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**STYLO-DISOURSE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA STANCE-TAKING IN
THE FUBARA–WIKE POLITICAL CONFLICT IN RIVERS STATE**

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Abstract

This study investigates how supporters of Nyesom Wike and Siminalayi Fubara employ stylistic and discourse strategies to construct political stances on social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok. Using a stylo-discourse approach combined with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Roman Jakobson's Communication Function Theory, the study examines lexical choices, pronouns, modality, metaphors, and discourse markers to uncover underlying ideological positions, identity construction, and persuasive strategies. Findings reveal that supporters use evaluative language to legitimize their preferred candidate, pronoun polarization to signal in-group and out-group alignment, and high-modality and metaphorical intensification to dramatize political conflict and mobilize audiences. These strategies demonstrate that social media is a performative arena of ideological contestation. The study recommends that political actors and campaign strategists engage social media mindfully, employing persuasive yet ethical discourse to shape public perception responsibly.

Keywords: Stylo-Discourse Analysis, Social Media, Political Discourse; Stance-Taking, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, Political Communication

Introduction

The proliferation of social media has significantly transformed political communication in Nigeria. Platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved into discursive arenas where political identities are negotiated, ideological battles are staged, and public opinion is shaped. The political rift between Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Wike has generated intense digital engagement, particularly

among supporters who actively construct, defend, and contest political legitimacy online. The uniqueness of this topic lies in its focus on stylistic and discourse strategies deployed by ordinary supporters rather than elite political actors. It shifts scholarly attention from formal political speeches to grassroots digital discourse, where contemporary political meaning-making increasingly occurs.

Stance-taking, as a linguistic and discursive phenomenon, has received considerable scholarly attention. Du Bois (2007) conceptualizes stance as a public act through which speakers evaluate objects, position subjects, and align with others. Biber et al. (1999) examine grammatical stance markers, while Hyland (2005) highlights stance as central to interaction and identity construction. Englebretson (2007) further situates stance within dialogic interaction, emphasizing its intersubjective dimension. In political discourse, Fetzer (2014) argues that stance-taking functions as a persuasive strategy used to negotiate authority and solidarity.

Within digital discourse, scholars such as Page (2012), Zappavigna (2012), and Barton and Lee (2013) observe that social media environments intensify stance expression through multimodal and interactive affordances. In the Nigerian context, studies on political discourse have largely focused on campaign speeches, media interviews, and newspaper editorials (e.g., Opeibi, 2006; Taiwo, 2007). While there is growing scholarship on Nigerian social media activism, particularly during electoral cycles, limited attention has been given to stylistic patterns of stance-taking in subnational political conflicts.

Existing research tends to examine ideology, propaganda, and hate speech, but there remains a gap in integrating stylistics with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how lexical choices, discourse markers, grammatical constructions, and rhetorical devices construct alignment and opposition in online political debates. Moreover, few studies have applied Jakobson's communication functions to digital political discourse, especially in the Nigerian sociopolitical context. This study addresses these gaps by combining stylistic analysis with CDA to investigate how supporters of Fubara and Wike deploy language to express evaluation, construct identities, and legitimize political positions.

By focusing on the Fubara–Wike political conflict, this paper contributes to digital political discourse studies by demonstrating how micro-level linguistic choices reflect macro-level ideological struggles. It highlights how stance-taking on social media becomes a site of discursive contestation, revealing underlying power dynamics and struggles for legitimacy within Rivers State's contemporary political landscape

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is anchored on:

(a) Roman Jakobson's Communication Function Theory

Roman Jakobson proposes six functions of language: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic. These functions provide a framework for identifying communicative intentions in social media texts, especially how supporters express emotion, persuade audiences, and maintain interaction.

(b) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Using Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2001), CDA examines how discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimize, and reproduce power and dominance. It enables the study to uncover ideological positioning and discursive struggle embedded in stance-taking posts.

The integration of stylistics and CDA allows for both micro-level linguistic analysis and macro-level socio-political interpretation.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design. Data were purposively sampled from public posts, comments, and threads on Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok related to the Fubara–Wike political conflict.

Sampling criteria include:

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- Posts explicitly expressing support or opposition.
- Posts containing clear evaluative language.
- Highly engaged threads (likes, shares, comments).

