RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED HOAX TEXT MESSAGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study focuses on language use in computer-mediated hoax text messages in Nigeria and aims to analyze their nuanced rhetorical strategies. Hoax messages are perceived as communicative acts with meaning substructure and discursive constituents which emanate from purposive language use, created, and negotiated to swindle unsuspecting victims out of their money. Such textualized transactions are conduits for fraudulent engagements and have continued to spread unchecked despite their financial implications. This phenomenon raises a question about the proactive measures taken in the fight against cybercrimes in the country. The position of this paper is that writers of hoax messages exploit the affordances of technology and language in their fraudulent engagements. Hence, the effectiveness of such messages is actualized through contrived strategies which often rely on politeness (pathos), claims of institutional authority (logos), and even suspicion-neutralizing gambits (ethos). Seventeen hoax text messages received via mobile telephony constitute the data for this study. These hoax text messages are subjected to qualitative construal following Aristotle's Classical Rhetorical Theory. The findings of the paper reveal that hoax text messages contain linguistic trails which reveal their duplicity and that the pervasive nature of technology and ineffective cyberspace regulations have encouraged the cheerless spread of computer-mediated frauds within and outside Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: **COMMUNICATION, COMPUTER-MEDIATED DISCOURSE, HOAX MESSAGES, PRAGMATICS, RHETORICS.**

1. Introduction

> All bank customers should beware that a lot of messages received on our phones these days are SCAM. DO NOT CALL OR SEND ANY TEXT containing your bank information to any FRAUDSTER!!! BE WISE!!!

The caveat above is a disclaimer from a financial institution in reaction to the spate of cybercrimes ferried through the instrumentality of mobile telephony. The concern raised by hoax messages, as channels for fraudulent transactions, is predicated on their intractable and unchecked spread despite the supposed measures put in place by the government to curtail their permeation. The impetus for this study stems from the fact that language is the nexus of social interactions and can be effectively investigated to explicate human acts in any given context. The Internet, through its ancillary outlet, mobile telephony, provides the springboard for the spread of hoax messages while language encapsulates the structural contours and the functional raison d'etre for such human actions.

Technological progression in the 21st century has occasioned unprecedented animation in human social interactions. Paradoxically, the simplification in the communication process, which has been informed by technological innovations, is inextricably entwined with complexities. Arguably, the complication is attributable to the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, which has burgeoned into an effective global communication mechanism for the actualization of different objectives. This is evident in the increase in the knowledge and application of computer technologies used for conveying messages whose senders maintain some form of anonymity (Chiluwa, 2010). Computer-mediated technologies have broadened the wavelength of social discourse by creating new interactive possibilities, which are sometimes exploited for negative purposes. The application of Internet resources for ulterior reasons has fuelled the preponderance of fraudulent practices and digital deception because the available interactive outlets afford its users, the leverage to engage in different activities on any chosen medium of interaction.

Fraudulent texts popularly referred to as scam, 419, or hoax messages are forms of communication with inherent meaning infrastructure and discursive components which emanate from purposive language use; contrived to persuasively engage people and negotiated to deceive unsuspecting victims. Such messages are textual communication sent through mobile telephony. Writers of hoax messages exploit the expansive and expressive latitude of technology and language in their fraudulent engagements. Hence, the effectiveness of such messages gets reinforcement through contrived strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
Information Communication Technology (ICT) with its allied digital cousins stirred a major transformation in human interactive processes. ICT refers to a distinct, yet diverse array of technologies used in accessing, storing, and disseminating information in a digitalized fashion. It is also perceived as an inclusive term for all forms of technologies deployable in the manipulation and transmission of information (Rogers, 2005; Bankole & Ogunrinde, 2017). ICT devices are transformational tools since they involve the pragmatic and purposeful application of scientific knowledge. While making a case for the emergence of a technology that has re-defined patterns of communication globally, Manovich (2002, p.6) avers that ICT represents a convergence of two separate historical trajectories: computer and media technologies whose synthesis has resulted in the translation of all existing media into data accessible through computers and texts which have become computable.

