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Visual-Textual Tactics and Negative Representation in Digital Cartoons: A Case Study of the 2019 Presidential Election

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Abstract

During presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, online media platforms deploy cartoons as strategies to underrate perceived opposition candidates. This study therefore explores how political cartoons served as subtle rhetorical tools to discredit, disparage unpopular candidates and project preferred presidential contestants by the media, particularly in mainstream newspapers via the use of imagery. Existing works have extensively addressed media framing and political communication during electioneering. However, much of this research works underplay the intersection between strategic media marketing, applied negatively, and the visual representation of political figures. This calls for an interdisciplinary fusion of verbal and non-verbal communication in imagery and language analysis. Three online news platforms: Punch, Daily Trust (DT) and BusinessDay (BD) were purposely selected because of their consistent and relevant political cartoon publications. Six political cartoons derived between November, 2018 and February 2019, representing two major political actors, Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), were purposively chosen because of preponderance of publications on them. Findings reveal that cartoonists employed sarcasm, exaggeration, and symbolism to damage the reputation of certain candidates, reinforce stereotypes, and promote voter cynicism. Notably, cartoons depicting President Muhammadu Buhari and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar elicit critical imagery to shape public perceptions, potentially influencing voter attitudes. The study highlights how cartoons served as subtle instruments of political strategy and public perception shaping during democratic contests.

Keywords: Semiotics, Election, Cartoons, Media, Multimodality

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1. Introduction

Presidential elections in Nigeria are always a time for serious campaigns for different candidates, using all means available, including cartoon publications in the newspapers. An important aspect of the campaigns is the way newspapers engage all means discreetly to convince voters to cast their votes for their preferred candidates.

The media is one of the channels where language use is engaged for proper information; hence, the way discourse is used in the media is quite significant. This is because the profession deals with humanity directly via reports and visual publications. Media discourses contain emotional and persuasive contents used to pass information, directly or indirectly, objectively or subjectively, it can similarly be used to influence the public's perceptions, actions, either true or untrue or distort existing facts or reality (O'Keffee, 2011). Discourses may be taken or rejected by the target audience based on some parameters ranging from beliefs, loyalty, values, tastes, religion and ethnicity to other reasons (Olowu, 2015). Media discourses can have a long range of consequences on the understanding readers give a particular message in verbal or non-verbal language use in the print. This is because evaluations differ from person to person, especially in any multi-ethnic environment. In other words, media discourse strategies may either be designed to be propaganda or an ideology for a target purpose which depends on the interpretations and the understanding of various parameters attached to the items used. In some instances, language use in the media can be to obfuscate reality and distort subjectivity or reports (White, 1997). These parameters are structures which determine the strategies in any discourse analysis of objects and written form (van Dijk, 1995).

Cartoons are one of the means of communication used in the media, though, many readers may not take cognisance of them. Some readers may perceive them as objects of entertainment but this is absolutely contentious as there are many messages now inherent in these visual communications beyond just entertainment (Kress, 2003). Cartoons have been described as metaphorical codification of mental ideas (Eko, 2007). They are effective ways of disseminating discourse and mental display of ideologies associated with any medium of communication. Eko (2007) affirms that cartoons are broadsheet works of art which are among the most evident indexes of post-cold war in African political freedom. These socially relevant works of art leave an indelible psychological mark in the minds of readers more than the words they read. Cartoons are believed to be sources of entertainment (Omosebi, 2021), criticism (Jimoh, 2010) and means of fighting political oppressions (Eko, 2007), (El-Falaky, 2019) and (Akpati, 2019).

The study analysed the visual-textual modes used to represent political actors in order to camouflage the prospective tendencies each candidate has in the election and to subtly convince the voters to modify their choices towards a specific candidate in the 2019 presidential general election.

Some textual studies have been conducted on political campaigns in Nigeria and one of such is Soetan (2012) which aligns with the fact that, part of the electioneering influence in Southwest is the engagement of music during campaigns where different styles and methods politicians adopt in ensuring victory after election are displayed. This is close to what Sunday (2021) examines with the use of hate speeches and other propaganda publications to tackle the opponents and gain the favour of the electorate through the sociognitive analysis of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Character assassination, verbal assaults dominated the exchanges during the electioneering in which the two leading political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) got involved in a bid to discredit one another. The paper opined that shared mutual knowledge played significant roles in the hate speech patterns adopted by the two parties, the result of which frightened the electorate. Ojekwe (2016) shares a different opinion as regards electioneering in Nigeria, a typical example of the general election which was

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conducted in Lagos State in 2015. During the time of Governor Akinwunmi Ambode, several election advertisements were played in the media, songs were written and posters were placed all around Lagos State. The study argues that voting behavioural patterns in the citizens are less affected via all these campaign strategies.

These studies did not focus on the functionalities of visual effects and the multimodal textual influences cartoons could have on voters' choices during electioneering. Therefore, this paper investigates how visual-textual options are deployed in online cartoons during the 2019 presidential campaigns. It specifically identifies the visual-textual options which generate meanings in the sampled cartoons, the representational forms of the political actors and analysed the text through the Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Social Semiotic Approach.

2. Literature review

2.1 Cartoons in Political Communication

Political cartoons are prevailing visual texts which combine creativity and thoughts to evaluate, inform, and incite public discourse on political interactions. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) view them as rhetorical strategies that use visual shorthand to sway political opinions. Conner (2005) also posits their convincing potential in shaping political culture. In Nigeria, Oso (2012) and Fashiku (2017) submit that the communication inherent in cartoons extend beyond ordinary humor, functioning as thoughtful expressions that reproduce and influence electoral politics. However, many of these studies represent styles and symbolism over the premeditated use of cartoons as tools of political interactions—especially in online publications. This study fills that space by exploring how online cartoons shaped visual communication during the 2019 presidential election.

2.2 Representation of Political Actors in Online Media

Representation of political players in media landscapes explains how audiences perceive political reality. According to Hall (1997), media do not simply represent reality; rather, they construct it by selecting and organizing images in ways that define identities and meanings. McNair (2011) affirms that in online media, representation of ideas becomes more inclusive and participatory, with users contributing to the reading of political meanings. In Nigeria, Okon (2018) notes that digital materials, including cartoons and other images, have become political expressions and analysis. Despite this, academic searchlight is still largely blurred towards textual analysis, with visual digital representations, such as cartoons, receiving less attention. This research addresses that gap by analyzing the representation of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar in online political cartoons.

