

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Chinso Rejoice Nnaemeka

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Department of English and Literature
Email: nnaemekachinso@gmail.com

&

Chinwe Udoh, PhD

Department of English Language & Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University,
Awka
Email: vc.udoh@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines the discursive strategies employed by social media influencers within the context of Nigerian social media discourse. There has been dearth of researches that explore how Nigerian social media influencers strategically use language and communication techniques to engage their audience, shape public opinion, and foster community in the social media platform in a way it resonates majorly to Nigerian audience, hence this study. A netnographic qualitative research design was adopted in this study, drawing on Self Presentation Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model theory as analytical frameworks. The study is based on the analysis of contents from Nigerian social media influencers and uncovered the fundamental strategies and motivations driving the influencers by immersing itself in the digital environment of social media. The findings indicate that these Nigerian influencers used self presentation, structuring, persuasion, branding, humour, scarcity and urgency, social proof, engagement and interaction, collaboration, call to action, and visual communication strategies to attract, persuade and engage their followers on social media platforms. These discursive strategies are deeply influenced by the Nigerian cultural and social contexts in which the influencers operate, reflecting local values, social norms, and the unique dynamics of the Nigerian digital setting. Additionally, the study reveals that these influencers consciously or unconsciously align their content with the evolving societal trends, thereby reinforcing and sometimes challenging existing cultural narratives. The study concludes that the discursive strategies used by Nigerian social media influencers are not only effective in engaging their audience but also serve as a reflection of broader societal trends and cultural shifts in Nigeria. The study adds that a deeper understanding of the role of Nigerian social media influencers in contemporary digital communication highlights the importance of context in shaping online discourse.

Keywords: discourse, discourse analysis, discursive strategies, social media discourse, social media influencers

Introduction

Social media has become an important part of contemporary communication, extensively changing the dynamics of discourse in various spheres of influence especially post 2019 COVID period. With the advent of more social media platforms like X App (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Truth, Threads, Whatsapp and TikTok, individuals have gained unprecedented opportunities to engage in discourse on both global and local issues without physical interaction. Among the diverse users of these platforms, are the social media influencers, who stand out as prominent figures that manipulate significant influence in these social media platforms. These influencers, often possessing large followings, thus utilize various discursive strategies to attract, convince and communicate with their audiences; they also shape the online opinion, and promote products or ideas.

The term "discourse" often brings to mind a complex idea involving communication through text beyond sentences, it refers to the broader concept of language in use, while discursive, is an adjective that describes something related to discourse; it is used to characterize something as involving or relating to language in use; while strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. Fairclough (1992) explains that discourse as a form of social practice, which shapes and is shaped by social structures. He further argues that to understand discourse, one must analyze text, discursive practice, and social practice together, considering the dialectical relationship between discourse and socio-cultural contexts. Gumperz's (1982) posits that discourse strategies generally refer to methods that people employ to understand each other in a conversation in order to achieve a particular goal. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) agree that discursive strategies are located at different levels of linguistic organization and complexity. According to the study "By 'strategy', it generally means a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal". This definition of discursive strategies introduces the concept of discursive

strategies as multifaceted tools employed to achieve specific goals. Thus, a discursive strategy is a deliberate plan or approach used to achieve a specific goal in communication.

The rise of social media influencers has been a significant “catalyst for the rapid expansion” of discourses on digital landscape as social media platforms have become powerful tools that shape public discourse and influence the broadcasting of information. Geyser (2024) agrees that Influencers on Social Media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. This phenomenon has also led to the emergence of local influencers, those who specifically focus on discourses related to their own localities and encourage their followers to engage similarly. Nigerian social media influencers are one of those growing bodies and they refer to a specific subset of social media personalities who have carved out a significant role within the broader context of global digital influencing. These influencers do not only entertain, they also interact, inform and inspire their followers by also educating them, through engaging posts and dynamic social media strategies. Nigerian social media users operate within a rich and diverse linguistic and cultural landscape, where multiple languages, dialects, and cultural norms coexist. Influencers in this environment must navigate these complexities to effectively engage their audiences.

