is that candidate effects and personality are major determinants of voters' decisions (Falcao et al., 2023; Aichholer & Willmann, 2020; Silvester et al., 2022).

Social media has fundamentally altered the landscape of political engagement by personalising political discourse and shifting power directly into the hands of politicians, allowing them to market themselves beyond traditional party ideologies. In the Nigerian context, these digital platforms played a critical role in the 2023 presidential election, facilitating a move toward electoral disaggregation, in which voters, particularly the youth, felt independent of traditional party loyalty and were guided instead by specific policies and candidate personalities. YouTube, specifically, has emerged as a dominant force in this sphere; as the top video-sharing platform globally and the most utilised social media video-sharing service in Nigeria—boasting 31 million users—it provides an expansive, high-reach environment for candidates to deploy persuasive frames and discursive strategies. By leveraging the platform for interviews, town hall meetings, and campaign rallies, political actors can bypass traditional gatekeepers to construct a specific identity and communicate their worldviews through coherent, credible narratives aimed at altering the mental state and voting behaviour of a vast digital audience.

However, extensive research in framing studies (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Lakoff, 2014; Torregoros et al., 2022) provides empirical evidence that how a speaker presents issues/policies

can influence and affect an audience's understanding and acceptance. It bridges the speaker's presentation of political issues/policies and the voters' comprehension and acceptance. In politics, studies show that election winners often depend on who can influence more people's opinions (Druckman, 2021). Here, we define a persuasive frame as credible, coherent communication that logically highlights the speaker's view of the world in a particular way, with the intention of bringing about a change in the audience's mental state, which leads to a change in behaviour and attitude.

Central to the concept of framing and politics is language. Since the socio-psychological factors (Kulachai et al., 2023) are largely indirect, mediated through language, the speaker's selection and presentation of issues substantially influence voters' choices. Also, extensive scholarship shows that politics is becoming more personalised (e.g., Ortega, 2023; Bennett, 2012; Pedersen & Rahat, 2019), which places more power in the hands of politicians, among other things, to market themselves. This validates the power of framing in persuading voters, which dispenses with party ideology and addresses a range of political issues. Granted, voters are rational and motivated by certain factors to vote for a candidate, make choices, and respond to issues based on how they are described. Therefore, the choice of a candidate is based on how the motivating factors are framed or described during the electioneering campaign.

It is a corollary that the effect, impact, and influence political campaigns and politicians wield over the electorate is located in the power of framing political issues in political discourse, the language used, and the power of the language to activate certain frames in the epistemic model of the voters. Language helps construct reality; it allocates political power and is also a means and medium by which we construct and understand ourselves as coherent beings, individuals, and members of a particular culture (Lakoff, 2000). Therefore, the question that propelled this study was whether the election was framed to be about ideology or competence in persuading the electorate through campaign discourse.

In studying electoral campaign communication, several studies focused on a broad range of trends and different levels of analysis (Steppat & Castro, 2023). Studies in sociological and psychological factors that influenced voting choice predicated voting behaviour on personality. It holds that an election campaign has minimal effect, thus, minimal persuasion, and, at most, reinforces held opinions and attitudes but rarely changes the opinion of a decided voter (e.g., Brady et al., 2006; Hansen, 2011).

On the other hand, rhetorical studies of political speaking focus on finding the right strategies in persuading voters, whether on the issue, that is, position or valence, or direction, that is, negative or positive (e. g., Haselmayer, 2021), providing evidence to the effectiveness of campaign messages in altering and reshaping the attitude of voters. Studies in Critical Discourse Analysis on political persuasion provided empirical evidence of the power of framing as a persuasion tool in politics. For example, Dhayef et al. (2022) did a contrastive analysis of the ideological persuasive strategies used by the American Joe Biden and the Iraqi Al Amiri. Also, Khan et al. (2021) analysed Trump's selected tweets on Twitter (now X) to investigate his discursive strategies in constructing Islamophobia. Others, such as Addy and Ofori (2020), Kadim (2020), and Khajavi and Rasti (2020), explored political persuasion in political discourse.

This study acknowledged the role of socio-psychological factors in voters' choice but took a step forward to propose that the persuasiveness of campaign messages is predicated on the framing of the issue in the context of the election. The study argues that, even though socio-psychological factors are important in voters' choice of candidates, they are mediated through language. Therefore, the manner in which issues are presented can change voting decisions.