Comparatively speaking, ICT has influenced every sphere of human existence just as the Gutenberg press and the stem engine changed the process of documentation and the movement of goods and services. ICT is a functional discipline, which refers to information infrastructure or science, the automation process or data exchange which guards the integrity of information resources (Kleve, *et a*l 2011). Cook (1997) in response to how the 21st century emerged from the technological revolution of the 1990's posits that the Internet, alongside its allied relations, has made inroads into people's imagination and various fields to the point that the revolution has had an impact on human life and the social ecosystem. The scholar affirms that the technological changes being witnessed today 'are not *caused* by the appearance of a single gadget; they are *constituted* in multiple, mutually influencing technological and social innovations.' ICT, through its cousin outlets, has opened up new vistas for effective communication, thereby foregrounding computer-mediated interactions as explicit manifestations of present-day social interactivity. These interactive outlets have

become marketplaces for fraudulent engagements and ironically, a goldmine of information for varied research.

2.2. ICT-Related Crimes

ICT platforms have become fertile grounds for different types of crimes which are often perpetrated using the tools of technology, especially computers connected to the Internet. ICT-related crimes, which are synonymous with cybercrimes, are always purpose-driven and targeted at persons or institutions to cause social, physical, mental, or economic harm. Online crimes are often executed by people who have a knack for exploiting cyberspace (Furnell, 2002). Krausz & Walker (2013) have argued that a cybercrime offense could be committed using the computer or when it is the target for the crime. Jain & Shrivasta (2014) explain that a computer becomes the target for a crime when the perpetrator aims to steal information from it or to cause damage to it through any means possible like hacking it, sending a virus to attack it, or several other malicious attempts against the target.

Most computer-mediated outlets such as chat rooms of linked computers, emails, and mobile telephony are conduits for fraudulent engagements. Consequently, ICT-related crimes, fecundated by the unassailable power of the Internet, have become a significant area of scholarly interest and the thematic concentration of many national and international conferences each year. Given the huge implications of cybercrimes on society and the response of academia to the menace, Bossler & Berenblum (2019) note that some universities now run programs that award specific certificates and degrees at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in cyber-related areas. Expectedly, scholars have explored different aspects of cybercrimes, from the anterior of its definitions to the interior delineations of its taxonomy and characteristics. From the standpoint of classification, Moore (2016) categorizes cybercrimes into Types I and II, using the intensity of crime as the parameter for his categorization and noting that all cybercrimes that require technical expertise are under Type I while Type II cybercrimes are less dependent on technology but on interpersonal strategies. Some other areas of cyber crimes that people in different fields in recent times have explored include *financial fraud* (Jain & Shrivasta, 2014; Levi, M., Doig, A, Gundur, R. *et al.*, 2017; Alghamdi, 2020); *email-spoofing* (Ramzan, 2010); *cyber pornography* (Saulawa, 2015; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006; Jenkins, 2001); *cyberterrorism* (Weimann, 2004; Conway, 2003); *cyber extortion*, (Vasiu & Vasiu, 2020); *cybersex*(Daneback&Mansson, 2005); *cyberwarfare*, (Ball, 2011; Mukherjee, 2019); *cyberbullying* and *cyberstalking* (Ahlgrim & Terrance, 2018; Al-Khateeb, *et al.*, 2017; Al-Rahmi, et al., 2019; Brown, et al., 2017).

Modern computers and sophisticated phones, as offshoots of ICT, have become tools of crimes that require only minimal technical expertise to manipulate. Often, human weaknesses are exploited in ICT-related fraudulent transactions. Sadly, victims of such frauds are most times unable to identify some of the linguistic trails or infelicities that belie the nature of such communicative acts.

2.3. Hoax Text Messages as Discourse

Attention turned in the direction of virtual discourse in the 1980s when the issue of the effects of electronic communication on language was raised in some scholarly quarters (Suciu, 2019). For linguists, the focus of virtual discourse has always been on language and the dynamics of its use in the virtual space, and oftentimes, discourse analytic procedures are employed in the explication of data generated thereof. The discursive nature of hoax messages is underscored by the fact that they contain elements that reveal deliberate and

strategic language use as forms of social activity, identifiable within the contextual bounds of cyberspace. The defining characteristics of hoax messages are anonymous authorship and fraudulent intentionality basically for personal benefits. Hoax messages are perceived to be discursive in their encapsulation of interpersonal elements. The notion of discourse, as captured by Yazdannik, *et al* (2017), has inescapably been trapped in the vortex of multidimensional definitions. First, they view discourse from a cognitive point as those thought processes which can be identified in communication whether spoken or written because of their structure. From a social angle, they hold that 'discourse is belief in practice or knowledge that can shape reality, thereby providing common grounds for understanding social phenomena in the world.

