

## Contextual Persuasion Strategies in Presidential Election Campaign Advertisements in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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### Abstract

Presidential election campaign advertisers in Nigerian newspapers combine predictable contextual knowledge and routes of persuasion as strategies in producing messages aimed at influencing voters' decisions before an election. Existing studies on presidential election campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers have focused mainly on persuasive effects from the stylistic, critical discourse analytic, semiotic, and satirical perspectives. However, little attention was paid to predictable contexts and routes of persuasion as strategies in creating desired effects in presidential campaign advertisements. This study, therefore, was designed to identify and analyse predictable context types and persuasive strategies used in election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers. M.A.K. Halliday's *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (1978), complemented by Petty and Cacioppo's *Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)*, served as the framework. Descriptive design was adopted. Data were collected from All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential campaign advertisements in three Nigerian newspapers: Daily Trust (DT), Punch, and Nigerian Tribune (NT). Seven out of fifty campaign advertisements published in 2015 and 2019 were purposively selected based on their wide circulation. Data were subjected to discourse analysis. Three predictable context types were identified: Victory (PCV), Defeat (PCD) and Countering of Opponent's Strategies (PCCOS). These predictable contexts were combined with central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Context of victory depicted Peripheral Route of Persuasion (PRP); context of defeat exhibited Central Route of Persuasion (CRP) (Punch and NT), while PCCOS (NT and Punch) reflected integrated use of PRP and CRP. Presidential campaign advertisers in Nigerian newspapers combine predictable contexts and routes of persuasion to consolidate voters' support, prevent likely defeat and counter opponents' strategies preparatory to winning an election.

**Keywords:** Contextual Persuasion; Routes of Persuasion; Campaign advertisements; Nigerian newspapers

### Introduction

Producing presidential election campaign advertisements in the media is a complex task that involves text-producers' pre-knowledge of voters' feelings, expectations, logical and illogical thoughts before an election. Similarly, as a success-inducing strategy, presidential election campaign advertisements may be ineffective without a thorough evaluation of societal challenges with conjectured solutions that are mutually beneficial to all the members of a social group. Text-producers often exploit some identified societal challenges and suggested

solutions by turning them into contextually predictive tools used in constructing persuasive messages in presidential election campaign advertisements.

Nevertheless, election campaign advertisements as promise-making ventures for a better future can be described as contextual projections which are meant to strengthen voters' support, prevent defeat or weaken opponents' strategies. Hence, as a complex, purpose-driven and arduous persuasive task, language use in election campaign advertisements is often ambiguous and nuanced in terms of their meaning potentials as they capture the prevailing realities at the time of their production. In this connection, readers need constant and updated knowledge about the realities and prevailing attitudes that inform advertisers' choice and selection of persuasive strategies in campaign advertisements to make well-informed decisions. This is important to promote better understanding and deeper interpretations of implicit messages and their persuasive intentions, which are contextually expressed and represented in such texts. However, persuasive meanings in texts are not always clearly visible without recourse to their contexts of production. They are often used to provide information to potential readers on issues of mutual interest to both the text-producers and the readers. Producing persuasive texts, such as presidential campaign advertisements, is contextually pre-planned and aimed at influencing voters' willingness based on prediction. The predictable dimensions of voting outcomes and realities are made salient and compact through the intermixing of written and visual expressions. Contextual persuasion describes the use of specific situational elements to influence readers' beliefs and timely actions to achieve desired outcomes.

It could be noted that every election campaign advertisement requires a specific persuasive communication strategy that is influenced by the political climate or environment in which it is situated. Such persuasive strategies could be informed by the candidate's status (as an incumbent, or a challenger/saviour), societal expectations, and people's socio-economic states, which may or may not attract appropriate voting actions. In Nigeria, corruption, insecurity and economic hardship are recurring socio-political challenges preventing the progress and development of Nigeria as a nation. Presidential election candidates often utilise some of these social problems to construct persuasive solutions aimed at ameliorating or eliminating them if they are voted into power. This study, therefore, examines the projected contexts and routes of persuasion portrayed in the 2015 and 2019 APC's and PDP's political election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers with insights from Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion.

