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## **Perception of the Rhetorical Strategies of Select Party Flag Bearers on Social Media during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election Campaigns**

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14031537>

### **Abstract**

This study was carried out to examine Edo State residents' perception of the rhetorical strategies used by select party flag bearers on social media during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns. The researchers employed the rhetoric theory, utilising a survey research design and questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The findings revealed that party flag bearers extensively employed rhetorical messages on social media, highlighting the significance of digital platforms in political communication. Multiple social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, were predominantly used by the flag bearers to implement their rhetorical strategies. These strategies encompassed derogatory/personal attacks, issue-based content, emotional appeals, voter mobilisation, grassroots engagement and transparency/accountability. Based on the results, it was recommended that political parties recognise the importance of rhetorical strategies on social media and provide training for their flag bearers in effective communication techniques. Additionally, parties should encourage the usage of diverse social media platforms to reach a wider audience and tailor messages to specific demographics.

**Keywords:** Rhetorical Strategies, Social Media, Nigerian Presidential Election, Political Communication, Perception

### **Introduction**

The 2023 Nigerian presidential elections marked the country's sixth consecutive election since the return to democratic rule in 1999. As the most populous country in Africa and a significant player in the global community, the elections garnered attention from both domestic and international stakeholders. The campaigns were centred around pressing issues such as insecurity, corruption, poverty and unemployment, which posed significant challenges to the nation's development.

Nigeria operates a multi-party system, with over 90 registered political parties (Nwaoboli & Ajibulu, 2023). The All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) are the leading political parties in the country, with the largest membership and political influence. Other significant parties like the New Nigerian People's Party (NNPP) and the Labour Party (LP) have also gained some popularity in

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specific regions. The APC focuses on economic growth, fighting corruption and improving security, while the PDP emphasises social justice, democracy and good governance (Egbulefu & Nwaoboli, 2023). The outcome of the 2023 Presidential Elections saw the APC and PDP as the leading parties, with both winning 12 states each. The LP won 11 states and the Federal Capital Territory, while the NNPP won only one state. Ahmed Tinubu of the APC secured the highest number of votes, followed by Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, Peter Obi of the LP and Rabiou Kwankwaso of the NNPP.

The interactive and user-centric nature of social media platforms has transformed the dynamics of political communication (Amiebaho, Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2023). Unlike traditional media channels, social media allows for real-time, two-way communication between politicians and voters, fostering a sense of direct engagement and dialogue (Raufu, 2020). Through features such as comments, likes, shares and retweets, individuals can actively participate in political discourse, express their opinions and contribute to the formation of public sentiment. This unprecedented level of interactivity has not only democratised political communication but also challenged the traditional hierarchies of information dissemination, enabling citizens to play an active role in agenda-setting and shaping the narratives of election campaigns (Abdulazeez, Kadiri & Asemah, 2022; Raufu, 2020).

Conversely, rhetoric refers to the art of effective communication and persuasion. It encompasses the strategic use of language, reasoning and symbolic devices to influence, inform and engage an audience (Wilson & Oyebode, 2018). The researchers, therefore, examined Edo State residents' perception of rhetorical strategies employed by select party (PDP, APC, LP, NNPP) flag bearers on social media during the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria witnessed a significant presence of party flag bearers on social media platforms, employing various rhetorical strategies to persuade and influence voters. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research specifically analysing the perception of the rhetorical strategies used by select party flag bearers in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Several studies related to political rhetoric and communication have been conducted, but they have not directly addressed the Nigerian context or the utilisation of social media platforms as a medium for political communication during election campaigns. For example, Jenkins & Cos (2010) examined Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign rhetoric, focusing on the rhetoric of inclusion, but did not specifically address the Nigerian context or the use of social media platforms for political communication. Adegaju & Oyebode (2015) studied humour as a discursive practice in Nigeria's 2015 presidential election online campaign discourse, providing valuable insights, but limited to humour as a rhetorical strategy. Despite these previous studies, a research gap exists in understanding how party flag bearers in Nigeria employ rhetorical strategies on social media during election campaigns and how these strategies were perceived by electorates. This gap is what called for this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Find out the extent to which rhetorical messages were used by party flag bearers via social media during the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the social media platform(s) predominantly used by select party flag bearers to implement their rhetorical strategies during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns.
3. Find out the perceptions of social media netizens regarding the rhetorical strategies employed by select party flag bearers during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns.