Myer (2010) emphasizes that the significance of discourse in contemporary scholarship lies in its concern with how language mediates and shapes interactions and socio-cultural formations in society. For Gee (1996, p.128), discourse is perceived as the recurrent and systematic means of interactions and processes of harnessing signification artifacts in a given context and within a particular time frame to establish social identity. He adds that:

> Discourses,...crucially involve a) situated identities; b) ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities; c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places, and times; d) characteristic ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing thinking-believing-knowing-speaking listening (and, in some Discourses, reading-and-writing, as well).

Gee argues that language alone is insufficient in the construction of identities but does so with other elements extrinsic to it which complement it in discourse situations. This submission aligns with the view of Foucault (1972) that discourse is basically about the contributions of social practices in the organization of the world rather than the roles of signs and language in isolation. For him, knowledge is discursively constructed through social practices conveyed by relations of power and ideological undercurrents, and discourse analysis is a task that consists … not treating discourses as groups of signs… but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p.54). The centrality of language in the quest for meaning is not in doubt; however, the position of language in relation to meaning direction is not viewed as being centripetal within the confines of grammar but centrifugal to the speaker, the position of speech and the intended effect of the message. Therefore, the vigor of the process of meaning lies in its functional composition rather than its passive uncovering.

Scollon (2005) examines the notion of discourse from the lens of Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) as a kind of negotiated action. He maintains that discourse is language in use as upheld by Fasold (1990, p.65), and it makes references to specific elements of language, appropriated by a person in each context in the hope of accomplishing a specific action. This view of discourse is an aggregation of action and language; it is the utilitarian and mediational aspects of language that are used in initiating actions.

2.4. Mobile Telephony in the Global Context

The advent of mobile telephony, especially the Global System for Mobile telecommunication (GSM) redesigned the communication process by solving the perennial

problems occasioned by space and time. There is strong evidence that the concept of the point-to-point short message was mooted as part of the development of the global system for a global communication network in the mid-1980s, but it was not until the early 1990s that phone companies began to experiment with its commercial possibilities (Thurlow, 2001; Crystal, 2002, 2008). One cannot agree less that the emergence of GSM text messaging came as a replacement for texts communicated by pagers and telegraphic machines.

When mobile communication began, it was obvious that it was designedly for people from the upper echelons of society. Today, however, mobile telephony has reduced the social barriers that once existed in communication (Castells, 1996). Though SMS, a textual form of communication, began slowly, it has developed into a common interpersonal communicative practice where interactions are initiated and negotiated on cell phones.

2.5.The Gsm and the Nigerian Experience

The licensing of *Econet* which has undergone several organizational rebranding as *V-mobile*, *Vodafone*, *Celtel*, *Zain* and now *Airtel*, and *MTN* marked the beginning of the operations of the Global System for Mobile telecommunication in Nigeria. The turning point in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria came under the Obasanjo-led administration in 2001. When the GSM companies began operations, almost one million subscribers residing in urban areas went for mobile phones which were then awfully expensive and had very high tariffs which ranked as the highest in Africa. Subscribers had to pay between N40 and N50 to send out a message of one hundred and sixty characters in length (Chiluwa, 2008; Awonusi, 2004). However, the licensing of Globacom, an indigenous telecommunication company, on August 29, 2003, and other mobile telecommunication companies that provided terrestrial services, made the industry competitive. There were drastic reductions in airtime tariffs; the cost of mobile lines and cell phones and the cost of sending SMSes within the same network.

