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Resolving the Political Tension: How Online Photographs Portray Candidates in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election

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Abstract: This paper investigates the online pictorial portrayal of two frontline candidates in Nigeria's 2015 presidential elections and how it resolved the related political tensions. Careful observation and analyses of the candidates' photographs, in accordance with the social constructivist perspective, enabled the determination of their conduct and verbal communication in a social context. Findings show that candidates' facial expression, body language, among others, portrayed mutual accord, cordiality and partnership. The impressions created from these did help to neutralize the perceived threats of violence from both sides of the political divide. In spite of the unpleasant rhetoric by the candidates on several occasions, the photographs portrayed them as friends as the images symbolized unity in diversity. One fact emerged from this study: When texts and rhetoric from political candidates and their supporters came like a flood, photographs were there to raise a standard against it.

Keywords: Photographs, online media portrayal, election violence, social constructionism, presidential elections, political communication, Nigeria.

Introduction

Photographs do reinforce verbal messages. Their use in Nigeria's 2015 presidential elections is important because, people are likely to retain 65 percent of information if paired with relevant images than 10 per cent that will remember it after three days (Medina, 2018). The relevance of pictures to communication is crucial as their messages may affect human cognitions based on their interpretation and meanings read into them, especially in a politically charged environment. The images may either promote political decorum or tension. This paper focuses on online photographs of prominent candidates in a presidential election to reveal their stance on election violence.

Nigerian elections have historically been characterized by waves of political violence (Adibe, 2015; Akubo, 2015; Campbell, 2010, 2015). Following the 2011 post-election violence, a similar occurrence was envisaged in the 2015 elections with regard to the utterances of the incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) and his challenger General Muhammadu Buhari (GMB). How can communication contribute in calming the tensions? Analysis of online pictorial of the main contenders would determine the level to which their demeanour encouraged or detracted from the electoral violence rhetoric.

Pictorials of the frontline candidates, GEJ of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and GMB of the All Progressives Congress (APC), would reveal their political stance during the election period.

The study examines pictorial portrayal of presidential candidates. The strength of the analysis lies in the assumption that "in politics, nonverbal signals disclose politician's intentions, emotions, or relations with the other participant(s) in the communicative event" (Alvarez-Benito & Inigo-Mora, 2015:329). Nonverbal language is, therefore, a key tool of political communication. Its messages disclose politicians' intentions and formation of human judgments (Kopacz, 2006). Visual communication is crucial in a violence-prone environment, especially the Nigerian political environment, which is often tense (Adibe, 2015; Akubo, 2015; Campbell, 2010) due to the desire of candidates to win elections at all cost. The study of pictures is significant because the audience will move beyond presumptions to the giving of meanings to the revealed disposition of contestants. This nonverbal revelation will inform the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of political fans regarding their engagement in election violence. Their natural response to election crises would be affected by the body language of contestants. Pictures are channels that give prominence to an

individual (Igene & Ofuani, 2012; Adeyemi et al., 2016; Odiboh et al., 2017, Oresanya et al., 2017) and would have implications on citizens' reactions towards elections. While pictorial images may contribute to resolving political tensions, violence, and crises situations, extreme partisanship may be addressed through pictorial communication. The study will add information to the existing body of knowledge on political communication, election violence and peace structures. It will benefit readers as the paper will provide them with scientific knowledge and basis to interrogate political issues and the place of body language in national election discourse.

Statement of the Problem

Negative electioneering campaigns are gaining prominence in the political discourse (Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2009; Kumolu & Oke, 2015). Ethical issues notwithstanding (Omojola, 2008; 2011), research has shown increasing citizens' negative reactions to political leaders' behaviour and the concomitant tension as the main foci of political news (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden & Boumans, 2011). However, while negative slants do provoke election violence, the potential also exists that pictorial representation in a news narrative can play a key role in calming political storms and the 2015 Nigeria's presidential election

offers the platform to put this conjecture to the test.

