

HEURISTIC CUES AND CONTEXTUAL FEATURES OF SELECTED TWEETS OF ATIKU ABUBAKAR: A MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVE

Rabiat Oiza Fakunle

Department of English and Literary Studies
Summit University, Offa-Nigeria

Abstract

Computer mediated discourse and political engagement deals with the role of the medium in fostering political participation. Researches in this field have included a critical discourse analysis of language use within the platform, issues of social interaction and social capital, flaming and mobilization. These studies however, have not been able to capture the vast data available in computer mediated discourse especially within the context of online discourse in Nigeria. In order to harness other multimodal features of the platform there is need for an integrative approach that will capture the vast data made available in the platform. In this regard, this study adopted a revision of Herring's multimodal computer mediated communication discourse analytic approach and insights from Kress and Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis to suggest an integrative approach that would capture some intricate features of computer mediated discourse such as multimodes and context with the aid of qualitative and quantitative approach, thereby examining the automated multimodes as semiotic nodes and the contextual features used in Abubakar Atiku twitter update . This study revealed that multimodes, context and linguistic items constitute discourse that aid political mobilization and participation across social media contexts. More specifically the virtual platform is a strong tool for political mobilization and could be used by political authors in fostering citizenship participation. The platform if properly harnessed can also serve educational purposes.

Furthermore, some portions of the 3-level integrative approach to computer mediated discourse suggested in this study, serve as a resource tool for researchers and scholars interested in multimodal computer mediated discourse analysis.

KEYWORDS: Multimodes, computer mediated communication, twitter, multimodal discourse analysis, Atiku Abubakar.

Introduction

The emergence of computer mediated communications (CMC) can be traced to the history of the Internet. Computer mediated communication as an effective technology has helped to develop interactions among individuals, enhanced contribution to common discussions, as well as increased opportunities for various actions and activities among users. With the platform, it is easy to gain first-hand information of net users and access them when possible. With its lack of geographical boundaries, it is easy to access people across the globe with the minimal expense possible. (Hamilton and Tolbert 2012)

Political and civic engagements across the platform became widespread in the twenty-first century especially during the general elections. Individuals who used the internet became information multipliers. The wide range of reports by Nigerian newspapers online maintained a strong online presence and a large quantity of contents were posted on the web. Beyond views that criticized the government, supporters of government policies also had their say and Nigeria's complex political system has become transparent through the medium. There is arguably a strong connection between the social media and several aspects of the society. While the platform was earlier established to foster social interaction between individuals and build social networks, the rising trends have demonstrated an extension in the use of the media. In Nigeria especially, the medium has served as a rich context for online engagement and political participation.

Different scholars of repute have done several researches on CMC and its impact on group interactions as well as the relationship between online and offline communication. Cumming, Butler & Kraut (2002) reviewed three studies on online social relationships, and observed that CMC, especially email, was less effective than face to face contact in creating and maintaining close social relationships. The CMC, especially social media, an effective facility, is a platform for fostering social interaction between political actors and their electorates. Since political campaigns are tied to elections which determine individuals who lead people, they attract a lot of attention as politicians seeking elective positions invest more on social media to reach out to its people through the aid of visuals. In Nigeria as well as well as other countries use political visuals such as vests, head wears, pictorals, memes and surrogate language amongst others by relaying messages thus establishing meaning(s) in discourse with a view of seeking political support for their parties and from electorates. Chiluya (2012) provided evidence of weblogs as platforms for dissemination of cultural norms and inter-ethnic discourse in political issues. He examined the weblogs in fostering political participation within Nigeria.