2.6. Theoretical Framework: Rhetorical Theory

The classical roots of rhetoric can be traced back to Ancient Greece and Rome, as the forms of communication and persuasion essential to social existence. Rhetorical theories have been in flux since their emergence, thereby making it difficult to provide a definitive clarification of the term. Nonetheless, there is some consensus that rhetoric is the art of persuasion. As the art of discourse, rhetoric is the field of learning that denotes how language is used to persuade or motivate a target audience to act in a particular manner in each context. Remarkably, the 21st century has witnessed some renewed interest in rhetoric which cannot be extricated from the volatilities of its historical antecedents. Situated within the paradigm of modern discourse, rhetoric can be described as the study of effective communication and the art of persuasion. It is assumed that every deliberate attempt to provide information or share knowledge involves processes of making choices that would best facilitate the achievement of those aims. These perceived communicative acts can be considered rhetorical as the quality of one's thoughts can be revealed in writing, thereby making written communication rhetorical in nature.

Rhetoric is the aspect of communication that explores the accessible methods of persuasion. As a theory of communication developed by Aristotle, rhetoric is a means of opposing several notions about what constitutes effective presentation. His perception of rhetoric is that dimension of the communication process that elucidates and facilitates people's understanding of communicative events. It is the art of effective speaking or writing. This art of using language specifically to persuade one's audience is the focus of rhetoric. The

Aristotelian theory is premised on the assumption that effective communicators must consider their audience and must deploy several proofs in their presentations.

Rhetoric, as the art of discourse, is a form of planned communication wherein the message is driven by the intentional preoccupation of informing, persuading, or motivating a defined audience in a specific context. As an area of formal study, rhetoric is essential to understanding, developing, and perfecting the art of arguments. Aristotle has termed it the faculty of observing in any given situation, the available strategies of persuasion. In this paper, we explore the three persuasive strategies of appealing to an audience as laid out by Aristotle, namely logos, pathos, and ethos alongside the five canons of rhetoric as plausible evidence of strategies adopted in hoax text messages. It is further argued that the success of hoax text messages is driven by rhetorical sophistry, which is indeed made up of covert strategies aimed at swindling the unsuspecting victim out of their valuables or money. In this paper, rhetorical strategies are deliberate efforts deployed in hoax text messages to persuade telecommunication subscribers to act in a predetermined way in the hope of defrauding them of their money.

3. Methodology

This study is analytical in nature and focuses on hoax text messages sent via mobile telephony to Nigerians. Seventeen hoax text messages purposively selected from twenty-eight messages received from the researchers' colleagues and friends constitute the data for this study. These hoax text messages are subjected to qualitative analysis following the theoretical mappings of Classical Rhetorical Theory by Aristotle. The data for this study are text messages that were received by Nigerians in the wake of the 2015 Bank Verification Number commonly referred to as the BVN compliance exercise. The BVN, a biometric identification system, was initiated and implemented by the Central Bank of Nigeria in line with the CBN Act of 1958 to strengthen and reduce financial impropriety in the banking sector. The BVN exercise and other allied financial matters provided the gestation period and cover for hoax text messages to thrive in Nigeria. However, the engaging nature of hoax text messages, as embodiments of rhetorical strategies, forms the discursive preoccupation of this study. The subjects of the messages received are those that point to BVN system upgrade (SU), system error (SE), incomplete registration (IR), ATM card deactivation (ACD), cashless policy (CP), blocked account (BA) change in date of birth & contact (CDOB & C) and investment opportunity (IO).

4. Data Analysis & Discussion

Hoax text messages, which serve as data for this paper, are analyzed based on their structural configurations and meaning directions, which have functional implications. The canons of rhetoric, namely invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery alongside the principles of logos, ethos, and pathos are used to account for the structural and persuasive constituents of the hoax text messages.

4.1. Invention

This canon of rhetoric refers to the strategic acts that provide the direction of discourse or the subject matter. It is about discovering the communicative possibilities, and the ability to carefully choose the most effective resources for persuasion in each situation. The data reveal that the phenomena that triggered the upsurge in hoax text messages were the BVN exercise

and the cashless policy that ushered in the use of the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) in Nigeria.

4.2. Arrangement

Arrangement refers to the structural layout of discourse. It appertains to all the ways of organizing the content of communication in a meaningful form. Hoax texts fit loosely into the type of discourse that has the structure of a beginning, middle, and conclusion.