### **Overview of Elections**

An election is the formal process by which a person or body is chosen to hold a particular position or office. In a democratic election, the choice is made by the people casting votes. Elections can be held at any level of government, from local to national and can also be used to choose representatives for organisations such as trade unions and sports clubs. Elections are the central institution of electoral processes and democratic governments. This is because in democracy and electoral processes, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed (Adibe, 2015).

Norris (2011) defines elections as a mechanism specifically designed to address the democratic deficit that may exist between citizens and their governments. In this context, elections serve as a vital means to bridge the gap between the governed and the governing. By participating in the electoral process, individuals actively contribute to decision-making processes and hold their elected representatives accountable.

Dalton (2008) posits that elections are not only a process but also a manifestation of citizen politics and political participation. In this comprehensive definition, elections are viewed as a platform that empowers citizens to engage in the political process and exercise their democratic rights. By casting their votes, citizens actively participate in shaping the course of their society. Elections provide individuals with the opportunity to influence policy outcomes, express their preferences and determine the direction of public decision-making. As a key mechanism of democratic governance, elections facilitate citizens' active involvement in the political sphere and enable them to contribute to the functioning and development of their society (Edegoh, Ezebuenyin & Asemah, 2013). The competition among political parties and candidates during elections mirrors the market competition found in economic systems. Similar to how market forces shape economic outcomes, elections act as a mechanism for reconciling diverse interests within a society and reaching policy outcomes that reflect the preferences of the majority (Omoevah, Oladele & Asemah, 2022).

### **Conceptualisation of Election Campaigns**

Campaign, in the context of political or marketing activities, refers to a coordinated series of efforts and strategies aimed at promoting a specific cause, candidate, product or idea. It involves planned actions and communications designed to influence and persuade a target audience to support or engage with the intended objective (David & Asemah, 2023; Ogunjobi, Ekhareafo & Asemah, 2023; Asemah & Omosotomhe, 2016; Asemah, 2015). According to Carmines & Stimson (2013), an election campaign is a period of intense

political activity that occurs in the lead-up to an election. It serves as a crucial platform for candidates vying for political office to compete and secure the support of voters.

Kavanagh (2013) sees election campaign as a process of social engineering, wherein candidates and their teams employ a range of strategies and tactics to persuade voters to support their candidacy. This complex and multifaceted process involves various goals and objectives. One of the primary objectives is to create a positive public image for the candidate, which can be achieved through engaging in activities such as delivering speeches, participating in debates and running television advertisements.

Jamieson (2004) sees an election campaign as a ritualised performance that takes place prior to an election. It involves candidates and their teams employing various symbolic elements and strategies to generate excitement and enthusiasm among voters. These campaigns often feature symbolic elements such as flags, rallies and parades, which contribute to the overall spectacle and create a sense of collective identity and pride. In addition, candidates and their teams strive to foster a sense of community among voters by emphasising shared values and beliefs.

### **Overview of Rhetorics**

Rhetoric, as defined by Kennedy (2003), is the art of persuasion. This definition highlights the persuasive nature of rhetoric, emphasising its ability to convince and influence individuals. Rhetoric is employed across different contexts, such as speeches, essays and advertisements, to sway people's beliefs or actions. It involves the strategic use of language and rhetorical devices to effectively communicate ideas and elicit a desired response from the audience (Komiti & Asemah, 2021).