In the same vein, Bimber (2001) investigated the role of the social media in fostering political affinity across the virtual platform. Bimber's studies revealed that the relationship between individual and information is not by itself connected to participation. While several studies have concentrated on the role of the social media in fostering political participation, much has not been the role of the semiotic implications of online multimodal resources such as political participation especially in Nigeria. This study therefore seeks to examine and analyze some of such multimodal resources used in online logs in Nigeria focusing on the twitter updates of Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the PDP 2019 election with a

view to investigate the explicit communicative characteristics of the twitter updates of Atiku Abubakar,, identify and bring out specific meanings in the digital multimodal context enacted through visual means in Atiku Abubakar twitter updates thus accounting for automated multimodes available in digital context within the study period and identifying these meanings convey. The focus of this study is in effect, to examine the technological affordances of the media in the Nigerian political process.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse across social platforms involves the use of texts and modes for communication. This study is set to examine the democratic outcomes of interacting in social media platforms with a particular focus on some of the multimodes used by political actors. An analysis would require a theory that reflects the use of modes, content and context of communication. The theoretical foundation of this study is drawn from the tenets of Herring's Multimodal Computer mediated discourse analysis (2015) and insights from Kress & Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal discourse analysis. It shall examine the contextual, linguistic and multimodal features as necessary tools for civic engagements in social media interactions.

Multimodal discourse analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis is an approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is constructed through multiple modes of communication. This approach involves the analysis of a mode's elements. In the visual mode, such elements include colour, illumination, composition, etc. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; 2006). Discourse here is an integration of text as multimodes and how they combine to create social interaction in a virtual platform. A multimodal discourse analysis is therefore concerned with the meaning making process of semiotic contents.

Kress & Leeuwen's (2001) approach to multimodality opined that each of the elements has a meaning potential, and their full meaning is realized when analyzed in relation to each other. This approach has its roots in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Language, according to Halliday, is a semiotic mode and any semiotic mode must fulfill the ideational, interpersonal and metafunctions of language.

Discourse in CMC, therefore, includes all tools used in the platform for creating interpersonal relationship. From the perspective of digital multimodality, meaning can be enacted by either, textual visual or audio medium. Multimodal platforms allow social media users to comment on multimodal contents via multiple channels available on web pages, threads or conversations. With the emergence of modern technology, the thrust of multimodal analysis has extended its goal beyond accounting for the use of texts and images in the construction (or co-construction) of meaning to, more recently, accounting for automated multimodes available in digital contexts. These different modes of communication convey information and meaning in various ways (Hamilton and Tolbert, 2012).

Multimodal Computer Mediated Communication (MCMC)

This is an integrative approach to computer mediated communication developed by Herring (2015) that incorporates the multimodal nature of the social media. This approach is an extension of Herring's computer mediated discourse analysis (2007) and was borne out of the need to match the emerging trends in computer mediated communication. It is useful in analyzing how texts and other modes merge to create meaning within an online platform. The multimodal computer mediated communication otherwise known as interactive multimodal platform (IMP) includes a text and another mode which may be audio, video, and/or graphics. The IMPs are Web 2.0 sites which incorporate user-generated content and social

interaction: examples include Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram among others.

Modality: Modality refers to the truth condition embedded in a work. In the context of visual images, modality refers to a collection of resources used by the sign maker to portray a truth value (Scollon, 2012).

Multimodal Discourse Analysis Of Atiku Abubakar Twitter Update

The data would be interpreted using Herring's multimodal computer mediated communication discourse analysis approach and insights from Kress and Leeuwen's multimodal discourse approach narrowing them to the analysis of multimodes, analysis of contexts{conversational pattern}, and the analysis of contents{linguistic and paralinguistic items and modes of communication enabled}.

Analysis of multimodal features /heuristic cues

The social plugins of Twitter such as *retweet*, *comment*, *share*, *like* and *media* are used extensively for mediating communication. We shall attempt a quantitative analysis of each of these modes and examine how they contribute to political engagement.