4.2.1. Beginning

Pathos, an argument based on an emotional appeal to the audience, is visible in the introductory opening of the hoax messages beginning as *Dear customer* in Text I*, and Dear valued customer* in Text III. This pragmatic strategy is aimed at setting a formal tone for the spoof, thereby putting the unsuspecting victim's heart at rest. It is strategically used to give the text message a formal outlook, as seen in formal correspondence. This part leverages phatic communication, an aspect of pragmatics, aimed at creating an atmosphere of politeness that would make the unsuspecting victims identify with the sender of the text, thereby cooperating with them.

4.2.2. Middle/ Body

The body of the messages contains the rationales for their creation, and they include *System Upgrade (Texts 1,2,4,5,8,9,10,12,17)*; *BVN Registration (Texts 3,6)*; *Financial Freedom (Text 13)*; *BVN System Error (Texts 7,14,15,16)* and *Personal Information Changes (Text 11)*. The body of the messages also contains the pith of the hoax which is on ATM debit card deactivation, a promise of financial autonomy, and account unblocking.

The information supplied by hoax creators in the body of their messages may be perceived as the observation of the maxim of quality because of their brief nature. On the contrary, such pieces of information have different meanings and implications and openly flout the maxims of cooperation because they encapsulate untrue information meant to swindle people out of their money. For example, the implicature of the expression: 'Due to BVN system upgrade your ATM CARD has been De-activated by CBN…', as seen in Texts 2, 4, 6, and 7, is that CBN is a commercial bank that deals directly with customers and with the issuance of ATM debit cards. Also, the expression presupposes that everyone who holds a bank account must own an ATM debit card. This is not often the case. The examples below reveal the composition of the body of the hoax messages.

S/N	FULL TEXTS	MIDDLE
1	**Text I** Dear customer due to our BVN system upgrade, your ATM Card has just been de-activated, to reactivate, kindly call CBN customer care 08162698461	due to our BVN system upgrade,…
2	**Text VI** DEAR CUSTOMER, CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA HAS BLOCKED YOUR account and ATM CARD DUE TO INCOMPLETE OF BVN REGISTRATION, CALL OUR CUSTOMER CARE	Due to incomplete BVN registration,

	09068080491 TO UNLOCK.	
3	**Text XI** FirstBank Dear customer, as regards to cashless policy, Your Account, ATM has been blocked- due to change in date of birth, contact, contact customer care on 08111709039 to rectify.	due to change in date of birth, contact,
4	**Text XIII** <u>MMM NIGERIA</u> Do you want to be financially free? Join the community of people helping people to get 30% of your spare. Visit m.nigeria-mmm-com/l. Millions of people help each other with MMM Nigeria, not for personal profit, but for the common benefit. Join us too. M.nigeria-mmm.cc/l monthly	Do you want to be financially free? Millions of people help each other with mmm Nigeria,
5	**Text XIV** BVN ALERT: Dear Customer, your ATM CARD & ACCT**** has been block due to BVN System error call our customer care line>09063110555 to open it under 24 hours.	due to BVN System error

Table I

The pragmatic entailment of these hoax messages reveals the writers' inability to capture nuanced meaning infractions.

4.2.3. Conclusion

The conclusion of hoax text messages is always engaging as it calls the receiver to some action which leaves a strong reflection of what was said in the introduction in the mind of the receiver. This is achieved through lexical counterbalancing as seen in *de-activated - to reactivate; not for personal profit, but for the common benefit; De-activated, to activate, etc.* Some examples of the concluding parts of the messages in the data include: *to activate, kindly call CBN customer care...; contact customer care on...; call us on...; visit M.Nigeria...; join us to...; call our customer care line on...; kindly call CBN customer care... now.*