Foss (2009) offers a broader definition of rhetoric, stating that it is the art or practice of using words effectively to communicate and persuade an audience. Foss's definition emphasises that rhetoric goes beyond mere linguistic correctness and focuses on the skillful deployment of language to effectively convey messages and sway opinions. Rhetoric involves understanding the audience and tailoring persuasive strategies to engage and influence them, whether through logical appeals, emotional connections or ethical arguments (Foss, 2009).

According to Miller (2011), rhetoric is the study of how language can be used to influence thought and behaviour. This definition underscores the analytical aspect of rhetoric, highlighting its role in examining the ways language shapes individuals' thinking and actions. Rhetoric explores the power of language to shape perceptions, attitudes and behaviours and it provides insights into the strategies and techniques employed to achieve persuasive effects (Miller, 2011).

### **Rhetorical Strategies in Political Communication**

In the realm of politics, effective communication is a pivotal factor in garnering support, swaying public opinion and ultimately securing electoral victory. Candidates vying for office employ various types of rhetoric to artfully craft their messages, appealing to the emotions, values and intellect of the electorate. From the power of repetition in anaphora to the persuasive allure of testimonials, political rhetoric encompasses a vast array of

techniques aimed at capturing attention, instilling trust and inspiring action. Some rhetorics include:

**Ethos:** Ethos refers to the credibility, authority and trustworthiness of the speaker or candidate. It relies on establishing the perception that the candidate possesses the necessary expertise, integrity and values to be a credible leader. Ethos appeals often involve showcasing the candidate's qualifications, experience and moral character (Hartig, 2018).

**Pathos:** Pathos appeals to the emotions and values of the audience, aiming to evoke empathy, passion and a sense of shared identity (Hartig, 2018).

**Logos:** Logos appeals to logic, reason and evidence. It involves presenting well-structured arguments, facts and data to support the candidate's positions and policy proposals. Logos appeals aim to persuade voters through logical reasoning and the presentation of compelling evidence (Sharkansky, 2002).

**Kairos:** Kairos refers to the strategic use of timing and opportunity to make persuasive appeals. It involves taking advantage of specific moments, events, or circumstances to deliver messages that resonate with the audience. Kairos appeals are often designed to create a sense of urgency or capitalise on current events (Sharkansky, 2002).

**Anaphora:** Anaphora involves the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences. This rhetorical device creates a rhythmic and persuasive effect, emphasising key ideas and enhancing their impact. Anaphora appeals can help to build anticipation, create a sense of unity and reinforce the central message of the candidate. An example is: "We will fight for justice. We will fight for equality. We will fight for a brighter future." By repeating the phrase "We will fight for," the candidate emphasises their determination and commitment to specific ideals, instilling a sense of unity and purpose among the audience.

**Loaded Language:** Loaded language refers to the use of emotionally charged words or phrases that evoke strong reactions and shape perceptions. It aims to influence the audience's emotions, incite passion and align their attitudes with the candidate's positions. Loaded language appeals can tap into existing beliefs, fears, or aspirations to provoke a desired response. An example is when a candidate says: "Protect our sacred values from the forces of destruction." In this example, the candidate employs emotionally evocative language, using words like "sacred," "forces of destruction" and "protect" to appeal to voters' values and create a sense of urgency around a particular issue.

### **Impacts of Rhetorical Appeals on Social Media Engagement in Elections**

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful platform for political communication and engagement, particularly during election campaigns. With its wide reach, instantaneous nature and ability to foster interactive dialogue, social media has

revolutionised the way political candidates connect with voters and disseminate their messages (Santas, Asemah & Jumbo, 2020). The power of rhetoric lies in its ability to go beyond mere information dissemination, as it has the potential to influence public opinion, mobilise support and ultimately impact voter decision-making. In this light, the impacts of rhetorical appeals on social media engagement in elections include:

a. **Mobilising Support:** According to Somer-Topcu, Tavits & Baumann (2020), rhetorical appeals play a crucial role in mobilising support for political candidates during elections on social media. By using persuasive language, emotional appeals and powerful narratives, candidates can connect with their audience, evoke strong emotions and inspire followers to take action.

