

PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS' ETHOS: THE CASE OF SPEECH ACTS IN BUHARI-ATIKU CAMPAIGN RHETORIC ON TWITTER DURING NIGERIA'S 2019 ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how *speech acts* were used to project *ethos* in the campaign tweets of President Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, during the 2019 General Election in Nigeria. Therefore, a qualitative discourse analysis approach was adopted. The study applied Searle's (1979) *Speech Acts*, van Dijk's (2006) *Rhetorical Discursive Strategies*, and a framework of ethos based on Beason (1991) and McCroskey and Teven (1999). The data analysed consisted of 140 tweets from the official Twitter handles of the two contenders. The results indicate, first, that both contenders similarly relied on *assertives* in their campaign rhetoric. However, while Buhari mostly utilised *assertives* in ways that emphasised his shared values and common bonds with the audience in terms of patriotism and trustworthiness (*similitude*, 48%) or highlighted his future potential based on current achievements (*inclination to succeed*, 38%), Atiku's *assertives* were mostly geared towards exhibiting competence in growing the economy and creating jobs (*expertise*, 50%) or emphasising his shared ideologies of supporting democracy and rejecting anti-democratic acts (*similitude*, 21%). The findings suggest that while Buhari's ethos was aimed at maintaining the audience's confidence and trust, Atiku's ethos was targeted at undermining their trust in Buhari and reviving their faith and support for Atiku. Based on these findings, the study concluded that *assertives* are the most effective speech acts in projecting *ethos* in campaign tweets, and that candidates can use them differently to employ different discursive tactics and sets of ethos that support their agenda.

Keywords: Ethos; Twitter; Speech Acts; Buhari-Atiku Campaign; Nigeria's 2019 Elections

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INTRODUCTION

Ethos, the credible image, persona, or character that persuaders exhibit in discourse (Rapp, 2022), has been identified by Aristotle as the most potent means of persuasion (Cooper, 1932). The philosopher shows how persuaders project ethos in discourse through their display of *expertise*, *trustworthiness*, or *goodwill* (Hyde, 2004). McCroskey and Teven (1999) contend that *ethos* has remained the most crucial appeal that persuaders deploy to build trust with audiences. Moreover, because it continues to accommodate current and evolving rhetorical contexts and genres, the credibility appeal has been a robust instrument for analyzing rhetorical discourse (Cockroft & Cockroft, 1992).

Consequently, ethical appeal has been a major focus of multidisciplinary research on discourse. The research on ethos is concerned with how persuaders in different discourses and genres utilise different dimensions of credible image as rhetorical tools. Specifically, ethos is a crucial element of political discourse; it has long been a central focus of multidisciplinary research as persuasion is always the main goal of political discourse (Chilton, 2004; Perloff, 2010; Perloff, 2013) and political actors intentionally deploy ethotic forms to construct persuasion. Charteris-Black (2011, p. 14) argues that ethos is *a prerequisite for political persuasion*, suggesting that dimensions of ethos are a necessary requirement that needs to be projected by political persuaders. Perloff (2014, p. 317) contends that ethos is *the cornerstone of effective political persuasion*, and this means that the credible persona created by politicians in their discourse contributes significantly in swaying persuadees. Flanagin and Metzger (2017) posit that ethos (*source credibility*) is a critical factor that affects political communicator's ability to persuade the audience. Philips (2018) observed how a leader's rhetoric was negatively affected by his inability to project appropriate ethos. It has even been established that political persuaders embed both *Logos* (logical proofs, cogent arguments) and *Pathos* (emotional appeals) in the projection of a credible image (Alkhirbash et. al., 2014; Nwaoboli et. al., 2024).

More interestingly, linguistic discourse analysts interested in political ethos identified different language resources for its interpretation. Their scholarship has revealed how political actors performing different genres establish their credibility through different resources such as *Metadiscourse* (Ho, 2016; Mai, 2016), *Personal Pronouns* (Herman, 2022; Malah, 2021; Roitman, 2014), *Metaphors* (Charteris-Black, 2009; Malah & Taiwo, 2020), and *Speech Acts* (Natsheh & Atawneh, 2021). This research has demonstrated that linguistic resources are vital for evaluating political ethos.

However, despite being the most basic unit of argumentation in political tweets (Elliott-Maksymowicz et.al, 2021) and effective in evaluating ethos on Twitter (Natsheh & Atawneh, 2021), *speech acts* still appear under-researched. Speech acts have been useful rhetorical devices that political tweeters utilise in designing their discourse to sway the audience. But knowledge on categories of speech acts that realize political ethos on Twitter is still far from being comprehensive. This seemingly resulted from the fact that past studies on political ethos mostly concentrated on offline speeches when political figures globally are increasingly adopting Twitter (X) for political persuasion (Howard, 2006; Vergeer, 2015). Only a handful of studies such as Herman (2022, President Trump's tweets), Natsheh and Atawneh (2021, President Trump's tweets), and Philips (2018, President Trump's tweets) explored tweeted political ethos. The current study, therefore, endeavours to bridge these gaps in research by exploring the use of speech acts to project ethical appeals in Nigerian presidential candidates' campaign tweets during the 2019 elections. The study, thus, set out to address the following objectives:

1. To identify the major *speech acts* in President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar campaign tweets during Nigeria's 2019 General Elections;
2. To examine how the contenders utilise these *speech acts* to project *ethos* in their rhetoric.

Nigeria's 2019 Elections and Twitter Campaigning

The 2019 election campaigns saw the most intense rhetoric on Twitter in Nigeria's political history, as this election came at the peak of Social Media use for political communication in the country (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020; Momoh, 2019). Most notably, this rhetoric was seen between the two leading candidates – President Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressives Congress (APC) and his toughest challenger, Atiku Abubakar, of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Buhari was tweeting to sustain voters' support and approval to keep power, while Atiku was tweeting to erode their faith in Buhari and to enable him to take power. Hence, the Buhari-Atiku Twitter campaign was characterized by heated rhetoric of accusations and counter-accusations, claims and counter-claims, propaganda, and manipulation of voters (Bamigbade & Dalha, 2020; Sule & Sambo, 2020).