2.3 Negative Strategies in Political Cartooning

The concept of denigrating political opponents has evolved as a political strategy involving the deliberate discrediting of perceived opposition (Kotler & Levy, 1971). In image communication, this is done through mockery, character misrepresentation, and strategic negative framing. Nwabueze (2013) and Odebunmi (2016) explain that satire in Nigerian media publications often employs negative and de-marketing strategies to ridicule perceived opponents. Cartoons, therefore, become visual fields where ideological battles are fought using exaggeration and mockery. Furthermore, Omoera (2010) posits that this strategy is predominantly persuasive during election cycles. Nevertheless, few studies methodically consider this phenomenon in digital political cartoons, an oversight this study attempts to correct.

2.4 Satire, Political Cartoons, and Democratic Engagement

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Satire serves as autonomous channels by holding power accountable and stimulating public engagement. Holbert (2005) submits that satirical media increase political consciousness, especially among younger persons. Baym (2005) and Baumgartner and Morris (2008) argue that satire fosters critical political thinking, particularly in environments of media distrust. In Nigeria, cartoons act as democratic platforms that demystify complex political issues and encourage public discourse (Akinwalere, 2013; Edegoh et al., 2018). Despite this, visual satire is often judged as mere entertainment. This study reconstructs it as a form of discourse that contributes to democratic engagement, visual and image analysis in the 2019 presidential election cartoons.

2.5 Visual-textual properties in Cartoons

In modern political communication, cartoons are progressively becoming more multimodal. In other words, they elicit more meanings than before. Eko (2007) adds that political cartoons as rhetoric weapons serve as visual struggle, assessment, and satire. Furthermore, they represent revolutionary tactics where perceived opponents are depicted through the mirror of metaphor, symbolism, and textual analysis. In order to buttress this claim, Oloruntoba and Adeyanju (2013) emphasize the role of editorial cartoons as reflections of citizen cynicism, while Adejuwon and Alimi (2011) explore their expansive functions and contributions in electoral processes. Furthermore, cartoonists, within the media space, have traditionally deployed visual metaphors rooted in deep cultural idioms, local allegory, and socio-political critique (Olaniyan, 2014). These works are not merely amusing but serve as critical evaluations of governance, corruption, and political incompetence.

According to the views expressed by Alao and Ekerikevwe (2020), during election seasons, political cartoons often adopt negative representations, portrayal of candidates through frames of ineptitude, corruption, or inconsequence. Such strategies combine visual exaggeration, using communication modes such as uneven facial features, clothing, appearance with sarcasm, and other textual cues to ridicule political players. The 2019 presidential election in Nigeria, branded by divergence, party rivalry, and social media battle, provided prolific ground for such representations.

However, most of the existing studies have focused on conventional print cartoons, often overlooking the digital aspect. Moreover, many studies concentrate on broad themes geared towards bad governance, corruption, and policy failures without extracting the multimodal strategies used in framing political actors, especially in time of electoral contexts. As digital media platforms increasingly recognise political engagement, the specific campaigns employed in online cartoons require closer scholarly attention.

3. Theoretical framework and techniques

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's Multimodal Social Semiotic Approach, complemented by M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, served as the framework. The term multimodality simply means meaning-making from different possible modes (Liu, 2013). Multimodality holds that people converse and interact with each other, not just through letters (which is one mode) but also through utterance, gesture, gaze, and visual forms (which are other modes) that appear in a text. It also looks at the many different modes that people use to communicate with each other and to express themselves. Additionally, the term multimodality simply means making out meanings from diverse modes. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) assume that representation, colour, music, lettering and other visual modes are like language and they can concurrently fulfil and realize the three broad communicative metafunctions as language does (Ojoawo, 2016). In their view, image and other visual modes can represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system (Halliday, 1985). Furthermore, there are many ideational choices available for visual sign-making in visual communication. Halliday holds that language is a semiotic mode and any semiotic mode has to represent three communicative band metafunctions,

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namely ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction. Based on Halliday‘s submission, Kress and Van Leeuwen use a slightly different terminology in discussing the meaning of image in visual communication: representational instead of ideational; interactive instead of interpersonal; and compositional instead of textual (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2016). The verbal-textual cues de--ployed in Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have great influence on the representational functions of visual-textual modes represented in the images sampled in this paper.

Modes are socially made and culturally available material, that is, semiotic resources for representation. Image, gesture, gaze, posture, and media such as screens, 3D forms of various kinds, books, notes and notebooks are modes in representation. Social semiotics is concerned with the social meanings constructed through the full range of semiotic forms, through semiotic texts and semiotic practices. (Hodge and Kress, 1988). As Jewitt and Oyama (1990) rightly asserts, it involves “the description of semiotic resources in terms of what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communication), and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted. Put differently, it relates to construction and interpretation of visuals. Participant refers to the ‘personality’ involved in the visual enterprise. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) recognise two types of participants in their framework. They are Represented participants and Interactive participants. Represented participants refer to the people, places and things that are represented or depicted in images and texts while Interactive participants denote producers of the images, texts, movies (e.g. painters, photographers, movie producers, etc.), viewers or readers, and other represented or depicted individuals. The frame in addition further recognises two different processes: narrative and conceptual. These processes are adopted to support the meaning evaluations in this paper.

Meanings in the cartoons were evoked using two processes: narrative and conceptual. While the narrative process explains the various actions performed by the represented participants in the cartoons and the matching speeches, the conceptual process attributes them to the connective events. Representation takes a de-marketing format, geared towards bringing down certain political actors. The negative representation of the candidate of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari, foregrounded bad leadership, corruption, poor policies, incompetence, religious and ethnic bigotry, insecurity and wickedness. Negative representation attributed to Atiku Abubakar of PDP tilted towards deception, economic mismanagement and corruption. The images conceptualised him as an unstable, corrupt and disobedient candidate. Salience, vector, colour, party emblems, facial expressions, social distance, accomplishments, shots, symbolism and attributives were used as visual cues. The textual cues evoked were affirmations, exclamations, sarcasm, verbalisations, metaphorisation, capitalisation, reference, interrogative statements, ellipsis, exaggeration, repetition, nominal and pronominal choices to complement meanings in the speech process. Affirmations were used for emphasis, capitalization for clarity and exaggerations for image enhancement.

4. Methodology

Three online news platforms: *Punch, Daily Trust* (DT) and *BusinessDay* were purposely selected because of their consistent and relevant political cartoon publications. Cartoons representing two major political actors, Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), were purposely chosen because of preponderance of publications on them and their mega parties status. Six political cartoons were selected through purposive sampling. The data were subjected to multimodal analysis for image and language interactions.

