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STRATEGIES OF DISCURSIVE (DE)LEGITIMIZATION IN ADVANCED FEE FRAUD EMAILS

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Abstract
The Nigerian 419 also known as advanced fee fraud (AFF) is a form of online-based scam that prompts victims to pay certain amount in order to receive huge financial returns. While previous studies have explored linguistic features of this form of scam, this study with insights from Reyes and van Leeuwen's strategies of legitimization, focuses on the (de)legitimization strategies embedded in the narratives of advanced fee fraudemails. The study examines the textual narratives in scam emails in an attempt to unravel how fraudstersposition themselves, their actions and other social actors embedded in the mail. Findings from the study reveal that scam mails adopt similar legitimization strategies found in political discourse such as voice of expertise, rationalization, and appeals to morality to deceive their victims. In addition, emotional appeals that emphasize the atrocities of other social actors serve as strong legitimization strategies and contribute to the success of advanced fee frauds. The study also suggests the application of legitimization strategies to the study other forms of discourse.
Keywords: Scam Mail, Social Actors, Self/Other Representation,

1. Introduction

The Nigerian 419 also known as advanced fee fraud (AFF) is a form of online-based scam. In this type of scam, the fraudsters impersonate different identities to swindle their victims through emails. The scam is named after the Nigerian criminal code and refers to all forms of crime where individuals are made to pay small up fronts in a bid to facilitate huge amounts that could come from government contracts or inheritance belonging to a deceased. The scam, which was initially traced to perpetrators mainly of Nigerian descent (Kperoogi & Duhe, 2009), has been spread to other parts of the world with Asia taking the lead in recent times (Statista, 2018).

The advanced fee usually scam sent through e-mail, requires the scammer to present himself in a highly acceptable manner to the addressee and provide valid reasons for his offers to be accepted. As a result, the scammer adopts some self-representation strategies to drive his fraudulent intentions. The sociologist Erving Goffman in his work on self-representation describes the term as strategic activities an individual/speaker exhibits to convey a desired impression to others that is in the speaker's best interest (Goffman, 2006). These strategic behaviours are either given, in which case they are conscious activities expressed by the actor or given off –unconsciously expressed during communication. Goffman's notion of self-representation can be extended to asynchronous online interactions where communication mainly relies on verbal and linguistic cues. In addition to representation of the self, legitimization strategies (van Leeuwen, 2007; Reyes, 2011) are also employed to validate the arguments raised in the samples.

In fund transfer scams, a subtype of advance fee fraud, the scammer either poses as a lonely person, a bank manager, or even a dying person in a bid to gain respect, or sympathy depending on the intention of the mail. The scammer further claims there is a large amount of money in his confines that would need to be transferred to a foreign account and later shared with the victim. Whitty and Buchanan (2013) observes that in the case of romance scams, the scammers begin by sending gifts to their preys as bait. Later they begins to indirectly demand for money. During a later part of the scam when victims realize they had been scammed, the scammer returns as a security agent and promises to trace the culprit (Whitty and Buchanan, 2013). These scams are interesting as they are built on characters and stories that may sound genuine to swindle their victims. This study builds on previous studies regarding the linguistic features of scam mails (Chiluwa, 2009;) and discursive legitimization strategies (van Leeuwen, 2007; Reyes, 2011) to explore legitimization strategies that conmen adopt to prey on their victims in advanced fee fraud emails.

2. Literature Review

There is an increasing body of research on the nature, narrative patterns and discourse features of scam mails. These studies span from psychology, (Modic & Lea, 2013); criminology (Button & Cross, 2017), to linguistics. Linguistic studies on scam emails examine their discourse structures (eg, Blommaert and Omoniyi, 2004; Chiluwa 2009) noting that the mail share similar features with business emails. In terms of their typology, Chiluwa (2010) identifies the various forms of scam present online as fund transfer, inheritance, contract, charity, lottery and romance scams. These different genres of scams have different manners of presentation and narrative styles that are peculiar to each genre. The lottery scams for instance adopt formal tone and language choices to portray a formal context.