b. **Shaping Perceptions:** Rhetorical appeals on social media can significantly shape public perceptions of candidates, their policies and their positions on key issues. Candidates strategically employ rhetorical devices such as logos (logical reasoning) and ethos (credibility) to present their arguments, outline their policy proposals and defend their positions. Effective use of rhetorical appeals can shape public opinion, steer discourse and frame electoral narratives, thereby influencing social media users' perception of the candidates' credibility, competence and alignment with their values and interests (Somer-Topcu, Tavits & Baumann, 2020).

c. **Increasing Engagement and Participation:** Rhetorical appeals can enhance social media engagement and encourage active participation in the electoral process (Onoja & Oguche, 2020). By leveraging rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, powerful metaphors and vivid storytelling, candidates can capture the attention of social media users and encourage them to join the conversation, share their opinions and participate in campaign activities.

d. **Influencing Voter Decision-Making:** Rhetorical appeals on social media can have a significant influence on voter decision-making processes. Through strategically employing persuasive language, candidates can shape the cognitive and emotional factors that influence voters' perceptions, attitudes and choices (Ekharefo & Alonge, 2021).

### **Empirical Review**

Ekharefo & Alonge (2021) conducted a study using textual analysis to examine the rhetorical tactics employed by politicians in the 2020 Edo gubernatorial election. The study was grounded in McCornack's theory of deceptive discourse and utilised focused qualitative content analysis. A total of 243 remarks from television, internet resources, and social media were analysed over a seven-week period leading up to the election. The researchers categorised the remarks into three groups based on their emotional appeal, focus on development, and use of aggressive language. The findings revealed that infrastructure growth was a prominent theme in the political rhetoric, and the campaigns employed emotive appeals such as mudslinging, ethnic appeals and references to

development difficulties. The study recommended the involvement of campaign advisors to tailor messages according to specific issues and emphasised the need for meticulous vetting of political advertisements to avoid animosity.

Okoro & Santas (2015) conducted a study on the utilisation of social media for political communication during the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. The study employed a random sampling technique to gather a sample size of 249 individuals who completed a questionnaire. The researchers analysed the data using descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing. The findings indicated that a significant number of participants were influenced in their choice of presidential candidates by social media. The study suggested that voters prioritize candidate selection based on credibility and worth rather than ethnic and religious considerations.

Aswad (2019) examined the charismatic leadership rhetoric employed by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election. The study used DICTION 7.0, a content analysis software designed for political discourse, to analyse the campaign speeches of both candidates. The findings highlighted Trump's use of hyperbolic crisis rhetoric, the formation of a shared social identity and appeals to collective memory and national nostalgia. In contrast, Clinton's rhetoric was constrained by gender expectations and her party affiliation. The study raised questions about the role of charismatic rhetoric in shaping candidate appeal and electability.

Otieno, Owino & Attyang (2016) investigated the use of metaphors in political discourse. The study highlighted the pragmatic and strategic functions of metaphors in political communication. It emphasised how metaphors help the general public make sense of complex political issues, express their attitudes, and understand their beliefs and goals. The researchers also explored how politicians strategically utilise metaphors to achieve persuasive and rhetorical objectives. The study revealed that metaphors can serve as a face-saving strategy for politicians, convey ideological positions, and shed light on their political agendas and perspectives.

