

Argumentation Strategies in Selected Editorial Reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's Administration in the *Nigerian Tribune*

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Abstract

This study investigated argumentation strategies in selected editorial reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's presidency in the *Nigerian Tribune*, addressing the research gap regarding how editorial reviews shape public understanding and perceptions of governance. The specific objectives of the study were to: identify and categorise argumentation strategies and topoi used in the selected editorial reviews; analyse how linguistic features legitimised or delegitimised presidential actions and policies; and evaluate the impact of editorial argumentation in the historical, social and political context of Nigeria. The study was anchored in the Discourse-Historical Approach and employed a qualitative design, analysing five purposively selected editorial reviews on security, health, electoral reforms, education, and the economy. The study found that the topoi of responsibility, failure, and reform were most frequently used to guide readers' interpretations of governance, while linguistic features such as evaluative adjectives, modality, presupposition, and agency construction facilitated legitimation and delegitimation. The study also found that editorial argumentation significantly shapes historical understanding of governance, social values, and political perceptions in Nigeria. The study concluded that editorial discourse functions as a powerful tool of political evaluation and public engagement. It contributed to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence of the strategic interplay between language, argumentation, and political perception in Nigeria.

Keywords: Editorial Reviews, Argumentation Strategies, Topoi, Governance, *Nigerian Tribune*

Introduction

After the general elections of 2023, before May 29 handing over, major News Papers in Nigeria did a review of President Muhammadu Buhari's two-term administration with specific focus on essential areas. The editorial reviews were published within the space of few days. These editorial reviews were done by some of the editors, hence the use of editorials and editorial reviews interchangeably. The study examines how editorial reviews construct, justify, and evaluate the actions and policies of Nigeria's former president. editorial reviews serve as influential opinion texts that shape public understanding of political leadership, framing achievements, challenges, and controversies through carefully structured argumentation. Central to this study is the concept of argumentation, which involves the use of linguistic and rhetorical strategies to present claims as reasonable, persuasive, and aligned

with societal norms (El Baff et al., 2020; Jegede & Lawal, 2025). The Discourse-Historical Approach provides a theoretical lens for analysing these strategies. The approach emphasises how language operates within historical, social, and political contexts to reproduce or challenge power relations. Debates in the field of political discourse often centre on the balance between objective reporting and ideological positioning, with editorial content occupying a hybrid space where opinion and social influence intersect (Van Dijk, 1997; Dunmire, 2012). In the contemporary Nigerian context, editorial reviews remain significant for interpreting presidential performance, shaping voter perceptions, and influencing public discourse, making the analysis of argumentation strategies a critical endeavour for understanding the nexus between media, politics, and power.

Despite sustained scholarly attention to political discourse in Nigeria, limited emphasis has been placed on editorial reviews as critical sites for evaluating presidential performance and shaping public judgement. Existing studies largely privilege speeches, policy texts, and straight news reporting, thereby overlooking how editorial reviews deploy structured argumentation to assess governance (Liu & Hood, 2019; David, 2014; Mokhberian et al., 2020; Jegede & Arubuola, 2025a). There remains insufficient empirical works that systematically explore the argumentation strategies and topoi used in Editorial Reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's administration. Knowledge is also limited regarding how specific linguistic features within these editorial reviews function to legitimise or delegitimise presidential actions and policy decisions. Furthermore, the broader implications of editorial argumentation for Nigeria's historical, social, and political context remain underexplored, particularly in relation to how newspapers frame governance, authority, and public responsibility. The Nigerian Tribune offers a consistent and influential platform for such evaluative discourse, yet its editorial reviews have not been adequately examined through a rigorous argumentation-based analytical framework. Given the limited research regarding argumentation strategies employed in editorial reviews, this study aims to examine the argumentation strategies employed in selected editorial reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's administration in the *Nigerian Tribune*. The specific objectives are to: identify and categorise the argumentation strategies and topoi used in the selected editorial reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's administration; analyse how linguistic features in these editorial reviews are employed to legitimise or delegitimise presidential actions and policies; and evaluate the impact of editorial argumentation in the historical, social and political context of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Argumentation strategies in editorials function as a mechanism through which newspapers construct, justify, and communicate ideological positions. They shape public perceptions of political actors and policies while exercising institutional authority (Al-Khatib et al., 2016). Editorials differ from straight news reporting by combining evaluation, interpretation, and recommendation within a persuasive framework, often deploying linguistic and rhetorical devices to present claims as rational and socially legitimate. Topoi, culturally and contextually familiar warrants linking premises to conclusions, allow newspapers to normalise certain political positions while delegitimising others. The construction of social actors through nomination and predication strategies, along with careful positioning of the editorial voice through perspectivalisation, guides readers' interpretations. Modulation of

