

# Rethinking Rhetoric: An investigation of political persuasion online. A case study of Mauritian electoral interviews livestreamed on Facebook.

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## COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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## ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

<b>COR</b>	–	Compatibility Representation/s
<b>CR</b>	–	Constituency Representation/s
<b>FPTP</b>	–	First-Past-The-Post
<b>HIL</b>	–	High-inference Language
<b>ML</b>	–	Muvman Liberator
<b>MSM</b>	–	Mouvement Socialiste Militant
<b>MP</b>	–	Mouvement Patriotique
<b>PMSD</b>	–	Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate
<b>PTR</b>	–	Parti Travailleiste
<b>RC</b>	–	Representative Claim/s
<b>RP</b>	–	Reform Party
<b>SR</b>	–	Self-representation/s
<b>V-Bhadain</b>	–	Bhadain’s viewertariat
<b>V-Boolell</b>	–	Boolell’s viewertariat
<b>V-Diolle</b>	–	Diolle’s viewertariat

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## ABSTRACT

The live-commenting feature Facebook Live offers a unique look into how persuasion operates online. By giving citizen-users, or the *viewertariat* (see Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011), the opportunity to comment on live political performances, Facebook Live presents a worthy site of investigation into how traditionally-powerful performer-persuaders (electoral candidates) now face off with traditionally-excluded masses of audience-persuadees (citizen-users). The livestream then becomes a mediated space of contestation, where the boundaries between persuader-persuadee and performer-audience fades, where, this study proposes, persuadee becomes persuader, rendering, in the process, the traditional persuader less persuasive, and thus less powerful.

The study sought to understand how electoral persuasion operates online in Mauritius by using the Facebook livestreamed interviews of three candidates (incumbent, long-time, and first-time candidate) running in the December 2017 By-Election. A combined rhetorical and content analysis was conducted on candidates' representative claims (see Saward, 2006) and the *viewertariat* responses to these claims. This study finds that candidates employ a self-centred rhetoric, focusing on their '*candidateness*' rather than their representativeness, which, this study proposes, has ramifications on how candidates approach politics in contemporary Mauritius. The study also finds that the *viewertariat* is actively engaged in counter-persuasion, constructing their own (re)representative claims and exchanging primarily with other *viewertariat* members and lurkers (see Hill & Hughes, 1997). The *viewertariat* exhibits horizontal persuasion which, this study discusses, dilutes the vertical persuasion employed by candidates.

The overall findings lead to the conclusion that rhetoric as a theoretical framework must be extended to adequately capture the persuasive dynamics in online electoral public spheres. A new theoretical framework is finally proposed, with the tripartite distinction between *performer-text-audience* rearranged to include *performer-persuasive text-viewertariat-lurkers*, and complemented with an argument as to the growing conceptual obsolescence of the 'audience' in studying rhetoric online.

**Key words: elections, persuasion, political performance, representative claims, social media, rhetoric, viewertariat.**

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric, the study of how persuasion operates through speech (Welldon, 1886), has been acclaimed since Aristotle first theorized about this technique of communication (Kennedy, 2007). Martin Luther King's iconic 'I have a dream' speech is one of the most applauded public addresses of modern political communication precisely because of the masterful use of the key rhetorical device of repetition. While it is true that politicians, seeking to persuade potential voters, make use of rhetoric in their speeches, the act of persuading others extends far beyond occasional speeches (Antaki, 1994), especially in today's information and networked society (see Castells, 2009).

Given the mediatisation of politics (Strömbäck, 2008), politicians are in almost a daily need of persuading members of the public, whether it be through mainstream or new media. Beyond the mediatisation of politics, the spread of social media has allowed for the mass public to morph into citizens-users who are now increasingly taking on active roles in contributing to political communication (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011). In their study on real-time responses to a televised political debate on the BBC, Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011) showed that politicians engaging in political persuasion are now met not only by the traditional 'watchdog' media but also by fact-checking citizens-users who, through Twitter, contribute to televised political events in real-time. This Twitter trend has been supported by Ampofo et al. (2011) who observed the emergence of "networks of lay tutelage, where users annotated... additional information, precedents, and explanations," (p.867) in their responses.

Despite the longstanding tradition of rhetoric within the sphere of political communication, there has been little review of the foundational assumptions of rhetoric. Not only does Aristotle's theory on the value and power of rhetoric to persuade people rest on theoretical and logical reasoning, but the audience to which Aristotle's theory of rhetoric is geared is also a simple, ordinary and unscientific one (Welldon, 1886). While assumptions about an uneducated and illiterate audience might have been valid in Ancient Greece, there is hardly any reason to keep using such assumptions in contemporary society. Given that contemporary rhetoric is derived largely from Aristotelian rhetoric (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2005), this research argues that there is room to investigate how rhetoric operates against contemporary audiences.

A number of rhetorical studies have been published with a view to enabling “political historians to re-examine speeches to ascertain how they were constructed and delivered,” (Crines et al., 2015, p.80). Despite scholars effectively probing into how an address is rhetorically constructed, very little research examining how rhetorically effective an oration (and its rhetorical elements) is with its audience exists. While some have offered insightful rhetorical analyses of political addresses (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016; Martin, 2015) and others investigated audience responses to political addresses (Ampofo et al., 2011; Anstead & O’Loughlin, 2011; Ramos-Serrano et al., 2018), there seems to be a gap in the literature addressing, comparatively and simultaneously, both sides of the persuasive discourse, namely the rhetorical text and the audience.

This gap in the literature speaks to the difficulty in gathering live audience responses to public orations. The emergence of live streaming on Facebook, this study posits, has opened avenues for research into operation of rhetoric in contemporary society. Scholars like Ampofo et al. (2011), Chadwick (2011) and Williams and Gulati (2012) advocate for political communication research to be conducted within the theoretical lenses of online media and their mediatisation affordances. The latter aptly summarise why such academic research is relevant: “the study of these emerging technology tools is important because of their potential to change both the conduct of campaigns and the relationship between candidates and voters,” (Williams & Gulati, *ibid.*, p.53). In probing the online media space, Chadwick (2011) supports using “detailed narrative case studies” (p.19) as research conduits.

## **1.1 Context**

In Mauritius, politicians are increasingly communicating to citizens via social media, and primarily through Facebook (Kasenally & Awatar, 2016). There has also been a rise in political interviews live-streamed on Facebook by various media houses. On these livestreams, Facebook users, or citizen-users as Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011) put it, can leave comments in real-time, alongside the politician(s) being interviewed. The livestream feature thus offers the possibility to not only record the persuasive discourses employed by politicians in their addresses to virtual audiences, but to also collect the instantaneous responses of the audience, ultimately enabling an investigation into the effectiveness of rhetoric within the context of online political communication.

As Mauritians and the Mauritian press prepare for what is expected to be a high-stakes general election season in late 2019 and early 2020, with multiple new political formations having mushroomed in the past few months, with the exoneration of the sitting Prime Minister by the Privy Council of charges of corruption, and the renewed momentum of opposition parties in the face of poor governmental approval ratings, the timeliness of this research project cannot be contested; such an electoral campaign would provide ample research material through not only increased political activity but also heightened need for political persuasion.

Given that the general election campaign, at the time of writing, had not yet started, researching a recent Mauritian electoral campaign seemed logical. While the most recent general election dates back to December 2014, the fact that social media had only barely started being integrated in campaign communication (see Kasenally & Awatar, 2016) led to the rejection of the 2014 electoral campaign as case study.

## **1.2 Case Study and Rationale**

Following the 2014 General Election, the only electoral campaign to have occurred in Mauritius was the December 2017 By-Election. Although a by-election is politically less salient than a general election, the particulars of the 2017 by-election (its high political significance and salience on the news agenda) position it as a case study worthy of investigation: in fact, i) the by-election was widely portrayed as a referendum by-election whose outcome would either signify a vote of continued support for the government of the day or a vote against it, and ii) its potential for electoral communication research, given the increasing mediatisation of political life in Mauritius since the 2014 General Election, is tangible.

The 2017 By-Election was caused by Roshi Bhadain, former Minister of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms under the governing alliance led by the *Mouvement Socialiste Militant* (MSM), and independent Member of Parliament since 23 January 2017, who, on 23 June 2017, resigned from the National Assembly in a surprise move, to contest both i) the transition of power between then Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth and his son Pravind Jugnauth, the MSM leader, ii) and the Metro Express, a major national transport-infrastructure project aimed at reducing road congestion by establishing a light-railway mass-transit system from the capital city to the five towns of the island. Bhadain's resignation, halfway through the government's mandate – the governing alliance was elected

into power following the 2014 General Election – called for a by-election, whereby his seat would be open for election in Constituency No.18 Belle Rose-Quatre Bornes. The by-election was set for 17 December 2017.

As of June 2017, the governing alliance, made up of the MSM and the *Muvman Liberater* (ML), had a simple majority with 40 seats out the 70 of the National Assembly. Bhadain's resignation was thus inconsequential to the balance of power within the assembly. The governing alliance (MSM-ML), having already lost one of its alliance partner the *Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate* (PMSD), with its 11 elected members, and enjoying low public support, chose not to field a candidate.