Language is the key weapon employed by these influencers to gain influence and accomplish their objectives; therefore, social media language use is a subject that deserves close examination. In order to achieve virtual or digital interactions they use discursive strategies which serve to uphold the communication. These strategies differ according to the needs and the intentions of that moment, ranging between clarity and conciseness, self presentation, structuring, persuasion, branding, humour, scarcity and urgency, social proof, engagement and interaction, collaboration, call to action, and visual communication. In a case that a certain strategy does not achieve the communicative purpose, it is conditional that the addresser may select another one to maintain the communication or to reach the desired aim.

Statement of the Problem

The study sets to investigate the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian social media influencers across Instagram, Facebook and X app platforms. Specifically, the research aims to examine the predominant discursive strategies employed by Nigerian social media influencers across various social media platforms. It investigates if Nigerian social media influencers use these discursive strategies to engage and persuade their audiences. The study also examines how culture and social contexts influence selection of the discursive strategies of Nigerian social media influencers and again, to identify the ethical implications of the discursive strategies used by Nigerian social media influencers.

Theoretical frameworks

Discursive Strategies of Social Media Influencers draw from various theories; therefore a combination of two theories is selected to be most appropriate to fully explore the aspect of discursive strategies used by social media influencers, particularly within the context of Nigerian social media culture. For the present study, below are theories that are used to analyze Discursive Strategies on Social Media Discourse.

Self-Presentation Theory (Goffman, 1959)

Goffman's "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" provides a framework for understanding how individuals manage impressions in social interactions, likening social life to a theatrical performance. The theory basic concepts are: **Dramaturgical Approach:** Goffman uses a theater metaphor, describing social life as performances. The "front stage" is where people present themselves according to social norms, while the "back stage" is where they can express their true selves away from the public eye. **Face-work:** Refers to maintaining a positive social image ("face") and the techniques used to avoid embarrassment, such as avoidance and correction. **Impression Management:** This involves controlling how others perceive us, using strategies like ingratiation or intimidation, tailored to the audience and context. Goffman's theory, though originally for face-to-face interactions, applies to social media, where profiles serve as the "stage" and user behavior, images, and content reflect the "personal façade."

Persuasion Theory

Persuasion theory explores how communication influences attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Key models, like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), provide insights into the mechanisms of persuasion.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

This theory was developed by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo in the 1980s, ELM explains how people process persuasive messages, leading to attitude and behaviour changes. The model identifies two paths of persuasion: **Central Route:** This path appeals to logic and requires active engagement from the audience. It is

effective when the message is relevant and involves well-researched data, fostering enduring attitude changes that resist counter-persuasion. **Peripheral Route:** This path relies on external cues like the speaker's attractiveness or emotional appeals. It is effective when the audience is less motivated or unable to engage deeply, using shortcuts like celebrity endorsements or catchy slogans. The choice between these routes depends on the audience's motivation and ability to process the message. For engaged audiences, the central route is more effective, while the peripheral route works better for less engaged audiences. Combining both routes can maximize a message's reach, appealing to both logical and emotional aspects of the audience.

Combining both theories of Self-Presentation and The Elaboration Likelihood Model will allow analysis of how social media influencers use discourse strategies to engage and influence their audiences.

Methodology

This study adopts a netnographic qualitative research design to gain detail understanding into the discursive strategies employed by social media influencers within the Nigerian digital landscape. The population of the study consists of data collected from social media influencers actively engaged on prominent social media platforms, specifically Instagram, Facebook, and X App. A non-probability purposive sampling approach was employed in this study, to select the data from social media influencers included in the analysis. This method is chosen to ensure that the influencers selected meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The primary criteria for selection include a minimum follower count of one hundred thousand, verified status on their respective platforms and influencers who gained significant recognition and visibility during the period from April, 2023 to August, 2024. The data collection method is a participant observation method of data collection and analysis used for this study is thematic data analysis encompassing the analysis of posts, tweet, and contents shared by some social media influencers.

Data Presentation and analysis

Research Question 1: What are the predominant discursive strategies employed by Nigerian social media influencers across various social media platforms?