claims via intensification and mitigation further shapes the discursive structure, influencing how readers form judgements (Jegade & Lawal, 2023). Studies emphasise that these strategies are embedded within historical, social, and institutional contexts, reflecting the relationship between language, ideology, and power rather than merely stylistic choices (Bal, 2014; Burger & Delaloye, 2016).

Research indicates that the persuasiveness of argumentation strategies in editorials relies on their interaction with broader discursive practices, including intertextual references to speeches, prior policies, and historical narratives (Masroor, 2013; Jegede & Arubuola, 2025b). Editorials draw on these references to create continuity and legitimacy, reinforcing a newspaper's ideological stance while engaging readers through familiar reasoning. Debate persists regarding whether editorials reflect genuine evaluative reasoning or primarily serve institutional biases and partisan agendas, with some scholars arguing that rhetorical persuasion sometimes outweighs analytical objectivity (Le, 2004). Examining argumentation through structured analysis of *topoi* provides insight into mechanisms of legitimisation and public persuasion. Such an approach informs the present study, offering a framework for identifying strategies used in editorials on Muhammadu Buhari's administration, understanding how they shape public interpretation, and revealing the broader role of editorial discourse in constructing political narratives.

Muhammadu Buhari assumed office as President of Nigeria in May 2015 following the country's first peaceful transfer of power between political parties (Akinrinde et al., 2023). His administration was expected to address long-standing governance challenges, including corruption, insecurity, and economic instability. Anti-corruption measures involved the establishment of special task forces, strengthening existing institutions, and high-profile prosecutions. In security, the government faced pressures to contain Boko Haram insurgency, rising banditry, and herder-farmer conflicts (Eme & Onuigbo, 2016). Economic reforms focused on diversifying the economy, promoting agriculture, encouraging private investment, and mitigating the impact of fluctuating oil prices on government revenue and inflation. Social interventions aimed to alleviate poverty and develop human capital through conditional cash transfers and skills acquisition programmes. Education and healthcare policies targeted infrastructure, access, and quality, though progress remained constrained by budgetary and systemic limitations, reflecting the practical challenges of implementing comprehensive national reforms.

During his second term, beginning in 2019, Buhari's administration faced intensified scrutiny over its management of national crises, including the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising insecurity, and perceived policy inconsistencies. Anti-corruption continued as a central principle, with claims that systemic reform was necessary to strengthen institutional accountability and attract domestic and international investment (Malah & Taiwo, 2020). Electoral reforms and efforts to improve governance transparency were pursued, though critics argued that implementation often lagged behind announcements, generating tensions between government rhetoric and public perception (Eme & Onuigbo, 2016). Infrastructure projects in road networks, railways, and energy formed a key component of economic growth and job creation strategies. Concurrent debates on social equity, political inclusivity, and regional representation influenced public discourse regarding the administration's performance and legitimacy (Ezeador, 2023). The presidency thus presents a setting in which reform ambitions, governance constraints, and public expectations intersect,

providing a framework for analysing how political leadership is evaluated, communicated, and interpreted in newspaper editorial discourse.

The Nigerian Tribune, established in 1949, occupies a distinguished position as one of Nigeria's oldest and most influential newspapers, noted for political engagement, advocacy, and independent journalism (Adesoji & Alimi, 2012). Founded by Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent nationalist, the newspaper promoted social justice, political awareness, and civic education during the late colonial period (Tafida, 2015). Over decades, it has maintained its focus on shaping public opinion through critical reporting, editorial reviews, and in-depth analyses of national and regional developments. Its reporting and commentary scrutinise political leaders, policies, and government institutions while also covering the economy, security, education, healthcare, and cultural affairs within Nigeria's historical and socio-political context. Editorial reviews serve as forums for evaluating government performance, articulating societal concerns, and guiding public discourse, reflecting a sophisticated engagement with argumentation, linguistic choices, and ideological positioning. Broad readership across urban and rural areas amplifies its influence on political debate, policy framing, and public opinion mobilisation (Tafida, 2015).