By refraining from fielding a candidate, the governing alliance sought to protect its credibility and contemporaneously force opposition parties to compete against one another (L'Express, 2017). Given the political landscape at the time, opposition and new parties all fielded candidates, valuing the opportunity to gauge public sentiment at mid-mandate, especially in the face of increasing popular discontent towards the governing alliance. As argued by political scientist Catherine Boudet, the by-election results would set the tone for the next general election due to take place late 2019 or early 2020 (Karghoo, 2017).

The by-election front-runner was Dr. Arvin Boolell from the *Parti Travailleiste* (PTR). Boolell, a career politician who had been elected in Constituency No.11 Vieux Grand Port-Rose Belle in 1984 and had won re-election at every general election until 2014, was called an opportunist on social media for allegedly 'deserting' his long-time constituents for a chance at re-entering the National Assembly by running as the PTR candidate for Constituency No.18. Despite speculation about the popularity of Bhadain's newly founded Reform Party (RP), Boolell ultimately won the by-election. Of the 42 052 registered voters, only 22 758 citizens cast their ballots (54.1% voter turnout), 7 990 of which went to Boolell (Electoral Commissioner's Office, 2017) who was thus elected winner under the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) model with a democratically worrying 35.1% of the votes. Given the national prominence of the by-election in local media, the meagre turnout calls for an interrogation about the contrast between the national media narrative and voter engagement.

Given the relatively low stakes of the by-election in relation to power dynamics within the National Assembly, the 40 candidates to the by-election (mostly first-time candidates) found themselves in an atypical position where, unlike in general elections, candidates mattered more

than the parties. Tania Diolle, candidate from the *Mouvement Patriotique* (MP), admitted in an interview that the political status quo would not change in the National Assembly and that the ability of candidates to convince voters revolved around the character of candidates rather than party identification. Diolle said that she is “offering them [voters] a new way of representing people,” (ION News, 2017a, trans.).

This paper agrees with Diolle’s reading of the by-election, and purports that it offers a unique opportunity to understand the practice of political representation, and political persuasion by extension, in contemporary Mauritius.

At the institutional level, political representation takes the form of a National Assembly modelled on a Westminsterian Parliament, with a FPTP electoral system, which is, “in fact a first-three-past-the-post system allowing for 60 [62] elected members to be represented in the National Assembly, with each of the 20 constituencies returning three MPs and the island of Rodrigues two,” (Bunwaree & Kasenally, 2005, p.16). The legislative assembly is also comprised on 8 additional seats, known as the Best Loser seats, “that are awarded to non-elected candidates based on their ethno-religious affiliation,” (ibid.) in order to establish a balance between the four constitutionally-recognised ethnic communities of Mauritius.

The Best Loser System has been contested on grounds that it relies on out-dated, thus unrepresentative, demographic data and distorts political representation. The representativeness of the National Assembly is further distorted by the fact that “MPs [Members of Parliament] have to bear absolute party allegiance,” (Bunwaree & Kasenally, 2005, p.18), thus restricting their abilities to fulfil their roles as elected representatives. In fact, Bunwaree and Kasenally (p.35) found that,

the pervasive culture of ‘toeing the party line’ impedes the democratic process within parties and is reflective of the quasi ‘dominance’ of the party leader, who decides on the selection and nomination of candidates, controls the purse and has vetoing power on certain important party matters.

General elections thus become leader-centric, where party leaders personify their parties, and where party candidates, rather than representing constituents, represent the leader. In a country where electoral manifestos are sometimes published only a week prior to election day, electoral campaigns focus almost exclusively on party leaders and party politics, with policy debates rarely surfacing substantially. In such situations, party candidates function as mere

placeholders through which voters show party allegiance. Party allegiance routinely takes over policy preference and there is seemingly no expectation on the behalf of voters for party candidates to represent more than a political party (at pre- and election times, at least). By-elections on the other hand offer candidates much more freedom to represent themselves as representatives of a constituency rather than as yet another party candidate. In a low-stake by-election like the December 2017 one, candidates, albeit fielded under the banner of a party (although a significant portion of 40 candidates were independents), could, and did (at least those from the mainstream parties) engage in campaigning on individual merits rather than solely focusing on party grounds. The 2017 By-Election thus offered a unique opportunity for political candidates to embrace more nuanced political persuasion, forcing candidates to persuade voters by measuring themselves to other individuals rather than using simplistic and conventional party-vs-party strategies. This is why this case study is an ideal site of investigation of rhetoric and political persuasion.

### **1.3 Political Persuasion Online**

Other than institutional political representation, the practice of representation can also be social. This societal practice of representation has been studied by scholars like Hall (1997) and Goffman (1959) who theorised about the relational character of representation and the necessity of establishing a link between the one representing and the one being represented. Saward's (2006) seminal work on representative claims expands on the practice of representation, proposing that representation is about making claims of being representative. In effect, representative claim-making is about persuading others of one's representativeness. These persuasive claims to be representative are constructed through public addresses like speeches, television interviews or photo-ops in what Atkins and Finlayson (2016) define as political performances.

Within legacy-cum-mainstream media, these performances are primarily constructed within one-to-many or few-to-many communication infrastructures – for example, a political manifesto distributed to voters or a political speech aired on radio. Under these physical media, political persuasion was studied either from the performer side (the orator) or from the audience side (see Atkins & Finlayson, 2016; Martin, 2015; Ramos-Serrano et al., 2018). Audience responses comprised of either applause or booing (see Atkinson, 1984) or proxies such as electoral outcome or editorials following major speeches.

The advent of social media has changed communication structures and dynamics within which political persuasion operates. Online platforms offer “two-way, decentralized communications” (Dahlberg, 2001, n.p.), effectively altering the nature of communications from a unidirectional to a two-way, many-to-many model. In a nutshell, new media, and social media in particular – through its affordances of reach, interactivity and synchronicity (see Baym, 2010) – elevates and accelerates acts of representation, and, by extension, of political persuasion. Citizens are increasingly engaged in critical debate online, often challenging political performances by, for example, posting comments (Douai & Nofal, 2012). As Mavoa et al. (2017) point out, by enabling citizen-to-citizen (re)presentations on various platforms, social media is in fact “radically altering the contexts in which realities and ideologies are shaped by public discourse,” (p.332).

In a study of social media usage by Mauritian political parties during the 2014 General Election campaign, Kasenally and Awatar (2016) noted “the absence of any engagement between the political parties and their leaders with users of social media” (p.62), with evidence of traditional one-way communication from political parties to citizen-users with “very little constructive exchange of ideas,” (p.62). They observed, primarily on Facebook, an overall negative tone of political communication surrounding the 2014 General Election and noted that while “the digital presence of all the mainstream political parties has increased considerably following the 2014 general election...the quality of engagement has not really improved,” (p.64-65).

In a country of 1.27 million citizens, active social media users, amounting to 820 000 and representing 65% of the population (Global Digital Yearbook Report 2019), have increased over the past two years, with a 30 000 increase from 2018 to 2019 alone. Among social media platforms, Facebook ranks the second highest, at the 5<sup>th</sup> most visited site after Google (search engine), YouTube (social media platform), Defi Media Group (news publication) and Inside News (news publication) (Alexa, 2019). Even though mobile subscriptions are reported at a 151% penetration rate, mobile social media users only represent 61% of the population. Interestingly though, mobile social media users, standing at 770 000 as of January 2019, has seen a significant increase of 10% since 2018 (Global Digital Yearbook Report, 2019).

Reading these numbers in juxtaposition to the increased use of Facebook by Mauritian political parties calls for continued exploration of social media practices and political communication within democratic lenses, especially in electoral contexts.

#### 1.4 Justifying site of study

Even though it was found that Mauritians generally “turn to television as their primary source of information/news,” (Kasenally, 2012, p.59), a quick overview of the audio-visual landscape of Mauritius suffices to further justify selecting Facebook as the site of investigation.

Since its creation in pre-independent Mauritius in June 1964, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), the state broadcaster, remains the only provider of television services. The MBC, whose director, chairperson and board members are appointed by the Prime Minister, is frequently criticised for its lack of impartiality, especially when covering politics and elections (Kasenally, 2012). Broadcasting was partly liberalised in 2002 and three private radio stations were established; the number of radio stations has since increased significantly. Contrarily to the highly regulated broadcast media, the Mauritian written press “is extremely diverse and varied and to a great extent unregulated” (ibid., p.58). Even though, Kasenally (2012) finds that “private radio stations have become platforms for popular voicing out and in the process have started to instil a culture of debate,” (p.60), radios still operate within a one- or few-to-many communication framework.

The advent of the internet as a viable platform for media houses in Mauritius in the late 2000s challenged the MBC’s monopoly on audio-visual content production. While media conglomerates like *La Sentinelle Ltd* and *Defi Media Group* progressively migrated their print content online, one media company, ION News, established itself as the sole web-only news company. Since its website launch in January 2014, ION News has grown in household recognition and explored cross-platform publication, using first YouTube (with already over 30 million total views and over 53 000 subscribers) and, more recently, Facebook as broadcasting channels (other than its website). ION News has also experimented with Facebook Live for broadcasting its one-on-one hard talk political interviews, with commendable success.

