



**ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS
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BOOK SERIES**



ONLINE READERS' COMMENTS AND NATIONAL UNITY

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Abstract:

Using Benoit's (2007) functional analysis of political discourse to ascertain the manner in which online readers comment (acclaim, attack, defence) on President Buhari's Maiden Media Chat, this study seeks to find out the implication of online readers' comments on national unity. Four online newspapers- Naij.com, Premium Times, Vanguard and Sahara Reporters were sampled and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Findings were presented based on the functional analysis of political discourse of "acclaim," "attack" and "defence" to explain the nature and patterns prevalent in the online readers' comments. Findings reveal that acclaimed comments constitute 16.9%, attack comments constitute 41.5%, and defensive comments constitute 24.7% of the total comments. The remaining 16.9% were comments that do not relate to the subject of discussion. From the findings, it was established that the manifestation of hate and abusive language, attacks and counter attacks by online commentators portends a calamitous danger, and, by implication, has the potentials of intensifying the disunity that characterised Nigeria.

Keywords: *online newspaper, unity, comments*