5. Results

Cartoon publications are increasingly used in Nigeria during presidential elections, especially as means of convincing the electorate. Their significance has tilted towards using the parasitic methods through education, entertainment, motivation and criticism to further expand the scopes of campaigns so as to

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connect voters from various ethnic backgrounds. Intense online campaigns had begun between November, 2018 and February, 2019 with each of the two political parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Party (APC) having their interests lobbied in various news platforms online.

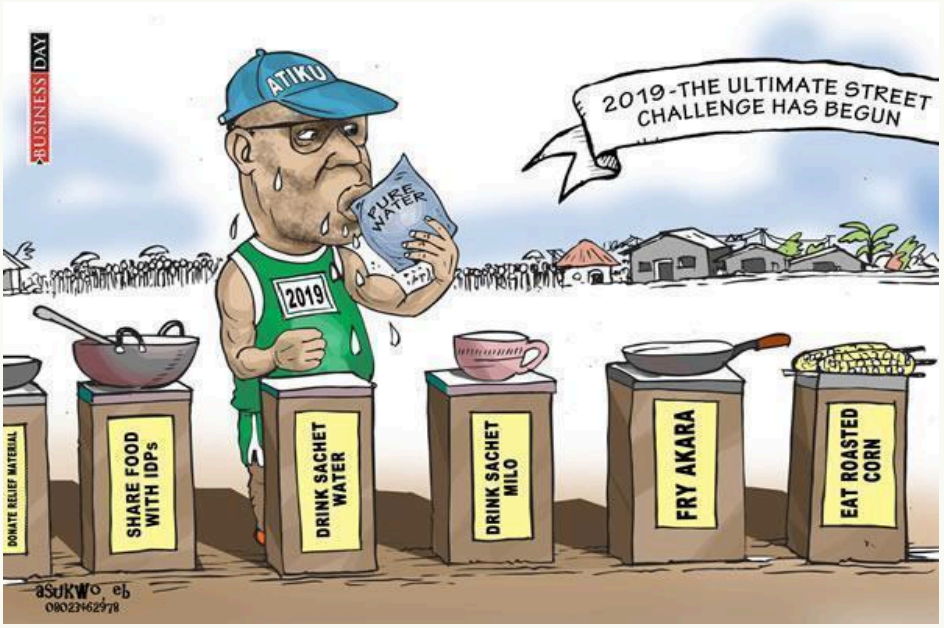
6. Strategies of Negative Representation

In attempts to prove to the prospective electorate reasons each of the candidates should not be voted for, online media platforms deployed different visual-textual strategies. In this analysis, attention is focused on how the de-marketing strategies were achieved via image engagements. The sampled cartoons reflect sociocultural and political contexts.

6.1 Representing PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar as a deceptive contestant

Atiku Abubakar was the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party in the presidential election. *BusinessDay* has not represented him in a good identity, hence the image below elicits strategies of announcing him as an unworthy candidate.

Excerpt 1



The cartoon tactically showcases the background information, using partly salient structures to transmit a message of ethnicity to voters. This is so because there are structures which have the northern, southern architectures at the background where the represented participant is standing. In his hands is a sachet of pure water and he appears in a sports dress which suggests he is into a race. The 2019 presidential race obviously has made him start sweating and despite the chilly sachet of water with him, he looks stressed and tired.

The event presented in the image reflects Atiku has some stools in front of him with various items, some edible, some non-edible; some have clear items displayed while others do not have visible items. All the stools are labelled with one item or the other. All these items are symbolic, in the sense that they all represent what the voters eat. The dialogue mode here presents activities common to political actors during electioneering, that is, they use items as bait to get votes. The same message is replicated with the items set before the candidate in the cartoon. The symbolic metaphor connecting these items to the voters presents the electorate as hungry citizens. The represented participant in the scene has a belief and that is the fact that the way to the hearts of the voters is food. Once they are given food items, they will be satisfied. An

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average voter in Nigeria is believed, according to the visuals presented, to be famished, therefore, he needs the items in exchange for his vote.

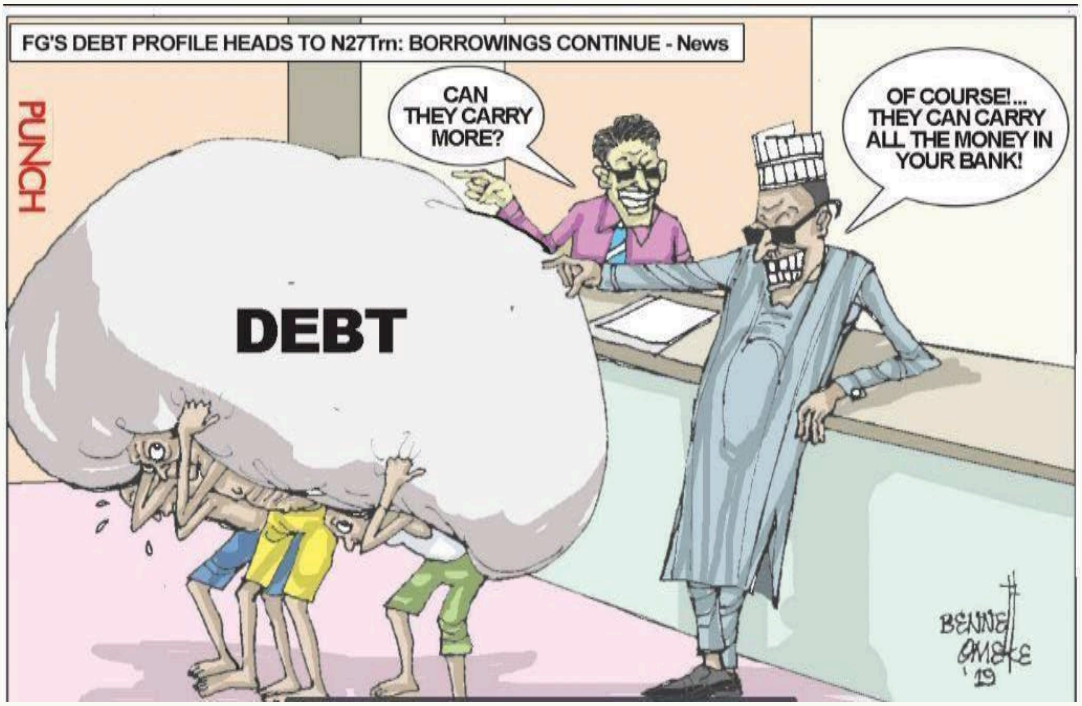
Apart from this, the reactional process denotes representation of response from the actor through the engagement of certain visual vectors. How these actions are performed is branded on the stools in front of the participant. This include; sharing food to internally displaced persons (IDPs), Frying of *Akara* (prepare fried beans cake), drink sachet water (this is done in order to level up with the socio-economic level of the voters), drink sachet Milo, eat roasted corns (which ordinarily may not be what the political actor likes eating), donate relief materials and so on. The semiotic representations here foreground the possible forms of behaviour of regular politicians in Nigeria who snap into action only on election periods.