During the 2017 by-election campaign, ION News launched a one-on-one series with the frontrunners and a handful of candidates from the better-known emerging parties. The Facebook livestream interview series, which ran from June to November 2017, received popular acclaim, with Facebook users frequently thanking, via the comment thread, ION News for the live content. Bhadain, during his one-on-one interview, even said, “This interview is my campaign; the nation is watching”, demonstrating both the strategic appeal of ION News

as a political platform to reach (and persuade) a maximum of voters and the perceived popularity of the format.

### **1.5 Scope and Aims**

While it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the reasons explaining the popularity of the ION News livestreamed interviews, it suffices to point to the stark gap in audio-visual-cum-impartial political content in Mauritius as well as to the interactivity of the Facebook Live format to justify studying selecting ION News as a worthy site of investigation of political persuasion in contemporary Mauritius. Indeed, users, through the live commenting feature, actively engaged in political communication of their own, exchanging with – and, as this study suggests, persuading – the politician, interviewer and, most importantly, with each other. While Kasenally and Awatar (2016) found little to no engagement between politicians and citizens online in their study of the 2014 General Elections, the popularity of the Facebook livestream interviews, with comments ranging from a few hundreds to the thousands, calls for a review of political engagement on social media. Could the interactivity of Facebook Live translate into higher levels of political engagement and, more pertinent to this study, does increased interactivity affect how political persuasion operates online?

This study, aiming to investigate political persuasion, is guided by one central question: *who, in an electoral context, is persuading who and of what online*. By using the 2017 By-Election ION News' Facebook Live interviews as case study, this study aims to map the electoral online public sphere, attempting to re-evaluate electoral persuasion in Mauritius with a view to engaging with a critical discussion on social media, political communication and rhetoric. This study also seeks to fill a lack of research in the field of electoral communication and social media in Mauritius where the most recent study on social media and elections dates back to 2016 (see Kasenally & Awatar, 2016).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature, this chapter will begin by understanding how political performances come about and how rhetoric is intricately linked to those performances, especially within electoral contexts. Representative claims, a key element of this research, will then be explored as the embodiment of electoral persuasion. Not only are representative claims repositories of persuasive discourses but they also function as the link between the performer (orator/candidate) and the audience (citizen-users/viewertariat). An exploration of online audiences will then ensue, providing findings about audiences as a whole, lurkers and viewertariat – another essential component of this research. The viewertariat will then be located within online public spheres, and Facebook Live, one such online public sphere, will be explored as a platform where performers and viewertariat merge to engage in political persuasion through political performances and representative claims. This chapter will conclude with i) a review of the main findings of the literature, articulated through the conceptual framework this study will employ, and ii) the formulation of Research Questions.

### 2.1 Political Performances and Rhetoric

Understanding the framework of political performances is crucial for understanding how persuasion operates in traditional, offline communication structures.

Finlayson (2015) defines a political performance as an understanding of the traditionally separate concepts of the speaker, the speech and the audience as the constitutive “parts of one thing: a performance,” (p.99). Under the prism of a political performance, the speaker, the topic and the audience “exist in relation to each other and as part of an overall activity,” (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016, p.175). In this activity, Goffman (1959) finds it useful, for analytical purposes, to take “a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference” (p.26) and describe those who contribute to the reference performance “as the audience, observers, or, co-participants,” (p.27).

A political performance can take the form of a speech, a televised interview, an editorial, a radio interview, or even a photo-op. In a political performance like a televised political interview, the audience is understood to “receive, evaluate and react” (Reinelt & Rai, 2015, p.1) to what is made visible by the performer (see Reinelt & Rai, p.14). This act of making visible is possible through representation, of the self, of others, and of the links between the two. For Saward (2006), representation is not “external to its performance, but is something

generated by the making, the performing, of claims to be representative,” (p.302). Fundamentally, representation is the political performance, and representation is a claim-making practice (ibid.).

The political performance, being the “activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to *influence* in any way any of the other participants,” (Goffman, 1959, p.26, emphasis added) is thus inherently linked to the field of rhetoric (Finlayson, 2004). In fact, Bitzer (1999) argues that political performances are “rhetorical situations” (Bitzer in Atkins & Finlayson, 2016, p.164), given that claim-making relies on the ability of the claim-maker to persuade an audience that the claims are valid. While political performances are essentially claim-making instances, it is rhetoric that is substantially what determines whether a performance is successful or not.

Rhetoric, which Lunsford and Ruskiewicz (2004) define as “the art of persuasion” (p.462), allows for the study of persuasion by deconstructing a persuasive text as rhetorical elements, known as appeals (or proofs, or arguments) and rhetorical devices (ibid.). A rhetor has three types of appeals they can use to persuade an audience: *ethos* (an appeal based on one’s character), *pathos* (an appeal based on using emotions to move an audience) and *logos* (an appeal using logic and reason to persuade) (see Brandt 1970; Kennedy 2007). Research on political campaigns online has shown that politicians prefer using *pathos* appeals in two-party systems like the US (see Bronstein, 2013) while those in multi-party systems like in Israel rely primarily on *ethos* appeals (see Samuel-Azran et al., 2015). It is suggested that the competition between more than 2 parties or candidates may explain the need for candidates in a multi-party or multi-candidate election (like the December 2017 by-election in Mauritius) to rely on persuasion about one’s character, ability and credibility (ibid.).

It is interesting that *logos* appeals were the least employed rhetorical proof, irrespective of electoral system, especially given that using numerical rhetoric (using facts and figures in a political performance) can increase the candidate’s perceived competence (Pedersen, 2017). It is also noteworthy that rhetorical analyses of political communication on social media is rather sparse, and largely focus on static Facebook posts (see Bronstein, 2013; Samuel-Azran et al., 2015) rather than live political performances as this study seeks to study. Unlike live performances, static Facebook posts simply call for an application of traditional rhetoric within a one- or few-to-many communication structures.

Rhetoric is also divided into three genres of communication: i) forensic rhetoric (using past data to persuade about either appeal), ii) epideictic rhetoric (a celebratory or condemnatory type of communication, usually focused on present events and observations), and iii) deliberative rhetoric (using different types of appeals to dissuade and exhort about a proposal, plan or aspired future) (see Atkins & Finlayson, 2016; Finlayson, 2007; Kennedy, 2007). It is expected that incumbents will tend to rely on epideictic rhetoric (celebrating recent achievements while in power), that first-time candidates will tend to focus on deliberative rhetoric (relying on proposals, visions, and ideas for the future), and that long-time candidates will tend to employ forensic rhetoric (relying on past achievements).

An indispensable aspect of rhetoric is that it requires a speaker (the performer), a text (a speech or live interview) and an audience, a tripartite framework similar to the political performance, hence the term ‘rhetorical performance’ (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016). The persuasiveness of the speaker, Brandt (1970) argues, rests on the ability of the speaker to establish trust with the audience. If the audience does not sufficiently perceive the speaker as credible and trustworthy, then persuasion fails to operate. In a political performance, one way to establish trust with the audience is through the representative claim (Saward, 2006, 2008). By reverse logic then, if the representative claim is not strong enough, the audience will not be persuaded.

A political performance, essentially an instance of persuasive representation made by a politician to an audience, is thus a rhetorical performance. While some political performances resort to mild persuasive tools (for example, a photo-op only requires persuasive body language, style and facial expressions), other performances require an extensive rhetorical repertoire; an electoral performance, a political performance with *an electoral candidate, an electoral campaign text* and *an audience of voters*, is one such persuasively-lauded performance, and is thus ideal for an academic inquiry of political persuasion.

## **2.2 Representative Claims: Performing Persuasion**

At this juncture, it is opportune to turn to one of the guiding concepts of this study: the representative claim. This study posits that the representative claim is the conceptual embodiment of electoral persuasion.

Once we agree that an electoral performance is a rhetorical performance, it is reasonable to argue that the text of that rhetorical performance – the repository of electoral persuasion – is

the representative claim. To agree with this claim, one must first understand representative claims.

From the outset, representative claims are acts of representation, which are themselves borne out of political and, most importantly, electoral performances. Saward (2008) regards representation as “a process of making claims in electoral but also many other contexts,” (p. 273). In essence, representation is a process that is “generated by the making, the performing, of claims to be representative,” (Saward, 2006, p.302). In fact, Saward (2006) argues, “representation cannot function without claims, portrayals of self and other,” (p.311).

In an electoral context, the candidate, in making a representative claim, is arguing that his or her constituency is “as this or that, as requiring this or that, as having this or that set of interests,” (Saward, 2006, p.301). In depicting the constituency as such, the politician then claims to be the ideal representative of those interests, arguing thus that voters should elect him or her. A representative claim can thus be thought of as a composite of three sub-claims, namely i) a claim about the self (self-representation), ii) a claim about the imagined constituency (constituency representation), and iii) a claim about the link between the two (compatibility representation). These representative claims are then performed during political performances when the candidate gives an interview or delivers a speech, amongst many other campaigning activities. Essentially, representative claims stand as the epistemically purest form of acts of political persuasion in an electoral context.