Scam emails or email scams (Kich, 2005) have meaningful contents and how these contents are presented to potential victims remain crucial. They are usually addressed to an unknown recipient, claiming to share similar identity with the recipient or asking for help from the recipient. Kich (2005) identifies the following features of scam mails:

> *The introduction of the sender; explanation of how the recipient was selected to receive the letter; description of the supposed financial situation the sender is facing; a suggested resolution of the situation; identifying the receiver's role in that resolution; the supposed payoff that convinces the susceptible recipient to participate in the scheme; and the establishment of conditions that make the recipient less likely to question the scammer's subsequent tactics and demands (P. 132).*

In addition, the emails are predicated on rhetoric and persuasion, commonly framed in promises of huge material benefits and trust eliciting discourses like philanthropist appeals(Onyebadi & Park, 2012). In describing the persuasive nature of the mail, Naksawat, Akkakoson, & Loi, (2016) note their ability to exploit human needs, legitimize their actions through moral appeals, present deadlines and sense of urgency as well as appeal to trust, pity and even social conventions, Certain strategies used to lure victims as the study reveals include: request for compliance and emotional triggers such as stories of suffering and loss of a loved one.

How scammers position themselves, contribute greatly to the success of the scams. Burrell (2008) points out that these scammers adopt dramatic manipulations of identity and the invention of fictional identity that reflect social status and social ties.

Chiluwa M. (2017) in a study of positioning strategies adopted by scammers also suggests that the authors use authorial identities to appear legitimate. The use of personalities like bankers, lawyers, and business tycoons in oil rich regions like Sudan or Nigeria, is a credible discourse marker that promotes the likelihood of being accepted. Hence, exploring legitimization achieved through representations of the actors in the narratives of these scams become crucial.

Within linguistics and discourse analytic studies, representation strategies concern how language used in a text or talk to assign meaning to groups and their social practices, events, social and ecological conditions and objects (Wenden, 2005). It examines ideologies of sameness and otherness, determines how individuals perceive certain objects and events that might in turn influence social practice (Wenden, 2005). One of the major techniques that predispose victims to being swindled is how the scammers who are authors of the emails, present themselves in their scam narratives. While there is vast literature regarding the narrative pattern and linguistic features of scam mails, this study recognizes that the manner in which scammers present themselves and other actors invoked in their scam narrative is of great importance in an attempt to understand scam mails. To this end, this study examines the (de)legitimization strategies of scammers in funds transfer scam emails, in an attempt to contribute to this area of study.

3 Theoretical Framework/Methodology

Legitimacy is a feature of relations between actors that show acceptable action. Legitimacy/legitimation is a fundamental concept in organizations as they relate to hierarchy. Previous studies on legitimation focus on cognitive basis of legitimation (e.g Suchs, 1995) however recent studies have paid attention the legitimation of discourse since discourse play important role in the realization of institutional change (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the details of how language (verbal and non verbal) "varies across contexts and can make social difference" (Taylor, 2013, p.3). The term critical, by extension refers to the analysis of role of discourse in the construction of power relations and reproduction of resistance (Fairclough, 2003).Legitimization strategy is rooted in critical discourse analysis as it constitutes the process by which social actors endorse a social behaviour whether idea or action (Reyes, 2019). Legitimacy is a construct useful in instantiating hierarchy and serves a means for social control. It concerns actions and social position or representation of actors in any discourse.

Studies of legitimization strategies in critical discourse analysis focus not just on how individuals make their actions acceptable but also delegitimization, the act of providing morally unacceptable actions (van Leeuwen, 2007; Vaara, 2014). Van Leeuwen (2007) for instance, identifies four strategies of legitimization that include authorization or reference to authority, legitimization in relation to value system, rationalization that refers to knowledge claims and arguments and legitimization through narrative plots that make references to present or past events. Reyes (2011) further extends legitimization strategies to include appeal to emotions, in which case members of a group make claims that invoke pity and altruism that highlight actions that are in the interest of others.