S/N	FULL TEXTS	CONCLUSION
1	**Text VIII** CBN: DeaR customer Due to our BVN system upgrade, your ATM CARD has been De-activated, to activate, kindly call CBN Customer care 08063561659	to activate, kindly call CBN Customer care 08063561659
2	**Text: XI** FirstBank , Dear customer , as regards to cashless policy, Your Account, ATM has been blocked- due to change in date of birth, contact, contact customer care on 08111709039	contact customer care on 08111709039
3	**Text XII** SMSCaster.com: DEAR CUSTOMER, DUE TO BVN SYSTEM UPGRADE YOUR ATM CARD HAS BEEN DE-ACTIVATED, CALL US ON 08062952795 FOR REACTIVATION	CALL US ON 08062952795 FOR REACTIVATION

4	**Text XIII** <u>MMM NIGERIA</u> Do you want to be financially free? Join the community of people helping people to get 30% or your spare. Visit m.nigeria-mmm-com/l. Millions of people help each other with MMM Nigeria, not for personal profit, but for the common benefit. Join us too. M.nigeria-mmm.cc/l monthly	Visit m.nigeria-mmm-com/l. Join us too.M.nigeria-mmm.cc/l monthly
5	**Text XV** BVN ALERT: Dear customer your ATM card & ACCT..has been block due to BVN System error call our customer care line on [09060981364]to open now within 24Hours..	call our customer care line on [09060981364]to open now within 24Hours..

Table II

4.3. Style

Style refers to the way ideas are organized to persuade an audience. The four cardinal preoccupations of style within the matrix of rhetoric include the virtue of style, level of style, quality of style, and the figures of speech. The virtue of style relates to grammar, audience demographics, affective and effective language uses, principles of propriety, and effective linguistic embellishment. The grammar of the hoax messages that form the data for this paper is couched in a simple way to make it easy for the receiver to relate to the message. However, some grammatical sloppiness that lends credence to the fraudulent nature of the text messages is evident in the areas of wrong application of punctuation marks, indiscriminate use of capitalization, wrong spelling patterns, and pragmatic infelicities. The use of capitalization helps to keep the receiver focused on the key lexemes of the hoax message such as BVN, ATM CARD, CBN DIRECTIVE, MMM.NIGERIA, DEACTIVATED, BLOCKED, UNBLOCK, DEAR CUSTOMER. Also, the text messages reveal pragmatic failings, illogical forms, and inherent grammatical pitfalls at different levels. Some examples include:

Lexical Level (Spelling Errors)

> **Text IV**:
> To **Re-activated**(reactivate) call *costomer* (customer) care...
> **Text IX:**
> CBN; DEAR customer, DUE to our BVN system **upgrad** (upgrade)…

Syntax (Punctuation & Capitalisation Errors)
Text II:
Dear customer, **D**ue to BVN **S**ystem upgrade your ATM CARD
has been **De**-activated by CBN **T**o **R**e-activate call customer care
08069055326.

Text VII:
> Dear customer, your ATM debit card **H**as been **B**locked by (CBN)
> **D**ue **T**o BVN **S**ystem **E**rror. Quickly **C**all **U**s @ 08140860987 **T**o
> **R**eactivate it **U**nder 24**H**ours.

Text IV:

Dear customer, **D**ue to BVN system upgrade your ATM has been de-activated by CBN **T**o **R**e-activated call costomer care 08069055326 for help.

Text IX:

CBN**;** DEAR customer, DUE to our BVN system upgrad…

Text XVI:

Your ATM CARD & ACCT…**has** been blocked due to BVN
error, Call our customer care on 09065141943…

In Texts II, VII, and IV, the indiscriminate use of capital letters in the middle of sentences flouts the rule of writing. In Text IX, the use of the semi-colon instead of the colon is a punctuation error. In Text XVI, the error results from flouting the subject-verb concord rule.

Semantic Error

Text II

Dear customer, Due to BVN System upgrade your ATM CARD
has been De-activated by CBN To Re-activate call customer care...

In Text II, the absence of the comma at the necessary points has obfuscated meaning in the text. This sentence can be understood as 'Your ATM card has been deactivated by CBN to reactivate call customer care.' In this case, the reactivation of 'call customer care', the assumed name of a place, is the reason for the deactivation of the ATM card, instead of the system upgrade initially mentioned. Consequently, the reason for the deactivation is fuzzy.