The nonverbal behaviour of politicians has also drawn increasing attention, focusing on the positioning of the eyes to influence electoral outcomes. While most research has been limited to nonverbal language and election violence, little is known about online juxtaposition of presidential contenders for political communication or the use and interpretation of pictorial images for political peace overtures in Nigeria. This study, therefore, examines online media pictures of GEJ and GMB, with a view to determining their posture and composure during the 2015 presidential elections. It describes the perceived contribution of nonverbal political communication to the resolution of political tension. The analysis digs into the candidates' sociopolitical encounters, facial expressions and body contacts. It reveals the probability of political harmony insinuated by pre- and post-election online photographs of presidential candidates and its implications on moderating election violence.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by two research objectives:

1. To examine the conduct of Goodluck Jonathan (GEJ)and Muhammadu Buhari (GMB) in

online pictures during the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections.

2. To describe, in these online photographs, contestants' facial expression, body contact, dimensional space and how they resolve the tension generated with regard to the 2015 Nigeria's presidential election.

A Review of Nigeria's Political Environment and Threats of Violence in 2015 Elections

The political environment of a nation is one of the determinants of the nature and outcome of election in a democracy. The probability of a chaotic election would depend on the social, economic, religious, political and contextual character of the process. Election period is often tense and post-election outcomes predictable because of the strong relationship between hate campaigns and violence, which occur before, during and after elections (Akubo, 2015; Jega, 2007).

Elections in Nigeria have historically been characterized by conflict because electioneering campaigns are often marked by pettiness, intolerance and violence, including abductions and assassinations (Jega, 2007). Election violence is, therefore, not new (Abbas, 2007; Jega, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2011; Kukah, 2015). The build-up to the election time is described as warfare (Abbas, 2007),

and associated with killings and deaths (Kukah, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The electioneering environment is often hostile, characterized by the jettisoning of core campaign issues and setting of negative agenda. Negativity is cooked up to discredit opponents and incite the public against a candidate, thereby breeding antagonism and threats of election violence. Most campaigns emphasise the negative sides of opponents rather than present a clear political agenda. This negative sequence of incitement and threats was a key factor in the 2015 presidential elections. Deployment of hate speeches contributed to the general feeling that Nigeria could witness genocidal killings like those of Rwanda (Kukah, 2015). These tensions necessitated the establishment of the Abuja Accord (promoted by a former military dictator Abdulsalami Abubakar which) contained a proposal to make the contestants abide by the outcome of the election (Mohammed, 2015). The accord specified that since everybody believed there would be some hell and fire if their candidates lost, it became imperative that candidates themselves publicly voiced it that they would accept the results of the elections as declared by the electoral commission.

While hate speeches have much negative impact on citizens and their disposition toward elections and candidates (Akubo, 2015), the inherent messages can damage the electoral process. In an era of citizens' journalism, characterized by unchecked use of the New Media, political operatives spread rumours and defamation adverts through websites and social networking tools. With reference to the elections in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, Campbell (2010) observed the adverse effect of hate campaigns and outbreaks of violence, which stirred up lingering resentment and massacre of 1500 people. Relative to the 2011 election crises, higher tensions were envisaged in the 2015 elections (Campbell, 2015).

Skepticism surrounding the conduct of peaceful elections was hinged on the 2011 election outcomes, where violence erupted in northern Nigeria due to the pronouncement of Goodluck Jonathan as winner and President-elect (Adibe, 2015). The announcement triggered rioting and post-election violence with an estimated 800 deaths (Human Rights Watch, 2011), described as the greatest bloodshed since the 1967–70 civil war (Campbell, 2015). Based on previous experiences and current projection of political anomie, threats of violence were taken seriously because Jonathan and Buhari had fanatical supporters, who expect

them to become winners (Alechenu, 2015). The election airspace was ventilated with rumors of violence; hence, many Nigerians believed the verbal proclamations and foresaw a highly contentious election outcome. Reiterating this, Adibe (2015) projected a likely post-election violence in the north if Buhari lost but renewed militancy in the Niger Delta if Jonathan did not win.