Furthermore, the textual modes extend its meaning exchange with how the headline is carved in a ribbon-like design, a vector that connects the event to the normal race activities in sport. The verbal complement reads: 2019- THE ULTIMATE STREET CHALLENGE HAS BEGUN. The adjectival options used here have classified the election as the biggest out of all the elections, since it is classified as the ultimate. This implies an election which is very important even if all other ones did not. There is the use of nominal choice 'challenge' which connotes a contest where candidates would have to prove their worth and woo the prospective voters. The possible meaning to the nominal choice too could mean the cartoon headline places the candidates at the helpless position where they have to win based on what they can offer, their strength and perhaps, their resources. These resources are reflected in the visual representations. The cartoon has adopted communication modes to facilitate the character of Atiku as a deceptive presidential candidate.

6.2 Negative Representation of the APC candidate

Excerpt 2

Muhamadu Buhari was the candidate of the All Progressives Congress and the incumbent president of Nigeria who was seeking re-election into office in the 2019 presidential election race. His leadership styles were not what some media platforms supported, hence, he is presented as a candidate that should not be considered in the election by the electorate.



The image presents a number of participants, a major actor and some accomplishments. There are obviously-starved, emaciated participants represented to have carried a heavy load with a bold write up on it. The write up signifies debt and the loads have practically overwhelmed them heavily in such that they are seen famished, sweating and looking gaunt. This is presented as a result of the burden on them. Apart from that, there is another participant who smiles at the dilemma of the debt carriers. Visually, a white man is standing very close to the smiling represented personality. He looks happy too about the predicament of the carriers

The symbolic attribute engaged in the image connects the events together in such that going by the visual and the verbal complement; the image has represented the president of Nigeria, and candidate of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari. The relationship between the president and the burden bearers is asymmetrical in nature, that is, the status is painted unequal, and therefore, it is overtly classified. It implies the burden heaped on the people he governs in the first term he has been the president, his penchant for foreign loans has plunged the people into debt and hunger. The image engaged the use of colour separation, the debt bag is painted white for clarity, the verbal inscription on it is black, therefore, the cartoon paints a white background and a black write up which gives clarity. The salience is also obvious, the characters are well separated to identify the represented participants, the interactive participants and the accomplishment or the locatives. The salience also shows the modes engaged clearly while it is being assisted through the use of good framing. To further expand the meaning in the cartoon, good framing pattern was deployed. The framing pattern captures the event, all the characters in the image, the visual discourse modes, the gestures and the movements.

Apart from the aforementioned communication modes, the secondary participants bearing the burden of debt are three, and in Nigeria, there are three major ethnic groups prominent in the country: Hausa, Igba and Yoruba. The symbolism attaches the three secondary participants as the direct recipients of the borrowing action of the president. Meanwhile, to the chagrin of the interactive participants, the president does not really care about their state of devastation. He appears happy with the situation. This is adjudged based on the kinesics, the position of his mouth, the representation of his teeth and the smiling facial expressions. Therefore, position of the body movements is another visual communication mode engaged to further expand the meaning of each participant. The white man points to the direction of the three men who are secondary participants now, asking a question on whether they will be able to ‘carry ‘more loads of debts on them in addition to what they have on their heads. Already, symbolically, the country, as implied, is groaning under the burden of external and internal debts imposed on it. The locative is of the opinion, based on his gestures, the position of his hand, the facial expressions he puts up, that there could be more money to be borrowed if the country could bear the brunt. Therefore, this foregrounds a foreign body that grants loans to Nigeria, knowing well that the financial burden will be overwhelming and unbearable.

Two dialogue boxes are opened containing utterances from the primary participants. The first was the introduction of an interrogative statement, ‘Can they carry more?’. The interrogative statement alludes inquiry, looking at the stress the burden bearers are going through. Meanwhile, the linguistic choices of the APC candidate affirm, ‘of course, they can carry all the money in your bank’. The interrogative expression from the foreigner foregrounds sarcasm, used to mock the sweat of the three men who pine under the heavy burden and the reply of Muhammadu Buhari in the image admits that they are ready to take more money, therefore, adding to the burden of the masses. The statement is a metaphorical application. It expands the capacity of the burden by exaggerating the whole event. The main actor said they can carry all the money in the bank. This is an undue exaggeration which depicts Buhari as someone who magnifies event in order to suit his intention. Verbalization is freely deployed in the first and the second expressions.