The Nigerian Tribune has adapted over time to evolving media environments, technological changes, and reader expectations while retaining editorial independence and intellectual rigour. Expansion to digital platforms has enabled timely updates, interactive content, and access to archives, broadening audience reach. Editorial policies continue to balance advocacy and journalistic objectivity, addressing governance accountability, human rights, and socio-economic development (Alimi, 2011). Sustained emphasis on quality reporting and analytical commentary has reinforced credibility, institutional authority, and recognition as a trusted media voice. Editorial reviews, marked by decisive argumentation, critical evaluation, and strategic use of linguistic and rhetorical devices, offer material for examining how political leadership, policies, and national issues are framed and communicated (Jatula, 2017). The newspaper thus provides insights into the intersection of media, politics, and public opinion, illustrating how journalism shapes national discourse, influences governance debates, and reflects societal expectations.

Theoretical Framework: Discourse-Historical Approach

Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) explains how discourse constructs and reproduces social and political meanings through the systematic integration of linguistic analysis with historical, social, and political contexts over time (Wodak, 2001). This approach represents a well-established model within Critical Discourse Analysis that foregrounds the systematic integration of linguistic analysis with historical, social and political context. The approach is premised on the assumption that discourse both shapes and is shaped by social structures, particularly relations of power, ideology and dominance (Wodak, 2001). A defining feature of the DHA is its emphasis on context, which is analysed at multiple levels, including the immediate co-text, the situational and institutional setting, and the broader socio-historical background against which texts are produced and interpreted (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005). This contextual layering enables the analyst to trace how discourses emerge, persist or transform over time. Another central feature is methodological triangulation, which combines diverse data sources, analytical tools and theoretical perspectives in order to strengthen explanatory validity and reduce

interpretive bias (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005). The DHA also introduces a set of discursive strategies that examine how language is used to construct meaning and shape social realities. These strategies include argumentation, nomination, predication, perspectivisation, and intensification or mitigation (Wodak & Meyer, 2005; 2009). These strategies operate as analytical categories through which social actors, events and processes are constructed, evaluated and justified within a text.

The Discourse-Historical Approach is especially relevant to this study because Editorial Reviews function as institutional opinion texts whose primary purpose is persuasion, evaluation and policy recommendation. Within this context, argumentation strategies constitute the most analytically productive feature of the DHA. Editorial Reviews rely heavily on structured reasoning to present particular interpretations of social and political issues as logical, necessary and aligned with public interest. The analysis of argumentation enables the identification of topoi such as responsibility, danger, justice, national interest and accountability, which serve as implicit warrants connecting premises to conclusions in editorial discourse. These topoi allow newspapers to legitimise certain political actions while delegitimising others, often without making ideological positions explicit. Thus, applying Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach to editorial analysis makes it possible to reveal how argumentation operates as a key mechanism through which ideology, power and institutional authority are discursively constructed and normalised in public discourse.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative design, employing the Discourse-Historical Approach to examine argumentation strategies in the selected editorial reviews. Qualitative analysis allowed for an in-depth investigation of argumentation strategies, topoi, and linguistic features used in the editorial reviews. The data comprised 5 published editorial reviews from the *Nigerian Tribune*, selected for their relevance to major governance themes, such as security, health, electoral reforms, education, and the economy. These editorial reviews represented a purposive sample, chosen because they contained substantial discussion of presidential actions and policies, which offers rich material for discourse analysis. The population consisted of all editorials published on Muhammadu Buhari's administration. Data collection involved retrieving full-text versions of the editorial reviews from the newspaper digital archive, followed by identification of argumentation strategies, linguistic realisations, and topoi using an aspect of Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach. Data analysis employed thematic and discourse analysis techniques to identify instances of legitimation and delegitimation, with careful attention to contextual and historical factors. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring accurate representation of the texts, maintaining transparency in the data analysis procedures, and acknowledging the original sources, while the publicly available nature of the editorial reviews does not require the need for consent.