In the context of email scams, their writers use linguistic strategies to portray the narrators of the mails and the actions proposed as legal. The study of legitimization and delegitimization practices focus mainly on institutional discourse (Vaara, 2014); however, Burrell(2008) argues that the narratives of scam emails are situated within real life events. As stories are constructed, the narrators in the frames are either legalized or described as evil. Reyes (2011) also adds that personal expressions form the bases of representation of social actions and argumentation. In the same manner, when narrators of advanced fee fraud emails position themselves, they do so, based on existing social roles in the society. For this reason, this study extends the notion of legitimization by paying attention to textual representations that scammers use in scam mail narratives. The study focuses mainly

To deconstruct (de)legitimization strategies adopted in scam mails using discourse analytic approach, the study examines 10 samples of fund transfer from a larger sample of scam emails[1] randomly retrieved from November 2016-February, 2017from www.hoaxslayer.com, a scam baiting site. This study focuses on identifying representation strategies that scammers assume when narrating their personal experiences or those of others. The data was restricted to 10 samples for the purpose of clarity and also since the mail contain similar narratives.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Legitimization through Authorization and Expertise

A common approach to scam discourse is their appeal to persons in authority to appear legitimate. Personas in scam mails exhibit professional and educational achievements that suit the kinds of scams presented. Generally, scammers adopt different strategies to project certain traits with a view to serve social functions of themselves as credible for their potential victims. Scammers assign authorial roles to themselves that position them to direct or instruct their victims. By assuming superior roles, addressees are described as subordinates and are persuaded to act in particular ways. Aristotle cited in Kennedy (2007) outlined good sense, excellence and goodwill as sources of confidence in an orator. In online context where there could be cases of doubt and uncertainty, scammers adopt high social status and identities of authority to appear acceptable. At the first level of authorization, the individual assigns a position that plays a central role in making the scam believable. The position claimed by the scam narrators serves as legitimization strategy as seen in the sample below:

> (1) My name is Major; Rebecca Schieble. I'm an American soldier, am currently still serving in Iraq for **ICU NURSE AT THE COMBAT SUPPORT HOSPITAL AT CAMP SPEICHER** in the United State Army and providing adequate security for the **US** embassy in Baghdad. I'm seeking your kind assistance to move the sum of **US$14.5Million** to you as far as I can be assured that my share will be safe in your care until I complete my service, this is no stolen money, and there is no danger involved. I'm presently in a hospital recovering from injuries Sustained in a suicide bomb attack, that took place during our combat with some ISIS Militant, I have successful move the Fund out of Iraq, the fund is currently with a security Company in S.A , where the fund is will be disclose to you as soon as I got your feedback for Security reason. I am contacting you because you might be a good fearing citizen that is willing to be involve with this transaction and I am willing to share the money with you. I am sending you this email message.

The narrator in example1 refers to himself as an American soldier. What is emphasized here is the institutional position of serving in one of the largest military outlets in the world. As the mail extends, the authorial position ascribed in the text serves as rational to argue that the money in question is legitimate. This assumed identity blurs the real intent of the narrator, which is to defraud the addressee, and diverts attention to the hierarchical position of being in the army. In this context also, a moral frame is introduced as the heroic act of ensuring peace in a war-prone region, in addition to the trainings of being a soldier positions him as selfless. This authorial position serves as a premise for justifying the genuineness of the money in question. Again it serves as a solidarity marker because most of the advanced fee fraudemails are written to foreigners. The recipients are obliged to identify with the writer as a member of their own community. Adopting an authorial frame from the international community serves as a strong legitimization appeal. Another use of authorization is present through professional expertise found the next sample.

> (2) I am Mr Abdul Uzun the manager of Bank of africa Burkina Faso i am writting you this letter based on the latest development at my department which i will like to bring to your personal notice.$18.5Million? i will offer you 40%. Your full name.......Your private telephone number........Your passport or identity card..Your country........Your occupation.... If you are interested then it is compulsory you contact me with above details of yours for further procedure.

In example 2, a professional expertise is explicitly constructed by reference to being themanager of a large financial organization. This act of assuming institutional authority is relevant because the bank manager in a firm has the sole ability to endorse financial transactions. While the narrator adopts this position to carry out his scam, the recipient is also included as part of the recipients to benefit from the deal. The authorial voice of the speaker is further reinforced this context, by using the conditional "if you are interested… then it is compulsory", an obligatory expression that shows that the speaker has no time for negotiations with the addressee. The authorial voice of legitimation used in this context attempts to reflect that of the manager of a financial institution, a position that comes with power and success. It is also a deceptive strategy that leaves the addressee to focus on the authority instantiated in the message rather than verification of the true identity. In addition to the authorial positions that scam mail narrators ascribe to themselves, the personal pronoun *I* plays a crucial role in legitimization of their discourse. In the samples examined, the positions of the narrators are described using the first person pronoun to signal authority and identity (Bramley, 2001).