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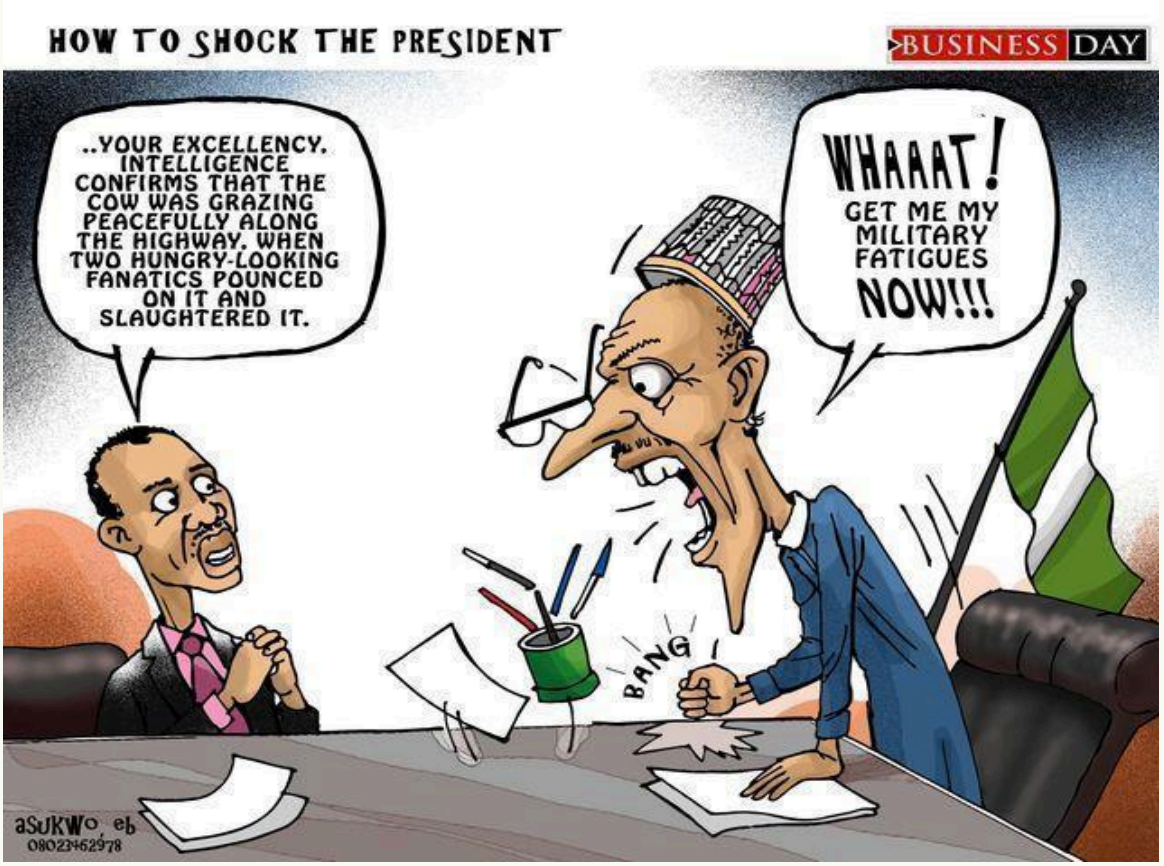
Also, exaggeration was used to support the linguistic cues. Buhari responds using the statement 'all the money…' statement to further exaggerate how much the country would want to take from the foreigner. His language use assumes the position of a careless, selfish leader who borrows loans at the expense of the people.

6.3 Representation of Buhari preference for cows over human lives

Excerpt 3



The visual representations here have some modes describing the projected characters. The image comprises a man who is referred to as 'Your Excellency'; apparently, the image identifies the character as the candidate of the APC and the incumbent president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari. There is a man reporting to him a situation involving a cow and a set of human beings who are referred to as hungry fanatics. A Nigerian flag with colour green-white-green is strategically placed in front of the main reacter in the scene. An asymmetrical relationship is established between Buhari and the man giving the report. The position of the hands shows a character that exemplifies subordinate gestures which is a symbolic attribute showcasing low self-worth. The position of the character shows he is kneeling to present his report to the president which confers on him the identity of a man of lower worth. The cartoon symbolically places a well-dressed, educated participant kneeling for a man who is dressed in his native attire. To put this in a different light, the secondary participant is presented in a suit, tie and a pink shirt, this implies a formal education, the position of the man in suit foregrounds how the administration has relegated formal education. The symbolic attribute also explains the economic status of the secondary participant. His neck is long and the stature shows a hungry-infested individual, yet, in order to prove his loyalty to Buhari, he refers to others as hungry-looking fanatics. Metaphorically, the image represents him

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as a hungry-looking individual. The locative used in the conceptual process shows the secondary participant as a connective character useful to the analysis in the setting.

Body kinesics is significant to the image. The facial expressions of both primary and secondary participants show anger, disappointment, vengeance and resentment. On the part of the secondary participant, the facial expression implies fear and trepidation, low self-esteem which means the character gave his report with an expression of trepidation. His eyes are dilated using a mode that depicts someone who does not know what may come after giving his reports. The shape of his mouth confirms this because it remains open. The facial appearance of the president also shows anger at the report. His glasses flipped as a result of his anger and his eyeballs popped out, his cap pops from the head with a good visible distance from the head roof, his mouth is wide open, expressing his interjectory visual display and his hand banging the table with heavy hits.

The primary reacter, Muhammadu Buhari, has used a salient action process to show he is interested in the lives of cows more than the fanatics his secondary participant reported to him. The image symbolically represents him as a leader who prefers cows to human lives. The action process buttresses the symbolic attribute used in the actions. The symbolic attribute also shows some visual engagements represented with items such as pens in a cup, table and sheets of paper. These items represent the president as the leader of cows, which may be a good way of demarketing him, since he has not really shown a trait that can integrate the country or present him as a candidate who values the security of the prospective voters.

The verbal complement has a number of metaphors in it. From the secondary participant, a statement is credited, ‘YOUR EXCELLENCY, INTELLIGENCE CONFIRMS THAT THE COW WAS GRAZING PEACEFULLY ALONG THE HIGHWAY, WHEN TWO HUNGRY-LOOKING FANATICS POUNCED ON IT AND SLAUGHTERED IT’. There is a descriptive expression used to describe the state of the cow and the two fanatics who killed it. The use of the nominal word ‘intelligence’ in the expression confirms a misplaced priority of the president who wastes intelligence gathering on perky state matters while other prominent matters are neglected. The fact that the nominal option connects the verbal word ‘confirms’ is a reflection that much effort was put into finding out who killed the cow. There is also a defensive adverbial usage with the use of the word ‘Peacefully’. The expression that the cow was grazing peacefully shows that the preference was given to the cow more than the human beings. The use of ‘peacefully’ also collocates with the status given to the cow in the administration. There is an adjectival usage with the use of ‘hungry-looking’ which is a language choice that collocates the low preference given to human lives in the administration. As the election draws near, the cartoon has used language to describe the priority of the candidate of the APC.

The primary actor in the image, Muhammadu Buhari makes use of some verbal complement in terms of linguistic choices. In the expression: WHAAAT! GET ME MY MILITARY FATIGUES NOW!!!The introductory choice in his expression confirms he is surprised humans could slaughter a cow without any caution. The emphasis is placed on two different interjections: ‘whaat!’ and ‘Now!’ The two words imply a strong attachment with the subject of discussion. Another way of projecting the candidate of the APC in a wrong light is his request for his military fatigues because a cow was killed. The statement is metaphorical in the sense that it portrays the president as a misguided leader. A military uniform is supposed to be used for different national assignments and not something to be worn in order to defend a dead cow. This is sarcastic on the part of the cartoon. There is also verbalization that gives a command in order to express more actions. The verbal word ‘get’ alludes urgency on the part of the president. The linguistic choices place the textual balance to support the visual cues the image projected. A demarketing tendency is practically salient in the cartoon.