Aims of the Study

The study combines content analysis and critical discourse analysis to investigate the persuasive frames and discursive strategies employed by Peter Obi in the 2023 presidential campaign messages on YouTube. It explores how issue framing, power relations, roles, and identity were mediated through language to persuade voters in the election.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are the persuasive frames conveyed in Peter Obi's campaign messages on YouTube?
2. What are the stylistic strategies employed by Peter Obi in his campaign messages on YouTube?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis is rooted in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school before World War II (Van Dijk, 2015), especially influenced by the work of the second-generation Frankfurt scholar Jurgen Habermas. According to Horkheimer, an early director of the Frankfurt School, the main goal of Critical Theory is man's emancipation from slavery (Thomassen, 2010). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) and Locke (2004) suggest, among others, that Critical Theory assumes language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious unawareness). That is, language is a social practice. Van Dijk (2015) argued that CDA's current focus on language and discourse was initiated by Critical linguistics that developed at the end of the 1970s. CDA sees language as a social practice. It claims that language use is always social and that discourse reflects and creates the social reality. According to Van Dijk (2015) CDA "is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". There are different approaches to CDA scholarships. However, this study adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Van Dijk's ideological square. Fairclough proposed a three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis: the first, description, is concerned with textual analysis, and it is closely related to Halliday's SFL. The second, discourse practice, concerns the interpretation of the text. It focused on textual production and interaction with other texts. The third, sociocultural practice, concerns explaining the interaction between the text and its social context. It focused on things that gave rise to textual production (Fairclough, 2013). Van Dijk's ideological square is suitable for political discourse analysis of polarisation between the self and others. The model comprises 25 discursive strategies applied to discourse designed to enhance positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

Methods and Materials

The data for analysis were videos downloaded from YouTube. YouTube was chosen as the source because it is the world's top video-sharing platform and the most-used social media video-sharing platform in Nigeria, with 31 million users as of the beginning of 2023 (Kemp, 2023), more than Facebook and WhatsApp.

The study is a qualitative descriptive-interpretative study. It employs content analysis and critical discourse analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a [value-free] method of systematically describing data (Schreier, 2014). It reduces the amount of material by identifying descriptive categories. Critical Discourse Analysis is employed because this study draws on interpretivist assumptions to critically examine how language and communication patterns are used to frame political issues and communicate political ideologies (Kincheloe et al., 2018). The study used all 47 sample speeches available on YouTube, drawn from interviews, town hall meetings, and campaign rallies across all the federation states except Yobe state, which was not found on YouTube at the time of data collection. The sample was purposively selected to minimise noise and videos with clear start and end points, where Peter Obi speaks during the rally. Also, the selected videos for analysis were further guided based on the principle of saturation (Saunders et al., 2017; Guest et al., 2020). The speeches selected were from series 1 & 3 of Arise News Town hall meetings and campaign rallies in all the states of the federation.

Research Instruments, Validity and Reliability

The study employs a code sheet as the instrument for data collection. This study adopted a closed transcript system. Closed transcripts are based on the notion that transcripts are guided by predetermined research objectives (Jenks, 2018). The researchers paid attention only to the verbal component. For speech in the Igbo language, an interpreter/translator was employed who was trained to recognise the context of the data to interpret and translate it into English. The codebook was hand-developed and coded by two trained postgraduate students, with reported acceptance levels of .72 and .1 for persuasive frames and discursive strategies, using Scott's *pi* (1955) inter-coder reliability formula. Owing to the absence of canons in assessing the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data, it was guided by the data discounting principle for credibility and data analysis (Taylor et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

For content analysis, word was the smallest coding unit. The codes emerged inductively through the following steps: First, the researchers listened to and transcribed the downloaded speeches. Second, a close reading of the transcript was conducted to identify and label themes by examining patterns in the speaker's responses to issues. Third, the coded themes were summarised and grouped into categories and subcategories. Fourth, the categories were reread and assigned persuasive frames. Having coded the persuasive frames, a critical analysis was carried out at different levels of analysis, such as lexicalisation, semantics, syntax, rhetorical pronouns, etc., that structured the speaker's meaning-making, evoking frames in the voters and the ideologies conveyed by them.