A corpus of selected posts is subjected to:

1. Stylistic analysis (lexical choices, modality, pronouns, metaphors, discourse markers).
2. Functional classification using Jakobson's communication model.
3. Ideological interpretation through CDA.

Ethical considerations include anonymizing usernames and restricting analysis to publicly available content.

Data Analysis

The social media discourse surrounding the political rivalry between Siminalayi Fubara and Nyesom Wike in Rivers State presents a vivid landscape of linguistic and ideological positioning. Analysis of selected posts demonstrates that supporters strategically employ stylistic choices to express evaluation, align with ideological communities, and persuade audiences. For analytical clarity, the posts are coded as **PF1–PF4** for Pro-Fubara content and **PW1–PW4** for Pro-Wike content. Three primary variables guide the analysis: (1) Evaluative Lexicalization and Legitimacy Construction, (2) Interpersonal Positioning and Identity Alignment, and (3) Modalization, Intensification, and Metaphorical Framing. Each variable is examined with four representative coded posts.

Evaluative Lexicalization and Legitimacy Construction

Evaluative lexicalization refers to the use of words and expressions that encode judgment, appraisal, or ideological positioning. In the Fubara–Wike context, lexical choices frequently function to legitimize political actors while delegitimizing opponents.

PF1: "Fubara is the people's governor. Rivers has finally broken free."

PF2: "This administration represents true democracy, not political slavery."

PW1: "Wike built modern Rivers from nothing. That legacy cannot be erased."

PW2: "You cannot deny the infrastructural revolution Wike delivered."

In PF1 and PF2, the lexical items "people's," "broken free," "true democracy," and "political slavery" serve as ideological markers. "Broken free" evokes a liberation metaphor, contrasting past political domination with current autonomy. "Political slavery" intensifies this opposition, framing previous governance as morally and politically oppressive. Similarly, PF2 casts Fubara's administration as a moral corrective, implicitly delegitimizing previous authority structures.

PW1 and PW2, on the other hand, foreground achievement-oriented language. Verbs like "built," "delivered," and nouns such as "legacy" and "revolution" construct Wike as an agent of tangible progress. These lexical choices transform governance into a site of material accomplishment, anchoring legitimacy in demonstrated performance.

Jakobson's communication functions are evident in these posts. While the referential function conveys factual claims about governance, the emotive function dominates, signaling value-laden judgment. The poetic function is also operative in metaphorical language, drawing attention to the message as rhetoric. CDA analysis reveals the interplay of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation: Fubara supporters frame themselves as liberators, while Wike supporters foreground tangible accomplishments to assert moral and administrative authority. In this way, lexical evaluation becomes a strategic tool for ideological persuasion.

Interpersonal Positioning and Identity Alignment

Interpersonal positioning captures how individuals linguistically define themselves, align with supporters, and distance from opponents. Pronouns, possessives, and inclusive/exclusive references are central to this process.

PF3: “We stand with our governor. They cannot dictate our future.”

PF4: “Let them try. Rivers belongs to us.”

PW3: “They want to destroy what Wike did for us.”

PW4: “We will not allow outsiders to rewrite our history.”

The repeated alternation of “we” and “they” establishes a clear ideological boundary. In PF3 and PF4, “we” signals solidarity with Fubara and positions supporters as guardians of political freedom. “They” marks opposition as intrusive or illegitimate. Possessive constructions, such as “our governor” and “Rivers belongs to us,” further personalize political authority, transforming office into a symbolic communal asset.

PW3 and PW4 employ similar strategies, emphasizing loyalty and moral continuity. “They” refers to perceived threats, while “we” frames the speaker and audience as a cohesive community defending collective achievements. Terms such as “outsiders” and “our history” strengthen in-group identification while framing opponents as external disruptors.

From Jakobson’s perspective, these pronouns activate both **conative** and **phatic functions**. The conative function manifests in calls to alignment and vigilance, while the phatic function reinforces group cohesion and sustained interaction within the digital environment. CDA reveals how pronoun polarization enforces binary ideological distinctions, simplifying complex political landscapes into in-group/out-group morality. In effect, language becomes a boundary-making device, shaping political identity and mobilizing support.

Modalization, Intensification, and Metaphorical Framing

Modality, metaphor, and orthographic intensification enhance the rhetorical impact of stance-taking by increasing certainty, dramatizing political stakes, and eliciting emotional engagement.