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6.4 Representation of PDP candidate as a Backward Option for Voters

Excerpt 4



Both verbal and non-verbal cues are engaged in the image sampled here. The image shows the two candidates represented, Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar struggling against each other for less obvious reasons. There is a car with an inscription of Nigeria, the car is painted in green colour, and it fumes at the back of the exhaust pipe. One of the back tires is rammed and it looks imbalanced while one of the doors of the car has been battered, it is not closing. A candidate in the representation of Muhammadu Buhari is seen popping out of the car and pointing to Atiku Abubakar who is standing in front of the moving car. There is a conceptual process here. The car is a symbolic attribute of what the country looks like under the candidate of the APC, Buhari who was the president as of that time. The rickety car is a symbolic representation of the state of the nation under him.

The car is depicted as rickety with a wobbled tire, yet he wants to keep driving it to a next level he is not sure the car will reach. Incidentally, the attention is not on the wobbled car and the deplorable state of it, he keeps revving it. This is another symbolic mode used to show where the priority of the president is. The meaning exchange translates to desperation for victory in the election and not the deplorable state of the country. While this desperation was captured, the image also projects another significant interpretation that is essential to the crux of the nation. The position that is engaged in the image is a reflection of his stand when the issue of development is concerned. Postures and positions are verbal modes which are parts of the narrative processes. The actor is seen popping out of the car and obviously warning the opposition to steer clear of his way. The position shows an active car, based on the bellowing smoke from the exhaust pipe. This state of the car needs the driver to be concentrative at this time but the president is not in the car. His head and part of his body are out of the car. It transmits the metaphorical adventure of a distracted presidential candidate.

Atiku Abubakar is represented using the money in his pocket to foreground a rich candidate. While he is standing, obstructing the ‘progress’ of the car (nation), the money he has is used as a mental process to depict a character who uses his money to push the nation back from progress. Money collocates influence

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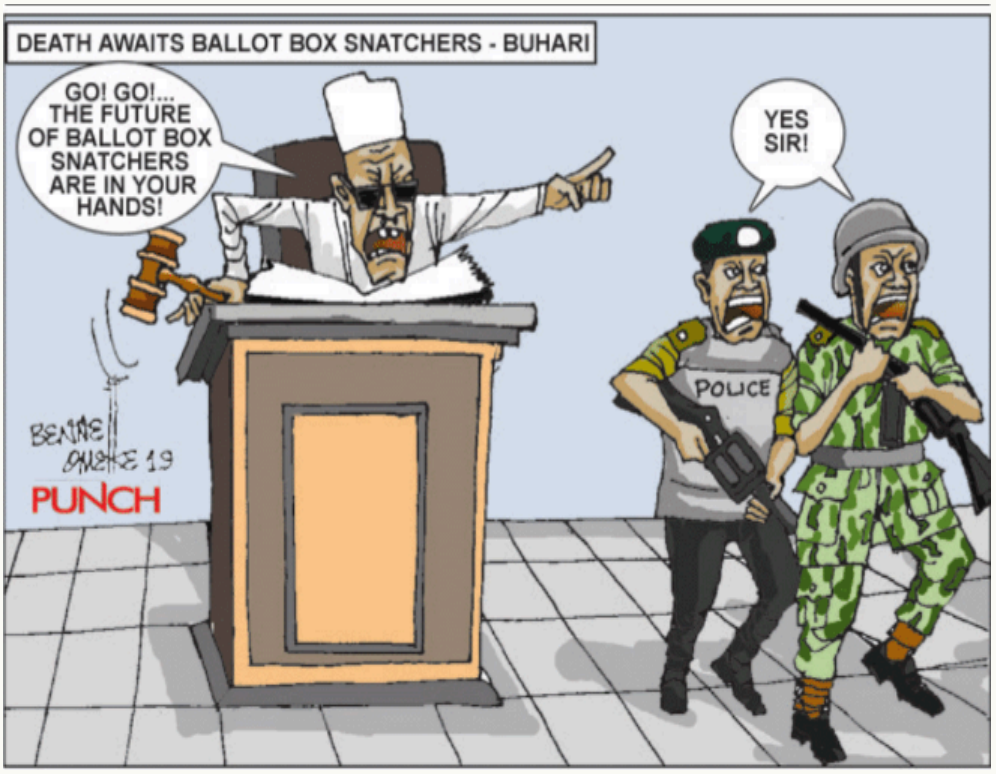
and the possession of it is translated to power. Therefore, it is suggestive that the PDP candidate has money but his source of wealth was meant to influence retrogression for the country. It suggests a way of demarketing him.

The textual submission adopts the use of interrogative statements and affirmation. The simple sentence 'I am taking us to the next level' used by the APC candidate depicts good intention which is a subtle way of selling him to the voters. The 'next level' as used here represents the political mantra of the president and it is a good semantic exchange to drive positivity for the APC candidate. However, the PDP candidate engages affirmation and interrogative sentences 'which level? This interrogative statement is sarcastically deployed to push beyond a polar question. Rather, it is more of a dare interrogation. It affirms his intention by informing the other representative his direction of movement. Logically, the use of the pronoun 'I' is common to both parties but while the other one exhumes positivity, the latter exhumes negativity. Thereby, their pronominal choice was used to command different meanings.

However, the position of the image favours the candidate of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari who seems to be the front-goer. Atiku's stance of moving the vehicle back has not really portrayed him as a suitable candidate in the election.

6.5 Representation of APC Candidate as a Tyrant

Excerpt 5



Basically, the narrative process has recorded a lot of visual communication in this image, coupled with the verbal complement. The idea begins with a metaphorical representation of the candidate of the APC in the general election, Muhammadu Buhari who is seen sitting on a bench used as an indicator of the court. The seat presents him as a judge. There are certain visual indicators used to confirm this, the gavel in his hand and the movement of the object. There are two Goals represented in the form of a soldier and a police officer fully armed to the teeth and the image presents them as people who have just received an order. The image uses a reactionary process to represent a character sitting on the seat which should have been used by a judge. There is a problem identified in the representation. The representation does not align with the

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position the man occupies, the candidate is contesting, therefore, should not have been the one sitting to judge the case in which he is involved.