Results of Findings

Persuasive Frames Employed by Peter Obi

Corruption Frame

Obi presents other parties and their candidates using negative lexical words such as *thieves* and *corrupts* with a *criminal structure* whose actions of mismanagement of funds, oil theft, waste in governance, and oil subsidy had brought the country to a failed state. However, by implication, he had referred to PDP and APC since only both parties had governed the country since the fourth republic which he alluded to in: "*Your country in the past 20 years, all they have produced is*

insecurity, poverty, out of school children, student strike, illness—everything that is wrong is what they've been producing", "All your country have done in the past 20 years is to manufacture poverty; to manufacture insecurity; to ensure people are unemployed so that they can use suffer to bring misery to all the families". He metonymically substituted the *country* for her leaders, whom he construed as the agencies responsible for the country's problems. This is expressed by the pronoun *they* which anaphorically referred to the *country*, that is, the leaders; and also in the meaning expressed through the demonstrative adjective *these, those*, which pointed metaphorically to politicians as the people in government as in: "... *I have said those who are stealing oil are people in government; don't listen to these people who are sharing money; the money they are giving you is your money they have stolen*".

Responsibility Frame

In politics, actors call into question the attribution of responsibility for causes and the treatment of situations. And since the support given to politicians by voters in elections tends to depend on the situation of the country in terms of the origin of the problem that gave birth to the situation and who is responsible for solving it, politicians are quick to attribute cause and responsibility of unfavourable situations to outsiders and claim responsibility for favourable situations. Obi, having called those in government corrupt, blamed them for the country's problems. He attributed the cause of poverty, banditry, unemployment, insecurity, crime and high rate of mortality to them and their failure to treat it as in: *He has told you; your country in the past 20 years, all they have produced is insecurity, poverty, out of school children, student strike, illness—everything that is wrong is what they've been producing*. The construction links the action of the verb *produced* to the leaders, and the prepositional phrase *in the past 20 years* provides additional information about the headword *leader* it modifies, which tells how long the citizens have been suffering.

Stewardship Frame

Obi constructed his identity positively as a good steward. In a country at a time when politicians are prodigal, wastrels, and live in luxury at the expense of citizens living in poverty, Obi presented himself as frugal, accountable, and a manager. Experiential value is expressed in that Obi, having constructed the leaders of the country as thieves and criminals whose outrageous cost of living has harmed the country, believed the election was about trust, about who can serve and manage the country's resources well. He campaigned on the basis that he should be voted for because he is trusted.

Nationalism Frame

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society divided not only politically into six geo-political zones, but also along religious lines, mainly Christianity and Islam. Obi presented his party as the future and the beginning of a new Nigeria, thus constructing national discourse by persuading voters to break their intractable religious and tribal ego defences through conscientisation, as in: *This year's election should not be based on tribe or ethnicity. Have you ever seen people buying bread more cheaply because they are from the North? Nobody buys food cheaper because of where he comes from. It should not be by religion. Is there any way Christian can buy bread cheaper? Is there any way Muslims can buy cheaper?* He constructed his nationalist identity through the pronoun *we* with the modal verb *would*, which expressed the future in past form, and the transitive *want*, expressing a strong desire to unite Nigeria, where Nigerians, irrespective of their tribal and religious differences, would love each other. He campaigned against the anti-nationalist enemies

within the country. Obi persuaded Nigerians using the inclusive pronoun "we," as in "join us to fight for a new Nigeria." *A new Nigeria is possible, drawing on the patriotic narrative expressed in the lexicon "fight,"* which connotes struggle.

Competence Frame

Obi referred to his outstanding achievements as governor. Achievements in education and health earned him an award from Bill Gates and the federal government for road infrastructure development, as well as saving the state money, proving his dedication to serving the nation and his ability to face related or tougher challenges as the country's leader. He enhanced his competence through the use of positive lexis such as *integrity, youth, mental and physical strength, compassion, and character*. He presents himself as younger, entrepreneurial, educated, a disciplinarian, a wealth creator, and diplomatic, framing these as necessary qualities to lead the country.

Saviour Frame

Obi constructed his identity as a saviour who will end the suffering of the people using the modal *would* and *will*, which expresses hypothetical situations and actions in the future if and when he is elected as president; a saviour who will stop corruption and stealing. He promises to restore the citizens' hope for a better future, and I promise you *that a new Nigeria is possible. Datti and I will build a new Nigeria*. The metaphor *constructs the speaker and his vice as protectors and a shelter* for Nigerians. He builds a discourse of brotherhood and empathises with flood victims and the Niger Delta over oil exploitation using the inclusive, empathetic deixis *we*, which he sometimes used as a referent for the speaker and his party in identifying with the victims, and other times, as a referent for the nation, incorporating the position of the victims cognitively