This study examines context-determined persuasive strategies used in presidential campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers, not on multimodality. The essence is to

showcase how campaign advertisers combine diverse and foreknowable contexts with routes of persuasion in producing messages meant to influence voters' decisions before an election.

### **Statement of the problem**

Scholars such as Ademilokun (2015), Gbadegesin and Onanuga (2018) and Makinde and Adejumo (2024) adopted semiotics, critical discourse analysis, and content analysis to explore visual resources and concepts as analytic tools in unveiling persuasive effects, representations and communication strategies in Nigeria's presidential election campaign advertisements. Also, many of these studies looked at lexical and syntactic patterns used in presenting ideologies and revealing actual meanings in presidential election campaign advertisements (Abdulahi-Idiagbon 2013, and Gana 2023). These analyses paid more attention to the use of content, verbal and visual resources in creating persuasive effects in such texts. However, little attention was paid to how text-producers predictably combined different contexts and routes of persuasion in presenting political information to influence voters' decisions before an election. This study, therefore, focuses its attention on APC and PDP's 2015 and 2019 presidential election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers to identify, explain and analyse the predictive contextual persuasion strategies in producing the selected advertisements

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

This study aims to investigate predictable contexts and persuasive strategies used in election campaign advertisements in the selected Nigerian newspapers published in 2015 and 2019. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. identify predictable contexts in selected APC and PDP's presidential election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers;
- ii. explain the routes of persuasion used in the selected campaign advertisements
- iii. analyse contextual persuasion strategies in the selected campaign advertisements

### **Scope and significance of the study**

This study limited its attention to contexts and persuasion in the All Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party's (PDP) presidential election campaign advertisements during the transitional periods in 2015 and 2019. The advertisements were published in three Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Punch*. The newspapers were selected based on their wide circulation and readership.

The study is significant in contributing to text-producers insight on how contexts and routes of persuasion can be predictably combined in their efforts at producing better political election campaign advertisements in the newspapers. The research will also facilitate readers' understanding and interpretation of inherent messages in campaign advertisements concerning political parties and their candidates, and how candidates from a particular party can be differentiated from their opponents before an election.

### **Literature review**

Political campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers have attracted different interests and attention of scholars from different fields and theoretical perspectives. Some of these studies adopted Critical Discourse Analysis, Stylistics, Semiotics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to indicate how text-producers used linguistic and visual resources to present and promote contemporary issues of political concerns to the electorate in Nigeria. Scholars such as Ademilokun (2015), Gbadegesin and Onanuga (2018), Jones and Ayuwo (2022), and Makinde and Adejumo (2024) adopted semiotics, critical discourse analysis, and content analysis to explore visual resources and concepts as analytic tools in the constructions of power and ideology in Nigeria's presidential election campaign advertisements. Similarly, Ademilokun and Olateju (2015) noted that visual images provoke deeper feelings and stir people to certain required actions more than spoken or written language. They further observed that visual images are used for the popularisation of politicians and political parties before elections in Nigeria. Many of the authors also looked at lexical and syntactic patterns used in presenting persuasive effects and meaning representations in presidential election campaign advertisements (Abdulahi–Idiagbon, 2013 and Gana, 2023). Similarly, in a synchronic stylistic analysis of language used in thirty-five campaign advertisements in selected southern Nigerian newspapers during the 2007 general election campaign, Omozuwa and Ezejideku (2008) identified different linguistic devices that politicians used to achieve their aims. These include: exaggerations, rhetorical questions, repetitions, promise-making, colloquialisms and figurative expressions. Their investigation was based on linguistic considerations without referring to other meaning-making resources. Shandarma and Mohammed (2013) adopted the Crystal and Davy model of linguistic stylistics to examine election campaign posters and slogans within the Yola metropolis. Their analysis was based on nine selected posters, which contained typographical features that functioned as persuasive means to secure voters' support. They concluded that posters were visually used by politicians to attract readers' attention and awareness. They, however, noted that posters were visual tools having been subjected to only

linguistic analysis, devoid of contextual persuasive analysis. Also, Patrick and Ndimele (2024), using socio-pragmatic principles of post-colonial pragmatics and common ground theory, identified marketing and de-marketing strategies used by political parties to market their candidates and to de-market opposition candidates. These are valid observations of some of the purposes and strategies that text-producers deploy in communicating intended messages before political election campaigns. The studies are devoid of attention to combinatorial patterns of predictable contexts and routes of persuasion in presidential election campaign advertisements. Therefore, the present study is focused on how text-producers combined predictable contexts and routes of persuasion as strategies in achieving desired intentions and influencing voters' decisions before an election.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Contexts, Predictable Contexts, Persuasion and Elaboration Likelihood Model**

