Discursive Strategies and Ideology in Cyber Security Online Reports

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Abstract

The paper is set to identify the discursive strategies and ideology in selected online cyber security levy discourse. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The study used qualitative method of data collection. The Random Sampling Technique was employed and data for the study was drawn from Naira land Forum. Major lead paragraphs on cyber security levy issue were randomly selected and were labelled A and B. In addition, the total number of the lead paragraphs was 20. The study examined the structures of micro propositions in order to investigate the nature of the online report. Hence, lexical items such as verbs, nominal expressions and social actor representation revealed the nature of the cognitive structures of the ideology. Moreover, considering the context model and situation model, Van Dijk's mental model was also adopted for the study. The findings show that some linguistic constructions such as rhetorical questions, figurative expressions (metaphors), use of deictic expressions among others were employed as the discursive strategies in the cyber security levy discourse. These strategies were equally found to embody some ideological underpinnings as discussed in the work. The study concludes that language is a means of constructing social reality and also, the media use language in discourse to assert dominant ideologies.

Keywords: discourse, discursive-strategies, ideology, cyber security

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or dominance. CDA is a set of relationship between language and power. Discourse analysis is a modern approach to textual

analysis which studies the ways specific features of language contribute to the interpretation of texts in various contexts. This present study dwells upon the discourse theory of CDA to analyse levy discourse on cyber security in social media. The study also draws on a political discourse, that is, discourse that is itself concerned with formal/informal political context and political actors, with politicians, political institutions, governments, political media and political supporters operating in a political environment to achieve political goal. The choice of levy discourse as a corpus is prompted by the fact that cyber security levy is a phenomenon that many Nigerians are concerned about. To many Nigerians, imposition of this levy on cyber security is anti-people. Thus, the levy discourse started in April2024, when the Federal Government proposed to impose a cyber-security levy on every bank account holder in the country. This foregone situation led to the levy discourse all over the country. The scope of this study is the online media where discursive strategies and aspects of ideology as well as structures of micro propositions are analysed.

The way cyber security issue is represented in the online media evokes readers' emotion which in turn reflects the feelings, opinions and attitudes of people about the condition of the masses. Previous studies have examined discursive strategies and ideologies mostly on political speeches and newspaper representations while scanty attention has been given to the online cyber security levy issue. It is this gap that the present study intends to bridge.

Review of Related Literature

Previous studies focused on many social aspects in language representation and ideology in the media, but there is however, paucity of works especially on discourse analysis of cyber security levy.

Chinonso and Oluwasegun (2019) explored discursive strategies in selected 2019 presidential campaign speeches to identify the content of political campaign speeches and also examined the discursive strategies through which power is enacted, legitimized and constructed in campaign speeches. The study adopted analytic research design and qualitative approach as its methodology. The findings of the study revealed that the contestants employed linguistic constructions such as figurative expressions, parallel structures and rhetorical questions as discursive strategies in the campaign speeches towards winning prospective voters to their partisan blog.

Similarly, Glorilyn and Teresita(2018) did a critical discourse analysis on headlines in online news portals. The study analysed the importance of headlines through a theoretical discussion of the online media outlets. The study found out that the media used discursive strategies in the news headlines to attract attention from the readers. Moreso, it also showed how the devices brought out media practitioners' ideologies. Although, the present study also dwells upon the framework of CDA, but it aims to investigate the discursive strategies that lay in the discourse of cyber security levy in online report, which makes it different from the previous study.

Another relevant study was conducted bylfeatu (2021). The study interrogated the legislation on cyberstalking in Nigeria with a view to ascertaining how effective a response it was to cyberstalking and its impact on the right to freedom of expression of the Nigerian people. CDA was used to serve as the theoretical backing and its approaches as analytical tools. The study found out that legislation was effective and it did not infringe on the right to freedom of expression but could be wielded by the government to silence critics. Ifeatu's study is however more interested in the legislation prohibiting cyberstalking in Nigeria whereas; the present study focuses on discursive strategies and ideologies deployed in cyber security online report.

Agboand Ijem(2022) also examined Discursive Features of Political Discourse and their Implications for a Cohesive Society. The study investigated how a discursive feature like deictic elements performs the function of proximal and distal reference in political discourse. Purposive sampling technique was employed and the deictic field theory developed by Buhler (2011) and Hank (2005) was adopted for the analysis of the data. Their findings showed that both pronominals and short phrases can yield the same pragmatic and semantic meanings of either proximal or distal references in political speech. This study however, is not intended to investigate pragmatic and semantic referential meaning in political speeches.

Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA was employed as the theoretical framework for this study. The theory is grounded on the issues of meaning in language use as well as the discursive strategies in the construction and interpretation of ideology. The choice of this theoretical approach was based on its relevance to the present study. Van Djik's Socio-cognitive Approach(SCA) to CDA more broadly relates discourse structures to social structures in a complex socio-cognitive interface. As in cognitive linguistics, it critically describes the cognitive aspects in the use of metaphors in expressive communication. SCA deals with shared social knowledge, as well as the attitudes and ideologies of the language users as current participants of the communicative situation, and as members of social groups and communities. SCA not only makes explicit the fundamental role of mental representation, but also shows that many structures of discourse itself can only be described in terms of various cognitive notions, especially those of information, beliefs or knowledge of participants.

Among other discourse structures, this is the case for phonological stress, syntactic word order, topic and focus, the structure of propositions, pronouns and co-references, global meaning or topics of discourse, indexical expressions, metaphors and others. SCA does this in terms of explicit psychological theories of mental representations, such as individual mental model of journalists or other language users, and the way these models mediate between shared social cognition (knowledge, attitude, and ideology), societal structures and actual text and conversation.

Furthermore, according to van Dijk (2017)SCA to CDA is a particular application of a more general theory or philosophy of social constructionism, which holds that social and political 'reality' are construction of social members. Different from some other forms of social constructionism (such as Discursive Psychology or Conversation Analysis), this approach not only holds that such 'constructions' are mental representations implemented by the brain, but also that these mental processes and representations should be taken seriously and analysed in details, for instance in terms of contemporary advances in the cognitive science. Thus, the mental model and context model are the major tenets of the socio-cognitive model of CDA. This implies that for discourse to be produced and comprehended, mental model is relevant. Discourse production and comprehension involve the formation, activation or actualization of a mental model which is long stored personal experience (Li, 2013). Mental model is the subjective representation of the events that make up the discourse. It includes personal knowledge, beliefs, and opinions of the writers which may be controlled by ideologies (Asiru, 2016).

Given the complexity of human mental construct in the course of social interaction, it must be first stated that this study does not intend to examine a cognitive theory, but to show the importance of

text-context relationship from a socio-cognitive perspective.

Methodology

The research deploys a qualitative and analytic research design. It describes the linguistic features that are observed in the data on cyber security levy using Van Djik's CDA theory of social cognition. The first phase of the analysis was the micro-structure level which examines the structure of the micro propositions so as to produce the nature of the online media reportage of the cyber security levy. Hence, aspects of lexicalization, social actor representation and rhetoric were examined. At the second phase of the analysis, linguistic features such as rhetorical questions, metaphors and the use of deictic expressions were identified and analysed as the discursive strategies in the cyber security levy discourse. The reports on the cyber security levy were randomly selected by the researcher. The reports in the analysis were labelled A (in favour of the government) and B (in favour of the masses). Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis centres on the reportage of cyber security levy by an online media website (Naira land Forum) and the data were labelled as A (for the government) and B (for the masses). Going by the first phase of the analysis which intends to examine the structure of micro-propositions, the study focuses on lexicalization, social actor representation and nominal expressions to investigate the internal components of ideology and mental model of ideology. The mental model includes models of events, actions, situations as well as of their participants. The discursive level investigates how ideologies are expressed and reproduced in the online reports giving the consideration to language as a means of social struggle, ideological manipulation and unequal power reproduction. Structures of Micro-propositions in the Online Report

Lexicalization

In language, lexicalization is a well-known domain of ideological expression and persuasion to refer to the person, groups, social relations or social issues. The analysis of particular words used in a news report is almost always the first stage of any text or discourse analysis. Words convey the imprint of society and are of value judgement in particular, they convey connoted as well as denoted meaning. Furthermore, lexical items overtly and covertly give clues to the ideology of the text producer. Hence, the lexical items used in the levy reports are particularly important because they legitimize the ideologies of the reports. Thus, the study focused on the following classes namely: verb, nominal expressions and social actors. They are allocated within the excerpts.

Verb

A verb can be used to indicate approval or disapproval of participant's action in discourse. The following sentences from the excerpt portray verb.