Political Inclusion Frame

Obi convinced voters that his government would be inclusive in terms of gender, varied social classes, policy-making, accountable and responsible to all as in: *We have assured (you) that women and youths would be the engine of our government, and that I have shown an example of how many women who have worked with me as governor, and the statement the government we are going to form would be government of youths and women*. Obi presents the Labour Party as a party for the youths and women, as in: *It is your government, youths of Nigeria. We want to bring about your government, and in: You are the one running this election. You are the one running this election. You are the one running this election—the youths of Nigeria. You are the one contesting this election through us; we are only representing you.*

Industrial, infrastructural, and Agrarian Revolution Frame

Obi framed the government as corrupt and thieves responsible for all that is wrong in the country—multidimensional poverty, 60% youth unemployment, etc. He persuaded voters that the youth would be pulled out of poverty only by adopting an export-oriented economy, moving the country from consumption to production through industrial, infrastructural development, and an agrarian revolution. Using the inclusive "we," referring to his party, he repeatedly pledged support for *youth, farmers, and women in employment, investing heavily in farming, resuscitating moribund agricultural development banks, and in infrastructure projects like roads and electricity.*

Discursive Strategies Employed by Peter Obi

Hypophora

Hypophora is a rhetorical strategy in which a speaker or writer raises a question and then answers it immediately. Obi employed hypophora (e.g., in Adamawa campaign rally, Kaduna rally, Lagos rally, and Gombe rally). In each case, the strategy enhances the speaker's credibility and mitigates doubt in the addressee's mind by providing answers to issues the addressee might have had trouble thinking of or believing. The strategy constructs Obi's positive self-presentation as a credible, courageous, knowledgeable and practical leader; as the one with the solution to the problems affecting the country.

Generalisation

Generalisation is the strategy of implicitly or explicitly using quantity terms to attribute some characteristic properties to a class of things or persons rather than a particular thing or person. Obi treats *all politicians in government, without exception*, as corrupt and thieves. He made a sweeping universal statement about politicians in power, knowing that not all are corrupt and thieves. Constructing arguments using *everybody knows*, Obi generalises his propositions to be known by everybody; and the audience, in effect, not wishing to be ignorant of what is public knowledge, is expected to accept it as truth, hence, and pass off the evidence unquestioned. He generalises that *everything* that is causing poverty in Nigeria resides within the government. This makes the audience think that all causes of poverty are related to the government, which is not true in all cases. This strategy constructs a negative identity about those in power and positively presents Obi as honest and trustworthy, passing off as credible.

Euphemism

It is a rhetorical device of mitigation (Van Dijk, 2006). Obi constructs his identity as honest and trustworthy; presenting bandits and kidnappers in a positive frame would be a double standard. That would risk losing the support, trust, and respect of Nigerians. However, he needed the vote and support of the bandits and kidnappers, who were mainly young people. Thus, he mitigated banditry and terrorism by using the term "agitation".

Actor description

According to Van Dijk (2006), how actors are described in political discourse depends on their ideologies. Political actors tend to describe out-group members badly and attribute negative characteristics to them. Obi described the government as *corrupt and thieves, whose political structure has brought untold suffering and hardship to the people he presented as victims of the system*. He describes the politicians as far from the people and without any sympathy, as weak, old, and looters. Obi presents the audience as patriots and fighters and urges them to fight for their freedom by voting out their oppressors using the hunter metaphor, *chase out*. Obi identifies himself as a saviour who has come to save the people from their oppressors through economic empowerment. He describes himself as competent, a nationalist, and for the people.

Number Game

According to Van Dijk (2006), it is a strategy in which speakers enhance their credibility by "moves that emphasise objectivity". Audience members are more persuaded by an argument when

it is presented as objective, which enhances the credibility and authority of the speaker. It is one of the moves Obi uses most. He uses numbers and statistics to persuade the audience of the country's deplorable state in terms of life expectancy, human capital, and the human development index, which he says are poor and below global standards. Using statistics, he presents other candidates and the ruling party negatively, then offers solutions, highlighting the differences between his propositions and those of his opponents, thereby making his propositions appealing to the audience.

Intertextuality (Allusion, Quotative, Paraphrase)

Intertextuality is a theory of text where one text references other texts either explicitly or implicitly (Beard, 2000). Obi persuades the audience through the voice of the managing director of NPA, which serves as evidence to the speaker's claim that those in government are the ones stealing oil, which lends credibility to the speaker and, thus, makes him appear reliable and knowledgeable to the audience. Through intertextual relation, Obi referenced the book *The Great Escape* by Angus Deaton which ideologically placed him in agreement with the author's recommendation that lifting trade restrictions, developing local businesses, and giving incentive to local businesses would help in developing the country and reducing unemployment.