Context provides the means of producing and interpreting different meanings detectable in texts. Meaning-making in texts is a matter of many contextual possibilities which readers may interpret differently. Without mutual contextual knowledge and understanding between text-producers and their readers, meaningful interpretations of messages being transmitted may be difficult or elusive. Context is useful in creating persuasive trajectories in the production and interpretation of messages in campaign advertisements before an election. Cook (1999) believes that context is an infinitely expandable concept. Hence, several types of contexts are recognised as linguistic, social, cultural, verbal, and cognitive, among others.

The term 'context' has been variously described by scholars from different perspectives based on the circumstances, conditions or time in which a text is produced. To Widdowson (2000:126, context refers to those aspects of the circumstances of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning. Similarly, Babajide (2000) identified verbal context as the company that a linguistic item keeps. In other words, interpreting a text from a verbal context perspective involves identifying and emphasising verbal elements used in terms of their linkage and interrelationship with one another. This was instantiated in the ambiguous use of the word "bill" in the sentence, "*The bill is too large*". The statement can be interpreted from the physical size of the bill, whether the paper size used in its production is too large, or the cost in monetary terms. The sentence can only be disambiguated by adding such expressions as: "at this time that paper should not be wasted", or "but needs not be paid". The additional expressions can help in the correct determination of the contextual meaning of the word

through its relationship with the other words in the sentence. This means that some expressions may be ambiguous when not surrounded by appropriate words or when it is uttered in isolation. This study adopts aspects of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1978). The choice of this theory is informed by the foundational account on context, often traced to it as a key component in exploring and understanding how language is used in different situations to create different meanings within a text. He identified three meta-functions of language as ideational, interpersonal and textual. He introduced the transitivity system, which comprises three process types as part of the ideational function of language, which include three components: process, participants and circumstances. Halliday (1978:10) defines context of situation as social processes within which a text is located. These social processes comprise: material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential. To Halliday (1994:110), material processes are "processes of doings and happenings". The doing process explains the idea that an entity materially does something, which may extend to affect another entity. Happening process types express the notions that something happened, is happening or is about to happen as a phenomenon or an entity. Without adequate understanding of these contextual elements, the production and interpretation of implicit and thought-provoking messages in presidential election campaign advertisements may not be fully understood. Context is a crucial requirement for the reader's appropriate interpretation of a text-producer's intention within a location or time in which it is produced. Hence, text-producers should pay considerable attention to context-dependent issues that require contextual evaluation to choose the most appropriate route of persuasion meant to influence voters' decisions when designing election campaign advertisements. As a form of political communication that involves the identification of the target electorate in a predictable context, campaign advertisements are designed to create awareness and solicit voters' acceptance of a particular candidate within a period, usually before an election.

### **Predictable contexts**

Halliday's (1978) SFL emphasises that by understanding the context of a situation, it is possible to predict the linguistic features likely to be used and to interpret the intended meaning within a text. In Halliday's SFL, predictable contexts refer to recurring patterns which are influenced by factors such as social activity, the participants, and the relationship between them. These contexts create predictable situations where certain linguistic choices could be made. It asserts that language is not just a system of rules, but a tool for social interactions. Predictable contexts refer to circumstances, situations or environments where patterns of behaviours are consistent and easily predictable, where individuals can anticipate what to expect, make decisions and

adjust their actions accordingly. Predictable contexts result from recurring events or commonly observed behaviours in daily social interactions within a society. However, context can also be unpredictable when an individual acts out of character. Also, context may be predictably unreliable when an individual in social interaction is not consistent and makes promises that cannot be fulfilled.