Results

This section presents the findings of the analysis of the study. It outlines the argumentation strategies, linguistic choices, and topoi identified in the editorial reviews. This section also

presents how these strategies were employed to legitimise or criticise presidential actions and to shape public interpretations of governance.

Identification and Categorisation of Argumentation Strategies and Topoi in the Editorial Reviews

This section identifies and classifies the dominant argumentation strategies and topoi employed in the selected editorial reviews. It explains how recurrent patterns of reasoning are organised and quantified, showing the relative prominence of each topos.

To address the first objective, data were drawn from five selected editorial reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's administration published in the *Nigerian Tribune*, focusing on key policy areas of security, health, electoral reforms, education, and the economy. The editorial reviews were systematically coded using an argumentation framework derived from the Discourse-Historical Approach. Each instance of argumentation was identified and categorised according to dominant topoi and related strategies. The analysis yielded a total of fifty-five (55) identifiable argumentative instances across the editorial reviews.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Argumentation Strategies and Topoi

| Argumentation Topos / Strategy | Frequency | % |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| Topos of Responsibility | 14 | 25.5 |
| Topos of Failure | 11 | 20.0 |
| Topos of Threat/Danger | 10 | 18.2 |
| Topos of Reform/Progress | 9 | 16.4 |
| Topos of Public Interest | 7 | 12.7 |
| Topos of Justice/Accountability | 4 | 7.2 |
| Total | 55 | 100 |

Table 1 indicates that the topos of responsibility occurred most frequently, accounting for 25.5 per cent of all argumentative instances. This pattern suggests that the Editorial Reviews consistently framed Buhari's presidency in terms of leadership obligation, governance duty, and moral accountability. Closely following was the topos of failure at 20.0 per cent, which was predominantly used to criticise perceived shortcomings in policy implementation, especially in the areas of security and the economy. The topos of threat or danger constituted 18.2 per cent of the data, reflecting recurrent references to insecurity, economic risk, and social instability as justifications for critique or calls for urgent action. Argumentation invoking reform or progress represented 16.4 per cent, indicating instances where editorial evaluations acknowledged policy efforts or projected potential improvement. Less frequent but still significant were appeals to the public interest and justice or accountability, which reinforced the Editorial Reviews' institutional stance as defenders of democratic norms and societal welfare.

Linguistic Features and the Legitimation and Delegitimation of Presidential Actions and Policies

This section analyses how linguistic features in selected *Nigerian Tribune* Editorial Reviews were employed to legitimise or delegitimise the actions and policies of Muhammadu Buhari's administration.

Excerpt 1: *"The administration has consistently failed to translate promises of security into tangible safety for citizens."* (Editorial on Security, pg19, *Nigerian Tribune*, Thursday, 18 May, 2023)

This excerpt exemplifies delegitimation through negative evaluation. The adverb *consistently* intensifies the claim, presenting failure as a repeated and established pattern rather than an isolated occurrence. The verb *failed* functions as an explicit judgement, leaving little room for alternative interpretations. Agency is clearly assigned to *the administration*, foregrounding presidential responsibility for security outcomes. The contrastive construction between *promises* and *tangible safety* reinforces the perception of a gap between rhetoric and reality, a common delegitimising strategy in editorial discourse. The absence of modal mitigation strengthens the force of the claim, positioning the evaluation as factual rather than opinion-based. Through these linguistic choices, the editorial constructs insecurity as evidence of governance inadequacy, thereby undermining the legitimacy of presidential policy in this domain.

Excerpt 2: "The persistent insecurity across northern states shows the administration's inability to safeguard citizens, despite repeated assurances." (Editorial on Security, pg19, *Nigerian Tribune*, Thursday, 18 May, 2023)

This excerpt exemplifies delegitimation through explicit attribution of responsibility, strong negative evaluation, and contrastive framing. The adverb *persistent* emphasises the prolonged nature of insecurity, reinforcing the claim of systemic failure. The verb phrase shows the administration's inability clearly assigns agency and emphasises incompetence. The phrase *despite repeated assurances* introduces contrast between rhetoric and reality, accentuating the gap between promises and outcomes. Modality is absent, creating a declarative and assertive tone, presenting the evaluation as incontrovertible. Collectively, these linguistic features frame the administration as failing its primary obligation, strengthening the editorial's persuasive critique while guiding readers to interpret security failures as evidence of broader governance deficiencies.