Consequently, the two contenders revolutionized the conduct of campaign in Nigeria, and this attracted scholarly attention from across multiple disciplines. The research on Buhari-Atiku discourses revealed how they utilised their campaign tweets to *build agenda*, *interact with voters*, *shape public opinion*, and *construct Othering discourses* (see Auwal et. al., 2020; Momoh, 2019; Ndela & Mano, 2020). However, despite the appreciable advances in this research, Buhari and Atiku's use of ethos remains unexplored. Past studies appear to have neglected the forms of credible character prioritized by each of the contenders. Meanwhile, the literature suggests that presidential contenders deploy different ethotic forms as powerful weapons to dominate their opponents and ultimately influence the audience's voting behaviour (see Perloff, 2014). Hence, the current study attempts to bridge this gap in research by investigating the categories of credible images projected by Buhari and Atiku in their tweets during the 2019 election campaign.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the discovery by previous research that Aristotelian ethos is critically important for persuasion in offline political genres, researchers have begun to explore its rhetorical relevance in political tweets. Philips (2018), for example, investigated ethos in President Trump's tweets to examine how his discourse conformed to the established conventions of U.S. Presidential rhetoric. The study found that Trump's rhetoric on Twitter failed to satisfactorily project any of the dimensions of ethos namely *wisdom*, *character*, and *goodwill*. The researcher observed that this made the President unable to project appropriate persona in his tweets, unable to enact appropriate presidential rhetoric. Thus, Philips' (2018) findings suggest that aspects of credibility are crucial in presidential discourse, and that presidential rhetoric appears weird if it does not exhibit any of the pillars of intrinsic ethos. This finding disagrees with those of Mwetulundila and Mlambo (2021) and Basuki (2017) who were consistent in reporting how Namibian President Geingob and Indonesian Presidential candidates Subianto and Widodo created appropriate personas in their rhetoric.

In another study by Hills (2019), attention was focused on Bernie Sanders' Twitter campaign rhetoric during the 2015/2016 primary elections in the US. The findings showed strong preference for *ethos* than *logos* and *pathos*. It revealed how *ethos* dominated as the most-featured alone in tweets, when both *logos* and *pathos* mostly combined with other appeals. Thus, Hills' (2019) findings corroborate Charteris-Black's (2011) and Perloff's (2014) claims that *ethos* is the most dominant appeal in political persuasion. It is also clear to see how Hills' findings are inconsistent with Philips' (2018) findings on the non-use of *ethos* in President Trump's tweets. This contrast may reflect differing persuasive styles—Trump lacking credible persona, while Sanders strongly projected *ethos*.

Similar to Philips' (2018) study reviewed earlier, Natsheh and Atawneh (2021) also analysed *ethos* in President Trump's tweets. But while Philips' study was mainly a content analysis research conducted within the framework of Communication Studies and with little attention on linguistic resources, Natsheh and Atawneh's study specifically analysed how *speech acts* were used to construct *ethos* in those tweets. So, the study analysed how Trump harnessed speech acts to "polish his image" in his Twitter rhetoric. They found that the President relied on *expressives* and *representatives* to polish his image by intensifying his adversaries' weak points, attacking their credibility, and intensifying his credibility. Therefore, this study has shown how speech acts could be utilised for communicating *ethos* in political tweets. Secondly, although they analysed the same politician and similar data, Philips (2018) and Natsheh and Atawneh (2021) have reported conflicting findings. Philips' study could not find any dimension of *ethos* in Trump's tweets, but Natsheh and Atawneh's study has reported how the President used speech acts for "image polishing". This disagreement could be attributed to differences in methodological approach used, in that while Philips' study was more concerned with contents and did not anchor its analysis on linguistic resources, Natsheh and Atawneh specifically focused on speech acts.

Finally, Herman (2022) drew on Pragmatics to analyse how inferences on *ethos* could be drawn from linguistic resources (*syntax, personal pronouns, lexical items, capital letters, exclamations, etc.*) and messages deployed by President Trump in his tweets of January 6, 2021, the day his supporters assaulted the US Capitol. The study was concerned with the *ethotic* forms that Trump constructed on Twitter to persuade his "unconditional supporters" to carry out the attack. The results revealed, first, that Trump utilised *shown ethos* – capital letters, exclamation marks, disjointed syntax, and personal pronouns – to construct the image of an unfairly victimized President who was speaking loudly to his supporters in the street, seeking their support to restore justice. Secondly, Trump employed *community ethos* to disguise his personal aspirations as those of his party and the country by emphasizing how *THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, OUR COUNTRY NEEDS THE PRESIDENCY MORE THAN EVER BEFORE....* identifying himself with all party members and the country for "rescuing America's democracy".

Therefore, Herman's findings about Trump's rhetoric on Twitter appear consistent with those of Philips (2018) and AlBzour's (2022). The finding that Trump's rhetoric failed to exhibit expected US Presidential *ethos* corroborates that of Philips (2018), which also reports that Trump's rhetoric on Twitter was actually not in keeping with the conventions of US Presidential *ethos*. Secondly, Herman's finding on how Trump's Twitter rhetoric of January 6, 2021 was framed to incite violence appears consistent with AlBzour's (2022) findings on how speech acts were utilised by the President to achieve this goal. Both studies reported consistent

findings that Trump's Twitter rhetoric was designed to push his supporters to carry out the attack on the Capitol.

In conclusion, this review has attempted to capture the current state of knowledge regarding political ethos on Twitter, how political figures deploy aspects of credible character in tweets as powerful strategies for persuading their audiences. However, we have not seen sufficient account on how speech acts are related to political ethos on Twitter, how categories of illocutionary forces construct twittering candidates' ethos. Thus, there is a need to further the current knowledge by exploring the categories of ethos projected through speech acts on Twitter. Hence, the current study attempts to analyse how President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, utilised speech acts to build ethos in their tweets during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach, Data Sampling and Collection

Following Dornyei (2007) and Creswell (2012), this study applied a *qualitative discourse analysis* approach. This approach was deemed appropriate because it allows for in-depth exploration and detailed interpretation of the phenomenon being researched. The study analysed campaign tweets as specific genres produced by presidential contenders with the intention of persuading prospective voters to cast votes in their favour. These tweets are, therefore, instances of language-in-use that can be explored using discourse analytic tools in order to uncover how linguistic patterns interact with social contexts of language use (Jones, 2012; Paltridge, 2012).