### **Persuasion and Elaboration Likelihood Model**

Persuasion has long been studied by scholars in philosophy, language, politics, and religion who seek to understand how people influence others in changing their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour (Aristotle 4th BC, Petty and Cacioppo, 1986 and Perloff, 2003, among others). To Perloff (2003), persuasion is a process in which communicators try to convince other people in order to change their attitudes or behaviour on a particular issue.

Many theories have been propounded by scholars on persuasion. These include: social judgment theory (Sherif and Hovland, 1980); narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1985) and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, selected for this study, is a theory of attitude change. It was developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1986. To Petty and Cacioppo (1986:124), "ELM is a general framework for organising, categorising, and understanding the basic processes underlying the effectiveness of persuasive communications". These processes can be unravelled through contextual interactions of participants in producing and interpreting communicated messages in texts such as political campaign advertisements. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) see persuasion as a process or route through which the success of an influence depends largely on the way the receivers make sense of the message. Hence, they present two different routes that an individual may use in influencing others.

The first is the central route that provides elaborate information, rational arguments, claims and evidence to support a particular conclusion. Not all readers are capable of identifying or receiving centrally routed messages because it is based on two conditions:

1. The audience must be highly motivated to process all of the information received.
2. The audience must have the ability to understand the sent messages.

The second is the peripheral route, which is used when the audience lacks the motivation or ability to interpret a given message. The persuader can use the peripheral route, which relies on emotional involvement and other superficial means of persuasion like patriotism, character and likeability, celebrity endorsement or public support. The peripheral route can work

perfectly when the audience is committed, dedicated or loyal to a cause and it may produce a bandwagon effect.

Whether central or peripheral, the knowledge of predictable contexts can facilitate easy selection of appropriate routes of persuasion in the production of political campaign advertisements in the print media. Similarly, readers' ability to correctly identify persuasive trajectories in political campaign advertisements requires their understanding of the text-producer's intent and predictable contextual considerations behind such textual compositions.

### **Methodology**

The research was designed to identify predictable contexts and their combinatorial patterns with routes of persuasion in presidential election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers. Based on the regional axis, data were collected from APC and PDP 2015 and 2019 presidential election campaign advertisements in three Nigerian national dailies published during the transition periods of 2015 and March 2019. Quota sampling was used to collect 20 from *Punch*, 10 from *Daily Trust (DT)* and 10 from *Nigerian Tribune (NT)*. Seven out of the fifty were purposively selected based on their relevance to this study. Data were subjected to discourse analysis. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978), complemented by Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), served as the framework. Descriptive design was adopted and data were subjected to Discourse Analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In this analysis, three predictable context types were identified in the selected data. These comprised: Victory (PCV), Defeat (PCD) and Context of Countering Opponent's Strategies (PCCOS). Each of them was defined, characterised and exemplified with associated persuasive patterns are presented as follows:

#### **1. Predictable Context of Victory (CV)**

Plates 1 and 2 are produced in a predictable context of victory. After seemingly rejection from or disapproval of the former ruling party (PDP) by some Nigerians in 2015, APC saw the need for a change in the country's political leadership. In Plate 1, the APC's candidates appealed to 'existing donors for more donations, till we achieve victory...' This appeal was made before the 2015 presidential election based on the predictable context of victory.

### Plate 1: Predictable context of victory

**DAILY TRUST**  
Monday, February 23, 2015

**11**

**APC** **BSO**

**A New Nigeria is possible.**

One of the reasons for the postponement of the elections, is to make Buhari/Osinbajo Presidential Campaign run out of funds. Since the PDP and its candidate have unfettered access to the state treasury, they will always have billions to spend. To make sure our March4Buhari is real, we call on Nigerians and all supporters of GMB and Osinbajo, to continue to donate to the Buhari Campaign funds, so as to save our country from mindless looting and incompetent leadership. We thank our existing donors and we appeal to you for more donations till we achieve victory.

**2 Ways to Support Change**

You can make this possible by supporting the Presidential Campaign Fund of GMB. Buy the Buhari Support Organisations scratch cards or donate directly to the BSO bank account, which has GMB as the Sole Signatory.