In the area of audience demographics, the hoax messages do not reveal any gender, education, age, professional, religious, or cultural preferences as they are highly neutral. This neutrality implies that the dragnets of hoax messages are designed to trap any unsuspecting victim, irrespective of the person's gender polarity, professional affiliations, educational accomplishments, religious proclivities, and cultural leanings.
The principle of propriety is visible in the way the hoax messages are framed. The style of framing is causally linked with the rhetorical element of pathos. The hoax messages begin with *Dear customer, Dear valued customer*, a direct formal emotional appeal (pathos) to the receiver of the message. In this case, the principle of propriety is deployed courteously to make the reader believe that they are loved and valued. From the point of pragmatics, the principle of politeness has been exploited as a suspicion-neutralizing strategy. This is the principle of decorum.

4.4. Memory

This concept is related to the context and timing of communication and it is used to establish an understanding or connection with an audience. Memory helps an audience to remember certain 'improvisational necessities' in discourse. It helps them to connect psychologically to the lexical realities presented in the discourse. It also refers to persuasive devices and figures of speech that add flavor and animation to the discourse. Some examples of persuasive devices in the data include:

Rhetorical Question:

Text XIII: Do you want to be financially free?

Bandwagon Fallacy:

This is also called the appeal to common belief or to the masses to think or do things because everyone else is doing it.

Text XIII: Millions of people help each other with MMM Nigeria, not
for personal profit, but for the common benefit. Join us too

Repetition:

Text I: Dear <u>customer</u> …<u>customer</u>
Text III: …our <u>BVN</u> … call <u>BVN</u> room
Text VIII: <u>CBN:</u> DeaR <u>customer</u> … call <u>CBN</u><u>Customer</u> care
Text XIII: <u>Join the community</u>… <u>Join us too</u>
Text XIV: <u>BVN</u> ALERT: Dear <u>Customer</u>, …to <u>BVN</u> System …our <u>customer</u> care

4.5. Delivery

In the data, logos, an artistic proof of persuasion based on reasoning or logical appeal to the audience is established through bogus references to numerical evidence and institutional authority. In the deployment of this strategy, the hoax writer attempts to appeal to the receiver's intellect through ratiocination or a systematic process of reasoning. The orderly presentation of facts in hoax messages is a method adopted to guide the audience to the conclusion, which is the point of the logical trap of deception.

S/N	Numerical Evidence	Examples
1	**Text XIII**: Millions of people help each other with MMM Nigeria, not for personal profit, but for the common benefit	Millions of people
	Institutional Authority	
2	**Text VI:** Central Bank of Nigeria has blocked your account and ATM card due to incomplete of BVN registration…	Central Bank of Nigeria
3	**Text VII**: Due to our BVN system upgrad in compliance with CBN directive, your ATM card has been de-activated	CBN directive
4	**Text XI**: FirstBank: Dear customer, as regards to cashless policy, Your Account, ATM has been blocked…	First Bank

Table III

Ethos is an appeal to ethics and the writer's credibility. It is the method of persuasion in which the writer makes attempts to convince the reader by demonstrating his knowledge, credibility, reliability, or authority. In the data, the violation of ethos is visible in the examples that reveal the writer's ulterior motive to defraud the unsuspecting victims of the money through:

Claims to Financial Institutions:

 *Text I: to reactivate, kindly call **CBN** customer care;*

 ***Text II:** your ATM CARD has been de-activated by **CBN**;*

 ***Text VI: Central Bank of Nigeria** has blocked your account and ATM card;*

 ***Text X:** in compliance with **CBN** directive, your ATM card has been de-activated;*

 ***Text XII: FirstBank:…** Your Account, ATM has been blocked.*

Claim to National Policy:

 Text XII: as regards (to) cashless policy, Your Account, ATM has been blocked

Open Telephone Contacts:

 Text I: call…08162698461,

 Text II: call…08069055326,

 Text III: call BVN room 08068577402,

 Text X: call our help line on 009234813067701,

 Text XV: call our …care line>09063110555

Pathos is an appeal to the emotions of the reader. In the construction of an argument that is based on pathos, a writer uses vivid and emotionally charged language to appeal to the reader. In the data, the use of pathos is found in the expressions: ***Dear customer*** (Text I) and ***Dear valued customer*** (Text III).