Accordingly, the researcher selected purposive samples that enabled addressing the research objectives (Merriam, 2009; Matthews & Ross, 2010). The data were collected from the official Twitter handles of President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar. These two were the most dominant candidates in the 2019 election. The samples collected were published during the campaign period, between October, 2018 and February, 2019. A total of 140 tweets was hand-analysed in the study, 70 each from Buhari's account at: https://twitter.com/MBuhari/with_replies and Atiku's account at: https://twitter.com/atiku/with_replies

Data Analysis

The study employed two distinct levels of analysis. Each of these two analyses was done manually by the researcher, which is in keeping with qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Dornyei, 2007). The unit of analysis is basically the *sentence*, but the analysis also examined *word groups* and *tweets* or *streams of tweets* as units of discourse. The first-level analysis, which focused on identifying categories of speech acts, drew on Searle's (1979) framework of *Speech Acts*. The speech acts in this framework include: *Assertives (AST)*, *Directives (DIR)*, *Commissives (COM)*, *Expressives (EXP)*, and *Declaration (DEC)*.

The second-level analysis was concerned with how the *speech acts* identified are utilised to project ethos by the candidates. Hence, the analysis drew on Aristotelian theory of *Ethos* and applied an eclectic framework based on Beason's (1991) and McCroskey and Teven's (1999) *Strategies for Establishing Ethos*. The dimensions of ethos in this framework include: *Similitude (SIM)*, *Deference (DEF)*, *Self-criticism (SCR)*, *Expertise (EXP)*, *Inclination to Succeed (INC)*, and *Goodwill (GWL)*. Moreover, in an attempt to infuse more rigour in

analysing how ethos is realized, the study also took advantage of van Dijk's (2006, 2011) *Rhetorical Discursive Strategies*.

Moreover, in attempts to achieve analytic rigour and validate coding, speech acts and the ethotic forms created were cross-checked through multiple readings. In addition, following Creswell (2012), services of an *external auditor* was employed to study the procedures and methods applied in conducting the study and offer valuable comments/suggestions for improvement. This auditor, who was an expert in qualitative research (see **Acknowledgement**), carefully studied the data, analytic frameworks, coding, and interpretation and offered valuable comments and suggestions which were finally used to improve clarity and quality of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Major Speech Acts in President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar Campaign Tweets during Nigeria's 2019 General Elections

The analysis revealed that both President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar relied more on *assertives* speech acts in their campaign tweets during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. This illocutionary force was by far the most preponderant across the two data sets (Buhari 61%; Atiku 43%). Other speech acts found include *commissives*, *directives*, and *expressives*. Buhari's tweets displayed more preference for *commissives* (15%), while Atiku's more *directives* (27%) and *expressives* (19%). In addition, *declarations* (Buhari 3%; Atiku 1%) were the most scant speech acts seen in the tweets.

These results suggest that although both candidates' campaign discourses on Twitter were similarly dominated by utterances that make or deny claims, describe states of affairs, assert propositions, and report situations; they still exhibited some differences. These differences are that while Buhari's discourse displayed more promises and commitment to perform future actions, Atiku's discourse displayed more accusations, attacks, blames, criticisms and more commands, invitations, and suggestions to the voters. Moreover, the study observed that their discourses mostly revolved around the key issues in this election: *security, corruption, the economy, unemployment, poverty, infrastructure, and electoral credibility*.

Let us take examples 1 and 2 below, which illustrate Buhari-Atiku's contested assertions on the fight against corruption. In example 1, President Buhari's assertives present him positively as a trusted and committed fighter of corruption who, in the first place, was intentionally elected by Nigerians to address this challenge. His determined tone, which can be perceived from his strong words like *reiterate* and *non-negotiable*, is a deliberate tactic by the president to portray himself and his team as working in accordance with their 2015 campaign promise to eliminate corruption and heal the country:

Example 1

(01) Let me *reiterate* that fighting corruption is *non-negotiable* for our administration [AST]. (02) It is one of the *reasons* we got elected [AST], and we cannot afford to let Nigerians down [AST]. (03) When we tackle corruption we free up resources for investment in infrastructure and development [AST].

Muhammadu Buhari, Oct 4, 2018

In example 2, Atiku's assertives are shown dismissing Buhari's discourse by downplaying his performance in the fight against corruption, in growing the economy, and in improving security. The rhetoric re-frames Buhari's anti-corruption campaign negatively as a complete sham. It uses comparison to emphasise that the level of corruption being seen under Buhari is even *worse* than before, and that the president's purported mission against corruption is simply a *pretext* employed to pursue his re-election agenda:

Example 2

(01) In terms of corruption, Nigeria is *worse* of today than we were in 2014 [AST].
(02) In terms of economy, we are the *poorest* country in the world today [AST]. (03)
In terms of insecurity, we are *most insecure* than at any other time in our history [AST]...

Atiku Abubakar, Dec 5, 2018

Moreover, we can also take examples 3, 4 and 5 to see how Buhari employed *commissives* and Atiku employed *expressives* and *directives* to display contested discourses on *electoral credibility*. The president was elected in 2015 on the basis of his campaign of CHANGE, where he promised to, among other critical issues, rid Nigeria of electoral malpractices. Electoral results manipulation by the incumbents was among the worst challenges bedevilling Nigeria's democracy. So, in the 2019 campaign, Buhari tactically reminded voters about this compelling reason to vote for him again. The tweet featured in example 3 illustrates how he deploys commissives to project the image of a credible leader who, despite his re-election agenda, is commitment to ensuring *free, fair, and credible* elections in 2019. His discourse demonstrates how he, like the voters, adheres to positive values of honesty, fairness, and patriotism on election matters:

Example 3

(01) As I welcome you into 2019, I also reiterate my many promises and declarations that the general elections will be *free, fair and credible* [COM].