Metaphor

Metaphor is a rhetorical device mostly used in politics. It is a linguistic expression where one thing or domain of experience is understood and experienced in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In the journey metaphor, Obi describes the election as a journey: a journey to make Nigeria productive, a journey to take back Nigeria. He describes himself, his running mate, and the chairman as three important persons in the journey. He persuades the audience using a construction-based metaphor through the semantic cluster build, fix, and repair, which constructs Nigeria as a building structure and a mechanical system. Just as structures are erected, damaged, and repaired, he persuades the audience that the country has been damaged and in ruins by past administrations; however, he promises to rebuild it. Moreover, as a mechanical system, he promised to repair the faulty parts so it would work again.

Repetition

Repetition is important in political discourse for emphasis, clarity and cohesion. It is a linguistic phenomenon in which a lexical unit is duplicated either in an exact form or with inflectional or derivational change (Sigar & Saeed, 2022). Obi repeated the phrase *you can go and verify, you can go and see and go and check* at the beginning of every clause in para 20 throughout his speeches to enhance his credibility and as evidential to his claims. He presents himself and his party as honest through the anaphoric repetition *we are not going to steal your money*. In Obi speeches, these were most repeated: *Secure and unite Nigeria, we would give you back your, we are ready for the job, I wasn't owing any, move Nigeria from consumption to production, deal with, it is unacceptable, borrow for production, pull people out of poverty, you can't have that and won't have crisis, replace it with employment, trust, ensure, assure*. The repeated words, phrases and clauses emphasise Obi's ideological position and construct his identity, which helped in persuading the audience.

Comparison

Comparison, unlike the rhetorical trope of simile, is an argumentation strategy used by speakers to compare an in-group, either positively or negatively, with an out-group, in line with their ideologies (Van Dijk, 2006). Obi, arguing for an increase in police personnel to fight insecurity, compares Egypt, a country with a population of 100 million and 1 million police personnel, with Nigeria, with a population of 200 million and 320 thousand police personnel. Again, he compares Nigeria in 2010, when it had a higher per capita income than Bangladesh, and in 2022, when it fell by 20%, while Bangladesh tripled. Obi proposes a budgetary increase for education, comparing it to South Africa's one-year education budget, which is higher than Nigeria's education budget from 2016 to 2021 combined. He persuades the audience of the need to buy the agrarian revolution by highlighting how the land mass of Borno state is bigger than the size of Belgium and Israel put together; Nasarawa is bigger than Israel, and Niger state is twice the size of the Netherlands, yet these countries are not hungry because 60% of their land is cultivated.

Compassion move

An argumentative move in which the speaker enhances the wickedness of others by showing empathy and sympathy for the victims (Van Dijk, 2006). The strategy moves by implicitly blaming others as the agents responsible for the victims' empathetic situation. Obi shows signs of empathy and solidarity with the kidnapped, the kidnappers, flood victims of Bayelsa State, those suffering and dying of a flood, and abandoned youths (Kaduna and Gombe rallies), which enhances the wickedness of the agents in the minds of the victims and the audience, and constructs Obi as compassionate.

Vagueness

Vagueness is the fuzziness of meaning or an expression that does not have a precise referent. Peter Obi uses obscure words like *everything*, *few*, and *a lot* to improve his position on the issues discussed in the interviews. For example, in the statement: *these are areas you need to invest, so there is a need to be a physical package to support this in order to support the insurance and everything, which will allow them to treat from high to low*, it is not clear how high or low those insured are. While the speaker may mean high and low status, it is less clear whether they refer to financial or social status. The vague terms have no clear referent, and one cannot tell what the speaker meant by them. However, it commits the audience to believe the speaker is knowledgeable and, hence, credible.

Presupposition

Presupposition is a piece of information that a speaker takes for granted or assumes to be in the common ground or known to the hearer in order for the speaker's statement to be meaningful in the context in which it was made (Potts, 2015). For example, the statement *this year's election should not be based on tribe or ethnicity* presupposes that in previous years, elections have been based on tribe and ethnicity. This strategy persuades the audience to think beyond tribe, ethnicity, and religion to take Nigeria back.