Excerpt 3: *"If the government is serious about reform, urgent action must replace repeated assurances."* (Editorial on Educational Reform, pg15, *Nigerian Tribune*, Friday, 19 May, 2023)

This excerpt combines conditional structure and modality to delegitimise perceived inaction. The conditional clause *if the government is serious about reform* presupposes doubt regarding sincerity, subtly questioning commitment without direct accusation. The modal verb *must*

expresses strong obligation, framing action as non-negotiable and morally required. The contrast between *urgent action* and *repeated assurances* delegitimises verbal commitment while elevating practical intervention as the sole measure of credibility. Agency remains implicit yet clearly directed at the government, allowing the editorial to maintain an authoritative tone. The linguistic strategy here lies in presenting reform as possible but unrealised, thereby sustaining criticism while retaining a normative expectation of better governance.

Excerpt 4:“The implementation of new educational policies demonstrates recognition of structural challenges and a commitment to long-term reform.” (*Editorial on Educational Reform, pg17, Nigerian Tribune, Friday, 19 May, 2023*)

This excerpt exemplifies legitimisation through evaluative framing, institutional agency, and positive presupposition. The verb demonstrates signals observable action, while recognition of structural challenges frames the administration as aware and responsive. The phrase commitment to long-term reform positions policy as intentional and morally guided. Agency is attributed to implementation rather than directly to the president, maintaining a balanced perspective. Linguistic features such as evaluative adjectives and noun phrases construct legitimacy by presenting action as corrective and progressive. This strategy encourages readers to perceive the administration’s efforts as responsible and constructive, reinforcing editorial influence on shaping public understanding of governance achievements.

Excerpt 5:“Some economic policies introduced by the administration have shown modest signs of recovery.” (*Editorial on Economy, pg14, Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 18 May, 2023*)

This excerpt illustrates cautious legitimation through mitigation and evaluative restraint. The determiner *some* limits the scope of success, preventing overgeneralisation. The adjective *modest* downplays achievement, while *signs of recovery* suggests early or incomplete progress rather than definitive success. Agency is indirectly attributed to *policies* rather than the president, which reduces personal credit and frames improvement as conditional. Modal absence contributes to an observational tone, lending credibility to the assessment. This linguistic configuration allows the editorial to acknowledge positive outcomes without fully endorsing the administration, reflecting a balanced yet guarded legitimising stance that aligns with critical editorial conventions.

Excerpt 6:“Economic recovery efforts remain uneven, suggesting that policy formulation often lacks comprehensive foresight.” (*Editorial on Economy, pg14, Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 18 May, 2023*)

This excerpt reflects cautious delegitimation through mitigation and evaluative hedging. The adverb *uneven* moderates the extent of failure, while the verb *suggesting* introduces interpretive evaluation rather than categorical assertion. Agency is indirectly assigned to policy formulation, attributing shortcomings to systemic processes rather than personal leadership. The linguistic strategy balances criticism with analytical objectivity, framing economic challenges as complex and multifactorial. The combination of hedging, evaluation,

and indirect agency strengthens the editorial's credibility while encouraging readers to interpret partial economic progress within a context of broader governance constraints, reinforcing nuanced delegitimation.

Excerpt 7: “*Nigeria cannot afford continued indecision in matters of electoral reform.*” (Editorial on Electoral Reform, pg19, Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 18 May, 2023)

Delegitimation in this excerpt is realised through collective alignment and negative abstraction. The use of *Nigeria* personifies the nation, invoking a shared national interest that transcends political divisions. The modal verb *cannot afford* frames indecision as dangerous and costly, constructing urgency and risk. The noun *indecision* abstracts responsibility while still implicitly targeting leadership failure. This strategy allows criticism to appear principled rather than partisan. The absence of direct reference to the president intensifies the moral appeal, suggesting that the issue is self-evident. Linguistically, the statement functions as a presupposition, assuming consensus and positioning resistance as unreasonable.