Excerpt 1:



Influencers effectively use a range of discursive strategies to engage their audience on X (formerly Twitter) while addressing political hypocrisy in Nigeria. The information is presented in a well-structured and organized manner, with each point building logically on the previous one, making it easy for the audience to follow the argument. The repetition of the phrase "He didn't demarket the country" reinforces the central message, emphasizing the hypocrisy in governance, and making the argument more memorable. Through careful self-presentation, this influencer portrays a face as a concerned and courageous citizen, akin to a whistleblower, speaking truth to power. This helps establish trust with the audience, as the influencer aligns with Nigerian cultural values that respect those who stand up against injustice. The influencer's persuasion strategy relies on emotional appeal rather than factual data, tapping into the collective frustration of Nigerians regarding corruption, governance, and justice. The message resonates deeply with a Nigerian audience, particularly those who feel personally affected by these problems. The mention of emotionally charged issues such as drug trafficking, fraud, and terrorism, the call to action is subtle but effective, using a rhetorical question to prompt the audience to reflect on who is truly responsible for the "demarketing" of Nigeria. This encourages engagement and participation, inviting the audience to challenge the government's narrative and hypocrisy. Humor, in the form of sarcasm, lightens the tone of the message. The repeated phrase "He didn't demarket the country" carries a sarcastic undertone that critiques political leadership while making the content more digestible for a wider audience, including those who prefer a less formal or more playful approach to serious issues. Additionally, the influencer fosters engagement and interaction by posing indirect questions that encourage followers to think critically and engage in discussions, increasing the visibility and impact of the message. The overall branding strategy contributes to the influencer's identity as a vocal critic of the government, establishing them as a potential activist figure. The influencer's use of structuring, emotional appeal, self-presentation, subtle humor, and strategic engagement combine to create a

powerful message that resonates with Nigerians frustrated by corruption and governance. The message encourages reflection, discussion, and ultimately strengthens the influencer's personal brand as a critical and outspoken political commentator.

Research Question ii: If Nigerian social media influencers use discursive strategies to engage and persuade their audiences?

In Excerpt 1, the influencer presents a structured argument, highlighting scandals involving high-ranking government officials to criticize Nigerian politicians for damaging the country's image more than external critics. The use of emotional and logical appeals, such as linking the president's alleged criminal past to broader corruption, engages the audience and encourages reflection. Humor and sarcasm, like the phrase "Guess who the demarketers are," lighten the tone while making the critique more accessible and relatable.

The replies build on this strategy. **Reply 5** echoes the original message by pointing out the chief of staff's criminal history, reinforcing the criticism of the government. **Replies 1 and 3** add further examples of corruption, such as "ex-convicts in government," expanding the conversation and strengthening the original argument. **Reply 4** contrasts political inaction with the idea of "demarketing" the country, further highlighting the hypocrisy in leadership. **Reply 2** uses humor to mock the Senate president's questionable election victory, keeping the discussion engaging while reinforcing the influencer's point.

These replies deepen the discussion, encouraging participation and expanding the critique of corruption, governance, and Nigeria's international image. Together, the influencer and their audience create a collective voice that questions political leadership and amplifies the emotional impact of the original post.

Research Question iii: How do culture and social contexts influence the discursive strategies of Nigerian social media influencers

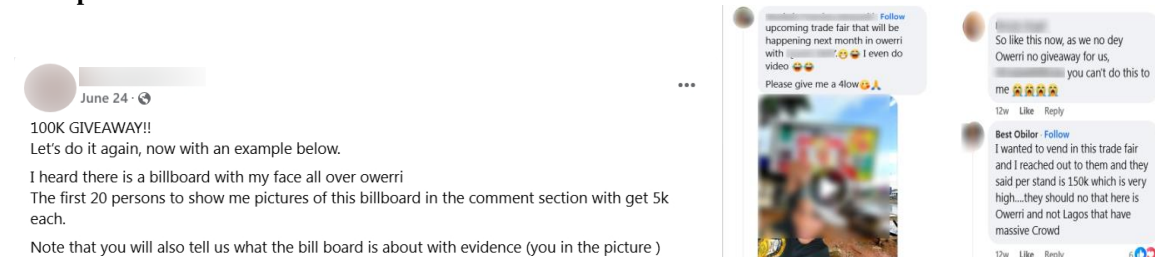
Excerpt 1: In this excerpt, the influencer discusses issues of corruption and political disillusionment in Nigeria. The use of sharp rhetoric and references to specific political figures reflects a Self-Presentation Strategy, where the influencer positions themselves as a socially aware individual advocating for accountability. The cultural context of widespread political cynicism in Nigeria influenced the influencer's tone, to highlight the hypocrisy of leaders while engaging the audience in a collective critique of governance, resonating with the frustrations felt by many Nigerians.