Crucially, Saward (2006) equates representative claims with political persuasion, arguing that in the act of speaking on behalf of and for voters, political candidates are not only making claims of being representative (in the sense of representing the interests of a particular group or community) but are also representing (in the sense of constructing an imagined constituency). Saward (2006) offers us a bare but useful template, arguing that a candidate will, and does, use representative claims to construct a *self-representation* in light of some *constituency interests* so that he or she can argue to be the *ideal representative* for that constituency. The representative claim, as persuasive discourse, thus operates as a syllogism (a rhetorical logical argument, see Brandt, 1970; Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 2004) with a major and minor premise, and a conclusion, as follows:

*Major premise:* The constituency has a set of interests A (Constituency Representation);  
*Minor premise:* The candidate has abilities that speak to interest set A (Self-Representation);

*Syllogistic conclusion:* The candidate is thus the best representative of the constituency (Compatibility Representation).

Representative claims are inherently rhetorical speech acts, employing a variety of rhetorical techniques in constructing claims to represent others. Given the need to establish some form of trust and credibility on behalf of the performer (Brandt, 1970), the representative claim must be tailored to a target audience, a specific imagined constituency who will be receptive to that specific claim. The representative claim, especially the constituency representation sub-claim, can thus offer unique insights into how politicians imagine their audiences – either as voters, as citizens, as fans, or as demographic groups, amongst other classifications. The self-representation sub-claim can provide crucial information about how politicians view themselves and their roles as representatives while the third sub-claim, perhaps the most consequential of the three (and most democratically valuable), speaks about how a politician can craft a persuasive bridge between himself or herself and constituency interests.

This is why the representative claim is so valuable to this study on political persuasion: not only does its form rest on the tripartite theoretical framework of the rhetorical performance (with a performer, a text and an audience) but its substance also sheds light on the intentions towards, and conceptions of, the candidate's target audience-cum-voter. Since electoral candidates seek to persuade as many voters as possible, identifying a candidate's target audience-cum-voter may reveal who candidates perceive as citizens worthy of persuading, and ultimately who matters as voters, and who do not.

Within the rhetorical performance of a representative claim, it is important to note that the audience is not devoid of agency. In fact, Saward (2006) confirms that representative claims are “contestable and contested” (p.302) by audience members, who, if they disagree with either sub-claim or the representative claim as a whole, can reject or even ignore it (Saward, 2008). It can be assumed that, similar to traditional rhetorical performances, a representative claim can be rejected by means of booing (for live audiences) or other asynchronous communication (for example, an editorial piece denouncing the claims), depending on the context of the performance.

### **2.3 Social Media and Viewertariat**

Social media, with its affordances of interactivity and synchronicity (see Baym, 2010, Ott, 2017), offers multiple avenues and formats within which an audience, or audience-users rather,

can offer feedback on or contest claims made by candidates. In fact, the ability to “receive, evaluate and react” (Reinelt & Rai, 2015, p.1) to political performances on social media has been studied by various scholars (see Dahlberg, 2001; Highfield, 2016; Mavao, et al., 2017). Of the extensive literature on social media and communication, it is the work of Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011) on the emergence of the viewertariat that is critical to this study.

Defined as a collective of viewers “who comment on events in real time through social media” (Ampofo et al., 2011, p.850) in response to a live event (political or not), the viewertariat is a key concept in making sense of how public, political discourse is shaped both online and offline. In their exploratory study on social media users’ response to BBC Question Time, a political debate show in the United Kingdom, Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011) found that the viewertariat was engaged in a process of peer-to-peer information-sharing. This process of information-sharing created what Ampofo et al. (2011) call “networks of lay tutelage” (p.867), whereby “users annotated... additional information, precedents, and explanations” (p.867) in their Twitter responses to the televised political debate. Through the use of hyperlinks and other data, the viewertariat was seen to establish networks where users help one another by answering questions, summarising information, or contextualising a performer’s words, effectively engaging in ‘lay tutelage’ through comments, tweets, or responses on live threads.

While Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011) observe that the social media affordance of live commenting impacts how citizen-users, both viewertariat and lurkers (see Hill & Hughes, 1997), consume live political content, there has been little research – other than a study on the behaviour of the British viewertariat around electoral polls (see Ampofo et al., 2011) with similar findings to Anstead and O’Loughlin – focused on the informational processes involved within the viewertariat. It is thus crucial for this study to theorise, and explore, the specific information-sharing function online – the defining trait of the viewertariat.

#### **2.4 Live commenting as a form of public deliberation**

The process of giving feedback, itself a type of information, through commentary has been observed for years in mainstream media (Reagle, 2015). The ubiquity of social media has elevated this feedback process to a new dimension where commentary, through *comments*, is now increasingly provided by laymen, ‘non-experts’ and those at the periphery of society (see Habermas 1996, on core-periphery distinction; Highfield, 2016). In fact, an intrinsic feature of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram is the *comment*.

Reagle (2015) defines a comment as a “genre of communication” (p.2). He posits that a comment is essentially social in nature: “it is meant to be seen by others, and it is reactive,” (ibid., p.2). Reagle here offers a useful functional definition of a comment, pointing to the explicitly relational character of this genre of communication. If comments are meant to be ‘seen’ by others and are borne out of a reaction to some stimuli, then, as Reagle aptly argues, “the intentions and effects of comments are important,” (p.17). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the effects of comments on audiences, research on the informational role of the viewertariat has laid sufficiently clear foundations for a focused investigation of the intentions of comments to be undertaken.

According to Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011) and Ampofo et al. (2011), comments usually attempt to inform others. Even though Reagle (2015) admits that an “essential function of comments is to inform” (p.23), he argues that comments can also manipulate and shape discussions and discourses, which may then have significant consequences on audiences, on their perceptions, and, ultimately, on their political behaviours.

Comments are usually posted on threads in an asynchronous manner (Reagle, 2015). The livestreaming features of Facebook Live, YouTube Live and Instagram Live now offer synchronous – or real-time – commenting which resembles a “running transcript of a conversation,” (Hill & Hughes, 1997, p.6). These live comments collectively populate a thread which parallels what Dahlberg (2001) and Poor (2006) conceptualise as an online public sphere, that is, “spaces of discourse” (Poor, n.p.) that allow “for new, previously excluded, discussants” (n.p.) and where “ideas are judged by their merit, not by the standing of the speaker,” (n.p.) This in effect is the Habermasian theory of the public sphere (see Habermas, 1996; Habermas et al., 1974) applied to new media platforms. If we agree with how comments in a thread embody an online public sphere, then the thread also becomes a space where deliberation occurs as members of the viewertariat engage in exchange of information. Given that public deliberation is an essential function of a democracy (see Cohen, 1998; Elster, 1998; Johnson, 1998), and that commenting on a thread is analogous to public deliberation – albeit mediated through an online platform – it is evident that investigating the nature of this comment-fostered deliberation is of theoretical, practical and democratic value for a study on online electoral persuasion.

Deliberation is often cited as the bedrock, and sometimes the *sine qua non* condition, of democracy (Gambetta, 1998). Not only is deliberation essential to deliberative democracy, but

democracy scholars generally also believe that “deliberation improves the quality of decisions and enriches democracy,” (Stokes, 1998, p.123). As a key term in democratic and communication theories, it is opportune, at this juncture, to understand deliberation.

Political theorists usually define ‘deliberation’ in contrast to discussion, one distinctively different from the other. According to Johnson (1998), deliberation is a “subset of political discussion” (p.166) given that, unlike political discussion, deliberation revolves around “reasoned discussion” (p.161). This reasoned discussion comprises of “careful and serious weighing of reasons for and against some proposition” (Fearon, 1998, p.63) in a rational-scientific way (see Gambetta, 1998). The aim of deliberation is “to *persuade* the interlocutor rather than an audience,” (Elster, 1998, p.2, emphasis added) and “change the preferences on the bases of which people decide how to act,” (Przeworski 1998, p.140). It is thus evident why deliberation is essential to the proper functioning of democracies where it is rationally beneficial to “influence other people’s views because these views will affect us,” (ibid.).

The conceptual boundaries of ‘discussion’ on the other hand do not include rationality as a defining element. As Fearon (1998) suggests, “discussion need not be careful, serious, and reasoned,” (p.63). For Cohen (1998), discussion is nonetheless important in democracies “only because of its essential role in pooling private information,” (p.193). Private information here includes feelings, ideas, and “‘how things look’ from perspectives, situations and vantage points that the others had never considered or thought of,” (Fearon, 1998, p.52). Due to its non-rational or non-reasoned aspect, discussion is usually seen as sub-optimal democratic communication or even as “sophistry or demagoguery” (Elster, 1998, p.1), relying on rhetoric rather than reason or rationality to advance a point of view.

The distinction between deliberation and discussion ultimately rests on a simple dichotomy: the former is *prescriptive* (what public communication ought to be in a democracy) while the latter is *descriptive* (what public communication actually is in contemporary democracies). It is thus important to refine the concept of the live commenting thread as a communicative space of either deliberation or discussion, with very different consequences for public opinion-formation, political decision-making and democratic communication.