Accordingly, the environment for the 2015 Nigerian presidential election was complicated with violent expressions, hate speeches and threats of post-election crises. While political participation was high, politically motivated vigilante and militant groups were ready to take up arms. Pressure groups made violence-sensitive statements, which predicted disruption of peace if the presidency went either way. Violence loomed large with anticipated blood-shed, displacement and civil war. In the midst of this uncertainty, utilisation of appropriate communication mechanism was needed to dismantle, calm and abort the purported crises. Hence, while presidential candidates signed the commitment to peaceful elections as represented in the Accord, the same was pictorially displayed to reveal their political stance on the issue to the public.

Before the 2011 elections, Campbell (2010) predicted greater militant activity in the Niger Delta if Jonathan lost the election and greater radicalization of northern Nigeria's Islamic population if a southern Christian emerged victorious. In both scenarios, violence was envisaged, and eventually occurred in northern Nigerian when Buhari lost the presidential position. Based on this experience, public expectation from the 2015 presidential elections was similar, especially as the campaigns were shrouded with hate speeches and threats of post-election violence to be championed by ardent supporters of Jonathan and Buhari. Attack campaigns were publicised through different communication and media channels. Campaigns portrayed character assassination, hate speeches and violent acts (Akubor, 2015) even though some traditional news media used the elements for systematic arguments and emotional appeals (Jerit, 2004). But by and large confrontation and negativity featured prominently in GEJ "Transformation" and GMB "Change" campaigns agenda.

Campaigns are fundamental to contested positions. They are pre-structured (Marcus, Newman & MacKuen 2000). Hate campaign environment and circumstances fuelling hostility are traceable to an interplay of variables like high use of social media (Okorie, et al.

2018), joblessness of the youth population and emotional blackmail (Kukah, 2015). Despite the exposure of citizens to the harsh political environment and violence narratives, online pictorial depiction becomes a viable channel for counteracting hate rhetoric. The platform is a more accessible and permanent communication channel for public exposure and interpretation of presidential body language. Since the goal of political communication is to inform, educate and persuade citizens to make informed decisions, the display of presidential images is necessary to calm or escalate crises situations. This paper describes the role of online pictures in calming tensions associated with 2015 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

Social constructionism theory or the social construction of reality was adopted to underpin the work. It emphasizes the socially created nature of social life and the idea that society is actively and creatively produced by humans. Used in 1966 by Peter Berger and T. Luckmann, the social construction of reality is an aspect of micro interpretive theory perspectives in sociology. They portray the world as made and that the basic features of social order are captured in the principle that the society is a human product and that the important experiences of others takes place in the face-to-face

situation of social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). They believe that people create society, which is converted to objective reality, thereby making the society a human product and an objective reality. They summarised the basic features of social order as human product. While the theory assumes that daily life is ordered through shared meanings by the community (García, 2015), the approach is associated with the post-modern era in qualitative research and concerned with construction and understanding of knowledge (Andrews, 2012).

The purpose of social constructionism is to enable comprehension of social interaction, and production and distribution of knowledge (García, 2015). Propositions of the theory would enable interpretation about the reality of calming political storm during the 2015 presidential elections. Pictorial construction of presidential candidates, their images and the meanings they conjure are shared within the online and offline communities to increase political knowledge. The theory assumes that people jointly construct their world and the meanings they give to their encounters with others (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2016). It is concerned with the ways people think about and use categories to structure and analyse human experience in the world (Jackson, Penrose).

Luckmann (2008) conceives it as an individual permanently linked and interacting with subjects to construct society. While explaining that communicative construction of reality consists of communicative elaboration, Knoblauch et al. (2008) adds that social actions are negotiated, changed, maintained or implanted in society.