- a. Nigeria's central bank <u>did withdraw</u> the controversial 0.5% cybersecurity levy on electronic transfers three days before it was supposed to take effect. (A1)
- b. The levy was <u>seen</u> as regressive by the financial industry experts... (A2)
- c. We <u>did concur</u> in line with the enactment of the cybercrimes Act....(A3)
- d. The financial institutions <u>were required</u> to apply the levy at the point of electronic transfer... (A4)

Nominal Expression

This is a linguistic term which refers to a category used to group together nouns and adjectives based

on shared properties. Nominal expression is used to label a person or group depending on the commitment of the writer to affect the reader's interpretation. Furthermore, nominal expressions such as pronouns always refer to the same elements in the real world, independent of the specific speaker context. Some of the nominal expressions found from the data are as follow:

- a. Against this background, <u>we</u> have strongly come out to support the Central Bank of Nigeria (A5)
- b. <u>We</u> did concur in line with the enactment of the cybercrime (prohibition, prevention, etc.) (A6)
- c. Buba, <u>who</u> sponsored the amendment bill, told Economic Confidential, a business focused magazine, that levy is aimed at financial institutions and telecommunication companies as they are vulnerable to financial crimes and cyber fraud. (A7)
- d. During my presentation of the bill, at the senate last year, <u>I</u> expressed concern over the country's annual loss of \$500 million caused by cybercrime (A8)
- e. The president is sensitive to what Nigerians feel. So, <u>he</u> has asked the CBN to hold off on that policy and ordered a review. (A9)
- f. You know <u>he</u> (Tinubu) was not around when that directive was being circulated. And <u>he</u> does not want to present his government as being insensitive. (A10)

Social Actors

Social actor may have 'inclusion or exclusion' patterns in any representation depending on the interests and purpose of such representation'. The representation strategies can be in form of 'individualization' and 'assimilation'. 'Individualization' and 'assimilation' strategies are crucial because our society puts much significance to personality and group affiliation. Individualization happens in news discourse when social actors are referred to as individuals taking cognizance of their personality in the society. On the other hand, assimilation (collectivization and aggregation) happens when social actors are represented as groups.

In this study, the social actors as found from the excerpt are: President Bola Ahmad Tinubu, Vice President KashimShettima, CBN, NLC and TUC among others.

- a. <u>CBN</u> officially withdraws cybersecurity levy. (A11)
- b. <u>NLC</u> commends the Federal Government on halting the cyber security levy. (A12)
- c. <u>Senator Shehu Umar Buba</u>, Chairman of the Senate Committee on National Security and Intelligence, has said the levy announced by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) was not targeted at individuals or ordinary bank customers. (A13)
- d. <u>President Bola Ahmad Tinubu</u> signed the bill into law in February 2024. The amendment is a comprehensive legal framework that will deter, investigate, pursue and prosecute cybercriminals, among other security and economic benefits. (A14)
- e. <u>Tinubu</u> orders suspension of Cybersecurity levy. (A15)
- f. <u>CSO</u> group urges Nigerians to support the policy, states benefit. (A16)
- g. <u>Vice President, Kashim Shettima</u>, on Saturday, said the tax reforms undertaken by the Bola Tinubu administration were not aimed to frustrate Nigerians but to sustain the country's investment friendliness. (A17)

The above examples show different representation of the socialactor in the cybersecurity online report some as individual personality while others as group. Other forms of 'social actor' representation in the data are in form of 'functionality'. This is another strategy for representing social actor in news report, 'functionalization' means 'the representation of social actors in terms of

something they do, an occupation or role in the society'. Consider the following examples from the data:

- a. Also speaking to Sunday PUNCH, the <u>Director of Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open</u> <u>Leadership</u>, Debo Adeniran, said while <u>President</u> Tinubu should be commended for the decision, the Federal Government should consider a total cancellation of the policy instead of a temporary suspension. (A18)
- b. Also, <u>a Professor of Economics at Olabisi Onabanjo University</u>, Sheriffdeen Tella, cautioned the Federal Government against creating additional hardship for Nigerians. (B1)
- c. A statement signed by the <u>NLC President</u>, Joe Ajaero, demanded the reversal of the directive by the CBN, adding that the Federal Government should prioritize policies that alleviate the financial burdens of Nigerians. (B2)

The Discursive Strategies in the Online Cyber Security Levy Report Rhetorical Question as Discursive Strategies

Rhetorical questions are those that do not require direct answers but rather, are implied by what is said. A question is interpreted as a rhetorical question when its answer is known to the speaker and the addressee. In contrast, a speaker who wishes to make a point that is not immediately obvious will occasionally use a rhetorical question to indicate that the argument is clear. Rhetorical questions are another tactic that speakers might use to avoid presenting evidence for their statements, especially when those claims are not clearly true.