> (3) **I** am a member of the Federal Government of Nigeria Contract Award and Monitoring Committee in the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Sometime ago, a contract was awarded to a foreign firm in NNPC by **my Committee**. This contract was over invoiced to the tune of US$21.5M. U.S. Dollars. This was done deliberately. The over-invoicing was a deal by **my committee** to benefit from the project. **We now** want to transfer this money which is in a suspense. Account with NNPC into any Overseas Account which we expect you to provide for us the following…

In example 3, the writer uses the personal pronoun *I* to index himself as part of an institution (Nigerian National Petroleum Committee). This identity positions him to represent the group and portray his thoughts as a representation of the group's shared values. He validates his membership through the expression 'my committee' repeated in the text as a proof to the claims expressed in the mail. Generally, The use of *I* as discourse strategy implies that there is always an underlying authorial stance embedded in scam mails. The scammers adopt this stance to initiate discourse, control and manipulate their victims.

Another form of authorization common in scam mails is the strategy of somatization. Somatization is a linguistic representation of social actors by referring them to a place or things they are closely associated with (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In van Leeuwen's strategy of legitimization, somatization can be likened to the authorization by role model, (van Leeuwen, 2017). Apart from using authorial identities, scam mails construct their identities by way of associating with credible entities.

> (4) This message may come to you as a surprise, but be assured it is in good faith from a widow in need. I am MRS. VERONICA JOHN GARANG the wife of late vice president of SUDAN, DR JOHN GARANG who happens to be the former rebel leader of THE SUDAN PEOPLES LIBERATION MOVEMENT (SPLM). My husband died on Saturday 30th of July 2005 on a sabotaged helicopter crash just three weeks after his inauguration on the 9th of July in our capital(KHARTOUM may his gentle soul rest in peace. I got your contact through INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INFORMATION EXCHANGE though I did not disclose the nature of the business to them during the process of searching for a reliable individual/company who can assist my family in transferring the sum of US$22 Million (Twenty Two Million United States Dollars only in a private or company account overseas for safe keeping/investment hence I decide to write you. As a family we have agreed to offer you 20% of the total sum of money for your assistance 5% has been mapped out for both local and international expenses that will be incurred by both of us in the course of this transfer and the remaining 75%will be for my family investment in your country through your advice. You have to understand that continuous existence of my family depends on this fund. That is why I have taken the responsibility of making this initial contact for my family.

In example 4, another form of authorization is presented based on a relational term of kinship. The narrator assumes an authorial identity by identifying herself as the wife of a deceased political figure in Sudan. This position comes with some sense of authority. John Garang is Sudanese revolutionary leader who led the Sudan People's Liberation Army during the second Sudanese war. Given the political history and tales about the political crisis in Sudan, the scammer is expected to assist the narrator especially with her position as a widow. In addition to the authorial identity ascribed, the mail also attempts to delegitimize the government ascribing to popular media reports about political leadership in Africa (Smith, 2009). Being the widow of John Garang, a political figure in Sudan whose death was attributed to some political interests in Sudan (Laurence, 2014), such dire situation apart from discrediting the government, is a strong tool to garner support from members of the international community who are obviously the targets of advanced fee scams.

4.2 Altruistic Appeals as Legitimization Strategies

Altruistic behaviours refer to actions done in the interest of others, which may be acts of self-sacrifice or the use of personal resources (Heinrich, 2006). Altruism is an argumentative strategy in political discourse and other forms of communication where social actors describe their actions and deeds in relation to the good of others. Although there is no distinction on what constitutes an altruistic behaviour, it is generally described in terms of the motivation rather than the action (Abo, 2012). In deceptive communication of advanced fee frauds, altruistic arguments serve legitimization purposes where the business proposed in the mail is considered to be in the interest of the addressee. This is common in lottery or fortune bequeathing scam when an addressee is often presented with huge amounts of money usually in dollars or pounds.