1. Support by buying BSO cards:-

2. Support by Online or Cash Transfer to:-

Acct Name	Buhari Support Organisations
Banker	First Bank Plc
Acct No	2026724465
Sort Code	011150008

OR

You can also donate online via  
[www.quickteller.com/buharisupport](http://www.quickteller.com/buharisupport)

Source: *Daily Trust*, Monday, 23 Feb., 2015:11

The APC candidates saw themselves as agents of change and capitalised on the misfortune of the PDP, as a competitive advantage with the assumption that the majority of the electorate thought likewise. The advertisements in Plates 1 and 2 displayed this sentiment through the peripheral route of persuasion in the use of positive attributes of the APC candidates. The two advertisements, therefore, displayed the peripheral route of persuasion. This did not require the reader's serious evaluation efforts in determining the text producer's communicative intention aimed at engendering and strengthening supporters' loyalty before the election. Similarly, P CV was glaringly depicted in the New Year congratulatory message directed to "the President in waiting." Plate 2 portrayed an envisaged victory for APC candidates even before the 2015 presidential election was held. The message as presented in Plate 2,

**Plate 2: Predictable context of victory**



Source: Daily Trust, Wednesday, 21 Jan., 2015:4

Plate 3 was produced in dual contexts of pre-election victory celebration and greetings for the New Year. This was based on the certainty that the party would be victorious at the election.

### Plate 3: Predictable context of victory



Source: *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday, Mar. 24, 2015:11

The advertisement in Plate 3 depicted a predictable context of victory based on the assumed acceptance of the candidates by the majority of the electorate and confidence in the APC's candidates' competence. The picture of a card-carrying lady with an avowed commitment to "march for Buhari" in the 2015 presidential election corroborates this observation. The picture of the lady extolling the candidates took a substantial portion of the advertisement; it highlighted General Buhari's and Professor Osinbajo's leadership qualities before the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. The advertisement in Plate 3 focused on the female voter's endorsement and preparedness as reflected in the statement: "I am Ready for BETTER LIFE", and in the display of her voter's card. Similarly, the readiness for the task ahead of the candidates was depicted through their corporate mode of dressing. The route of persuasion in the advertisement is peripheral, based on hope for a better future rather than any rational or logical presentation of issues.

#### Plate 4 Predictable Context of Defeat (PCD)

Plate 4 depicts the Predictable Context of Defeat (PCD) is meant to prevent likely defeat before the 2019 Nigerian presidential election. This calls for a central route of persuasion, which entails high elaboration and logical presentation of facts aimed at provoking critical thinking in readers. Both PDP and APC appropriately deployed PCD as the challenger and as the incumbent party, respectively, before the two elections. This context type is exemplified in Plates 4 and 5 below.



Sources: *Punch*, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2019:33

The text produced by some supporter(s) was code-named 'Build the Future' in support of the incumbent's re-election before the 2019 Nigerian presidential election on the platform of the APC. This was done in a predictable context of defeat characterised by a strong request for voters' continuous support. Plate 4 contextually reflects the compositional pattern of command in the form of polite request and admonition. The text was produced to reflect personality and party loyalty. It, therefore, typifies a peripheral route of persuasion which does not provoke critical thinking, comparison or logical presentation of facts. Similarly, the APC campaign advertisement in Plate 5 depicted PCD as a persuasive strategy in reminding the readers of President Buhari's honesty and trustworthiness in handling matters of the state, particularly as an incumbent candidate who was seeking re-election.

**Plate 5: Predictable context of defeat**

Source: *Punch* Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019:18

**Beyond the Fight Against Corruption...**

**Buhari Runs a Compassionate Government, and Intends to Continue to do so.**



No longer shall illegal flows of massive sums leave these shores to finance other economies. While our people languish in poverty, we effectively give financial aid to nations that is not justified. I am sick of this. It must stop. The money saved will finance jobs, health care and the provision of social safety net for the needy, weak and vulnerable of our land...

We will be a compassionate government, for out of compassion arises the truest forms of wealth and progress a society can attain.