PF5: “Rivers people must defend democracy.”

PF6: “No one can silence this movement.”

PW5: “This betrayal will destroy our progress.”

PW6: “The political war has just begun.”

In PF5, the modal verb “must” conveys deontic obligation, framing participation as moral duty rather than choice. PF6 uses “can” to signal epistemic certainty, emphasizing resilience and invulnerability. PW5 uses predictive modality through “will,” projecting future consequences to generate caution and urgency. PW6 employs a war metaphor, recasting political disagreement as existential struggle.

Metaphorical framing, particularly in phrases like “political war,” dramatizes the conflict and heightens affective intensity. Orthographic strategies, such as capitalization and repeated punctuation, serve as digital prosody, visually simulating heightened emotional arousal.

Jakobson’s **emotive and conative functions** dominate these posts. Emotive function is evident in the display of moral urgency and indignation, while conative function mobilizes supporters through implicit and explicit calls to action. CDA demonstrates that these intensifiers not only dramatize political disagreement but also enforce ideological commitment, discouraging compromise and reinforcing polarization. Language thus functions as a performative instrument of power, shaping perceptions of legitimacy and moral authority.

General Discussion

The analysis of social media stance-taking in the Fubara, Wike political conflict reveals a complex, multilayered discursive landscape in which supporters actively construct, negotiate, and contest political legitimacy. Across the three examined variables, evaluative lexicalization, interpersonal positioning, and modalization with metaphorical framing, several patterns emerge that illustrate how linguistic choices operate both as micro-level stylistic tools and as macro-level instruments of ideological influence. These

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observations collectively illuminate the processes by which social media functions as a performative political arena in Rivers State.

First, **evaluative lexicalization** operates as a primary mechanism for constructing legitimacy. The coded posts PF1, PF2, PW1, and PW2 demonstrate that both supporter groups consistently deploy highly value-laden lexical items to signal approval of their preferred candidate while simultaneously critiquing opponents. For instance, phrases such as “people’s governor” and “true democracy” in pro-Fubara posts encode positive moral and political qualities, framing Fubara as a liberator who challenges entrenched power structures. In contrast, pro-Wike supporters foreground material achievement and infrastructural legacy, using terms like “built modern Rivers” and “legacy cannot be erased” to assert tangible evidence of governance. These lexical choices are not merely descriptive; they function as ideological instruments that project authority, competence, and moral rightness. The posts achieve a dual effect: they elevate the self-perceived status of the political actor and, by implication, delegitimize the opponent. This reflects the duality of stance-taking as described in Du Bois’ (2007) stance triangle, where evaluation toward an object coexists with alignment to an audience and self-positioning.

The evaluative choices also engage Jakobson’s communication functions, primarily the emotive and referential functions. While referential elements provide the factual or quasi-factual basis for the argument (e.g., “built modern Rivers”), the emotive function dominates, conveying approval, admiration, or moral indignation. In addition, the poetic function emerges through metaphorical intensification, as in PF2’s “political slavery” and PW2’s “infrastructural revolution.” These metaphors do not merely embellish language; they foreground the message’s rhetorical qualities and enhance its persuasive force, reinforcing ideological positioning. In the digital context, where attention is fragmented and content abundant, such figurative amplification is particularly crucial for achieving discursive impact.

Second, **interpersonal positioning and identity alignment** is central to the construction of in-group and out-group distinctions. Across posts PF3, PF4, PW3, and PW4, pronouns such as “we,” “our,” and “they” function as linguistic boundary markers, delineating supporters from opponents. The inclusive “we” establishes solidarity with the political actor and other aligned supporters, projecting collective identity and shared moral purpose. Conversely, the distal “they” and possessives such as “outsiders” or “their agenda” construct opposition as illegitimate or threatening. This binary structuring exemplifies the dialogic and intersubjective dimensions of stance-taking: supporters position themselves in alignment with their chosen candidate while situating the audience and opponents within a moral and ideological hierarchy.