Excerpt 8: “The delay in passing key electoral reforms continues to frustrate citizens and threatens democratic consolidation.” (Editorial on Electoral Reform, pg20, Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 18 May, 2023)

Delegitimation in this excerpt is realised through negative evaluation, agentive assignment, and abstract consequences. The noun *delay* foregrounds inaction, while the verb *frustrate* conveys direct social impact. Agency is attributed implicitly to the legislative process and administration, emphasising responsibility for stalled reforms. The modal phrase *continues to emphasise* persistence, reinforcing the perception of repeated failure. The phrase *threatens democratic consolidation* frames inaction as a serious risk to national stability. Linguistically, this excerpt positions the failure as morally and politically significant, guiding readers to interpret delayed reforms as a breach of leadership responsibility, consistent with editorial strategies of accountability and public persuasion.

Excerpt 9: “*The approval of increased funding for healthcare reflects a recognition of long-standing systemic neglect.*” (Editorial on Health, pg18, Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 18 May, 2023)

This excerpt demonstrates legitimisation through institutional acknowledgement and evaluative framing. The noun *approval* foregrounds official action, while *reflects a recognition* attributes intentional awareness to the administration. The phrase *long-standing systemic neglect* situates the policy within historical continuity, allowing present action to appear corrective rather than reactive. The absence of overt praise maintains editorial distance, yet the positive framing of recognition constructs the policy as morally responsive. Agency is strategically attributed to institutional processes rather than personal leadership, enabling legitimisation without personalisation. The linguistic balance achieved here supports conditional approval while sustaining critical oversight.

Excerpt 10:“Investments in healthcare infrastructure are beginning to yield measurable benefits, indicating a cautious but commendable approach to policy implementation.”
(*Editorial on Health, pg17, Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 18 May, 2023*)

This excerpt demonstrates conditional legitimation through mitigated evaluation and positive framing. The phrase beginning to yield measurable benefits limits the scope of success, suggesting progress is partial yet observable. The adjectives cautious and commendable signal evaluative approval while maintaining editorial distance. Agency is attributed indirectly to investments, avoiding overt personalisation of the presidency, which tempers potential bias. Modality is absent, lending an observational tone that enhances credibility. Through these linguistic choices, the editorial legitimises the administration’s action while subtly signalling the need for continued diligence. This strategy balances recognition with critique, reflecting a measured and persuasive editorial voice.

Impact of Editorial Argumentation in Nigeria’s Historical, Social and Political Context

This study assessed how editorial argumentation shapes public meaning within Nigeria’s historical, social and political setting. Findings show that Editorial Reviews frame governance through moral judgement, responsibility claims, and evaluative language. Such framing links present governance to past military rule, civil struggles, and democratic expectations. Editorial Reviews often present leadership actions as continuation or departure from earlier regimes. This practice shapes collective memory. Readers interpret present policies through historical comparison. Editorial argumentation also strengthens accountability culture. Language choices assign blame or credit with clarity. This process affects how citizens judge state authority. Power relations become visible through argument patterns. Editorial Reviews function as a public record of approval or disapproval. They influence how governance history becomes written in public discourse. The press therefore plays a strong role in shaping historical interpretation of leadership performance.

Social impact appears through how Editorial Reviews guide public values and civic attitudes. Results indicate frequent use of inclusive pronouns, moral evaluation, and appeals to social welfare. Such features position citizens as stakeholders in governance. Editorial Reviews define what counts as fairness, justice, or neglect. Social issues such as security, health, and education receive value judgement through argumentation. These judgements affect public trust. Readers form opinions based on repeated evaluative frames. Editorial argumentation also normalises criticism as civic duty. It encourages public debate. Silence becomes framed as consent. Language simplifies policy debates into moral choices. This strategy supports social mobilisation. It also sharpens division where policies affect groups unevenly. Editorial discourse therefore shapes social perception of power and responsibility. Public understanding of governance becomes shaped through repeated social framing.