Akinola (2019) examined the rhetoric embedded in politically motivated musical renditions in Nigeria after the 2015 elections. The study was based on Mey's pragmatic acts theory and analysed two popular songs from social media. The analysis focused on the use of pragmatic acts such as direct and indirect speech acts, conversational acts, and psychological acts conveyed through the rhythm and lyrics of the songs. The study highlighted the political consciousness and conflicting perceptions of Nigerian citizens regarding governance. It emphasised the importance of "truth awareness," citizens' active participation and access to information in building trust in the government and fostering political involvement.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Rhetorical Theory**

Rhetorical theory is a field of study that explores the art of communication and persuasion. The term "rhetoric" itself derives from the Greek word "rhetorike," meaning the art of oratory. Over time, rhetorical theory has evolved and expanded to encompass various aspects of persuasive communication, including written, spoken and visual forms

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(Borchers & Hundley, 2018). The rhetorical theory was initially propounded by ancient Greek philosophers and rhetoricians, including Aristotle, Plato and the Sophists. Aristotle, in particular, made significant contributions to rhetoric theory in his work "Rhetoric," which was written in the 4th century BCE (Borchers & Hundley, 2018). The tenets of the rhetoric theory include:

a. **Persuasion and Communication:** Rhetorical theory centres around the concept of persuasion and effective communication. It explores how speakers or writers can influence an audience through their choice of language, argumentation and delivery. Rhetorical theorists examine the strategies and techniques employed to engage, persuade and motivate listeners or readers (Buck, 1990).

b. **Audience Analysis:** Rhetorical theory emphasises the importance of understanding the audience or the intended recipients of a message. It recognises that effective communication requires tailoring one's message to resonate with the beliefs, values and interests of the audience. Rhetorical theorists study audience analysis to determine how to best appeal to the specific needs and perspectives of different individuals or groups (Green, 2004).

c. **Ethos, Pathos and Logos:** Rhetorical theory often incorporates the concepts of ethos, pathos and logos as key elements of persuasive communication. Ethos refers to the credibility and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer, pathos appeals to the emotions of the audience and logos focuses on logical reasoning and evidence. These elements are considered essential for crafting persuasive arguments and engaging the audience effectively.

d. **Style and Delivery:** Rhetorical theory recognises the significance of style and delivery in effective communication. It explores various rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, similes, repetition and rhetorical questions, that enhance the clarity, impact and memorability of a message. Rhetorical theorists also study nonverbal communication, including body language, tone of voice and gestures, to understand how these elements contribute to persuasive communication (Green, 2004).

e. **Context and Purpose:** Rhetorical theory acknowledges the role of context and purpose in shaping effective communication. It recognises that the same message can have different impacts depending on the context in which it is delivered and the intended purpose. Rhetorical theorists analyse how situational factors, cultural norms and the goals of communication influence the choice of rhetorical strategies (Hartelius & Browning, 2008).

This theory is relevant to this study as rhetorical theory can help analyse the power dynamics and social implications of the candidates' rhetorical strategies. With the theory, researchers can investigate how the candidates leverage their positions of authority and influence on social media to shape public opinion, mobilise supporters, or suppress opposing voices.



**Methodology**

The researchers adopted the survey research design. The study's population consisted Oredo, Igueben and Akoko-Edo local government areas in Edo State, with respective populations of 374,515, 297,441 and 262,110 as reported by City Population (2021). Combined, these populations equal 934, 066 (nine hundred and thirty-four thousand and sixty-six) people. The sample size was 384 and was arrived at using Krejcie & Morgan’s (1970) sample size calculation formula. The researchers employed a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure a representative sample of the population. In the first stage, the researchers purposefully selected the three senatorial zones in Edo State, namely Edo South, Edo Central and Edo North, to capture a broad range of perspectives from the residents of Edo State. This selection is made with the intention of providing a comprehensive view of the topic under investigation.

In the second stage, the researcher utilised a random ballot system to select one local government from each senatorial zone. By listing all the local government areas within each zone and placing them in separate boxes, the researcher introduced an element of randomness to the selection process. Consequently, Oredo Local Government Area was chosen from Edo South Senatorial Zone, Igueben Local Government Area from Edo Central Senatorial Zone and Akoko-Edo Local Government Area from Edo North Senatorial Zone. This approach ensured geographical diversity and representation across the three senatorial zones.