In his review of democratic behaviours, political philosopher Jason Brennan (2016) makes a convincing case in favour of using *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive* approaches when explaining and theorizing democracies. Brennan advocates for the descriptive approach for the

simple reason that citizens do not behave as rational individuals, especially in public decision-making. From his extensive review of findings on the levels of political knowledge amongst American voters, Brennan concludes that citizens “tend to be ignorant and irrational about politics,” (p.24), behaving much more like what he calls *hooligans* than *vulcans*. Hooligans represent citizens who “have strong and largely fixed worldviews... consume political information, although in a biased way... tend to seek out information that confirms their pre-existing political opinions,” (p.5) whereas vulcans “think scientifically and rationally about politics... actively try to avoid being biased and irrational,” (ibid.). Given that the empirical evidence strongly demonstrates that, on average, citizens behave in a biased and irrational manner, it is safe to assume that the live commenting thread will embody a communication space of *discussion* rather than *deliberation*.

## **2.5 Public Discussion: Information and Persuasion**

While Brennan (2016) suggests that the reasons motivating biased and irrational behaviour in politics relate to the perceived low utility of unbiased and rational behaviour, this paper, despite agreeing with his findings (that citizens are largely irrational voters), attempts to explore this ‘non-rational’ behaviour within public communication. One of the most respected theories of communication, the Habermasian public sphere, serves as a solid foundation to understand public discussion.

Within Habermasian public sphere theory, the process of public deliberation takes the form of a collective of citizens, coming together, seeking to share and receive information, which is to be assessed rationally (Habermas, 1996; Habermas et al., 1974). While Habermas uses *deliberation* to describe the type of communication within the public sphere, there is room to argue that the type of communication he theorises amounts more to discussion than deliberation. In fact, this rational-critical deliberation, Habermas (1996) argues, is not based on rationality “in a rational-scientific sense” (Hopkin & Rosamond, 2017, p.4), dealing with observable facts and empirical truths, but rather “express a decision or a cultural shaping that in fact has become dominant,” (Habermas, 1996, p.292). In other words, citizens in the public sphere use their experiential knowledge, sourced at various points within their social environments, to judge claims and assess informational value of exchanged opinions. Thus, the Habermasian public sphere comprises not of rational scientific discussion (see Gambetta, 1998), which is conceptually defined as *deliberation*, but of citizens using private information

(experiential knowledge) to rationally assess and exchange information, which in effect amounts to *discussion*.

Habermasian ‘rational’ deliberation is in fact analogous to “affective, traditional and valuational rationalities” (Finlayson, 2007, p.546), where communication and decision-making is a process that includes a degree of deliberation and argumentation (ibid.) based on “internal order of beliefs and inference[s],” (Gigerenzer, 2001, p.46).

If citizens within the public sphere use experiential rationality (see Finlayson, 2007) to make decisions and reach a consensus, it is fair to assume that merely sharing information would not suffice to convince others of the inherent superiority or validity of that information relative to their pre-existing knowledge. What participants must do to be successful within the public sphere is package or frame that information in a way that resonates “emotionally and instrumentally” (Finlayson, 2007, p.546) with participants. In simpler language, citizens must be able to persuade one another, and as argued by Finlayson (2007), this is exactly what they do. In fact, Finlayson goes further, suggesting that “to present and explain a belief to others is to present the arguments that are part and parcel of the belief,” (p.551). Sharing information (for example, in the form of comments in a live thread) is thus not a value-free, neutral process; presenting information can in fact mean arguing in favour of a value-laden position (Antaki, 1994). It follows that public discussion comprises of persuasive communication, amounting to sharing information while at the same time arguing (persuading) for that information to be accepted as valid, superior and inherently right.

It is important to note that the Habermasian discussion model is equally applicable to online public spheres (Dahlberg, 2001; Poor, 2006) as it is to members of the viewertariat. As demonstrated by Ampofo et al. (2011) and Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011), the viewertariat is engaged in information-sharing and in establishing “networks of lay tutelage” (Ampofo et al., p.867) to respond to and help others better understand the political performance being commented upon. While neither Anstead and O’Loughlin nor Ampofo et al. attempt to investigate the motives of such information-sharing, Ng and Detenber (2015) suggest that it is important to understand “what people hope to get out of the Internet that motivates political discussions online,” (n.p.). Given that information-sharing is analogous to persuasive discourse (Antaki 1994; Finlayson 2007), this study agrees with Ng and Detenber, and thus seeks to explore the nature of political persuasion by the viewertariat by exploring what motivates citizen-users to share information and persuade each other.

Given that “synchronous communication was perceived as more informative and persuasive than asynchronous communication” (Ng & Detenber, 2005, n.p.), the possibility of the viewertariat influencing individual citizen-users through persuasive information-sharing discourse in real-time (synchronous) comments on livestreams is tangible. In an electoral context, the viewertariat engaging in political persuasion could thus have significant consequences on public opinion online. While it is true that the viewertariat is quantitatively smaller than the total number of viewers (not all viewers of a livestream choose to comment and become part of the viewertariat), Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011) argue that those who choose to only view the media event, referred to as ‘lurkers’ (see Hill & Hughes, 1997), may also be influenced in their consumption of the media content given the presence of the comment thread juxtaposed to the livestream. Those lurkers then become a dual-audience, firstly to the live political performance, and secondly to the live juxtaposed viewertariat responses.

## **2.6 Persuasion about what? Representative claims and viewertariat influence**

If we agree that the viewertariat, through information-sharing, engages in persuasion through public discussion on live commenting threads, the nature of this persuasion, especially in an electoral context, becomes a worthy site of investigation. If we also agree that citizen-users become the viewertariat through posting comments in real-time, and that comments are reactionary in nature (Reagle, 2005), we can then deduce that the viewertariat, by engaging in persuasion while commenting, is by nature reactionary, responding to some stimuli online.

In order to assess the viewertariat’s persuasion, it is thus crucial to identify, and examine, the stimuli which cements the viewertariat into being; in an electoral context, this stimuli is, this study posits, the *representative claim*.

In an auditorium, an audience can cheer, boo or applaud a speaker making a claim, demonstrating their acceptance of the claim he or she is making (Atkinson, 1984). This applause would in effect be the audience’s feedback or comment in response to the claim. In an electoral context, rarely do live audiences boo candidates since by being part of the live audience, these citizens are usually supporters of that candidate and are thus less likely to contest his or her claims. Online though, the viewertariat, theoretically comprised of diverse users given the reach of new media (see Baym, 2010) – of thus both partisans and non-partisans – is able to contest the representative claims during the performance itself. For example, on livestreamed interviews on social media like Facebook or YouTube, the viewertariat is not only

able to comment and persuade others of a claim; the viewertariat can also reject representative claims by simultaneously offering counter-arguments to the claim made by the performer. Within online political performances, the performer is thus inevitably sharing the ‘stage’ with the audience, part of which (the viewertariat) becomes a co-performer as it engages in its own persuasion in live comment threads.

If we agree with Reinelt and Rai (2015) that it is “the interactions between performance and its reception [that] generate politics,” (p.14), and that politics is essentially the act of representation (Saward 2006, 2008), then representative claims become the stimuli the viewertariat reacts to. The affordances of social media in enabling citizen-users to interact and talk back to candidates thus create a valuable site of investigation where the political performance of making representative claims, with a performer, a text and an audience, morphs into an online political performance with a performer (candidate), a text (representative claims), an audience (lurkers), and co-performers (viewertariat); where persuasive discourses from the performer (candidate) are received and read back through comments; where politics is generated online.

Research on the type of politics generated online have so far produced mitigated and contradictory results. While Papacharissi (2004) found that “incivility and impoliteness do not dominate online political discussion,” (p.276) – echoed by Hill and Hughes (1997) in their seminal study of USENET groups – Ng and Detenber (2005) found that “in cyberspace uncivil behavior and ad hominem attacks (also known as “flaming”) are widespread in political discussions” (n.p.). They argue that the temporal structure of social media – the “constant flow and newness” (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014, p.1164) – do not allow users to have fully deliberative communication. In fact, Ng & Detenber suggest that the “short line space and the fast pace of chat rooms required people to make snap comments, not thoughtful ones, hence leading to a low level of information and a small amount of issue discussion,” (n.p.). Ott (2017) found similar results when studying Twitter, concluding that because of its structure that favors “simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility... Twitter structurally disallows the communication of detailed and sophisticated messages,” (p.60). The anonymity feature of social media is also mentioned as a possible explanation to the ease of using profanity and uncivil discourse online (ibid.).

These findings have implications for the democratic health of online electoral communication and, when read alongside earlier findings on the low quality of political communication on the

Mauritian social media (see Kasenally & Awatar, 2016), suggest that the Mauritian viewertariat is likely to engage in uncivil rhetoric in their live comments.