The table below illustrates the level of involvement of Twitter enabled semi-automated contents used in Atiku Abubakar Twitter page. As a medium of social interaction, net speakers endorse their support by using Twitter's automated cues. Beyond this, civic engagement is further fostered when participants in this forum share information on their walls making it accessible to non-members of the Atiku twitter community. Without the use of words, over three thousand people are able to disseminate updates on Atiku's page. With each person using the *like*, *hashtags*, *share*, *retweet* or *comment* plugin, information is generated on their walls creating reduplication of information. T shall represent Tweet, C for Comment, R for Reply

	Total number	Mean %
Likes/follow	26236	46
Comments	6281	28
Retweets/Share	4031	16
Media	300	3
Total	35848	93

Table 4.1 Mean distribution of automated activities on Atiku's twitter page within some days in February 2019

Like

The like button serves as a semiotic node to relationships online. When content is posted on Twitter and a user clicks the like button, the story appears on the user's newsfeed. This allows the user's friends to view such content. At the macro level the 'like' and 'follow' plugins are used to express interest and agreement to an opinion or update as well as foster engagement.

C1: Jamal_Curtis: If you know you're atikulated just as I am, kindly like and follow.GMB 2015, a year of change. (Posted 11-02-19).

C2;Mazi Nwabueze Snr:If you know you're ATIKUlated OBIdiently,just like and I'll follow you.

Like is used in the communicative context above, not just to express consent but to create affinity with the group's ideology. Within days in February 2019, a total of 26236 likes and follow representing 75.5% of non-verbal activities as seen in table above were generated on Atiku Abubakar Twitter page. This is an expression of conformity with contents posted on the page. The *like* button is non-verbal and the most commonly used pre-set node, it is easier to use especially for

netusers who cannot express themselves. This accounts for its strong presence in the table above. Although there are speculations that the *like* button is a rather weak form of agreement compared to the share and comment plugin, our data above shows that it remains a means of expressing interest and creating affinity.

Retweet and Share:

The retweet and share plug-ins can be regarded as the strongest plugins used to express one's interest in a Twitter update. By clicking the retweet and share buttons, netusers perform the following actions:

- I strongly like your content
- I may not have anything to say about it but
- I would want others to also see this.

It is a strong tool for information dissemination and a communication strategy that allows net users to share other people's information on their timeline. The table above doesn't show the percentage the share plugin covers because it only does a list of only links where its tweet could be accessed in other social platforms so we won't be out of place to assume that the share button has twice the percentage the occurrence of the automated activities on the Twitter page than retweet because the share button performs a wider function than the retweet button because while it accommodates other social network sites having access to the tweet through copying and pasting of links, retweet only reduplicates itself in a twitter environment. The non-verbal speech act of sharing and retweeting is an important activity that helps to sustain political engagements in the platform because netusers who are not friends of Atiku Abubakar on Twitter could access information updated on his timeline and express their opinion through a third party platform thus, covering a large percentage of Atiku's activities on Twitter and serving as a strong tool for spreading his political ideology.

Comment:

The *comment* plugin is a creative semi-automated plugin that is used to express a strong interest in a discourse. Unlike the *like* plugin, comment allows netizens to express their views with their choice of linguistic items while allowing friends on their list to view these comments on their timeline. It is a strong tool for political engagement across virtual platforms and represents 17% of the activities of Atiku Abubakar's followers. This data signify that Netspeakers sometimes prefer the use of non- verbal cues to disseminate their message of change.

T1 So, let me reassure you, we are going to win these elections. And to our long-suffering citizens, I say do not despair,our time is now,and together we shall reshape the destiny of our beloved country (posted 19-02-19).

C3: Hidima:We all know you cannot win this election, thus a reason you had to stop your rally and couldn't cover the remaining states while resorting to rigging tactics...PMB is in charge... (posted 20-02-19).

C4: Bukar Tijjani:We pray to God that people with desperation and bad political records will never rule us again... Ya Allah ka amsa mana adduarmu.Amen(posted 20-02-19).

C5: Chuks:Atiku /Obi is winning ,and would emerge the winners in Jesus name[Amen] (posted 20-02-19).

C6: Biology Brother:As you can see,you are moving alone (posted 20-02-19).