The construction of presidential candidates in Nigeria is a social activity engineered by interactions and conversations among diverse political and media subjects in society. García (2015) notes four general characteristics of social constructionism - the primacy of social projects, historical and cultural specificity of products, interdependency between knowledge and action and the critical posture that all knowledge is historical and socially specific. For her, social world is shaped by conversations, conceived as patterns of joint activities and determined by subjects. Social constructivism is a useful theoretical framework as it allows necessary qualitative analysis to reveal insights on how people interact with the world (Creswell, 2009). Because symbols and signals are components of knowledge and the meanings associated with constructed reality, the language of communication is vital for interpreting the 2015 presidential elections in Nigerian. The chosen communicative genre would

contribute to solving electoral violence since language is the main means to social construction.

The theory provides the basis for a formal analysis of the communicative formation and transmission of personal identity, knowledge and historical social words (Luckmann, 2008). It is a way to know and observe the world in order to yield its nature to people. A critical observation of the pictorial social interactions of GEJ and GMB would enable interpretation of the constructed peaceful images towards the expected non-violence behaviour.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was employed. Online photographs were observed and analysed to give meaning to the posture and composure of the APC and PDP presidential candidates in the 2015 Nigerian elections. Their nonverbal temperamental projections were examined, revealing their disposition to opposition politics. The study of pictures is important because it uses conceptual, figurative or iconic system of signals, and other technical means to convey communicative actions (Luckmann, 2008). The body language, facial expression and dimensional space between Jonathan and Buhari were examined to decipher their input in calming the purported election tensions.

A combination of observation and qualitative content analysis were used to gather the data featuring online media juxtapositions of the political leaders. Observation was employed because social constructivism allows qualitative analysis, which gives insight on the nature of human interaction (Creswell, 2009). It became imperative as it generally focuses on settings and designed to generate data on the activities and behaviours of subjects. Accordingly, the pictorial body behaviour of contestants in different social settings was observed. Content analysis, on the other hand, describes the contents, including the political message, patterns and themes of communication. The constructed images of contestants were, therefore, observed, analysed and interpreted for their relevance to post-election public response. Because human interaction often involves other forms of communicative devices like gestures, photography and body language, the study described the connections of pictures within the prevailing socio-political context. It gives meaning to the nonverbal actions of Jonathan and Buhari during the election period.

The process of selection of photographs for analysis was systematic. All online pictures that had both Jonathan and Buhari were retrieved from online images. A

total of 59 pictures were retrieved but only 27 fell within the study context. While the relevant pictures were retained, the rest were eliminated based on the number of people in the photograph, the social context of communication and type of picture. Since the study was limited to real life situations where Jonathan and Buhari were featured together in specified locations, another process of elimination occurred. Cropped photos and painted pictures were discarded as they constituted subjective human creations rather than natural representation of contestants. It also excluded pictures that featured more than two political figures, leaving 13 for analysis. The repetition of photographs was observed, hence, a methodological restriction to pictures whose dates corresponded with the day of the political event and with headlines reporting the same issue. This drastically brought down the relevant pictures to four. The analysed photographs are, therefore, limited to those posted within the week of events. Purposive and available sampling techniques enabled selection of pre- and post-election images that met the pictorial, numerical and situational criteria.

Focused on the self-constructed reality pictures of candidates, the selected photographs were analysed because of the assumption that self-portrayals would showcase the intent of political messages from the candidates' point of view. They communicate individual's dispositions rather than imposed constructs. Pictorial portrayal is, therefore, a self-representation of politicians' emotions and self-display of impressions to influence public perception, attitude and behaviour. The pictures showcased the political stance of candidates. While the body language and facial expressions of the presidential candidates were analysed, the dimensional space between them revealed their level of social distance. These variables gave meaning to pictorial display, and political behaviour and message.

The study period is five months, January to May, 2015. It captures contestants' online representation two months prior to and after the elections. January was selected because most pre-election activities like submission of presidential nomination forms, publication of list of nominated candidates and debut of campaigns began then. While March was central to all the activities as it was the month for presidential elections, May was the month of handover to the president elect and the inauguration ceremony. The time span accommodated the sociopolitical meetings of candidates - Abuja Accord (January, 14) and renewal of the peace accord (March 26) -, and formal handing over (May, 28), and

inauguration ceremony (May, 29). The study period is important because while electioneering is often tense due to the struggle to win the seat, losers oppose election results within the same period, with likely result of violence.