Also, the reactor is not a judge, it can be implied that the position where he occupies is a wrong location which suggests that he usurps the responsibilities of the Judiciary. This action foregrounds a president who has dislodged the judiciary to occupy its position giving orders. The absence of a judge on that seat is an implicit representation of a situation where the judiciary is cowed and conquered. In a court of law, there should be lawyers who will defend a case, then, a judge will rule on the case, this is not what is represented here. There is no lawyer, nor any advocate, only the president ruling on a matter which involves him. The reactions ironically depict an angry candidate, a person who is determined to enforce his rulings, using state resources. The facial expression speaks of resentment, anger and order. He opens his mouth agape, a reaction that suggests he is shouting. This is coupled with the direction of his hand and fingers. The hand is extended in a full length and the finger is further extended to restate his stance on the order he has given. The reactionary process also shows an action that sees the gavel hitting the table, based on the lines of vector used to reflect the movement of the gavel. The action processed a presidential candidate who has given his judgement irrespective of what anyone says based on the movement of the gavel.

Another visual cue in the image is the dark sun shade he wears while delivering his judgement. The shade has not revealed his eyes and that is a symbolic attribute which conceptually processes a man who gives orders blindly, not considering the aftermath.

The book in front of him implies multiple rulings he has given, just only a page has been checked and delivered. In other words, the president may not really stop his actions of issuing rulings without the judiciary as the book pages are still many. Therefore, it can be said that since the pages in front of him are seen half way, it projects a visual metaphor that foregrounds a first term, second term representations. The first part of the book represents the first term he has used and the ones he is yet to open symbolise the second term he is trying to get. However, what the interactive participants should expect in the second chapter of the book is sampled, using him to represent a judge with a dark shade.

Additionally, the secondary participants in the image in forms of security agents are seen facing front without looking at where the order is coming from. They are represented using the movements of the legs as visual engagements to confirm a forward movement. Their position speaks of battle and this is connective to the position in which they back the ‘judge’. The represented secondary participants have used a back-side position to show that they do not want to consider where the order is coming from, but to execute it. The colour on the first secondary representative shows a Nigerian colour, green-white-green, the uniform depicts a Nigerian soldier, while the second secondary participant has a tag of police on his jacket. They both hold guns which are vectors eliciting force, either the order given to them is right or wrong.

For each visual mode engaged, there are certain textual balances. In the speech process, the Sayers have different perspectives. The main primary participant who is the ‘judge’ in the scene has an Utterance he uses which reads; GO! GO!... THE FUTURE OF BALLOT BOX SNATCHERS IS IN YOUR HANDS! There is the use of exclamations here to establish the tyrannical pronouncements. The exclamation markers are deployed to reiterate exigency and a form of despotism. The verbal engagements are clearly used to depict an action of promptness and urgency, repeatedly sounded. This is confirmed with the use of the verb’ GO!’ repeatedly. The exclamatory markers are significant. The nominal expression ‘The future’ translates a metaphorical placement of power in the hands of the security personnel to deal ruthlessly with anyone seen snatching ballot boxes, meanwhile, without any exception or regards for their rights to fair hearing. The headline captures the compliment as it reads: DEATH AWAITS BALLOT BOX

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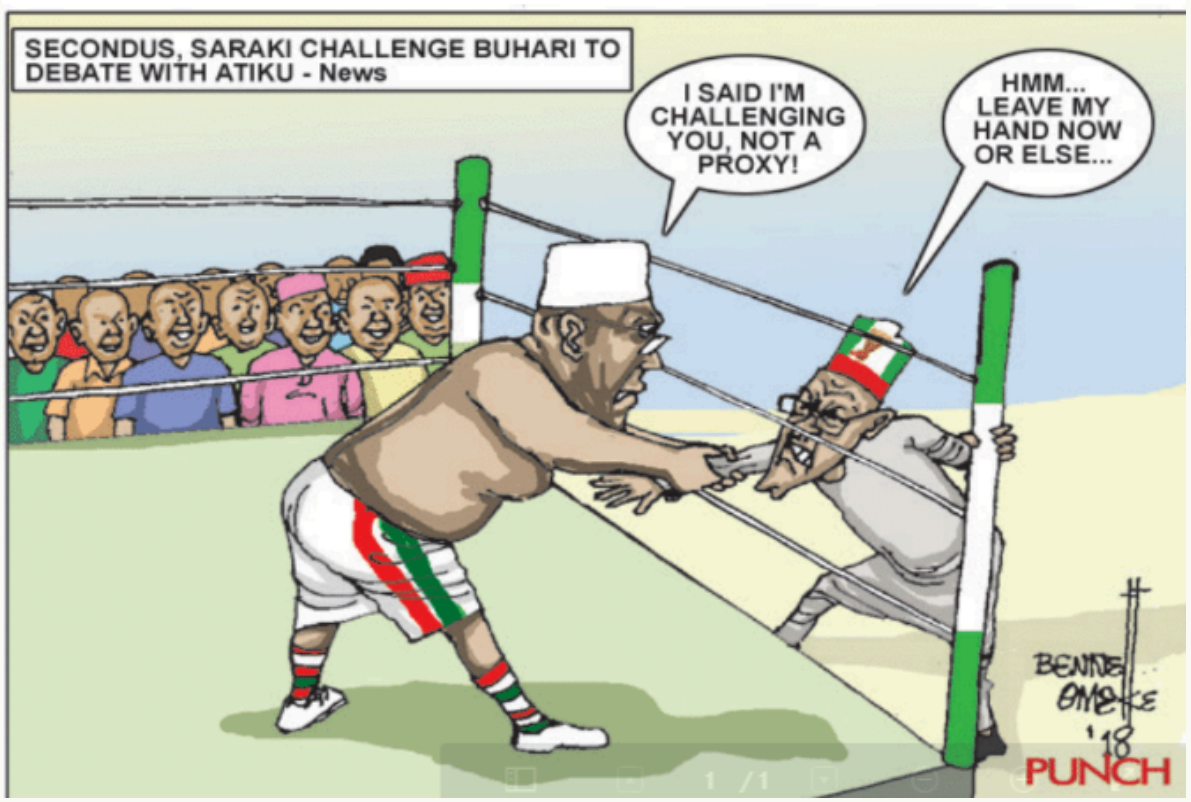
SNATCHERS--- BUHARI. The use of 'death' here is an allegorical representation of the ruling he has given and the collocation of the word 'future' which he uses in the previous expression. Therefore, it can be said that the nominal choice of FUTURE as used in the expression means death. Put differently, the president has ordered the security agents to exterminate anyone who snatches boxes during the 2019 election.

The expression puts a marker on the headline with the name of the APC candidate on it to seal the source of the expression. The idea is suggestive of what Buhari uses his office to do, especially issuing directives to security agents to kill Nigerians without a fair hearing. The utterance from the security agents admits the reception of the ruling as they both shouted YES SIR! Exclamation was deployed to respond to the previous commands given to them by the president. It is also recognition of an order to kill anyone who may be considered a ballot box snatcher, either innocent or not. The candidate of the APC is represented as dangerous to the rule of law in the country, therefore, the verbal-textual cues suggest disapproval of his ambition.