Political impact remains strong within democratic practice. Findings show that editorial argumentation influences legitimacy of state actions. Positive framing supports policy acceptance. Negative framing promotes resistance or demand for reform. Editorial Reviews use contrast, evaluation, and causal claims to assess leadership. Such methods affect voter perception. Political authority faces public scrutiny through press language. Editorial

Reviews also influence agenda setting. Topics receive priority through sustained argument. Policy debates gain direction. Argumentation therefore affects democratic accountability. It shapes standards for leadership judgement. Political culture grows through critical media practice. Governance becomes subject to reasoned evaluation. This role strengthens democratic norms. Editorial argumentation thus shapes political consciousness and participation in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study addressed the problem of how Nigerian newspaper Editorial Reviews use argumentation to judge presidential governance and shape public understanding of state performance. The aim was to examine argumentation strategies, linguistic choices, and topoi used in *Nigerian Tribune* editorial reviews on Muhammadu Buhari's administration, with attention to how these features legitimise or criticise policy actions. The results indicate that editorial reviews rely on structured reasoning patterns rather than casual opinion. The data suggest that argumentation is organised around moral judgement, responsibility, and public duty. This confirms that editorial reviews function as institutional voices that guide readers on how governance should be assessed. The findings respond directly to the research objectives by showing how discourse practices are linked to evaluation of leadership within democratic settings.

The results indicate that the topoi of responsibility appeared most frequently across the editorial reviews. This suggests that governance is framed mainly as duty-bound leadership rather than technical administration. The strong presence of the topoi of failure and threat further shows that critique is anchored in perceived harm to citizens and national stability. Such patterns align with studies that describe Editorial Reviews as norm-driven texts that judge political actors against shared expectations (Burger & Delaloye, 2016; Bal, 2014). The data suggest that argumentation in the editorial reviews is not random. It follows repeated reasoning patterns that make criticism appear justified and reasonable. This supports Al-Khatib et al. (2016), who argue that editorial argumentation depends on recurrent topoi that structure persuasion and guide interpretation.

Interpretation of the linguistic findings shows that legitimation and delegitimation are achieved through clear evaluation, agency assignment, and controlled use of modality. The results indicate that negative evaluation often appears without hedging when policies are framed as harmful or ineffective. Positive evaluation, in contrast, is mitigated and restrained. This asymmetry suggests editorial caution in offering praise while maintaining credibility. Such practice reflects earlier observations that editorial reviews balance authority with distance to preserve trust (El Baff et al., 2020). The frequent use of contrast between promises and outcomes supports the view that political critique often relies on exposing gaps between rhetoric and action (David, 2014; Jegede, 2024; 2025). The findings therefore show that language choices directly support the persuasive goals of Editorial Reviews.

The study also shows that editorial argumentation draws meaning from Nigeria's historical, social, and political context. The results suggest that present governance is often interpreted through references to past struggles, democratic expectations, and prior regimes. This

supports Dunmire (2012), who argues that political discourse links present action to historical memory. Socially, the use of inclusive references and moral judgement positions readers as participants in governance evaluation. This practice reinforces civic norms and encourages public scrutiny of power. Political implications are seen in how sustained argumentation promotes accountability and shapes legitimacy. These findings extend existing literature by showing how argumentation operates not only at textual level but also within broader public meaning formation.

Some findings require cautious evaluation. Positive legitimation appeared less frequently and was often limited or conditional. This may reflect editorial norms of scepticism rather than absence of policy success. The small sample of five editorial reviews limits generalisation across Nigerian press practice. Focus on one newspaper also narrows ideological comparison. Future research could include multiple newspapers or longer time frames to test consistency of these patterns. Despite these limits, the findings remain valid within the dataset analysed. The study contributes theoretically by reinforcing the relevance of the Discourse-Historical Approach to media analysis. It contributes methodologically through systematic coding of argumentation instances. Practically, it shows how press discourse shapes governance judgement. These insights support the study's conclusions on the power of editorial argumentation in Nigerian democratic life.

Conclusion

The study concludes that editorial argumentation in the Nigerian Tribune significantly shapes public understanding of Muhammadu Buhari's administration. Findings show that editorial reviews consistently employed argumentation strategies and topoi to legitimise or delegitimise presidential actions, with responsibility, failure, and threat emerging as the most frequent themes. Linguistic features such as evaluative language, agency assignment, and modal verbs played key roles in constructing moral and political judgement. Patterns in the data reveal that editorials linked current governance to historical experiences, framed social values, and influenced perceptions of political accountability. These results reveal the importance of examining editorial discourse as a tool for public persuasion, providing evidence of how newspapers mediate political power and civic engagement. The findings have practical implications for journalists, policymakers, and media scholars in understanding how language shapes opinion and legitimates authority.

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