- MUHAMMADU BUHARI

**He is trusting and can be trusted. His love for Nigeria is unquestionable.**

**THE TIME IS NOW...**

**Buhari / Osinbajo**

**CHANGE IS A PROCESS. BUHARI IS ON COURSE.**



The advertisement was designed to prevent the likelihood of defeat and to endear the personality of the president to the electorate. It was also aimed at influencing voters' support for his candidacy before the 2019 Nigerian presidential election. Plate 5 was contextually structured to depict the fighting spirit in the incumbent President Buhari and what he was capable of doing apart from fighting against corruption. Hence, the advertisement in Plate 5 was produced in a predictable context of defeat using the central route of persuasion.

**Predictable Context of Countering Opponents' Strategies (PCCOS)**

Predictable context of countering the opponent's tactics depicts comparative listing of achievements and change of slogan to reflect new realities. PCCOS often centres on critiquing opponents' unfavourable stances on recurring economic and socio-political issues in the past and possibly forewarning readers to prevent any re-occurrence.

**Plate 6: Context of countering opponent’s strategy**

**Facts Speak**  
 Compare & Contrast

Jonathan	Buhari
✓ Upholds the rule of law. • Committed to credible elections.	✗ Truncated democratic progress by suspending the 1979 constitution. • Jailed several Nigerians without fair-hearing.
✓ Signed the Freedom of Information bill into law.	✗ Promulgated Decree 4 of 1984 to gag the press
✓ Established 14 new universities in two years. • Initiated the Almajiri system of education.	✗ Never built a single school for the educational advancement of the country.
✓ Reviving the railway system.	✗ Scrapped the Lagos Metroline Project at a loss of \$78 million of taxpayers' money.
✓ Unbundled the power sector with policies that encourage massive private sector investment.	✗ NIL
✓ Declined Nigeria's food import by \$5.3billion. Food production expanding by an additional 21million metric tons	✗ NIL
✓ Revamping Automobile Industry.	✗ NIL
✓ Re-equipping and re-positioning the Nigerian Armed Forces.	✗ NIL

*"I am convinced that I have kept my pact with Nigerians, and it is now time to look to the future. With your tremendous support, we have collectively done so much in the last three and half years, but to take our country to the next level, there is still more to be done."*  
 — President Goodluck Jonathan: GCFR

**Vote right, Vote PDP**  
 Peoples Democratic Party... power to the people  
[www.peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng](http://www.peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng)  
[www.facebook.com/pages/Official-Peoples-Democratic-Party-PDP-Nigeria](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Official-Peoples-Democratic-Party-PDP-Nigeria)

Source: *Daily Trust* Monday, Jan. 19, 2015:51

The PDP’s advertisement in Plate 6 was produced in a predictable context of strengthening voters’ rejection of the APC’s presidential candidate during the 2019 election. By comparatively using a tabular format, PDP briefly summarised some of the successes it recorded in some sectors such as: education, economy, security, infrastructural and constitutional developments. This was done as a criticism and reminder about the opponent’s political antecedents for readers’ appraisal and consideration before the election. The advertisement was produced in a predictable context of preempting opponents’ tactics through the comparative listing and contrasting of previous performances of the two major candidates before the 2015 elections. The advertisement, therefore, structurally indicates both parties’ successes and failures to provoke critical and logical thinking in the readers.

### Plate 7: Context of countering the opponent's strategy

**DAILY TRUST**  
Tuesday, February 3, 2015 15

## UNCOVERING PDP'S GRAND DESIGN TO SCUTTLE ELECTIONS

**WHILE:**  
ABUJA PEACE ACCORD AS ENDORSED BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES FOR 2015 ELECTIONS: AND US SECRETARY OF STATE, EU AND ECOWAS ELECTION MONITORS HAVE SPOKEN IN FAVOUR OF HOLDING A FREE, FAIR AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS AS SCHEDULED

**THE PDP IS BUSY:**

- INFLUENCING OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES TO THREATEN BOYCOTT OF THE ELECTIONS;
- MOBILIZING THE UNEMPLOYED YOUTH AND STUDENTS TO ABUJA FOR MASS PROTESTS AGAINST THE INEC TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS
- MANIPULATING PDP COUNCILLORS TO SABOTAGE INEC
- BRIBING KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO SCUTTLE THE ELECTION
- INFILTRATING INEC ICT DEPARTMENT TO HACK ELECTION RECORDS
- NIGERIANS ARISE AND SAY NO TO THIS DEVILISH INTENTION AS IT IS A RECIPE FOR CHAOS.