Muhammadu Buhari, Jan 1, 2019

In examples 4 and 5, the tweets shown illustrate how Atiku responded angrily to President Buhari's postponement of elections on the 16th of February 2019. As the President was trying to explain this decision, Atiku discredited all explanations and the *many promises and declarations* that he had made on giving Nigerians *free, fair and credible* elections. He took advantage of *expressives* to accuse that the unexpected decision was a deliberate political manoeuvre by Buhari and his party APC, who were planning to ensure voter turnout was low, in their desperate efforts to avoid defeat and manipulate the electoral outcomes. See example 4:

Example 4

(01) This postponement is obviously a case of the hand of Esau but the voice of Jacob [EXP]. (02) By instigating this postponement, the Buhari administration hopes to *disenfranchise* the Nigerian electorate in order to ensure that turn out is low on the rescheduled date [EXP].

Atiku Abubakar, Feb 16, 2019

Hence, through the use of *directives*, Atiku's rhetoric ultimately urges voters to *frustrate* Buhari and his dishonest plans. It frames Buhari not as someone who will give credible elections as he claimed, but as a deviant leader who was actually bent on disenfranchising voters and rigging votes to achieve his re-election ambition. The discourse not only exhibited *populist anger* but also *fear* for the future of Nigeria's democracy under Buhari. See example 5:

Example 5

(01) Please come out to vote on Saturday, 23 February and Saturday, 9 March respectively [DIR]. (02) *Frustrate* those who do not want this election to hold by coming out in very large numbers [DIR]. (02) That is the best antidote to their *plans* [AST].

Atiku Abubakar, Feb 16, 2019

The following section focuses on the categories of ethos projected through speech acts by Buhari and Atiku.

How President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar Utilised Speech Acts to Project Ethos in their Campaign Rhetoric on Twitter

The analysis revealed that both President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar utilised speech acts to project different dimensions of ethos in their rhetoric on Twitter during the 2019 election campaigns. The results indicate that both contenders similarly relied on *assertives* for creating credible image in their rhetoric. Moreover, their discourses have also seen ethos established through other categories of speech acts, especially *commissives*, *directives*, and *expressives*. President Buhari's rhetoric employed *assertives* and *commissives* for expressing *similitude*, and *assertives* for projecting *inclination to succeed*. Atiku's rhetoric relied on *assertives* and *directives* for exhibiting *expertise*; *assertives* and *expressives* for projecting *similitude*; and *assertives* for *inclination to succeed*. These results mean that *assertives* are not only the most predominant speech acts in Buhari-Atiku campaign tweets, they are also the most-employed for projecting different dimensions of ethos by the candidates.

In addition, the analysis discovered that in utilising these speech acts to project these forms of ethos, both candidates took advantage of numerous rhetorical discursive strategies. These strategies include, especially, *positive Self-presentation*, *negative Other-presentation*, *lexicalisation*, *metaphor*, *populism*, *hyperbole*, *norm expression*, *authority*, *number game*, *evidentiality*, *agency*, *implication*, *presupposition*, *focus*, and *actor description*.

Table 1 below presents the frequencies of ethos dimensions found in the data:

Table 1. Ethos in Buhari-Atiku Campaign Tweets

S/No	Ethos	Buhari	Atiku
1.	Similitude	48%	21%
2.	Deference	2%	1%
3.	Self-Criticism	0%	0%
4.	Expertise	5%	50%
5.	Inclination to Succeed	38%	18%
6.	Goodwill	7%	10%
		100%	100%

As seen from Table 1 above, President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar differed regarding the dimensions of ethos prioritized in their discourses. Buhari mostly established his credible character through *similitude* (48%), while Atiku largely concentrated on displaying credible image through *expertise* (50%). However, the results also suggest some degree of similarity between the contenders' ethos. It can be seen from this table that both of them deployed significant *similitude*. This finding suggests that identifying with the audience is a key ethos-building strategy deployed by these contenders in their Twitter rhetoric.

Another key finding shown in Table 1 is how both contenders avoided the use of *Self-criticism* ethos. This finding is quite supported by Beason's (1991) submission that although Self-criticism has the potential to enhance trustworthiness, it is actually a risky strategy that communicators avoid in order not to make themselves vulnerable to attacks. He adds that even those who use it mostly follow it immediately with redeeming statements or tactics in order to address its possible ramifications. Therefore, it could be assumed that Buhari and Atiku deliberately refused to deploy this ethos in order not to expose themselves to opponent's attack that could threaten their chances of success at the ballot.

Finally, the results suggest that there is tendency for multiple types of ethos to occur in tweets. Many of the tweets analysed across the two datasets showed a combination of two ethotic forms. However, it has been observed that Buhari and Atiku differed in terms of their preference for dissimilar combinational patterns of credible images in tweets. In addition, combinational patterns were in agreement with the dominant components of ethos found in each of the two datasets. That is, President Buhari's tweets, where *similitude* (48%) and *inclination to succeed* (38%) were the most dominant, mostly featured combination of these two components. This finding shows how the president's discourse constantly established common grounds with the audience and at the same time projecting an image of a leader with good potential for future success. On the other hand, Atiku's tweets, where *expertise* (50%) and *similitude* (21%) were the most preponderant, mostly displayed a combination of the two components. This shows how the challenger's discourse constantly exhibits competence and at the same time portraying an image of someone who identifies with the audience.

The following section discusses and illustrates how speech acts are used to project the most-featured categories of ethos found in Buhari-Atiku campaign tweets:

Similitude

Similitude is about highlighting similarities between the persuader and persuadees. It is a strategy of building ethos that persuaders deploy to earn persuadees' trust through identifying with them in terms of shared values, concerns, backgrounds, goals, and beliefs. According to Beason (1991, p. 331), expressing similitude in discourse enables persuaders to build a sense of community with audiences through emphasising their commonalities and ties, and through creating the impression 'he is one of us'.