Discussion of Findings

The study exposed the power relations between Obi, the ruling party, and the 'people.' Obi described those in government as exercising dominance over the majority of Nigerians who are subordinated through the mechanism of poverty and hunger. He framed those in government as

corrupt and responsible for social, political and economic inequality, and also benefited from the system at the expense of the people. Thus, he produced a counter-hegemonic discourse that positioned the audience as fighters. Analysis of the speeches revealed Obi's pattern of interpreting the country's problems, which he attributed to those in government, using corruption and responsibility frames that fit more into the shared socio-cultural experiences of the majority of Nigerians. He then persuaded the audience using the other six frames to construct his identity and enhance his role as a saviour. This evidence aligns with that of Kosmidis et al (2019), who found that positive framing is more persuasive and accepted than negative framing.

Results showed the abundant use of personal pronouns in Obi's speeches. The first-person singular pronoun *I* is dominant in the speeches. It occurred with mental, modal, and primary auxiliary verbs to represent the speaker's opinion, commitment, attitude and position. The first-person plural pronoun "*we*" is frequently used and is the most ambiguous. The speaker used *you* as a reference to his discussants and the audience, mostly to enhance the dialogicity of his argument with the general audience. He persuaded the audience of his credibility through rhetoric that gave credence to his personality. Along with telling the right story and providing evidence, Obi persuaded the audience through an ethotic argument. That is, through anadeictic reference, the speaker's claims pointed more to himself than to the party he represented, which could be interpreted as suggesting that, though he contested under the aegis of the Labour Party, it was a weak vehicle for leadership.

The analysis found that lexical choices can construct a speaker's ideological position and identity. Obi used lexical terms such as *stolen*, *corrupt*, *produced*, *manufactured*, *weak*, *old*, *thieves*, *criminal*, *loot*, *poverty*, etc., to negatively present his opponents; and *integrity*, *young*, *wealth creator*, *frugal*, *trust*, *manage*, *revolution*, etc., which presented Obi as credible and progressive, and also revealed his background as a businessman.

The discursive analysis of the speeches revealed the polarisation of US vs THEM, cued by pronouns, lexical choice, and discourse strategies that negatively described the out-group and positively described the in-group. He persuaded the audience against the ruling party and other candidates by enhancing his credibility through hypophora to mitigate doubts. It was found that Obi deliberately generalised unfavourable situations, such as the cause of poverty, to the ruling party and preceding governments. In terms of euphemism, Obi described Boko Haram, IPOB, bandits and terrorists using pleasant words like *angry* and *agitator* to gain their acceptance. Findings showed that he described his opponents, particularly APC and PDP, as weak, old, corrupt, and thieves, the audience as victims, patriots, and fighters, and himself as a nationalist, wealth creator, and educated. The use of a number game enhanced Obi's credibility by presenting numbers and statistics to substantiate propositions. He persuaded the audience by referring to other texts through the discourse practice of intertextuality. Obi alluded to the authority of the Bible and appealed to the managing director of the Nigeria Port Authority, a book by Deaton, and Pastor Adeboye to enhance his credibility.

Metaphor analysis revealed that Obi compared politics to business and his struggle as a journey. He used war metaphors to describe his attitude toward the problem confronting the nation and persuaded the audience through the family frame, in which he positioned himself as a caring and disciplined father with the authority to reward and punish. According to the analysis, Obi used repetition to express his views, attitude, and commitment to propositions and occupy an

ideological position. This aligns with previous research (e.g., Van Gorp, 2010) on the effect of repetition on framing. He compared Nigeria with other countries to highlight Nigeria's failure and ideologically persuade the audience to vote for him, positioning himself as a remedy. According to the findings, an analysis of Obi's frames and discursive strategies in his speeches revealed populism and the ideological structure of social democracy.

Conclusion

The researchers triangulated content analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine how issue framing affects voting choice in Obi's 2023 presidential campaign messages on YouTube. Our findings acknowledged that voters respond to campaign messages through the prism of their preexisting beliefs, emotions, and prejudices; however, evidence supported our proposition that the persuasiveness of campaign messages is predicated on the framing of the issues in the context of the election. That is, issue positioning and presentation influence voting decisions. That is not to say that voters are defenceless in the face of persuasive campaign messages; rather, they are persuaded when political issues are framed in the common frame of interest with the audience. Through the frames, which fit well with the socio-economic experience of most Nigerians, and the strategies employed, Obi constructed his image as an honest person who draws on authority, traditions, and expertise, making him credible and believable to the audience. We noted that there is more to persuasion in politics than the words of the candidates—the prosodic elements. This limited our studies. Further analysis should focus on prosodic elements. Also, to analyse campaign messages of other parties and compare them with Obi to look at the similarities and differences in the frames and strategies employed

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