R1: Deogun Demola Deniyi @Biology Brother: Looking at the number of his likes and yours, we can see who's really moving alone. Shior. (posted 20-02-19).

In Tweet1 above, Comments 3and 4 and 6 denote rejection of the presidential aspirant while Comment 5and R 1 hold a different

view ,as they stand as a solidarity pledge and a way of showing their unalloyed support for Atiku. The *comment* plugin has this potential to connect people who have ideas and opinions in common irrespective of their tribe, religion or affinity with one other but also debate those who hold different ideas, as illustrated in C6. Through the reply plugin, C6 is attacked directly for not supporting Atiku showing a high level of out-group exclusion by making reference to the predominance of likes on Atiku's platform. Within a particular discourse, the *comment* plugin is used to draw the community to pertinent issues which may likely hinder the presidential aspirant from a successful election. This can be justified as C4 refers netpeakers back to history; during the tenure of Obasanjo/Atiku which was perceived as desperate filled with bad political records. Beyond the role of the *comment* plugin in showing disapproval and reinforcing solidarity, it remains a means of driving social media traffic to a page and fosters integration within social networking sites. With the *comment* plugin, responses are made to various issues of interest.

Media

Within the official Twitter account of Atiku Abubakar, the media task was extensively used to generate social communication. The ability to upload photos and videos are persuasive strategies used by politicians to narrate events, present a positive image of themselves in few words and exposing the inadequacies of their rivalry party(s). As part of campaign strategy across Twitter platform during the campaign period;

T2:-Thanks to everyone who participated in the #AskAtikuYourself#...Click the link and engage by selecting the most important questions to you and hear my answers.*Ask Atiku Yourself Part 3* (Posted 13-02-19).

T3:Thank you
Lagos.#PDPLagosRally#LetsGetNigeriaWorkingAgainhttp://
youtu.be/MTuGWubGOs(posted 06-02-19).

T5: I will be making a broadcast on twitter and Facebook at
9am tomorrow.Tune in. (posted 08-02-19)

T6: I am saddened by the loss of lives at the APC presidential
rally in Jalingo, Taraba State today .All lives matter. May God
comfort their families and...

Videos are audio-visual semiotic resources that aid in making information more concrete. The use of video within this context is also a means of showing authenticity of the information passed on to net speakers. In T3 above, videos are used to answer questions on very important issues. T3 and T5 are displays of the mammoth turnout and success in his rally and also an address to Christians and Muslims keying his themenon-bias to the different religious groups in the country. T7 is a video showing tolls of death recorded at the APC presidential rally. As much as Atiku tries to show sympathy, lot of indicting meanings are embedded in the video as a way of purging a form of negative emotions from the viewers portraying a bad omen should the APC presidential candidate be elected to lead the nation. If a rally went wrong, could that be telling us something?

4.2 Examining contextual features

Social interactions within Atiku's twitter handle is computer mediated but contains some features of face to face group interaction such as group norms, a common ideology, creation of identity, the use of language, and self -representation among other things. It must be noted that participants within twitter discourse are technology savvy individuals including adults familiar with computer mediated discourse. The discussions within the page show the level of proficiency of language users. The posts are written in Standard English while comments are written using emoticons, coinage, and

visual images typical of CMC platforms. It is also necessary to point out that the use of these coinage by participants to some extent is to foreground what their presidential candidates stand but outside the campaign, this do not reflect their linguistic system in everyday language use (Crystal, 2004). Since Twitter is a public platform, we must not fail to recognize also that there are some spelling irregularities which reflect individuals' level of education and linguistic competence. Words that were commonly abbreviated include; you (u), and (n), your (ur), this (dis), are (re, r) have (hv) before (b4). Other creative manipulations typical of CMD include hahahaha, lol, oooo.

C4: Bukar Tijjani: We pray to God that people with desperation and bad political records will never rule us again... Ya Allah ka amsa mana adduarmu. Amen (posted 20-02-19).