Grammatical choice in these pronouns also carries ideological weight. By repeatedly using “our governor” or “we will not allow,” supporters linguistically enact symbolic ownership over political authority. This transforms political office from a neutral institutional function into an embodied, communal asset. From Jakobson’s perspective, these utterances serve both the conative function, mobilizing alignment and action, and the phatic function, reinforcing group cohesion and sustaining interaction within digital threads. CDA analysis further illustrates that these pronoun strategies do more than organize social roles; they naturalize political positions and create semiotic boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate actors. Language, therefore, functions as both symbolic and practical leverage in ideological contestation.

Third, **modalization, intensification, and metaphorical framing** amplify the persuasive and affective impact of stance-taking. Posts PF5, PF6, PW5, and PW6 demonstrate that high-value modal verbs (“must,” “can,” “will”) and predictive constructions enforce obligation, certainty, and moral urgency. In PF5’s “Rivers people must defend democracy,” the modal verb “must” functions to convert political preference into perceived ethical duty, while PF6’s “No one can silence this movement” conveys epistemic certainty and resilience. PW5 and PW6 employ similar strategies, projecting potential

consequences and framing political activity as a struggle (“political war”), which dramatizes ideological contestation.

Metaphor and orthographic intensification, capitalization, repeated punctuation, and the use of emotive symbols, enhance the rhetorical salience of stance. Metaphors such as “political war” or “betrayal will destroy progress” recast political disagreement in existential terms, invoking urgency and heightening emotional investment. In the digital environment, these strategies compensate for the lack of face-to-face prosody, providing visual cues that simulate heightened affective tone. Jakobson’s emotive and conative functions dominate in these instances: emotive in conveying moral urgency and indignation, conative in mobilizing the audience to adopt or defend positions. The poetic function is also evident, foregrounding figurative expression to enhance rhetorical memorability and impact.

Synthesizing across all three variables, a clear discursive strategy emerges. Evaluative lexicalization constructs legitimacy and delegitimizes opposition, interpersonal positioning organizes ideological camps and aligns audiences, and modalization/metaphor intensification dramatizes stakes and mobilizes action. These micro-level linguistic mechanisms collectively encode macro-level ideological struggles over authority, loyalty, and political representation in Rivers State. Language thus functions not merely as commentary but as performative action, actively producing and reproducing power relations.

The data also reveals the recursive nature of social media discourse. Posts frequently respond to previous content, building chains of alignment and counter-alignment, in which evaluation, pronoun polarization, and intensification are repeated, amplified, and recontextualized. In this sense, social media discourse becomes both iterative and interactive: stance-taking is dialogically constructed, with each post reinforcing group identity and collective ideological commitment. The digital environment amplifies these processes by providing immediate audience feedback, through likes, shares, comments, and reactions, which further incentivizes emphatic, affect-driven language.

Moreover, these discourse patterns illustrate the interplay of micro-linguistic choices with broader socio-political dynamics. Fubara supporters foreground liberation, anti-godfatherism, and moral correctness, reflecting ideological contestation over democratic legitimacy. Wike supporters emphasize continuity, infrastructural achievement, and historical legacy, framing authority as earned through performance. In both cases, language mediates between perception and ideology, shaping how political actors are evaluated, how supporters align themselves morally and affectively, and how opposition is delegitimized. Language is thus both reflective of social and political reality and constitutive of it a central premise of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Consequently, the sustained use of figurative language, high modality, and pronoun polarization demonstrates that stance-taking on social media is not merely expressive but strategic. Supporters intentionally deploy linguistic resources to construct moral authority, mobilize collective action, and dramatize political conflict. The combined operation of Jakobson’s communication functions, emotive, conative, referential, phatic, and poetic, reveals a rich, multifaceted communicative environment in which each post functions as a rhetorical performance, simultaneously asserting identity, aligning with a community, evaluating political actors, and persuading audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integrative analysis highlights that social media discourse in the Fubara–Wike political conflict operates as a performative, ideologically charged arena. Micro-level stylistic features, lexical evaluation, pronouns, modality, metaphor, and orthographic intensification, interact to produce macro-level ideological effects, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and group membership. Social media, therefore, is not merely a channel for political expression but a site of active ideological construction, where supporters participate in the symbolic negotiation of power, identity, and moral

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authority. The digital political landscape of Rivers State thus exemplifies how language, style, and discourse converge to structure contemporary political contention, reflecting both the potential and the intensity of online stance-taking in the Nigerian political context.

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