As highlighted earlier (Table 1), the analysis of this study revealed that both President Buhari and Atiku in their campaign tweeting used speech acts in ways that emphasised their shared identity with the voters. However, in creating this credible image, Buhari deployed *assertives* and *commissives*, while Atiku relied on *assertives* and *expressives*. The two additionally employed variety of discursive strategies to enhance their discourses. This is discussed and shown below according to each candidate:

President Buhari's Similitude

As seen above (Table 1), similitude is the most-featured ethos in President Buhari's tweets. The President took advantage of *assertives* and *commissives* to project this image by emphasising his shared values and strong bonds with the audience. He did this mainly through communicating the values of *patriotism, honesty/trustworthiness, fairness and obedience to law and order*, which persuasively portrayed him as similar to the audience. These were mostly seen when Buhari's rhetoric verbalized his love for Nigeria and his determination to work towards its progress; when it reiterated his resolve to manage Nigeria's resources judiciously; when it reiterated his commitment to keep sanitizing the conduct of campaigns and improving electoral credibility in Nigeria; and when it stated his solemn fight against corruption and looting that stagnated the country's development for decades. These are ethical values and concerns that most Nigerians would adhere to.

Moreover, the president's rhetoric was enhanced through many discursive strategies. Especially, the use of inclusive language through the pronouns *we, us, our* (the 'signalled ethos,' Beason, 1999) enabled him to not only involve the audience in his discourse and engage them emotionally, but also to align himself with them. The use of *norm expression* and *metaphor* allowed him to urge *all candidates and their supporters* to behave and act in ways that demonstrate patriotism and not to *set Nigeria ablaze because of politics or sectional interests* during elections. This president-preacher tone demonstrated *positive Self-presentation* and *populism*. The discourse presented Buhari as a candidate who put Nigeria first before his political ambition. It emphasised his positive ideas and selfless position of prioritizing Nigeria's peace and prosperity than personal interest/ambitions. This deliberate tactic by the president was aimed to draw the audience's attention to his strong bonds with them, eliminate all differences, and build a sense of community. Study example 6 below, which illustrates Buhari's patriotism through *assertives*:

Example 6

(01) It is also very important to emphasize this: that even as the Presidential and National Assembly campaigns <i>kick off</i> , all candidates and the supporters of all political parties owe it a <i>duty</i> to themselves and to <i>our</i> dear country to go about the campaigns <i>peacefully</i> and <i>decently</i> [AST]. Muhammadu Buhari, Nov 19, 2018	PSP, MET, LEX, NEX, POP,	SIM
(01) As I always say, <i>we</i> have no other country but Nigeria [AST]... Muhammadu Buhari, Nov 19, 2018	PSP, POP,	SIM

Example 7 below illustrates his good moral value of managing resources judiciously through *commissives*:

Example 7

(01) We are committed to deepening the work we started in this first term, such that Nigeria's assets and resources continue to be organized & utilized for the good of the common man [COM] ... Muhammadu Buhari, Nov 19, 2018	PSP, LEX, IMP,	SIM
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	HYP, POP	
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Atiku Abubakar's Similitude

As seen above in Table 1, *similitude* is the second most-preponderant ethos in Atiku's campaign rhetoric during the 2019 elections. It was demonstrated through the challenger's use of *expressives* and *assertives*, which identified him with the audience in terms of his ideology of supporting and defending democracy and its institutions, and rejection of anti-democratic acts. Atiku's rhetoric displayed this by employing *expressives* to frame President Buhari negatively as a leader whose actions went against the tenets of democracy. While displaying populist anger and bitter tone through *lexicalisation*, the accusatory rhetoric utilised other discursive strategies like *agency*, *actor description*, and *negative Other-presentation* to portray the President as a deviant leader who *attacked democracy*, *violated the constitution* and *disrespected the rule of law*. Using *evidentiality*, it specifically referred to how Buhari inappropriately suspended the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for his own political agenda, postponed the Presidential and National Assembly Elections in a plot to avoid defeat, and used the military to seal up Daily Trust Newspapers offices in Maiduguri and Abuja in order to 'suppress freedom of speech'. The rhetoric generally delegitimised Buhari and his official decisions. It established that they were not in keeping with the country's constitution and the rule of law, that they were at odds with the norms and values accepted in the society.

Let us take example 8 below, which features Atiku's rhetoric on the CJN's suspension. In this tweet, the challenger accused that the decision, which the president claimed was in line with his anti-corruption policy and a court order, was actually a *subversion of democracy* and *democratic institutions*:

Example 8

(01) As a democrat, I must say, without equivocation, that no mission or goal, no matter how noble or well-intended, should be used as a <i>pretext</i> for the <i>subversion</i> of our <i>democracy</i> and our <i>democratic institutions</i> [EXP]. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 28, 2019	IMP, PSP, AGY, NOP, LEX, POP	SIM
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Building on these arguments, Atiku went on to employ *assertives* to communicate propositions that draw clear contrast between him and Buhari, and then aligned himself with the audience in terms of supporting and defending democracy, and rejecting anti-democratic acts. The assertives present him positively as a candidate who cherishes and respects democracy, who vehemently rejects any action that is contrary to the provisions of Nigerian constitution. His messages are well supported by *lexicalisation* through the use of lexis with positive connotations in the context of democracy to describe himself: *a democrat*, *defender of democracy*, *patriot*. Lexicalisation additionally enables Atiku to associate his audience with similar lexis: *defense of democracy*, and *preference for democracy* as a strategy to identify with them in terms of the *current challenge facing democracy in the country*. In other words, Atiku's similitude is conveyed in the persuasive scenario that while the audience have *democratic will* and *preference for democracy*, and they have the civic duty to engage in *defense of democracy*, he is also *a democrat* and *a defender of democracy*. This scenario is also constructed by his use

of the inclusive pronouns *we*, *our*, and *us*, which allow the challenger to identify with his audience. See example 9 below:

Example 9

(01) All my life, I have been a democrat and a defender of democracy [AST]. (02) Like all men of good conscience and patriots, I believe this present challenge has imposed on <i>us</i> yet again, the duty to rise in peaceful defense of democracy, for which so many have laid down their lives [AST]. Atiku Abubakar, Jan 28, 2019	PSP, NEX, POP, LEX, MET, POP	SIM
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Moreover, Atiku's key rhetorical strategy were *populism* and *polarization*, which he employed to construct the discourse of a democrat against a dictator. His rhetoric created two opposing sides of pro-democracy and anti-democracy. He then utilised *lexicalisation* to describe himself as a *democrat*, which aligned him with the pro-democracy group and of course the audience. The same strategy was used to describe Buhari as a *dictator*, which identified him with the anti-democracy group. This portrayed Buhari as an aberrant leader who did not adhere to the societal norms and values of supporting democracy and respecting the constitution. Atiku then used the strategies of *norm expression* and *populism* to encourage the audience to vote (for him) in defence of democracy and the rule of law. Through this ethos, therefore, Atiku not only framed Buhari as unacceptable candidate who did not deserve another vote; he more importantly attempted to sway the voters by projecting himself as acceptable candidate for his adherence to similar ideologies.