6.6 Representation of APC candidate as an Unqualified Option

Excerpt 6



In the cartoon depicted above, there are visual events which simulate further semantics beyond the literal interpretation of the cartoon. In the image, there is a ring, two represented participants, vectors represented with bars which reflect the Nigerian flag with the usual colour of green-white-green, a group of secondary participants called circumstances and an emblem of political parties as a short worn by a participant and as a cap worn by another participant. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) recognizes the use of vectors to identify what an Actor is doing in a scene of an event. The representative of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar, is seen in a sporty dress, ready for a 'fight' while the representative of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari, is seen in a native outfit which suggests the latter was not ready for the ring. The cartoon projects the candidate of PDP as being prepared for any contest and does the same to the APC candidate but with less thought. The idea of this poor representation is conceptually processed to be connected with the contestable

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qualification of Buhari at the time of the electioneering. The fact that he is in full *Hausa* attire metaphorically confers on him the identity of someone who is not really ready or qualified for the ring in the first instance. This is because the setting requires a smart contestant to establish readiness.

Also, the vector, represented by the ring bars, foregrounds the power of incumbency, which further confirms the position of the candidate of the APC and the reason he may be reluctant to join the ring. The cartoon establishes this by painting the bars with the Nigerian colour: green-white-green. The implication of this vector display was a president who hid under the power of incumbency to avoid any form of public debate. This is a representation of a candidate covered with suggestive visual expressions which have tacit negative undertones. Apart from this, there are various reactions captured in the image while the narrative process is on, these reactions are termed the reactional processes. Most of the represented reactors transmit transactional or non-transactional messages in the image, exchanging diverse messages, especially the reactor representing the APC. Buhari wears a scowl on his face and gnashes his teeth as he is being dragged forcefully into the ring by his co-contestant. The look on his face is transactional against his opponent, Atiku Abubakar. Both reactors are seen looking ambitious and defendant in their action processes and this is suggestive of the significance of the glances captured in the cartoon. Put differently, whenever there is a reaction from a reactor in a scene of an event, there will be an action and the receiver of such an action is referred to as a phenomena. The action in the cartoon represents Atiku Abubakar as the one throwing the action (reacted) while the candidate of the APC, Muhammadu Buhari is the phenomena (receiver of the action). The action represents both candidates as political rivals but processed Buhari as a candidate who is not prepared for the position he contests.

While the main action continues in the scene, certain participants are observed prominent in the image. These secondary participants are recognised as circumstances and by extension; they are indirectly related to the events. The impression is that, in every boxing ring, there must be fighters, a referee and the audience. The three triangular categories are very significant to the success of any match. The smiles on the faces of the locative circumstances deemed are transactional towards the representative of the APC which suggests sarcasm or mockery; many of them are seen laughing at the reluctant opponent, Muhammadu Buhari. Apart from this, the image represents them with different colours. They all wear clothes and different caps but with different colours which foregrounds a symbolic multi-ethnicity. The semantic extension is that the cartoon represents these circumstances as being non-literally less supportive of the candidate of the APC. In other words, the image has adopted these circumstances to pass a message of disapproval to the prospective voters.

Also, the accomplished circumstances are seen, all at the back of the candidate of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar. Conceptually, the notion of the viewers all lining up at the back of the candidate of the PDP suggests who the people should support during the coming election. They are all seen laughing at the reluctant candidate of the APC and the fact that no one is standing behind him in the representation confers on him the identity of a loser in progress. It is a good strategy of how manipulation can be used to influence the public's perceptions, actions, either true or untrue or distort existing facts or reality (O'Keffee, 2011).

It is of note that the emblems of the two parties are also symbolic. APC is represented by a broom while the PDP is represented by an umbrella. However, the cap on the candidate of APC has the logo of his party on his cap but the candidate of the PDP does not have anything on his cap. This suggests a deliberate use of salience to flash forward the object of target by the newspaper. The cartoon further engages size and prominence as tools of communication exchange. The size of Atiku Abubakar in the image is large compared to that of his opponent, Buhari. The inference that could be drawn from the asymmetrical

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representation is that the former possesses the capacity for governance; meanwhile, the latter lacks such capacity according to the image.

Apart from the visual modes explained, each mode in the cartoon is supported with a textual counterpart to further strengthen the narrative process enmeshed in the cartoon. When a candidate or a participant in a cartoon says a word, under the speech representation, the speaker is captured as a speaker while what he says is recognised as an utterance. It is observed the represented participant of the APC is reluctant to enter the ring, he fumes and expresses an utterance 'Hmmm…leave my hand now or else…', The participant of APC issues an utterance which connotes a threat to his rival while holding on to a vector which symbolises power of incumbency.

The threat by the APC participant was to cow his opponent who was not ready to be browbeaten. The sentence collocates with the suggestive threat that he was not ready to budge. What could be his fear is not really stated in the visual, but one can infer that it has to do with his level of intelligence which at that time was contestable. During the electioneering, Buhari was accused of not having any certificate to qualify him for such a presidential position. Hence, he is reactive by engaging a verb 'leave' deployed to ascertain his unwillingness. In his reply, it is inferred the candidate of the APC wanted to have his public debate using someone more intelligent than himself. This action, however, was not acceptable to the representative of the PDP, an action that prompted him to counter the initial intimidation. He, being another sayer, replied 'I said I'm challenging you. Not a proxy!' Affirmation and exclamation are prominently used in the textual property to confirm the position of readiness, determination and resilience on the part of the candidate of the PDP. However, the candidate of the APC adopts the use of the verb 'Leave' to confirm his reluctance. Specifically, he insisted the opponent should leave his hand alone, and that was supported with a threat in the textual engagement.

7. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the visual-textual strategies engaged in political cartoons by online news platforms during the 2019 presidential campaigns. The cartoons focused on visual strategies, embedded with textual nodes, representing selected candidates of the APC and PDP in negative identities in order to convince voters not to vote for them during the 2019 polls. The representational forms rely heavily on character painting, political antecedents and asymmetries. While *Punch* shows much 'dissatisfaction' towards the candidature of the candidate of the APC, *DailyTrust* and *BusinessDay* have played neutral but subjective roles towards the two candidates in question. *Punch* focused more on the wickedness of Buhari while *BusinessDay* and *DailyTrust* focused more on the corruption and retrogressive tendencies in both Muhammadu Bugari and Atiku Abubakar.

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