Online pictorial portrayal of Goodluck Jonathan (PDP) and Mohammadu Buhari (APC) featured different situational contexts and locations. Data on their demeanour focused on body language, facial expression, dimensional space and social context of communication. The analysis began with the interpretation of the constructed social realities and was geared toward description of the sociocultural outlook of candidates, interpretation of pictures and their likely influence on post-election public behaviour. Interpretation of findings and deduced meanings are situated within the Nigerian sociocultural context.

Results

The result describes online pictorial demeanour of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) of the PDP and General Muhammadu Buhari (GMB) of the APC and its contribution in calming 2015 election tensions. It describes their communicative body language, facial expression and dimensional space during Abuja Accord, renewal of the Peace Accord, formal handing over and inauguration of the

president-elect. Their constructed media images symbolised peaceful coexistence and commitment to violence-free election outcomes. The candidates communicated cordial relationship, resonating noncompliance to election violence. These have implications on soothing the political environment.

Pre-election Online Pictorial Demeanour of the Presidential Candidates Electioneering period is often tense as contestants use different campaign strategies to label their opponents. However, during the socio-political interactions of the 2015 presidential aspirants, online pictorials showcased Jonathan and Buhari as friends during the Abuja Accord and renewal of the peace treaty. Analysis of their pre-election nonverbal behaviour in pictures reveal peace, unity, solidarity, and cohesion, which symbolize cordial relationship. The images epitomize harmony, thereby negating the assumptions of violence. Pictures of Jonathan and Buhari reveal their stance on election violence as depicted in the joyous mood of hugging and smiling with close body contact during the Abuja Accord (Figure 1). Portrayal of their closeness through hand to hand and stomach to stomach hugging, indicates their functioning in a politically comfort zone and closed social distance. Clinging to each

other demonstrates warmth and acceptance of each other. The friendly demeanour may contribute to political understanding and stability between factions. It represents peaceful relationship.

Figure 1: Buhari and Jonathan during the non-violence sensitization Workshop. Source: Pulse: January 14, 2015

The photograph in Figure 1 was taken in Abuja during the 2015 general elections' sensitization workshop on non-violence. Warm embrace, with hearty smiles, after the signing of the Abuja Accord, implies or means commitment of contestants to peaceful electioneering, polls and management of election outcomes. It suggests endorsement of violence-free election. The disposition of candidates, as reflected in their body language, communicates the pursuit of peace and a refrain from hate. Their conduct epitomizes harmony between contenders, which reinforces their verbal position against election violence. The photograph, therefore, depicts good neighbourliness, happiness, friendship and calm. The signing of the treaty expressed the intentions of contestants for a harmonious political stage, and the iconic picture reinforced the message.

To uphold the treaty, the main rivals met again to renew their commitment to peaceful elections. The photograph in Figure 2 captures both contenders in a warm, friendly body posture and facial expressions.

In an outlook of smiles, the nonverbal display was another opportunity for contestants to emphasize their commitment to peaceful electoral act.

Figure 2: Renewal of peace treaty
Source: Nigerian Eye (2015). March 26, 2015

The picture was taken during the signing of the renewal of election peace accord at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja on March 26**,** 2015. Their conduct a few days before presidential elections resonates calm, not crises, thereby projecting to the public that "election is not a do or die affair" – a popular line during electioneering in Nigeria. The foregoing images have implication for party supporters who may sheath their swords following the revealed images of their leaders. By virtue of the pictorial behavior of contestants, followers would interpret, give meanings, modify their notion of opposition, and have a rethink of election violence. Pre-election meetings portrayed the stance of presidential candidates

against election hostilities and tensions.