The third stage involved the selection of densely populated wards within the chosen local government areas. The researcher specifically chose Ogbe ward from the twelve wards in Oredo LGA, Afuda ward from the fourteen wards in Igueben Local Government Area and Ewan ward from the ten wards in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area. This selection strategy aimed to capture a significant number of respondents from areas with high population density, enhancing the generalisability of the findings. Lastly, in the fourth stage, the researcher distributed copies of the questionnaire to residents of the selected wards using an available sampling procedure. This approach provided an opportunity for random selection within each ward, minimising bias and ensuring a representative sample of respondents. Questionnaire was the research instrument and it was distributed on face-to-face basis. 363 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and the rest were lost.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Extent to which Rhetorical Messages were used by Party Flag Bearers via Social Media during the 2023 Presidential Election Campaigns in Nigeria**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>VH(5)</b>	<b>H(4)</b>	<b>N(3)</b>	<b>L(2)</b>	<b>VL(1)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Atiku Abubakar	173(32.1%)	104(32.1%)	16(32.1%)	51(32.1%)	19(32.1%)	2.5
Bola Ahmed Tinubu	219(60.3%)	119(32.8%)	5 (1.4%)	10 (2.8%)	10 (2.8%)	3.5
Peter Obi	95 (26.2%)	200 (55.1%)	0 (0%)	30 (8.3%)	38 (10.5%)	3.6
Rabiu Kwakwanso	100(27.5%)	92 (25.3%)	36 (9.9%)	80(22.0%)	55 (15.2%)	4.4

The findings from table 3 highlight the implications of candidates' usage of rhetorical messages during the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Bola Ahmed Tinubu emerged as the candidate with the highest utilisation of rhetorical messages, as indicated by the significant percentages of very high (VH) and high (H) ratings. This

suggests that Tinubu effectively employed persuasive language and communication techniques to convey his campaign messages. Additionally, Peter Obi received higher VH and H ratings compared to other candidates, indicating a strong utilisation of rhetorical messages to engage voters. Furthermore, the mean scores indicate that Rabiu Kwakwanso had the highest rating (4.4), suggesting a substantial extent of rhetorical message usage in his campaign.

**Table 2: Rhetorical Strategy utilised by Select Party Flag Bearers on Social Media during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election Campaigns**

Variables	AB	BAT	PO	RK
Ethos (Appeal to Credibility)	56(15.4%)	40(11.0%)	152(41.9%)z	77(21.2%)
Pathos (Appeal to emotion)	64(17.6%)	100(27.5%)	13(3.6%)	60(16.5%)
Logos (Appeal to logic)	20(5.5%)	15(4.1%)	120(33.1%)	82(22.6%)
Hyperbole (exaggeration)	84(23.1%)	42(11.6%)	3(0.8%)	50(13.8%)
Rhetorical Questions	4(1.1%)	0(0.0%)	12(3.3%)	7(1.9%)

Table 2 outlines the rhetorical strategies employed by the flag bearers on social media during the election campaigns. Ethos or appeal to credibility, was the most frequently utilised strategy by all the flag bearers, followed by pathos (appeal to emotion) and logos (appeal to logic). This suggests that the flag bearers heavily relied on establishing their credibility and forging emotional connections with the audience through their social media campaigns.

**Table 3: Rhetorical Strategies employed by Select Party Flag Bearers on Social Media effectively highlighted their Policy Proposals and Agenda**

Variable	SA(5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean
Atiku Abubakar	70 (16.3%)	84(23.4%)	19 (5.2%)	115 (31.7%)	75(20.7%)	3.0
Bola Ahmed Tinubu	94 (25.9%)	70(19.3%)	45(12.4%)	59(16.3%)	95(26.2%)	3.2
Peter Obi	148(40.8%)	120 (33.1%)	11 (3.0%)	38(10.5%)	46(12.7%)	3.6
Rabiu Kwakwanso	85 (23.4%)	90 (24.8%)	11 (3.0%)	89 (24.5%)	88(24.2%)	3.5

Table 3 examines how effectively the flag bearers' rhetorical strategies highlighted their policy proposals and agenda. Peter Obi received the highest ratings in this regard, indicating that his strategies resonated well with the audience in communicating his policy positions.