C7: Iiyasu a Iiyasu: Ameen Allah yabaka abin dakake nema da lahira

C8: Rahab Ngai Adegbola: Yes oooo I am Atikulated

C9: No worries Insha Allah u r there

Comment 4 is partly written in Hausa while Comment 7 is exclusively written in Hausa. The use of Hausa language, to express thoughts in this context is to construct identity considering the fact that Atiku is from the Northern part of the country. In C1, C2 AND C8 also, the netuser switches from Standard English to coinage show his solidarity as a typical Nigerian. C8 is a typical example of social media language. The use of oooo also depicts the unique linguistic system of the platform. Followers of Atiku's page are mostly Nigerians ranging from very educated to semi-educated net users. Switching from Standard English to coinage by elision or substitution is to create a meaning uniquely associated and attributed to their presidential aspirant and his vice. The preponderance of its (coinage) usage is

typical in this platform as it also used to create group cohesion, conformity and express solidarity. ATIKUlated, OBIdiently, and Insha Allah are linguistic elements present within this context used to create effective participation across ethnic groups.

Conversational pattern

As part of strategy for political mobilization, the Facebook through a one-many pattern of conversation is a resource tool for fostering political motives. Interaction in this context is between the page author (Atiku) and followers (friends), and among followers (friends to friends). Interactivity is important as it promotes the concept of democracy. It is effective as it allows people to air their views and reinforce solidarity for their political actor through turn taking. Through conversational contributions, interlocutors also exert dominance and show solidarity in various kinds of interactions (Tannen, 1993).

The conversation in the Ts and Csas illustrated in this study are directed to a lot of people at the same time. The conversational pattern here is such that many people are directly referred to at the same time. In the posts, Atiku updates information that are directed to members of his page. These generate responses from net users within the context. The presence of this type of interactive routine in conversation, operating most effectively when the speaker addresses a known audience, allows speakers to effectively select less explicit forms of reference, such simple noun phrases, deixis, anaphors and direct reference pronominals (Hemphil 2011). This accounts for the preponderance of 'you', 'our', 'we', 'the' as reflected in the comments. Through group chat, Atiku is able to update contents that gradually develop as norms which structure group interactions. Thus by introducing the 'Ask Atiku yourself' initiative, other netspeakers are able to expose other parts of their private lives. The strategy of

constructive turn taking above serves to elicit the emotive perspectives of netspeakers within the page.

Conclusion

The study carried out a multimodal discourse analysis of Atiku Abubakar's twitter updates in order to examine the role of the social media in fostering civic engagements in the 2019 general elections. The analysis was carried out by investigating the role of Twitter automated designs in communication, analysis of some context of communication and some linguistic codes used in the platform. Result from the study shows that Twitter is a strong tool for political engagement and extensively used by political leaders in order to integrate the masses towards a participatory government thus Social issues as an instrument should be used extensively by politicians during e-campaigns to sustain a strong presence in the virtual sphere.

References

- Adomi, E.E. (2005). Internet development and connectivity in Nigeria's program. *Electronic Library and Information Systems*, 39(3), 255-268.
- Ashley, H. (2009). *Change at hand: web 2.0 for development*. Illinois: IEED.
- Barnett, M. & Zanni, B. (2014). *Political and civic engagements: A theoretical perspective*. (Eds). New York: Routledge.
- Benedek, W. & Mathias, C. (2014). *Freedom of expression and the Internet*. Paris: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Bimber, B. (2001). Information and political engagement in America: The search for effects of information technology and the individual level. *Political Science Research Quarterly*, 54 (1), 53-57.