Furthermore, in what appears consistent with these findings, scholars from the fields of Rhetoric and Psychology have employed synonymous terms to emphasise the significance of similarity between persuaders and persuadees in persuasive communication. While working within the framework of Rhetoric, Burke (1969) uses his concept of *identification* to argue that the rhetorical strategy in which persuaders speak their persuadees' language by speech, by gesture, image, idea, or attitude, identifying their ways with them, is crucial in rhetorical communication. Building on this Burkean idea, Enos (2010) posits that the whole concept of ethos emanates from *identification* because it opens up a world that holds values that both persuaders and persuadees adhere to.

Finally, the employment of *identification strategies* has been a usual feature of political persuasion. This has been established by findings of many past studies on both offline and online genres. This is seen from the findings of Kazemian et. al. (2015; US President J. F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address), Basuki (2017; Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo's Facebook posts during Indonesia's 2014 Presidential Election campaigns) and Mwetulundila and Mlambo (2021; Namibian President Hage Geingob's 2020 Inaugural Address). These studies consistently showed how the political figures analysed identified with their audiences through strategies that emphasise *common ground* such as shared values, beliefs, interest, challenges, and achievements; and through the use of *inclusive language* that manifested from their employment of inclusive pronouns *we*, *us*, and *our*. In a similar manner, Buhari identified with his audience in terms of shared values of patriotism and morality, while Atiku in terms of interest, support, and defence for democracy. This indicates that both candidates identified with their audiences in terms of common ground. They also similarly employed inclusive language through pronouns, which they utilised to discursively involve their audiences and to identify

with them. Hence, Buhari and Atiku's campaign rhetoric on Twitter was similarly in line with the common nature of offline political rhetoric in terms of speakers' attempt to identify with their audiences as a way of influencing them.

Expertise

As the name implies, *expertise* ethos is about the persuader's competence, experience, practical intelligence, wisdom and proficiency exhibited in his discourse, and which relates to the specific situation or issues under discussion. The analysis found that Atiku's campaign rhetoric displayed expertise through its utilisation of *assertives* and *directives* speech acts. Through the use of *assertives*, the rhetoric revealed Atiku's expertise in job creation, in lifting people out of poverty, in growing the economy and in governance. Through the use of *directives*, it demonstrated *expertise* in adapting modern campaign tools, especially Facebook and Twitter, to engage with voters through digital means. The embedding of Twitter and Facebook for campaigns with so much proficiency and versatility as Atiku has shown was expertise in itself. This is especially arguable considering the fact that during the 2019 elections, the use of Social Media tools was a new political practice in Nigeria (see Bello et al., 2019; Momoh, 2019; Olowokere & Audu-Bako, 2019).

To begin with, Atiku's expertise through *assertives* manifested from his claims that drew sharp contrast between the "incompetent" Buhari and his competent Self. This was seen, for instance, in his streams of tweets on #TheAtikuPlan and #TheAtikuVision. #TheAtikuPlan was launched on Twitter and Facebook on 19th November 2018. It was a comprehensive policy document in which Atiku enumerated his expert plans for salvaging Nigeria's economy and creating jobs. #TheAtikuVision was launched simultaneously on Twitter, Facebook and physically offline at the Ozone Cinema in Lagos, on 30th January 2019. It involved 10 pragmatic policies the candidate planned to implement to stimulate Nigeria's economy immediately he was sworn in as President. In his rhetoric, Atiku utilised *assertives* to establish his *expertise* on improving the economy and creating jobs. He began by claiming and intensifying President Buhari's *incompetence* and *failure* to stimulate Nigeria's economy and create employment opportunities. This claim was substantiated through the strategies of *authority*, *evidentiality*, and *number game*. The strategy of *authority* was seen when Atiku referred to the International Monetary Fund who *recently stated that it is the failure of this government to have a coherent and comprehensive set of policies combined with poor leadership that has led to its failure to deliver*. The strategies of *evidentiality* and *number game* were seen when Atiku used specific figures and statistics – 4 years, 7 million, 21 million – to convey the ugly impression of worsening unemployment and poverty in Nigeria under Buhari. By invoking these supportive authority and figures, Atiku was not only validating his claim on Buhari's failure; he was also projecting an image of someone well-versed in this issue.

Conversely, as his discourse unfolded, Atiku employed various tactics and discursive strategies to establish his own expertise. These include, especially, *evidentiality*, *lexicalisation*, *number game*, *implication*, and *positive Self-presentation*. These strategies emphasised his credentials and proved to the audience that he possessed the required competence to reinvigorate the economy and create jobs. First, he contrasted himself with the *ill-prepared* president by projecting the image of a well-prepared candidate who had had *18 months of working with the best experts ... to come up with policies and plans that ... will get Nigeria going in the right direction again*. His ideas were supported by lexicalisation through the positive lexis *best experts*, *policies*, *plans*, and *right direction*. They conveyed positive

impression about his preparedness to address the country's economic challenges. Secondly, Atiku exhibited expertise by talking about his previous rank of *Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007* and his experience as the chairman of the National Economic Council *that gave Nigeria her highest and most consistent GDP growth of over 6% per annum*. These were forms of *evidentiality* provided to prove his proficiency in handling the economy. There were also the strategies of *lexicalisation* and *hyperbole* – *highest, most consistent GDP*, and the *metaphor* of *growth*. His tactics obviously targeted undermining the audience's confidence in Buhari's competence and then build their confidence and hope in his abilities. See example 10 below:

Example 10

(01) Over the last 18 months, I have worked with the best experts Nigeria has to offer to come up with policies and plans that when implemented will get Nigeria going in the right direction again [AST]. #TheAtikuPlan Atiku Abubakar, Nov 19, 2018	PSP, LEX, IMP, POP	EXP
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Coming back to Atiku's display of *expertise* through *directives*, it was displayed in multiple tweeting episodes. In each of these episodes, directives were used in ways that manifested Atiku's competence in embedding digital tools to engage with voters in his campaign. His discourse was supported by discursive strategies of *norm expression*, *populism*, and *positive Self-presentation*. The first instance was in his tweeting episode on #TheAtikuPlan, where Atiku invited voters to join him on Facebook and Twitter on 19th November 2018, as he launched his comprehensive policy document. The second was in #AskAtiku tweets, where he encouraged followers to add questions they wanted him to answer in his television interview, The Candidate, on the NTA, on 30th January 2019. The third was in #AskAtikuYourself tweets on 5th February 2019, when he urged followers to click on a hashtag link and have the opportunity of asking him questions online. The fourth was when he asked his supporters to tune in and watch his live broadcast on Facebook and Twitter, on 20th February 2019. Observed carefully, through the use of these directives and discursive strategies, Atiku's discourse not only signalled his authority or interpersonal relations with voters. Most importantly, it exhibited his impressive repertoire and skills in connecting with and engaging with voters through modern means of campaign. See example 11 below:

Example 11

(01) Join me at 12 noon, 19th November as we unveil our plan to Nigerians on Facebook and twitter [DIR]. (02) You can share feedback and questions using the hashtag #TheAtikuPlan [DIR]. Atiku Abubakar, Nov 18, 2018	NEX, PSP, POP	EXP
(01) If you are watching the launch of our policy, please get a friend to watch with you [DIR]. (02) Share with friends and family [DIR]. (03) Remember to engage with the hashtag #TheAtikuPlan [DIR] Atiku Abubakar, Nov 19, 2018	NEX, PSP, POP	EXP

Finally, similar to this finding on Atiku's tweets, Beason's (1991) study also reported dominance of *expertise ethos* in business speeches. Moreover, as the current study found that Atiku expressed expertise by referring to his credentials and good sense in reviving the economy and creating jobs, Beason's study similarly found that business speakers in his study exhibited expertise mainly by referring to their business credentials such as ranks, years of experience, and positions held. Thus, these findings seemingly suggest that while competence is crucial and pervasive in persuasive discourse of different contexts, the approach to communicating it may also be similar. In other words, the categories of elements drawn upon by business persuaders for the expression of competence may be similar to those relied upon by political persuaders.

Inclination to Succeed

Inclination to succeed is about the persuader's potential for future success. It is when the persuader comes across as someone who possesses what it takes to succeed. According to Beason (1991), this ethos is created through two basic rhetorical techniques. First, it is established through emphasizing one's successful track records by referring to past or present achievements that relate to the specific situation or issues under discussion. Secondly, successful inclination is also substantiated through demonstrating a confident attitude and forecast for future success, where the persuader boldly displays a conviction of success in the future.

This study found that *Inclination* is one of the two main ethotic forms projected through *assertives* by both President Buhari and Atiku Abubakar in their campaign tweets. However, the two contenders' rhetoric differed regarding the discursive tactics employed in creating this persona. This is discussed and shown below:

President Buhari's Inclination to Succeed

Buhari projected inclination ethos by employing *assertives* in ways that alluded to his concrete achievements in office in the last four years, which strongly signalled his tendency for future success. Through these speech acts, the president made numerous claims about his impressive performance so far. These were in the areas of *security, infrastructure development, employment, economy* and *fighting corruption*. He claimed that since his assumption of office in 2015, Nigeria had continued to see tremendous achievements. His rhetoric manifested the persona of a hard-working and successful leader with tangible accomplishments, and who obviously had good prospects for more successes in the future. It demonstrated the use of the present to justify the future –*temporal legitimation*. This was evident in his utterances that mainly conveyed positive impression of a well-performing leader who deserved another vote. Obviously, this image was deployed by the incumbent in his attempt to rebuild confidence and encourage support for his re-election. His discourse saw the deployment of numerous discursive strategies, especially *evidentiality, metaphor, hyperbole, lexicalisation, positive Self-presentation, implication, and negative Other-presentation*.

Through the use of evidentiality, the President enumerated specific instances (or *logos*) of his achievements in order to validate his claims. These included: *standard-gauge rail, roads, highways, airports, gains made, agriculture, and social investment*. His ideas were further verbalized by his *metaphors* of *yielding fruits, building an economy, and fighting corruption*, which allowed the utilization of terms from non-political domains to vividly depict the successes of his administration in the last four years. There was the use of hyperboles of *every*

part of Nigeria, all areas of national life, and all over the country, which was a deliberate tactic to heighten the degree to which his good performance permeated Nigeria. Across these tweets, the positive impression of Buhari's sustained accomplishments was also communicated via *lexicalisation*, through the use of items with positive connotations in the context of governance: *gains, steady and sustainable progress, very efficiently, prosperous, stable, strong, progress*. Ultimately, Buhari's discourse, through its projection of this ethos, created the image of a successful leader with strong tendency for more performance in the future. See example 12 below:

Example 12

(01) We are connecting <i>every part of Nigeria</i> by standard-gauge rail [AST]. (02) We're upgrading roads, highways, airports around the country [AST]. (03) Our efforts in Power generation, transmission, distribution are <i>yielding fruit</i> [AST]. (04) All of these are in fulfillment of our promise to invest in <i>infrastructure</i> [AST]. Muhammadu Buhari, Oct 26, 2018	EVI, PSP, MET, POP, HYP	INC
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Atiku Abubakar's Inclination to Succeed