> (5) Hi, My name is Charles Francis Feeney, a philanthropist and the founder of The Atlantic Philanthropies, one of the largest private foundations in the world. I believe strongly in 'giving while living.' I had one idea that never changed in my mind — that you should use your wealth to help people and I have decided to secretly give USD $1.8Million to randomly selected individuals worldwide. On receipt of this email, you should count yourself as the lucky individual. Your email address was chosen online while searching at random. Kindly get back to me at our earliest convenience, so I know your email address is valid (charlesfrancfeeney@gmail.com) Email me. Visit my Wikipedia web page to know more about me:

Example 4 shows a form of addressee oriented altruism. In the sample, the speaker in the guise of a philanthropist relies on moral frames of giving to justify his action. The writer designates himself as a "philanthropist" who is concerned with the welfare of others. The narrator impersonates the American philanthropist Chuck Feeny, who donates a great amount of his fortunes to charity, as a strong symbol of altruism in order to present the mail as genuine. While the identity assumed here is false, the narrative frame elicits a response from the addressee who would consider the offer an opportunity. Abo (2012) notes that altruistic appeals have the potential to trigger affective responses, as these appeals tend to increase group membership and reduce counter arguing. The mail, through altruistic arguments blurs its fraudulent intent and directs the addressee to focus mainly on the actions that are supposedly in the addressee's favour.

4.3 Rationalization of Actions and Offers

This is a discursive strategy that attempts to justify actions based on goals. It serves people oriented goals and common interests. In deceptive communication of advanced fee fraud, rationalization strategy is used in a number of ways to support the action or delegitimize other social actors. Moral arguments supported by expertise were used as manipulative tools to justify the goals and source of funds.

> (5) I have emailed you earlier few weeks ago without any response from you.
> On my first email I mentioned about my late client whose relatives I cannot get in touch with. But both of you have the same last name so it will be very easy to front you as his official next of kin. I am compelled to do this because I would not want the bank to push my clients funds into their treasury as unclaimed funds. If you are interested you do let me know so that I can give you Comprehensive details on what we are to do. My late client made a huge deposit in bank here and we must work to claim his funds before the bank will push it to their treasure as unclaimed funds. I await your immediate response

The rationalization strategy in example 5 is an attempt to delegitimize opposition and in this case, the officials of a bank. As part of deceptive strategy in discourse of scam mails, institutions such as corporate bodies, foreign companies and establishments that constitute social actors in the mails are constructed either negatively or positively. The writer draws on frames of justice and fair deal to argue that it is unwise for the bank to confiscate the funds of a deceased client, hence the desire to get an individual with same surname to receive the fund. While the claims to justify the scammer's actions are not right, the obligatory expression "we must work to push the fund" creates a sense of collectivity and attempts to build solidarity between the writer and addressee, it also creates an opposition (with the bank). The writer indirectly questions the right of institutions to confiscate unclaimed funds creating a sense of unfairness while presenting his rescue actions as legitimate. Another rationalization approach in the sample is the attempt to delegitimize the actions of the opposition, describing them as illegal or immoral.

> (6) I am writing you to solicit your co-operation in a multi million dollars investment. My name are Jean Paul Garang, the eldest son of Late Dr. John Garang, I am presently seeking political asylum here in Spain for fear of my live. My late father John Garang was the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army that fought the Khartoum government of Sudan for 21 years until 09 July 2005 when he was made the first vice president

> of Sudan after the Kenyan peace accord. Three weeks after (30 July 2005) he was killed when he was returning from Uganda on the Ugandan presidential helicopter who is an ally to the Sudanese president Oman el Bashir during the civil war against the people of south Sudan… I am writing you in absolute confidence primarily to seek your assistance to secure my father's fund deposited in Europe, my Late father's deposited Fifteen Million United States Dollars cash ($15,000.000.00) now in the custody the vault house of a Private Finance firm in Europe

In example 6, the scammers define himself as a member of an out-group by presenting serious allegations against the Sudanese government. The narrative frame here is a result of the political crisis in Sudan discussed earlier. The scammer claims to have fled to Spain in fear of what might happen to him. He adopts this stance to present the government as hostile to its opponents. While the writer of this mail is not the son of John Garang, he/she chooses to represent the Sudanese government and the Ugandan government as conspirators. Throughout the narratives of scammers, African leaders and the African region are deconstructed as hostile, always destroying oppositions. Hostility and insensitivity are common discourses represented in these texts and oppression according to the emails are carried out at by family members and the government. This form of delegitimization, (emphasizing the atrocities of others) strategy is intentional as it aims to spur anger in the receivers of these mails and prompt them to accept the claims in the narratives and act as ally to the narrators. Interestingly, when recipients are moved out of anger to act, they only realize later that the actors differ completely from the persons portrayed in the letters.