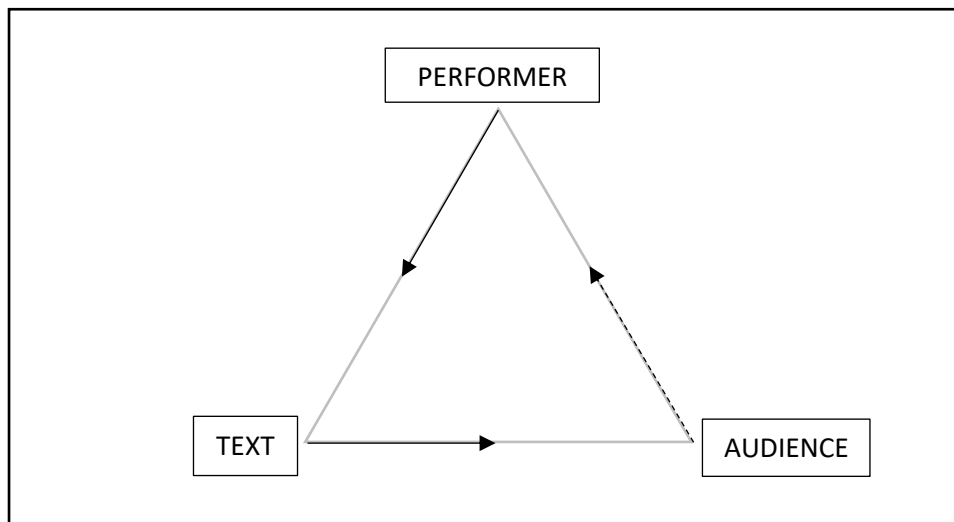
Other than enabling low-quality political communication, Gambetta (1998) finds social media to be “generally conducive to *clarismo*” (p.40, emphasis added), a communication culture where individuals use “belittling snap response[s] that greet those who express an argument” (p.21). In these situations, individuals “place considerable value on having strong opinions on virtually everything from the outset, and on winning an argument rather than on listening,” (Hirschman, 1986 in Gambetta, 1998). Such communicators will likely privilege strong opinions, which Gambetta aptly defines as such opinions “expressed in a definitive form that admits neither doubt nor nuances... packaged in a such a way as to silence the audience rather than to invite further argument,” (p.29).

Within a political and rhetorical performance context, these snap responses would generally employ epideictic (condemnatory or celebratory) rhetoric, and perhaps even rely on the logical fallacies of dogmatism, which is faulty reasoning where a performer “attempts to persuade by asserting or assuming that a particular position is the only one conceivably acceptable within a community,” (Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 2004, p.395). Such dogmatic appeals are frequent in partisan behaviour, aligning neatly with Brennan’s (2016) characterization of voters as largely political hooligans and not rational deliberators.

## **2.7 Conceptual framework**

At the conclusion of this chapter, it is opportune to highlight key findings from the literature which will inform the formulation of the research questions.

This study uses the theory of political performances as a reference framework within which operates three key research components: the performer, the text, and the audience. As a political performance amounts to a rhetorical performance (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016), the tripartite rhetorical framework of the speaker, the text and the audience applies to the political performance framework. In other words, in a traditional offline setting, the performer-speaker attempts to persuade an audience by means of a text (live oration or prepared speech).



*Figure 1 – Rhetorical performance framework*

In accordance with the research project, the performer is the electoral candidate and the audience is a group of possible voters; given that the area of research is social media, the group of possible voters-cum-audience takes the form of the viewers. In attempting to locate the text that connects the performer (candidate) to the audience (viewers), the review of the literature has asked: what does a candidate in an electoral context rationally attempt to persuade the viewers of? This study proposes that, in such a context, it is the representative claim (Saward, 2006). As such, representative claims become the persuasive text within the conceptual framework.

In this revised conceptual framework, the candidate uses persuasion in constructing representative claims, which are communicated to the viewers via the means of a livestreamed Facebook interview. The viewers, upon listening and receiving the representative claim, can then show acceptance or rejection of the claim by means of the live commenting thread or simply choose not to engage with the representative claims in an explicit manner. As this point, there is a crucial distinction between the viewertariat (those who choose to comment) and lurkers (those who choose not to comment). Within the revised conceptual framework, it is the viewertariat (as a subset of the viewers) that is of particular value to this research. As such, the viewertariat embodies the theoretical audience within the political performance framework.

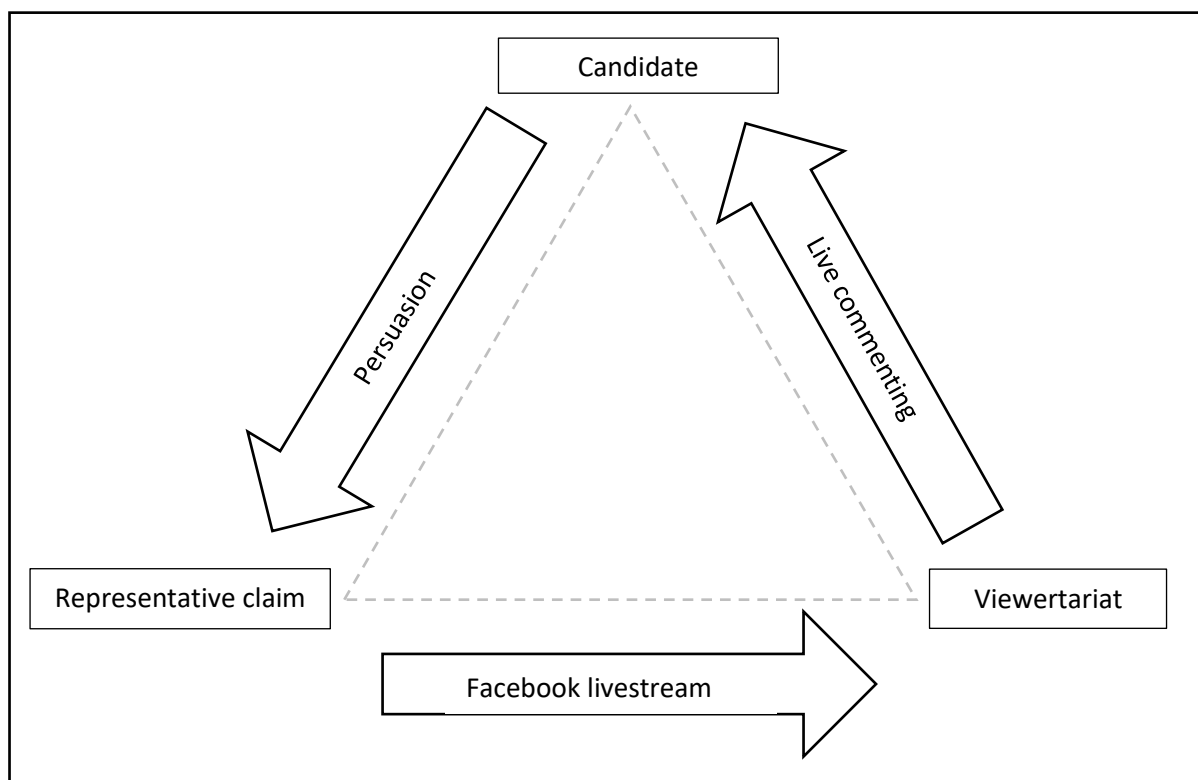


Figure 2- Adapted conceptual framework

It is important to note that under this conceptual framework the candidate uses persuasive techniques in constructing the representative claims and these persuasive techniques can be studied through an analysis of the rhetorical devices and genres the candidate is seen to use. Findings from rhetoric literature allow this research to hypothesize that different types of candidates, namely incumbents, first-time candidates and long-time candidates, would rely on different genres of rhetoric, namely epideictic, deliberative and forensic respectively.

It is also important to note that the viewertariat, by responding to the representative claims in the live comment thread, do not merely accept or reject the claims; they can also engage in persuasive discourses of their own. Again, the same rhetorical tools are available for the viewertariat to make counter-claims or claims of their own. With respect to the viewertariat, findings regarding voter behaviour and social media user behaviour seem to point to an expected polarized rhetoric with reliance on fallacious dogmatic appeals and a possible reliance on epideictic rhetoric (both celebratory for partisans and condemnatory for opponents).

The representative claim can also be divided into three parts: self-representation, constituency representation, and representation of the compatibility between the two (Saward, 2006). An overview of the substance of the representative claims as well as the frequency of each sub-

claim, especially relative to each other, may offer valuable insight into how political candidates imagine their role as representatives at the political level and engage with political representation at a social level.

## **2.8 Research Questions**

The reviewed literature on conceptual elements like i) political performance, ii) viewertariat and iii) representative claims, in juxtaposition to research findings on iv) electoral and persuasive communication, v) citizens' communication behaviour both offline and online, and vi) normative deliberative democracy, has resulted in a number of hypotheses in relation to the type of rhetoric different types of candidates could use; in relation to the nature of representative claims; and in relation to the nature of the viewertariat as well as that of the discourses in response to the representative claims.

The following Research Questions will i) guide this investigation of online political persuasion surrounding representative claims by Mauritian candidates at the December 2017 by-election as well as ii) assess the viewertariat response to these representative claims. As this is an exploratory study, online political performances from three different type of candidate (incumbent, first-time candidate and long-time candidate) will be analysed.

*RQ<sub>1</sub>*: How did candidates rhetorically construct representative claims and did the genre of rhetoric differ depending on the candidate type?