- Bjorkvall, A. (2009). Practical function and meaning: A case study of IKEA tables. In C. Jewitt.(Ed),*Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*(Pp. 242-252). New York: Routledge.
- Chiluwa, I. (2012). Citizenship, participation and CMD: The case of Nigeria. *Pragmatics and society*, 3(1), 61-68.
- Crystal, D. (2004). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummings, J. N., Butler, B., & Kraut, R. (2002). The quality of online social relationships. *Communications of the ACM*, 45(7), 103-108.
- Dominic, A. (2013). Social identity and groups. In J. Levine. (Ed). *Group processes*(Pp. 267-296). New York: Routledge.
- Eisenlauer, V. (2013). *A Critical Hypertext Analysis of Social Media. The True Colours of Facebook*. London: Continuum.
- Eko, L. (2012). *New media case regimes: Case studies in comparative communication, law and policy*. Maryland: Lexington books.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Arnold
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. & Fairclough, I. (2013). *Political discourse analysis: A method for advanced students*. London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. and Wodak, R. (2007) Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. Van Dijk (Ed), *Discourse as social interaction*(258-284). Sage: London.
- Fuschs, C. (2013). *Social media: A critical introduction*. London: Sage.
- Gulati, G. & Williams, C.B. (2007). Closing the gap, raising the bar: Candidate website communication in the 2006 campaigns for Congress. *Social Science Computer Review*, 25(4), 443-465.
- Gunther, K. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. New York: Francis & Taylor.

- Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeoisie society*. (T. Burger Trans). Massachussets: The MIT Press.
- Hacker, K., Coombs, M., Weaver, C. & McCulloh, G. (2006). Possible use of blogs and computer mediated communication for depolarizing political discourse. *Paper presented to the communication and technology division of the international communication association*. Dresden, Germany.
- Halliday, M. A. K & Mathiessen, C. (2004). *Introduction to functional grammar*. (3rd ed) London: Arnold.
- Hamilton, A. & Tolbert, C. (2012) political engagement in the internet in 2008 US presidential elections: a panel survey. In E. Perea, & M. Jensen. (Eds), *Digital engagement worldwide: A comparative study* (Pp. 58-79). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Herring, S. C. (2013). Discourse in Web 2.0: Familiar, reconfigured, and emergent. In D. Tannen & A. M. Trester. (Eds), *Discourse 2.0: Language and new media*. (Pp. 1-25). Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Herring, S. C. (2014). Language and the Internet in W. Donsbach. (Ed), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. Retrieved on 06-07-15 from <http://ellashs.indiana.edu/herring/concise.pdf>.
- Herring, S.C. (2015). New frontiers in interactive multimodal communication. In A. Georgopoulou & T. Spilloti (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language and digital communication*. London: Routledge.
- <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://twitter.com/ati ku>

- Ifukor, P. (2010). *Linguistics and socio-cultural dynamics in computer mediated communication: Identity, intertextuality and politics in Nigerian Internet and SMS discourse*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). Germany: University of Osnabruck.
- Iwokwagh, N. & Okworo, G. (2012). Social media and citizen engagement in the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria. *Paper presented at the international conference on communication, media, technology and design*. Istanbul. Pp. 380-387.
- Jewitt C. (2012). An introduction to multimodality. (Ed), *Handbook of multimodal analysis*. (2nd.ed). London: Sage.
- Kitchener, M. J. & Kuschin, K. (2009). Getting political on social network sites. Exploring online political discourse on Facebook. *First Monday*, 4(11). Retrieved 10-05-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v14.i11.2645>
- Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images*: (2nd.ed). London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A socio semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- LeVine, P. & Scollon, R. (2004). Multimodal discourse analysis as the confluence of discourse and technology. (Eds). *Discourse and Technology: Multimodal discourse analysis*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Makana, R. (2014, July 20). E- Campaigns and social media election. Frontiers of smart communication. *Dailytimesnewspaper*. Retrieved on, 1-11-2017 from www.dailytimesnewspaper.com
- Mikhail, K. (2013). *From utterance to speech acts*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Miller, V. (2010). New media, networking and phatic culture in P. Nayar (Eds), *The new media and cyber cultures anthology*.
- Milto, K. & Berks, E. (2012). E-communication articulation and online identity. In W. Stevens. (Ed). *Digital identity and social media*. New York: Bloomsbury.