4.4 Hypothetical Future Projections

The email samples often create a distinction between the past, present and advocate a future that is either in the interest of the writer or the addressee. Hypothetical future involves describing a threat or danger that might happen in the future if immediate action is not taken, and by focusing in the future, attention is drawn away from the present (Reyes, 2011). Hypothetical future is commonly instantiated throughout the text using the deontic modal verb "will" to express intention or a possible future action or conditionals. The sample below, the writer projects a future in the interest o the addressee as legitimization strategy for the obtrusive mail. In the sample below, a future threat is invoked by expressing a threat if an action is not taken.

> (7) I want to solicit for your partnership with trust to invest the $8 million dollars deposited by my late husband in Bank because my life is no longer safe in our country, since the rebels are looking for the families of all the oil business men in the country to kill, saying that they are the ones that is milking the country

The introduction of the mail in example7 clearly shows that the recipient is unknown. Yet the mail begins with a volitive “I want to solicit for your partnership”. The fraudster makes a hypothetical claim that her life would remain in danger if rescue efforts were not made. This prediction, a threat to the claimed narrator’s life is a strong premise to act in urgency to save the narrator. The recipient of this kind of mail might be prompted to act out of pity without first evaluating the message. Given the narratives of violence first on the death of a husband, there would be every possibility of danger to the presumed widow especially within the context of the narrative-Africa, where women are vulnerable. The narrative relies not just on a hypothetical future drawn from the context but realities of war and its impact on economic development to rationalize the fraudulent financial transactions presented in the mail and also delegitimize war torn regions.

4.5 Appeal to Recipient’s Emotions

One of the common emotions inherent in email scam narratives is appeal to emotions. Reyes (2011) in his study of political discourse focused mainly on fear as an emotional appeal common in the political discourse. Emotional appeals influence decision of the addressee through manipulation of information to elicit pity, fear or shame and it is expressed by exploiting atrocities (Reyes, 2011). In advanced fee fraud emails, the narrative frame is embedded in emotional appeals that emphasize the pathetic conditions of the narrators and the negative representations of other actors in the discourse. In the samples identified below, characters such as refugees, orphans and widows are personas chosen by fund transfer scam narratives to incite emotional attachments such as empathy to the narratives expressed in the following texts:

> (8) My name is Mrs CATHRYN NINA, My late husband deals on Crude Oil with Federal Government of Sudan and he has a personal Oil firm in Bentiu Oil zone town and Upper Nile city. What I have experience physically, I don't wish to experience it again in my life due to the recent civil Ethnic war cause by our President Mr. Salva Kiir and the rebel leader Mr Riek Machar, I have been Under United Nation refugee camp in Chad to save my life and that of my little daughter. Though, I do not know how you will feel to my proposal, but the truth is that I sneaked into CHAD our neighboring country where I am living now as a refugee. I escaped with my little daughter when the rebels bust into our house and killed my husband as one of the big oil dealers in the country. Ever since then, I have being on the run.
>
> I want to solicit for your partnership with trust to invest the $8 million dollars deposited by my late husband in Bank because my life is no longer safe in our country, since the rebels are looking for the families of all the oil business men in the country to kill…I will offer you 20% of the total fund for your help, while I will partner with you for the investment in your

country.I will wait to hear from you so as to give you details. With love from Mrs CATHRYN NINA,

(9) Greetings in the lord. Permit me to inform you of my desire of going into business / family relationship with you. I am quite aware that my message will come to you as a surprise because it is indeed very strange for someone you have not met before to contact you in this regard. l am Miss Lebonne Mary, the only daughter of late Chief and Mrs Lebonne Mathias, My father was a very wealthy Cocoa Exporter here in Abidjan, Cote d`Ivoire. He was poisoned to death by his business associates on one of their business meeting in France. My mother died on the 20th January 1999 and my father took me so special because l am motherless. Before the death of my father on 27th October 2015 in a private hospital here in Abidjan, he secretly called me at his bedside, when I sat down to listen to him, he started crying, why? (1) He complained that I am too young to be managing my life with no one to take care of me, (2) That I have not finished my university education as he planned for me, he revealed to me that he has a sum of US$7,500.000.(SEVEN MILLION FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND UNITED STATES DOLLARS) he left in fixed suspense account with Bank Ghana Industrial Accra…Furthermore, you can indicate your option towards assisting me as l believed that this project would be concluded within seven days you signify interest to assist me by standing by me as my foreign trustee / guardian. Hoping to hear from you soon. May God bless you as you as you extend your helping hand to an orphan.