Post-Election Online Images and Implication in Calming Electoral Tensions

Contentions are one of the natural outcomes of election in Nigeria. They aggravate crises, leading to violence. Following the pre-election peace treaties, nonverbal communication of presidential candidates contradicted public expectations, hence, instead of the projection of war imagery, peace was depicted. The same construct emerged during the formal handing over from President Goodluck Jonathan to the president-elect, Muhammadu Buhari as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Jonathan handover to Buhari
Source: Tukur, Sani (2015) *Premium Times*, May 28

Positive facial expression and body contact were also observed. The partial delight during the formal handing over of power was natural as expressed in the handshake and smiles of both leaders. This picture would have implications on calming the expected post-election squall based on this projection of warmth. After their sober reflection, Buhari and Jonathan portrayed great delight during the inaugural ceremony with genuine happiness, hearty smiles, eye contact and closed body contact (Figure 4). Jonathan verbally commended the performance of Buhari during the inauguration ceremony. Pictorially, both men were in a lively discussion mood. Their discourse moved beyond smiles to laughter, indicating acceptance of election outcomes.

Figure 4: Buhari's Inaugural Ceremony
Source: Okonkwo, K. (2015). *Online Nigeria News,* May 30

The constructed image of acceptance of victory is also revealed in the smiles, laughter, eye contact, and close social distance between both leaders. They created impressions of a harmonious relationship, which has implications for maintenance of a peaceful national outlook. Non-violence elections could be attributed to the labeling of Buhari and Jonathan as friends, not foes. Photographs could point supporters to the actual political stance of party flag bearers. Exposure of the public to these soothing political images of peace, not war, may have implications on the post-election tranquilly. Tension-free politics is a product of main political actors; who spoke explicitly and implicitly against violence, and journalists, who displayed positive political images

through different media channels. While citizens were rarely exposed to pictures displaying resentment, enmity or hatred, images revealing comradeship and human accord were consistently rather featured.

The displayed warm embrace, genuine smiles and close body contact would send positive signals to the public to remain calm throughout the election period. The constructed images, therefore, exposed the inherent intentions of presidential candidates to citizens, who could interpret their nonverbal cues as a call for peace. This communication strategy may have contributed to the experienced electoral calm. This affirms the position of Kukah in Mohammed (2015) that the candidates were committed to a free, fair and credible election, expressing that the

action they took was for the benefit of ordinary Nigerians who probably took the elections more seriously than the main actors. Public display of nonviolence is important because political leaders can influence followers by what they say and do.

The pictures exposed Nigerian publics to messages skewed toward political harmony and this image construct detracted people from political violence to understanding and maturity. Accordingly, *The Sun Online* (2015) - a prominent Nigerian newspaper - noted that it was a great relief to millions of apprehensive Nigerians to watch Jonathan and his opponent, Buhari, hugging on television. The display of contestants' emotions in the photograph delivers a message of peace, warmth and affection. They evoke mental narratives, which could influence human decision making. The nonverbal signals disclose the politicians' predisposition to cohesion, rather than discord. Management of people's intentions and emotions during elections may be actualized through nonverbal communication. Positive electioneering and post-election outcomes could be a construct of emotional intelligence and competence. Public exposure to the posture and composure of Jonathan and Buhari in those photographs might have played a highly significant role in moderating the political extremism and

portraying Nigeria as a growing democracy.

Summary of findings

The findings generally indicate that online pictorial portrayal of Jonathan and Buhari in the 2015 elections was geared towards peace to calm the political environment. Specifically:

- Photographs of the two presidential candidates showcased friendship as they displayed their political stance for peaceful elections.
- The nonverbal demeanour of the contestants symbolised warmth, harmony, unity, solidarity, cohesion, cordiality and friendship. This resonates calm not crises.
- Constructed presidential images reveal their support for a violence-free election as reflected in their body language - warm embrace, hearty smiles, eye contacts, hugs and closed social distance
- While citizens were rarely exposed to pictures displaying resentment, enmity and hatred, messages were skewed toward comradeship, human accord and political wisdom.
- Pictorials epitomized a harmonious relationship, which might have contributed to calming electoral tensions and maintenance of a peaceful political outlook

- Display of contestants' emotions delivered a message of human coexistence, calm political environment and commitment to violence-free elections. This has implications on calming the political storm and promoting a crises-free electoral season.