The analysis revealed that Atiku's campaign rhetoric also projected significant degree of *inclination to succeed*. But unlike President Buhari's inclination which derived from references to his current achievements, Atiku's *inclination* derived from his confident forecast of how successful his plans and policies would be in yielding a positive future for Nigerians. This means that, unlike the President's strategy of utilising *logos* to construct this ethos, the challenger's rhetoric relied on *pathos*. Atiku's rhetoric relied on pathos because his strategy was aimed to build hope and confidence, to establish his good potential for future success. In his earlier tweets, Atiku assumed critical tone to emphasise how the incumbent had failed due to poor planning, incompetence and bad policies. But as his discourse unfolded, he softened tone to talk about how he had developed good policies and plans capable of saving Nigeria's situation. His discourse was persuasively framed that these plans and policies will *take Nigeria from where she is now, to where she needs to be, and get [her] going in the right direction again*. These plans and policies were contained in his policy documents #TheAtikuPlan and #TheAtikuVision, launched on Facebook and Twitter. They were a set of well-formed steps and measures specifically tailored to address Nigeria's situation. According to his rhetoric, these policies and plans, when implemented, would create jobs, eradicate poverty, and stimulate Nigeria's economy. They were used to confidently refer to a hypothetical future that Nigerians would achieve once he was elected. These plans and policies, therefore, were exploited as a form of bait to make the voters visualize a positive future under Atiku's presidency.

In projecting this ethos, Atiku's rhetoric exhibited many rhetorical strategies, including *comparison*, *counterfactuals*, *lexicalisation*, and *populism*. However, *counterfactuals* and *lexicalisation* appeared most dominant. They emphasised the prosperity of Nigeria 'if Atiku is elected'. Through the strategy of comparison, Atiku contrasted himself with Buhari 'who only made promises without specific plans for fulfilling them'. He implied that he was a better candidate who believed in plans rather than empty promises. He then utilised the strategy of *counterfactuals* to emphasise how positive the future of Nigerians would be 'if he is elected to implement his policies'. This positive future under Atiku was tactically projected through

lexicalisation, using positive lexis as *living wage*, *world-class education*, *financial stability*, *jobs*, *prosperous nation*, *dynamic and competitive economy*, *increased self-employment* and so on. Through the use of these strategies, Atiku's rhetoric persuaded the audience that if he was voted for, these well-tailored plans and policies would be implemented to yield them a better future with abundant job opportunities, better condition of service, better education, and strong economy. This suggested the strategy of *populism*, obviously employed to earn himself more popularity as a better candidate with plans that would bring a better future.

Moreover, in a deliberate tactic to focus the audience's attention to his future-oriented ethos and to skew their minds, Atiku employed constant repetition of the words *plans*, *policies*, *strategies*, and *jobs*. This method of working on pathos was actually seen across all the tweets, where Atiku's discourse keeps attempting to arouse voters' hope for better Nigeria in order to portray the image of an acceptable candidate. Thus, the discourse persuasively presents him as a better candidate who has better prospects in tackling the challenges confronting Nigerians. See example 13 below:

Example 13

(01) ... my plan will help create jobs because in my many travels across our great nation the one consistent thing I hear wherever I am is that our people need jobs [AST].	CTF, POP, PSP, LEX, IMP	INC
Atiku Abubakar, Nov 19, 2018		

Finally, because the future-oriented ethos is about projecting one's self as having the potential for success, it could be viewed as associated with Chilton's (2004) political strategy of *Self-legitimation* and Reyes' (2011) legitimation strategy of *appeal to emotions*. This ethos is related to Self-legitimation in the sense that Buhari legitimised himself through alluding to his good performance in governance. On the other hand, Buhari's inclination strategies are also forms of appeal to emotions as they attempt to raise the audiences' confidence and hope in him. Therefore, from a point of view, the findings of this study are related to Ross and Rivers' (2020) findings on President Trump's use of appeal to emotions in his Twitter rhetoric to legitimate himself and his Mexico Border Wall policy. But while Trump appealed to the negative emotion of *fear* (towards the 'dangerous' migrants), Buhari appealed to the audience's positive emotions of confidence and hope (towards himself). Moreover, similar to these findings on the use of positive emotions, Beason's (1991) study also discovered how business speakers attempt to work on their audience's positive emotions. Therefore, these findings have further confirmed the findings of earlier studies that political rhetors embed pathos as an element of their ethos (Charteris-Black, 2009; Alkhirbash et. al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study was concerned with how Nigerian Presidential candidates, President Muhammadu Buhari and his challenger, Atiku Abubakar, utilised speech acts to project ethos in their campaign tweets during the 2019 general elections. It has been concluded that the findings could have broader implications for African electoral discourse, for digital rhetoric, and for political discourse generally. First, the findings indicate that *assertives* are the most

predominant *speech acts* that both Buhari and Atiku relied on to project ethos in their campaign rhetoric. The implication inferable from this is that African candidates during elections rely on claims and counter-claims as primary means of constructing their credible image. Secondly, the findings also show that although both Buhari and Atiku similarly relied on assertives for highlighting their ethos, the two differed in that while Buhari mostly projected *similitude* through emphasising his shared values with the audience, Atiku concentrated on projecting *expertise* through emphasising his own competence in growing the economy and creating jobs. What these results seem to imply is that although political adversaries may rely on the same speech act for ethos, they may utilise it differently to exhibit dissimilar dimensions that are determined by their respective agendas. Thirdly, the findings show that although both Buhari and Atiku similarly deployed significant *inclination to succeed*, the two differed regarding the discursive tactics employed to arrive at this ethos. Buhari's inclination manifested from his alluding to the concrete achievements of his administration in the last four years; Atiku's emerged from his confident forecast of how his plans and policies would take Nigerians to a prosperous future. The implication here is that twittering political contenders may accomplish the same ethotic forms by drawing upon dissimilar discursive techniques.

Finally, the scope of this study was limited to text-based campaign tweets of Nigerian presidential candidates of 2019. It did not analyse other semiotic resources like images, sounds, and videos. Therefore, it is recommended that future research on ethos in campaign tweets be multimodal, cross-cultural, or cross-linguistic in approach. This would extend the current knowledge and enrich literature.

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