Consider the following examples of rhetorical questions from the data.

- a. I don't know you are now paying for cybersecurity; how did he divide you the more? (B3)
- b. Why did he introduce cyber security levy? It is a very easy way to raise money. It isn't the best way though. (B4)
- c. Regarding this issue of cyber security levy, I have many issues with Tinubu but let me highlight a few: why will he use 90 billion to subsidize hajj? (B5)
- d. Why is 15 billion proposed for the renovation of VP's residence? (B6)
- e. What is the essence of the cyber security levy? (B7)
- f. Tinubu lacked transparency, who was the first person to automate tax collection in this country? (B8)
- g. It is personal business....Though the news is old. Why reporting it now? Is it a justification of the cyber security levy? (B9)

Similarly, the study also observed that rhetorical questions in the cybersecurity levy report are employed for building ideology; to chart a common front between the news reporters and their audience and to raise thought provoking issues. As a rhetorical strategy, readers are left to provide answers to the questions. In some instances, a text may however, provide an answer immediately. This could be a way to depict reader's emotions. Furthermore, the speaker used rhetorical questions to persuade the audience to embrace speaker'spoint of view on the application of the charge. Naturally, this is only one more illustration of the ideological content of the rhetorical questions used in online reports.

Metaphoric Expressions as Discursive Strategies

Metaphoric expressions are used to illustrate similarities or connection between two things. They are also used to convey or create complex ideas or emotions in a more similar way. The study discovered

that, in order to gain support and persuade readers, online cyber security levy reporters use metaphorical language to highlight specific meaning, call attention to themselves, and promote their ideology. Metaphors are deployed in news discourse to foreground the representations of sociopolitical reality that are compatible with the interest of the news outlet rather than those that form public debate.

Instances of metaphoric expressions used in the data include the following:

- a. Thankyou H. E @atiku Waziri Adamawa & @Peter Obi for condemning this levy & standing with <u>pauperized Nigerians</u>.(B9)
- b. ... Members of the House of Representatives had asked the CBN to withdraw the circular directing financial institutions to commence implementation of the 0.5 per cent levy describing it as 'ambiguous. (A19)
- c. You will not hear the mainstream media talk about this, because most of their editors have been bought over. The likes of FIJ and others, that refuse to be bought over <u>are being hunted with cyber law (B10)</u>

Ideology in the Online Cyber Security Report

Ideologies have something to do with ideas and especially with the social, political or religious ideas, shared by a social group or movement. Ideology is an ongoing process and ideological beliefs that are not an unordered set of evaluative propositions. Ideologies are not organized arbitrarily. Hence, there are ideologies in all the discursive strategies found in the data. The analysis is as stated below.

Ideology of Personality Profiling using the Third Person Pronoun 'He'

The ideology of personality profiling abounds in the online report as evident in this study. The speaker wants the audience to believe that the levy, among other hard economic policies of the government on the masses, is nothing but a severe punishment to Nigerians. Consider the following examples from the excerpt:

- a. What he has achieved so far: he removed subsidy. Subsidy is back with fuel @N830
- b. He floated Naira. It's 1500 today.
- c. He banned and arrested Binance. Still 1500
- d. He took loans. No development.
- e. He increased tax. Businesses are shutting down.
- f. He gave palliatives, food is expensive.
- g. He increased electricity tariff. No light.
- h. He demolished properties. No new road constructed.
- i. He subsidized Hajj with 90bn
- j. He imposed cybersecurity levy on all Nigerians bank account holder.

A close look at the above examples from the data reveals that ideologies may have a schematic nature where some conventional categories are built (Van Dijk, 2009). Therefore, the categories will make the audience to understand, accept, reject or modify an ideology. It is also noted that the categories should be derived from the basic properties of the social groups. As far as this study is concerned, the categories or schema of ideology as proposed by Van Dijk (2009) are significant because the focus of the study is to find out the inherent ideological structures of one group over the other. Hence, the study observed that ideologies are explained in a polarized manner, whereby polarity is expressed in saying positive things about Us and negative things about Them.