Emotional appeals are the most common legitimization strategies in the samples of fraudulent emails. Appeals to pity are constructed through lexical selected of words such as dying, killed, sick to induce pity. In example 9, Nominalization strategy is employed in the expression, “the rebels bust into our house and killed my husband”, the agents ie-the rebels are named here and their violent action expressed through the lexeme burst. Again by describing the killers as rebels, a sense of brutality and lawlessness associated with rebels is invoked. Another appeal is that of fear found in the expression “rebels are looking for the families of all the oil business men in the country to kill”. Cap (2009, p. 9) notes that discourse of threats result in fear and the result of fear is a strong legitimizing strategy because it offers an easy rationale for following the actor that claims to have the solution. Discourses of threats and fear in the samples projects the fear faced by the narrator and at the same time elicits fear in the addressee who might be concerned about what would happen to the writer. Such fear also serves predictive function where the addressee might want to act fast to abate any possible harm on the narrator.

In the sample 8, the expression ‘he was poisoned’ tends to highlight the brutal action o the victim. The state of helplessness of the narrator is also expressed through emotion words like ‘crying’ and ‘orphan’ denoting a state of loneliness associated with the loss of parents. The choices of words in the two samples while presenting a positive self, projects a negative other-those involved in killings in the sample. Another common discourse of pity is found in sample 10

> (10) I am Mother Sarah Alan Rowland, the wife to Late. Rev. Dr. Alan George Rowland who worked with the German embassy in Dubai for Nine years and died in the year 2004. We were married for good seventeen years without a child. He died after a brief illness that lasted for only one month and two days. Before his death we were both born again Christians. Since his death I decided not to re-marry or get a child outside my matrimonial home, which the Bible is against. When my late husband was alive he deposited the sum of $48 Million Dollars (Forty Eight Million U.S. Dollars) in a bank in Spain, and My Doctor told me that I would not last for the next three months due to my breast cancer problem. Though what disturbs me most is my stroke. Having known my condition I decided to contact you to make foundation with the funds for the orphanages and widows and also to propagate the word of God and to ensure that orphanages are educated. The Bible made us to understand that blessed is the hand that giveth. I am not afraid of death hence I know where I am going. I know that I am going to be in the bosom of the Lord. Exodus 14 VS 14 says that the lord will fight my case and I shall hold my peace. I don't need any telephone communication in this regard, With God all things are possible. As soon as I receive your reply I shall also issue you a letter of authority that will empower you as the original- beneficiary of this fund through the help of my late husband's attorney

The religious appeal is a common discourse also present in email advanced fee fraud scams. Scammers in order to align to a particular religious identity, use the appeals to religious values. There is a general perception that people with strong religious values tend live moral lives hence a strong legitimization strategy in the scam. In the sample, the writer describes him/herself as "a worthy Christian" drawing strong emphasis to religious frames. The effect of this form of legitimization including biblical reference in the text would appeal to addressee's moral values rather than rational reasoning and blur the intent of the mail, which is to swindle the victim. The discourse of death and illness in the text are appeals to pity also serve as legitimization strategy to justify the act of charity proposed by the writer.

5. Conclusion

The study examined the legitimization strategies in scam mails. From the study, discourse of advanced fees fraud letters contains similar legitimization discourse found in political discourses. The mails adopt voices of expertise to signal authority, play to emotions of fear, religious beliefs and pity and also adopt rationalization strategies that tend to justify their action such as seeking the good of the addressee, fighting for the right of a deceased client n the case of dormant account scams or emphasizing negative actions of other actors as rationale for their emails.

In delegitimizing other social actors, some actors identified in the discourse are represented as either members of in-group or out-group, with the governments described as enemies. There is also the representation of institutional authorities especially those of African descents as brutal and violent to oppositions. These representation strategies expressed in the discourse of scam mails tend to agree with the already established perceptions of some countries and serve as strong appeal markers resulting in deception. In sum, this study extends on the studies of legitimization in political discourse and notes that the concept can be relevant in understanding deceptive communication and ideological undertones in the narratives of email scams

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