5. Conclusion

 This paper has explicated how pragmatic and rhetorical strategies are embedded in hoax text messages and how they account for their effectiveness in swindling unsuspecting victims out of their money. Hoax text messages are effective because they are emotionally charged and backed up by false institutional support, open communication channel, brevity, and contain simple linguistic structures. As a computer-mediated means of fraudulent engagements, hoax text messages have had and will continue to have great social ramifications on unsuspecting victims because of the ubiquitous nature of mobile telephony. That fraudulent text messages have continued to spread unchecked despite their financial implications for Nigerians and non-nationals alike raises the question of the proactive measures taken by the government in the fight against cybercrimes in the country. The findings of this paper reveal that hoax text messages contain linguistic trails which reveal their duplicity and that the pervasive nature of technology and ineffective cyberspace regulations have encouraged the spread of computer-mediated fraud in Nigeria. Therefore, the paper recommends that receivers of hoax messages look out for tell-tale linguistic signs in order not to fall easy prey to fraudsters. Again, stringent cyberspace regulations should be put in place to deter people, especially the youth from engaging in cybercrimes.

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Appendix

1. Dear customer due to our BVN system upgrade, your ATM Card has just been de-activated, to reactivate, kindly call CBN customer care 08162698461
2. Dear customer, Due to BVN System upgrade your ATM CARD has been De-activated by CBN To Re-activate call customer care 08069055326.
3. Dear valued customer, due to our BVN registration your ATM CARD has just been De-activated to re-activate, kindly call BVN room 08068577402.
4. Dear customer, Due to BVN system upgrade your ATM has been de-activated by CBN To Re-activated call costomer care 08069055326 for help.
5. Dear customer: Due to our BVN system upgrade, your ATM Card has been de-activated, to re-activated call customer care 0092349031955 for more information.

6. DEAR CUSTOMER, CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA HAS BLOCKED YOUR account and ATM CARD DUE TO INCOMPLETE OF BVN REGISTRATION, CALL OUR CUSTOMER CARE 09068080491 TO UNLOCK.

7. Dear customer, your ATM debit card Has been Blocked by (CBN) Due To BVN System Error. Quickly Call Us @ 08140860987 To Reactivate it Under 24Hours.

8. CBN: DeaR customer Due to our BVN system upgrade, your ATM CARD has been De-activated, to activate, kindly call CBN Customer care 08063561659

9. CBN; DEAR customer, DUE to our BVN system upgrad in compliance with CBN BANK DIRECTIVE,your ATM CARD has BEEN De–ACTIVATED CALL OUR HELP LINE ON 009234813067701

10. CBN; Dear customer, Due to our BVN system upgrade your ATM CARD has been De-activated, to Re-activated, kindly call CBN Customer care 0806356159

11. FirstBank

Dear customer, as regards to cashless policy, Your Account, ATM has been blocked- due to change in date of birth, contact, contact customer care on 08111709039 to rectify.

12. SMSCaster. com: DEAR CUSTOMER, DUE TO BVN SYSTEM UPGRADE YOUR ATM CARD HAS BEEN DE-ACTIVATED, CALL US ON 08062952795 FOR REACTIVATION

13. MMM NIGERIA

Do you want to be financially free? Join the community of people helping people to get 30% of your spare. Visit m.nigeria-mmm-com/l. Millions of people help each other with MMM Nigeria, not for personal profit, but for the common benefit. Join us too. M.nigeria-mmm.cc/l monthly

14. BVN ALERT: Dear Customer, your ATM CARD & ACCT**** has been block due to BVN System error call our customer care line>09063110555 to open it under 24hours.

15. BVN ALERT: Dear customer your ATM card & ACCT..has been block due to BVN System error call our customer care line on [09060981364]to open now within 24Hours..

16. Your ATM CARD & ACCT… has been blocked due to BVN error, Call our customer care on 09065141943 to open it under 24hours

17. ACCOUNT BLOCK: DEAR CUSTOMER Due To Our BVN System upgrade, Your ATM CARD has just been DE-Activated To RE-ACTIVATE Kindly Call CBN Customer Care 09066939391 Now.