*RQ<sub>2</sub>*: How did candidates substantially construct representative claims and did these claims differ depending on the candidate type?

*RQ<sub>3</sub>*: How did each group of viewertariat rhetorically respond to representative claims?

*RQ<sub>4</sub>*: Were there any significant similarities and differences between the different groups of viewertariat?

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Given that both the text (candidates' representative claims) and the audience responses (the viewertariat comments in live threads) are objects of study, the methodology must adequately examine both micro (few representative claims) and macro (mass of live comments) level data.

A tailored-method, comprising of a two-step approach combining rhetorical analysis (see Brandt 1970; Finlayson, 2007) and content analysis (see Berelson, 1952), has been deemed the most appropriate methodology. Such a two-pronged methodological approach is expected to identify the main persuasive techniques used within the political performance as well as a possible correlation between representative claim and viewertariat response, and, finally, to establish *who's persuading who and of what online*.

### 3.1 Case Study Research Design: Qualitative Content Analysis and Rhetorical Analysis

This study falls under the case study research design. Given the novel area being studied, it was deemed appropriate to use a case study research as it not only accounts for and affords value to context in understanding the phenomenon under study (Harrison et al., 2017) but also allows the study to focus on one unique bounded system (Moeed, 2015). Such an approach also complements the exploratory nature of this first-time investigation of the interplay between political persuasion and synchronous online spaces.

Berelson (1952) defines content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication,” (p.18). It is particularly useful in detecting “patterns of similarities and differences,” (Leiss et. al, 1997, p.218) within a large body of data, such as real-time comments from lengthy livestreamed interviews. Content analysis is especially suitable to this study as it contends that there is value in the quantitative profile of a body of text (Rosengren, 1981). The research technique is also versatile (Thomas, 1994) and can be finely calibrated, using rhetoric as analytical lens, to deconstruct the comments into its constituent persuasive elements (Hansen, 1998). Even though content analysis has been criticized for its exclusive focus on manifest content and meaning (Ericson et al., 1991; Sumner, 1979), and that persuasion operates via both manifest and latent elements, recent approaches to content analysis position the method as a reasonable choice of method for studying both manifest and latent content.

Even though Berelson (1952) regards content analysis as a quantitative method, new perspectives on the research method offers a more nuanced perspective (Krippendorff, 1980). In their thorough review of content analysis as a research method, Rossi et al. (2014) find that it is a “technique for analyzing data both quantitatively and qualitatively,” (p.47). They posit that content analysis can not only provide quantitative results but also qualitative ones. In investigating the occurrence of persuasion through manifest content (comments), this content analysis is informed by the concept of rhetoric. As such, this content analysis is a qualitative accumulative content analysis (see Rossi et al., 2014) which goes beyond a simple quantification of rhetorical devices and allows for an accumulative analysis of a collective of rhetorical devices (within a comment) to provide an interpretative result on the latent meaning. For example, the research design will not only count the number of times *antomasias* are used but also count the occurrences of positive or negative connotations, the target and the comment type (definition, question, exhortation) in order to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the type of persuasion.

While the qualitative content analysis will be conducted on the viewertariat comments, a fully qualitative research method will be used on investigating the construction of representative claims by candidates: rhetorical analysis. Given that political performances are “rhetorical situations” (Bitzer, 1999, in Atkins & Finlayson, 2016, p.164) and that representative claims are exemplars of political persuasion, applying rhetorical analysis as an analytical tool seemed justified. Even though structural analysis, discourse analysis and analytical semantics are adequate methods to dissect discourses on a general level (see Burgelin, 1968; Gill, 1996), rhetorical analysis remains the most suitable to analyse the performance of persuasion (see Atkins & Finlayson, 2016; Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 2004). This qualitative research method is particularly useful when examining small samples of data, such political interviews or speeches.

A rhetorical analysis, defined by Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz (2004) as “an examination of how well the components of an argument work together to persuade or move an audience” (p.462), is ideal for examining how representative claims operate persuasively. Given the genres of rhetoric and types of appeals available to orators (see Brandt, 1970; Kennedy, 2007), the representative claims will thus be classified as relying primarily on *ethos*, *pathos* or *logos* appeals as well as using either forensic, epideictic, condemnatory or deliberative rhetoric; the substance of these claims were also examined as they collectively paint a portrait of both the

politician's persuasive intentions and the understanding of the viewertariat, and by extension, voters. This included the identification of "structural elements, tropes, styles of argumentation, speech acts" (Krippendorff, 1980, p.16), linguistic choices, tone, as well as for the construction of each representative claims by combination of SR, CR and COR sub-claims and that of the political issue being represented.

Every attempt to persuade is tailored to a specific audience and context, so that one *ethos* proof may be successful with one audience and fail to persuade another audience, or at a different time or venue. Thus, the context, in terms of timeliness and appropriateness (see Lambert & Landau, 2014), must also be taken into consideration during a rhetorical analysis. It was thus important to have a broad understanding on the political landscape surrounding the by-election campaign in order to adequately gauge the rhetorical validity and strength of representative claims each candidate made in their respective interview.

Such a two-step, mixed-method research design not only uses the strengths of a quantitative approach (studying large body of data, see Berelson, 1952; Leiss et. al, 1997) to complement the limitations of a qualitative approach (interpretative basis on small data samples, see Krippendorff, 1980), but also offers crucial comparative data from the performance of representative claims to their reception by viewertariat members. This two-step research design thus engages with persuasion on both sides of the performance to offer more robust interpretative findings.

### **3.2 Sampling**

Given  $RQ_1$  and  $RQ_2$  and the need to probe into three different types of candidates, this study must first survey amongst the 40 candidates running in the December 2017 By-Election and identify the incumbent, a first-time candidate and a long-time candidate. The selection of candidates is restricted to those who participated in a one-on-one Facebook livestreamed interview by ION News. A cursory overview of all one-on-one interviews with the candidates resulted in three interviews being purposively selected, thus constituting the first sample of data, the three interviews (see bibliography, ION News, 2017b-d).

The live interviews included that of incumbent Roshi Bhadain from the RP, first-time candidate Tania Diolle from the MP, and long-time candidate Arvin Boolell from the PTR – who also went on to win the by-election. The interviews run for 96 minutes, 42 minutes, and 68 minutes

respectively. Bhadain was interviewed at the very start of the campaign, on June 28, with Diolle and Boolell in the second half of the campaign, on October 26 and August 3 respectively.

The interview format, especially against self-published videos or party videos, was selected because it ensured that citizen-users from all political sides could converge and discuss on a neutral communication platform (the Facebook page of ION News), to partake in both accepting and contesting representative claims by the candidates. Party- or candidate-published livestreamed content would have attracted largely a partisan audience, thus potentially reducing the persuasive diversity in the live responses.

### **3.3 Units of Analysis**

Given the selected two-step methodology, this study explored two units of analysis. The first unit of analysis is the representative claim. Representative claims were identified through watching and transcribing each interview. Following Saward (2006), a representative claim (RC) was defined as an explicit attempt at self-representation (SR), at representing a constituency (CR) or at representing the compatibility between the politician and the constituency (COR). Due to the dialogic nature of representative claims, there was no minimum or maximum number of words per representative claims; as such, some were as short as six words and as long as 626 words. Representative claims were also categorized within each interview sample, as SR, CR or COR for analytical reasons.

Overall, Bhadain's interview returned 40 RC, 30 of which were classed as SR, 5 as CR and 5 as COR. Diolle's interview, almost half the length of Bhadain's only returned a total of 21 RC, with 14 SR claims, 3 CR claims and 4 COR claims. Finally, Boolell's interview returned 36 RC, with 25 SR claims, 5 CR claims and 6 COR claims. In total, 97 RC were observed, constituting the first sample of data.

The 97 claims were collated in three Excel sheets with corresponding timestamps for both the start and finish of each claim – each representative claim had unique timeframes of varying lengths and were organised in chronological order (see Annex 1).

The 97 timeframes were then used as parameters within which to capture the second unit of analysis, the real-time comment. Comments were recorded within the different timeframes. Extra 10 seconds were added to the 'finish' timestamp of each claim in order to account for delays between hearing the claim and responding to it. This 10-second window was deemed

sufficiently large to capture responses to representative claims upon early viewing of the interview and live commenting activity.

Using these timeframes reduced the final sample size considerably from the universe of available comments. Out of the 2358 comments on Bhadain's interview, only 897 (38.0% of available comments) fell within the timeframes. Out of the 156 comments on Diolle's interview, only 93 (58.3% of total available) ended up being included. Out of the 975 comments on Boolell's interview, only 388 (39.8% of total available) matched the timeframes. Overall, 1376 comments were collected, thus forming the sample for the second unit of analysis.

### **3.4 Coding**

In order to examine the extent to which the viewertariat engages in political persuasion, the coding frame was informed by the work of Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011) on defining the viewertariat and information-sharing. Moreover, the coding frame was also informed by traditional rhetoric (see Atkins & Finlayson, 2016; Brandt, 1970; Finlayson, 2007; Lunsford & Ruskiewicz, 2004) with a view to capturing persuasive devices and their structures to influence either other members of the viewertariat, viewers as a whole, or even the candidate.