Research Question iv: What are the ethical implications of the discursive strategies used by social media influencers?

Excerpt 1: In this excerpt, the influencer critiques political leaders and the state of governance in Nigeria. The ethical implications here involve the responsibility that comes with public discourse. While it is vital for influencers to hold leaders accountable, there is a risk of spreading misinformation or inciting divisiveness if claims are not substantiated. **Reply 4: "Buhari who swept a list of terrorist sponsors under the carpet also didn't demarket Nigeria"** may not have an authentic prove to back the statement but has to correspond as it was the discourse at hand. Ethical engagement requires influencers to be

Research Question ii: If Nigerian social media influencers use discursive strategies to engage and persuade their audiences?

Excerpt 2:



In Excerpt 2, the Nigerian influencer uses a range of strategies to engage and persuade their audience. By asking followers to take selfies with a billboard and offering a giveaway for the first 20 participants, the influencer encourages interaction, creating urgency and competition. The financial incentive, combined with the visual task, resonates with Nigerian social media culture, where giveaways are common. The influencer's reference to their billboard subtly reinforces their growing success while remaining relatable through the giveaway. Audience responses, such as **Reply 5** discussing the trade fair promoted on the billboard, show how followers engage deeply with the content and recognize the influencer's rising status. Reply 4 validates the social proof by mentioning seeing the billboard, contributing to the influencer's credibility. The call to action (CTA) is clear, but **Reply 7** points out that some followers misunderstood the instructions, highlighting how audience interaction can involve clarification. Humor is also woven into the engagement, with the influencer and followers using playful language

to keep the tone light and fun. For example, **Reply 6** humorously expresses frustration over the complexity of the task, adding a lighthearted element.

The influencer uses visual communication by making the task participatory, requiring followers to submit photos, which shifts some content creation to the audience. Additionally, asking followers to explain what the billboard is about promotes deeper engagement, aligning with the Central Route of persuasion. The combination of engagement, self-presentation, social proof, and a clear call to action makes the influencer's strategy effective in resonating with and persuading their audience.

Research Question iii: How do culture and social contexts influence the discursive strategies of Nigerian social media influencers