Discussion

Verbal and nonverbal interactions are fundamental in the making and shaping of social life. Nonverbal interactions guide social behaviour because communicative processes have a basic pragmatic function to provide solutions for the problems of life (Luckmann, 2008). For Luckmann, what people define as reality are socially determined and constructed through interaction, interpretation and shared action. In other words, portrayal of online pictorial interactions of Jonathan and Buhari, could be interpreted as reality to enhance a violence-free political agenda.

Norms, beliefs, and ideals are socially constructed realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The envisaged 2015 election violence was contained partly because of the constructed images of presidential candidates that depicted cordiality. Contestants and journalists created images that revealed a calm political environment, thereby supporting the social constructionism proposition that society is actively and creatively produced by human

beings. This product of social order and social reality is considered the most important of the social interaction experiences (García, 2015). Pictorial communication can form the basis for social creation and shared assumptions about a violence-free environment. Pictures moderate political tension because they provide the bases for communicative formation and transmission of personal identities (Luckmann, 2008).

Constructed media images reveal the alignment of contestants to non-violence. The impressions created may have contributed to the overall purview of calm during the period. Explicit images reconstructed the violence rhetoric to a peaceful one. Aesthetic display of pictures communicated the actual political slant of contestants, hence, photographs, oral and written statements played complementary roles in calming the political storm. These communication strategies support the declaration of Goodluck Jonathan that his political ambition was not worth anybody's blood (Mohamed, 2015, cited in Kukah). Constructed presidential images could, therefore, influence citizens' behaviour based on public awareness, interpretation and giving of meaning to pictorial contents. Media reportage was strategic in focusing attention to images that symbolised a tranquil society. The body language of the frontline

runner candidates complemented their verbal actions, which slanted toward a warm relationship. This observation is consistent with Obono and Onyechi's (2017) submission that pre-election peace treaties and conceding call of Jonathan, aided peace building in Nigeria.

Pictorial portrayal of the candidates was phenomenal. The findings corroborate Luckmann's (2008) assertion that communication is fundamental for constructing and maintaining reality, and the production of social order. Peace constructs and publications through appropriate communication genres contribute in managing political opposition, aggression, tensions and maintenance of harmony.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2015 presidential election was shrouded with threats of violence. However, the nonverbal character of the candidates contributed in deflating the violent intentions of ardent supporters. The study analysed online pictorial representation of the candidates focusing on the Abuja Accord, renewal of the peace treaty, handing over to the president-elect and the inauguration ceremony. The pictures mirrored candidates' consistent engagement in body language, facial expression and social distance that symbolise candour, closeness and peaceful coexistence. Their pictorial

behaviour is assumed to have implications on the achievement of a calm state devoid of election violence.

Tension-free elections would then partly depend on the commitment of political actors. Their pictorials depict cohesion, not crises. Presidential images communicated peace, hence, the assumption that pictorial portrayals could calm political tensions and engineer a violence-free state irrespective of citizens' political, ethnic and religious backgrounds. To resolve the issues of election violence in Nigeria, it is recommended that:

1. Political actors use appropriate body language and facial expression to communicate peace, not violence, to the public

2. Extreme partisanship should be downplayed through pictorial representation of party leaders

3. Since the demeanour of political actors may contribute to the achievement of a calm election environment, party flagbearers should act to thwart election crises.

4. Because political leaders have the power to influence their supporters, they should constantly project peace to prevent election violence.

5. While current interpretations of pictures are sociocultural relevant but subjective, further studies should be focused on

audience analysis of presidential images in the 2015 Nigerian

elections.

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