**Table 4: Extent to which Respondents believe the Rhetorical Strategies used by Party Flag Bearers on Social Media were successful in shaping Respondents' voting Patterns during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election Campaigns**

Variable	VHS(5)	H (4)	N (3)	L (2)	VL (1)	Mean
Atiku Abubakar	77 (21.2%)	83 (22.8%)	67 (18.5%)	62 (17.1%)	74 (20.4%)	2.7
Bola Ahmed Tinubu	96 (26.4%)	91 (25.1%)	38(10.5%)	88 (24.2%)	50(13.7%)	2.9
Peter Obi	166(51.2%)	148 (40.7%)	1 (0.3%)	28 (7.7%)	20 (5.5%)	2.9
Rabiu Kwakwanso	76 (20.9%)	80 (22.0%)	49(13.5%)	81 (22.3%)	77(21.2%)	2.9

Table 4 explores the extent to which respondents believe that the rhetorical strategies used by party flag bearers on social media successfully shaped their voting patterns

during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns. The results indicate that respondents had varying perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies. This finding suggests that while the rhetorical strategies employed by the flag bearers had some influence on voters, their impact was not uniform.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from the tables align with previous studies on rhetorics, political communication and public opinion, as discussed by Foss (2009), Hartelius & Browning (2008), Gazzaniga & Kosslyn (2004), Hauser (2002), Dalton (2008), Green Jr (2004) and Edegoh & Asemah (2014). In line with Foss (2009) and Hartelius & Browning (2008), the tables demonstrate the extensive use of rhetorical strategies by party flag bearers on social media during the election campaigns. This confirms the persuasive power of language and communication techniques in political discourse.

The emphasis on ethos, pathos and logos in the candidates' rhetorical strategies as indicated in table 12, aligns with the theoretical foundations of rhetoric discussed by Foss (2009) and Hartelius & Browning (2008). These studies highlight the importance of credibility, emotional appeals and logical arguments in effective persuasion.

The choice of Facebook as the primary social media platform, as shown in table 2, resonates with the study by Edegoh, Ezebuenyin & Asemah (2013) which examines the role of television as a medium of political advertising during elections in Nigeria. This suggests that social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have become prominent channels for political communication and message dissemination.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Rhetorical messages were extensively used by party flag bearers via social media during the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, demonstrating the significance of digital platforms in political communication. More so, the party flag bearers predominantly utilised multiple social media platforms, including, but not limited to Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, to implement their rhetorical strategies during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaigns. The party flag bearers employed various rhetorical strategies on social media, such as derogatory/personal attacks, issue-based content, emotional appeals, voter mobilisation, grassroots engagement and transparency/accountability, to convey their messages and connect with the electorate. Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Political parties should recognise the significance of rhetorical strategies on social media and invest in training their flag bearers on effective communication techniques. Parties should also encourage their candidates to utilise a diverse range of social media platforms to reach a wider audience and tailor their messages to resonate with specific demographics.
2. Social media platforms should continue to enhance their efforts to combat misinformation, hate speech, and abusive content, which can undermine the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies. They should also provide clear guidelines and support for political campaigns to ensure transparency and accountability in their social media activities.

3. Voters and social media netizens should critically evaluate the rhetorical strategies employed by party flag bearers. It is important for voters to engage in fact-checking and independent research to assess the credibility and relevance of the messages conveyed. Netizens can contribute to a constructive political discourse by engaging in respectful discussions and sharing reliable information.

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