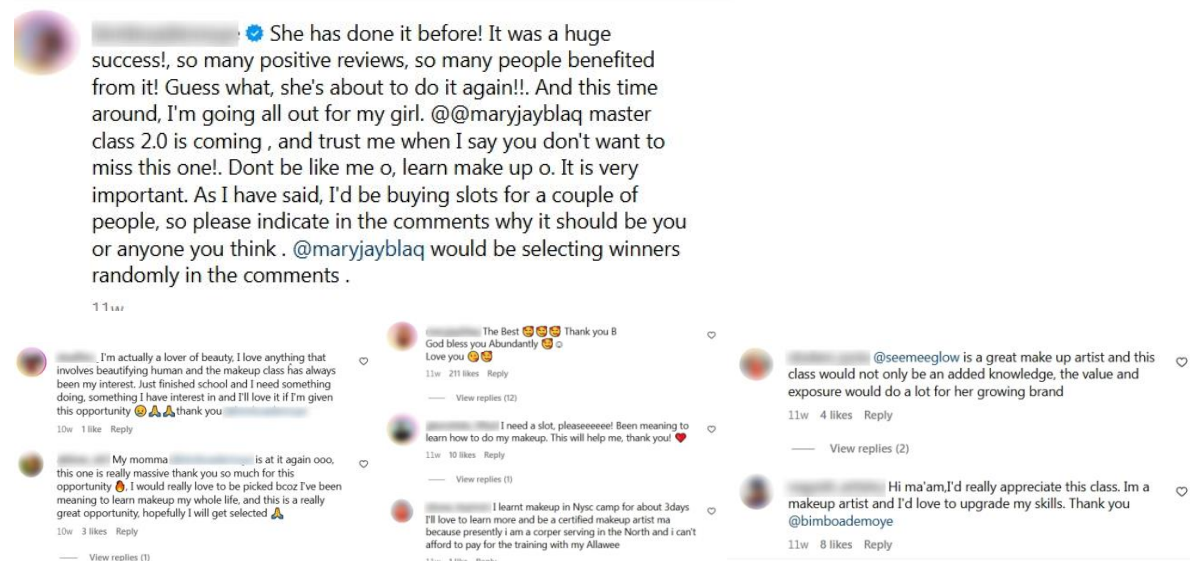
Excerpt 2: In this excerpt, the influencer announces a giveaway contingent on followers sharing pictures of a billboard featuring them. This strategy utilizes a call to action strategy, encouraging engagement and interaction from the audience. The cultural context of giveaways and competitions in Nigerian social media drives this approach; as such promotions are popular and effective for increasing visibility and follower participation. The excitement surrounding giveaways creates a sense of community and competition, which the influencer leverages to build a more interactive platform.

Research Question iv: What are the ethical implications of the discursive strategies used by social media influencers?

Excerpt 2: In this excerpt, the influencer promotes a giveaway tied to engagement with their content. The ethical implications here center on the responsibility of influencers to ensure transparency and fairness in promotional activities. If the giveaway is perceived as a means to artificially inflate engagement or manipulate follower behavior, it could undermine trust. Additionally, influencers must clearly communicate the rules and criteria for participation to avoid confusion and ensure equitable opportunities for all followers.

Research Question 1: What are the predominant discursive strategies employed by Nigerian social media influencers across various social media platforms?

Excerpt 3:



The influencer in this analysis effectively uses several strategies to engage and persuade their audience through a contest offering a monetary reward. The promise of "50K up for grabs" immediately draws participation, especially in Nigeria's tough economic climate, where free money attracts quick responses. By asking followers to guess the type of body shaper, the influencer adds a fun element, boosting engagement through comments and guesses. Clear calls to action like **"follow my family @getglowng"** and **"Please DM your account details"** provide straightforward instructions, making it easy for followers to participate. The influencer's warm and affectionate tone, referring to followers as **"my loves"** and congratulating winners personally, strengthens the bond with the audience and presents the influencer as approachable and caring. This builds trust and fosters community, which resonates well with Nigerian audiences. Social proof is established by mentioning a previous winner, proving the contest's legitimacy and encouraging more people to join. The influencer also creates urgency with the limited chance to win significant amounts of money, making followers act quickly. By tagging and promoting brands like **"amrhaf closet"** and **"@getglowng,"** the influencer boosts their visibility while aligning them with the contest. Both logical persuasion (clear steps to participate) and emotional appeals (affectionate

language, excitement of winning) are employed, ensuring the audience engages either thoughtfully or through emotional attraction. This combination of strategies effectively strengthens the influencer's brand and fosters strong audience interaction.

Research Question ii: If Nigerian social media influencers use discursive strategies to engage and persuade their audiences?

In Excerpt 3, the Nigerian social media influencer effectively engages and persuades the audience using interactive giveaways, personal connection, and community engagement. The giveaway, where followers guess the type of body shaper to win cash prizes, creates direct interaction and fosters gratitude, as seen in replies like, "**Thank you B God bless you.**" This builds rapport and positions the influencer as approachable, aligning with Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory by projecting generosity and personal engagement. Several replies express aspirations for self-improvement, such as learning makeup skills, indicating that the influencer's platform appeals to the audience's desire for personal and professional growth. By offering skill-enhancing opportunities, like makeup classes, the influencer taps into these hopes, creating an emotional connection through peripheral route persuasion. The influencer also boosts credibility by publicly announcing winners of previous giveaways, which shows transparency and fairness, enhancing trust. Followers engage not only for entertainment but for the chance to improve their skills and gain career opportunities, making the influencer's platform a space for community empowerment and economic mobility. This multi-faceted approach strengthens engagement and reinforces the influencer's role as a trusted figure in the audience's lives.