**VOTE BUHARI! VOTE APC!! VOTE FOR CHANGE!!!**

**APC**

*Source: Daily Trust, Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2015:15*

Furthermore, Plate 7, titled 'UNCOVERING THE PDP'S GRAND DESIGN TO SCUTTLE THE ELECTIONS' was produced in the predictable context of countering opponents' strategies. This APC's advertisement in the *Daily Trust* was intended to reveal the opponent's unethical tactic aimed at undermining the election process. The strategy was also used as a tool in weakening the strength and exposing the bad sides of the opponent to gain a competitive advantage during the election.

Countering the opponent's strategy involves the simultaneous use of the discourse marker "while" to comparatively reveal what the opposition party did contrary to what was agreed upon when signing the peace accord with the external monitoring group. The All Progressives Party, as a challenger in the 2015 electioneering period, used the advertisement as a persuasive strategy to discredit the PDP and present the party as an irresponsible one. The advertisement in Plate 7 was used to provide a timely warning to the electorate not to take the risk of voting

for the PDP during the election. The advertisement, therefore, indicates that the PCCOS is a strategy in reducing the efficacy of PDP's campaign messages and the persuasive effectiveness through the central route of persuasion.

### **Discussion of Findings and Conclusions**

Findings from these analyses confirmed Cook's (1999) assertion that context is an infinitely expandable concept. Three predictable context types were identified: Context of Victory (PCV), Context of Defeat (PCD) and Context of Countering Opponent's Strategies (PCCOS). These contexts combined with peripheral and central routes of persuasion as strategies in achieving text-producer's desired intentions. Context of victory involved the combined use of Peripheral Route of Persuasion (PRP), and characterised by low elaboration, credibility issues, positive self-presentation, emotional inducements and celebrity endorsements, requiring no critical thinking for readers' comprehension. Predictable context of defeat exhibited Central Route of persuasion (CRP) in high elaboration and logical presentation of facts aimed at provoking critical thinking, while PCCOS reflected integrated use of PRP and CRP made coherent through comparative listing of achievements and change of slogan to reflect new realities. Presidential campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers often deploy context-determined persuasive strategies meant to consolidate envisaged support, prevent likely defeat and anticipatorily counter opponents' strategies before an election.

The study also revealed that presidential campaign advertisements, as a persuasive strategy depended, to a large extent, on predictable contexts in facilitating readers' appropriate interpretation and comprehension of messages communicated in such texts. Text-producers creatively displayed favourable images and past histories of the presidential candidates to advance their political agendas through emotional and rational representations. These intentions and representations are constructed through predictable contextual persuasive trajectories. This conforms with Halliday's (1978) emphasis that language is not merely a tool for reflecting realities, but can be contextually used to interpret intended meaning with some degree of accuracy. Similarly, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) routes of persuasion combined with predictable contexts were used to reduce the thinking efforts that readers may encounter when deciphering text-producer's intended message in presidential election campaign advertisements.

Election campaign advertisements are forms of political communication designed to attract and to seek favourable attention of the readers through the use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources or strategies. Hence, in disagreement with analysts like Bignell's (2002:32) who

posited that ‘the first step in analysing an advertisement is to note the various signs in the advertisement itself’, this study attempts to show that understanding the predictable context in which the text is produced is foundational. As illustrated in the 2015 and 2019 APC’s and PDP’s political campaign advertisements in the selected newspapers, the advertisers exploited a pre-existing system of meanings, contextually shared knowledge and issues of common interests in persuading the target electorate. Though representing socio-political situations will continue to be controversial issues among various schools of thought, using signs and symbols alone to persuade voters who had already experienced a period of disillusionment can be counter-productive. It can therefore be concluded that presidential election campaign advertisements in the newspapers could be produced using the knowledge of predictable contexts as strategies to positively influence voters’ decisions before an election.

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