Building Ideology through the use of Metaphoric Expressions

According to Fairclough (1992), it is important to choose between alternative metaphors since the ideological attachment to a specific text becomes even more apparent when one metaphor is chosen over another. A metaphor in CDA refers to a wide range of life experiences (mental model theory). In this study, two (2) categories of metaphors have been observed in the data:

Metaphor of Time

There were instances of metaphoric references found in the online cyber security levy report. In news discourse, the producer of certain text or reference, used certain slogans and lexical items referring to time to captivate the mind of the readers. In the excerpt below, it is observed that there is careful choice of words that show the implication of time and change. These words were deployed ideologically to convey 'positive Us and negative Other'. Consider the following from the data:

- a. Though the cybercrime levy is not new as it has been in existence <u>since 2015</u>, the question is why implementing it now given the prevailing economic challenges? The timing of any reform is essential to the success of such reforms.
- b. There have been many government agencies that have not been audited <u>for years</u> and nothing has happened.
- c. Meanwhile, Civil Society groups have endorsed <u>today's Monday</u> shutdown, saying they were committed to any action that could ameliorate the sufferings of Nigerians.
- d. The organizations in the sectors have been listed in previous circulars by the Central Bank of Nigeria, in 2018.

Considering these words, such as 'since 2015', 'in 2018' and others as used in this online levy report, it revealed against the contexts of other meanings that went beyond the linear progression of clock time. For example, the deixis 'since 2015' which marks time of an event could represent the previous economic situation of Nigeria which is also used in the context of power and ideology to portray 'negative other' representation. However, a close look at the deictical references reveals that they were ideologically positioned to prioritize the interest of the masses and also to discredit the government.

Metaphors of Financial Benefits

Metaphors stressing financial desire from the side of the government were also observed from the data. They include:

- a. Buba who sponsored the amendment bill, told Economic Confidential a business focus magazine, that <u>the levy is aimed at financial institutions and telecommunication companies as</u> they are vulnerable to financial crimes and cyber fraud not citizens.
- b. A circular issued by the CBN confirmed <u>the exemption of certain transactions including loan</u> <u>disbursement, salary payments, intra account transfers among others.</u>
- c. Meanwhile, the Vice President Kashim Shettima on Saturday said the tax reforms undertaken by Bola Tinubu administration were not aimed to frustrate Nigerians but to sustain country's investment friendliness.
- d. We are not here to frustrate any sector of our economy but to <u>create an administrative system that</u> ensures the benefits of a thriving tax system for all our citizens.

The metaphors of financial benefit were used in the report to portray ideology of economic potentialities to convince the readers to accept the policy.

Use of Deixis 'We', 'Our' and 'Him' as an Ideological Tool

Discourse deixis of 'we' and 'our' have been portrayed in the online cyber security levy report. They

include the following:

- a. <u>We</u> are not here to frustrate any sector of <u>our</u> economy but to create an administrative system that ensures the benefits of a thriving tax system for all our citizens.
- b. <u>Our</u> tax reforms initiated for overall benefits of Nigerians_VP Shettima.
- c. ... <u>We</u> must commend <u>him</u> for listening to the voices of the people.
- d. All the taxes, rates and levies that are being imposed on the people should be streamlined so that if we want to pay personal income taxes, we should know that, that is what we are paying.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the study identified and analysed lexical items such as verbs and nominal expressions, social actor representation as well as rhetorical tropes in line with their ability to make meaning implicit. Similarly, the lexical items helped to give information about the cyber security levy online report. This is because they have an inherent ideology which gives judgement about the participant and group members. Therefore, the findings showed that language is a means of constructing social reality hence the online writers consciously or unconsciously construct their discourse in a way to produce dominant ideologies. In terms of the discursive strategies, the study proved that rhetorical tropes, deictic devices, metaphoric expressions etc. are relevant to online news discourse. It also found out that groups' polarization is evident in the online cyber security report with one group's identity distinguished against the other group.

In terms of the micro propositions, the cyber security levy was a bias report since it was mostly represented in favour of the government by highlighting the importance of the levy towards economic development of the country. In line with the discursive strategies, the ideological stance in the online media report showed a polarized discourse of both parties (those in support of the government and those that support the masses). Each group portrayed positive self-representation and negative other representation.

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