Research Question iii: How do culture and social contexts influence the discursive strategies of Nigerian social media influencers

Excerpt 3: This excerpt involves a giveaway tied to guessing the type of body shaper worn by the influencer. The use of a Call to Action Strategy is prominent here, encouraging followers to interact and engage with the post actively. The cultural context of fashion and body positivity in Nigeria influences this approach, as discussions around body image and self-presentation are becoming increasingly relevant.

Research Question 1: What are the predominant discursive strategies employed by Nigerian social media influencers across various social media platforms?

Excerpt 4:



In this analysis, the influencer employs various strategies to connect with the audience. Through self-presentation, they share a personal passion for fitness, making them relatable and positioning themselves as an authority in the fitness space while inspiring others to follow their example. The persuasion and promotion strategy subtly ties fitness to promoting a real estate initiative, linking personal wellness with community progress, which resonates with Nigerians' values around health and collective growth. The engagement and interaction strategy includes a shoutout to Akure's community, fostering a sense of local pride and belonging. Finally, the visual communication strategy, though lacking images, uses vivid descriptions like "positivity rush" and "energy over the roof" to help the audience imagine the experience, enhancing the post's engagement.

Research Question iv: What are the ethical implications of the discursive strategies used by social media influencers?

Excerpt 4: This excerpt discusses the influencer's passion for fitness and community events aimed at promoting a healthier lifestyle. The ethical implications here involve the influencer's role in promoting health positively and inclusively. They must avoid shaming individuals for their fitness levels or lifestyles while fostering an encouraging atmosphere.

Discussion of Findings

This study examines the discursive strategies used by Nigerian social media influencers, focusing on how they communicate and influence online discourse. The findings of this study by analyzing posts and tweets from platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook, reveals that influencers skillfully build trust through sharing personal experiences and aligning content with their followers' values, and enhancing authenticity. They use both emotional and logical appeals to persuade their audience, often sparking strong reactions and encouraging community engagement through direct calls to action. Posts are well-structured, using humour and visuals to boost engagement and cultural relevance. However, these strategies also raise ethical concerns about potential emotional manipulation and exploitation of followers' trust, emphasizing the need for a balance between authenticity and commercial interests.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the complexity and depth of discursive strategies employed by Nigerian social media influencers, demonstrating how these strategies are grounded in theoretical frameworks like self-presentation theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). It examines how influencers craft their messages to engage and persuade their audiences, and reveals the careful construction of online personas that foster trust and connection. Influencers skillfully navigate cultural and social contexts to resonate with their followers, balancing logical appeals with emotional engagement. This research not only enhances our understanding of the mechanisms of influence in the Nigerian social media space but also underscores the ethical implications of such powerful influence. As influencers continue to shape public discourse, the findings offer valuable insights into their responsibilities and the broader impact of their strategies, providing a foundation for future research and ethical considerations in the digital age.

Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, several recommendations can enhance the effectiveness and ethical responsibility of Nigerian social media influencers. First, influencers should maintain an authentic and relatable online persona, balancing their public image with their true selves to avoid alienating their audience. Second, they should strategically apply the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by combining emotional appeal with content that fosters deeper engagement and critical thinking, thereby boosting credibility and encouraging a more informed audience. Cultural sensitivity is also crucial, as influencers should reflect the values and aspirations of their audience while educating them on ethical issues and the broader impact of social media. Ethical considerations should be central to their strategies, ensuring transparency in commercial endorsements and avoiding manipulative tactics. These recommendations, grounded in established theoretical frameworks, aim to enhance the effectiveness of influencers' strategies while ensuring ethical practices, contributing to a healthier and more informed digital community.

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