The codebook (see Annex 2), revised from two pilot tests, was finally structured in two parts: context and meaning (see Rapoport, 1969). Contextual data include the time, author (username), type of comment, text (the comment itself), the target, and presence of a piece of information (hyperlink, statistics, date). It is important to note that the usernames were only collected for analytical purposes; as per ethics considerations, the results have been anonymised. The second part, on meaning, relates to both "the substance and the form" (Berelson, 1952, p.149) of the media text and comprise of variables that seek to both quantify and qualify the rhetorical devices employed in the comments. These variables includes purpose of comment (defining, qualifying, exhorting), the argument type (*ethos*, *logos*, *pathos*), rhetorical device (repetition, antithesis, equivocation, *antomasia*, rhetorical question, hyperbole, downplaying), the form (analogy, simile, metaphor), and the language (high-inference language, positive/negative connotations) (see Annex 3 for an application of the codebook).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Once the two-step methodology was applied to both samples, a number of findings were generated. In this chapter, findings are presented with a view to answering research questions *RQ<sub>1</sub>*, *RQ<sub>2</sub>*, *RQ<sub>3</sub>*, and *RQ<sub>4</sub>*.

In order to fully comprehend the results, they will be separated into three sections, pertaining to first-time candidate Diolle, long-time candidate Boolell and incumbent Bhadain. Due to the intricately-linked form and substance of rhetorical texts, findings relating to *RQ<sub>1</sub>* and *RQ<sub>2</sub>* will be presented together under the heading of Rhetorical Analysis for each candidate. The viewertariat's persuasion will then speak to *RQ<sub>3</sub>*; again, these findings will be split per candidate for analytical reasons. A final section, pertaining primarily to *RQ<sub>4</sub>*, will offer an aggregate view of the results for a comparative analysis of the viewertariat behaviour.

### 4.1 First-time candidate Diolle

#### 4.1.1 Rhetorical Analysis

Of the 21 RC made during her interview, Diolle employed 14 SR, 3 CR and 4 COR. Throughout these 21 RC, Diolle made a total of 35 sub-claims, comprised of 12 sub-SR, 12 sub-CR and 11 sub-COR. This shows that even though Diolle's performance was symbolically constructed to privilege her self-representations, she rhetorically constructed her RC in a balanced fashion, using all three types of sub-claims almost at par. As such, it can be argued that Diolle made coherent and complete RC overall, ensuring to persuade viewers by a) presenting herself through her set of self-representations, b) to a specific constituency, defined by her CR and sub-CR claims, and without forgetting the most essential element of the RC, that is to c) explain how her SR is compatible to her CR through her 11 sub-COR claims.

It was interesting to note that the overall structure of the 21 RC were sequenced in a traditional rhetorical ideal, namely, an *exordium*, followed by the *narratio*, *confirmatio* and *peroratio* (see Brandt, 1970). In effect, Diolle opens up by first establishing her *ethos* by exploring the *ethos* of her party, essentially representing herself through her party values and aims, using terms like "political ideology", "political philosophy" and "collegial philosophy". Diolle progressively establishes her character as 'young but experienced', politically knowledgeable, driven by values of honesty, rationality, simplicity, humility and respect, and engaged in ideologies of 'positive politics', consensus-building, deliberative democracy, and new forms of political representation.

By her 6<sup>th</sup> RC, Diolle shifts her attention, moving from the *exordium*, to the *narratio*, painting a portrait of what constituency she seeks to represent. Diolle represents her constituency as “deeply undecided”, “neglected”, seeking to be “inspired” and in need to be given “hope” again. Diolle is here trying to persuade her audience that this state of affairs is the problem is she aspires to resolve. Once she has established the ‘problem’ – the presence of an electoral void – she progresses to her *confirmatio*, in which she argues that she is the ideal representative to fill this void and thus solve the ‘problem’. This is a long persuasive attempt, comprising of RC 13 to 20, where she re-uses some SR in juxtaposition with COR, arguing why and how she is the ideal representative. In this crucial part of her persuasion, Diolle expertly blends SR, CR, anecdotes from campaign activities, policy proposals, and party representations to cement the idea that she is the ideal representative who embodies a “new”, “different” type of politician who can “re-inspire” those in need of hope, one who “listens to the constituents”, acts as the “voice of the constituents” and debates ideas rather than attacks political opponents’ characters.

The crux of her persuasion, her *confirmatio*, lasts until the very end, with Diolle using only 1 final representative claim as her *peroratio*: the summary of her argument. In this final claim, she reminds her audience what she stands for, how she thinks and what her goals are. She here uses repetition as a powerful rhetorical tool, hammering on a recurrent trope throughout her performance: the idea of construction, of growth, building afresh but also re-building with those left-behind and “neglected” by mainstream parties.

Overall, Diolle employs a clear and traditional oratorical structure, arguing that the constituency has been neglected by mainstream parties (her main CR), that she embodies a new form of political representation, one guided by moral principles of justice, collaboration and consensus-building (main SR), finally thus arguing that she is thus the ideal representative for the constituents (main COR). Diolle’s persuasive strength lies in her ability to zoom in on specifics, a trait that both Boolell and Bhadain (for different reasons) do not exhibit. Her simple, almost syllogistic, overarching representative claim is thus, structurally at least, very persuasive. Only an overview of the viewertariat response could nonetheless gauge whether Diolle’s structurally persuasive political performance was convincing to her audience. This is will explored further down.

Diolle’s use of the different genres of rhetoric further positions her performance as substantially and structurally conventional. She uses Forensic, Epideictic, Condemnatory and Deliberative rhetoric in the first half of her performance, while focusing at 80% on Deliberative rhetoric in

the second half. This again demonstrates a performance where the candidate uses different genres to situate and contextualise the performance before using deliberative rhetoric to make proposals and deliberate about how her candidacy would be the most beneficial to the constituents.

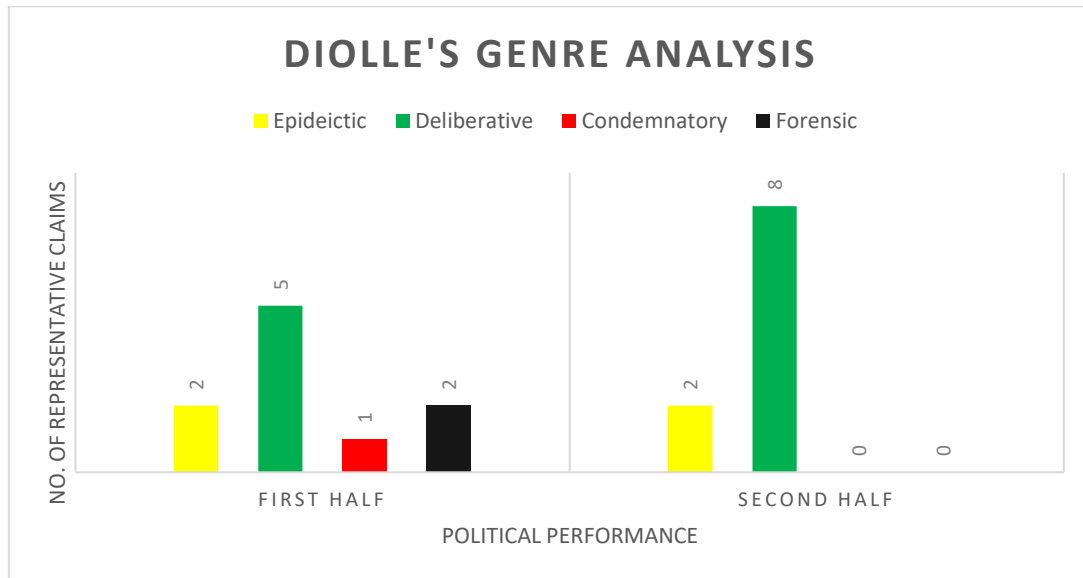


Figure 3 – Diolle’s representative claims per rhetorical genre during performance

It is interesting to note that Diolle uses deliberative rhetoric to explore the beneficial outcomes of her campaign as well as speak about her political ideology (4 RC each), and to a lesser degree, about her political party and political experience (2 RC each). Overall, Diolle shows clear commitment to deliberate about the realm of policy-making rather than mere politicking.

#### *Key persuasive tropes*

The prime persuasive trope Diolle relies on is the idea of construction. She establishes early on the concept, arguing through both personal and party *ethos* that the notion of growth and construction is central to her, to her constituents and thus to the reason for her being the ideal representative in this election. This notion is repeatedly used in reference to her ideology, to the MP’s goals, the observed lack of growth and renewal of the electorate, and how political know-how and trust needs to be built between voters and parties, between citizens and elected representatives.

Diolle’s persuasive approach to career or long-time politicians is diametrically opposed to both Boolell and Bhadain’s. While the public opinion at the time was decisively condemnatory towards long-time politicians who, by virtue of having been in the system so long, lost their ways, lost touch with reality and were thus obsolete and deserving of being replaced by a new

generation of leaders, Diolle takes the opposite stand. She represents older politicians as “those who were here before and who participated in erecting our parliamentary democracy” (trans.), not only paying homage to her political mentors in her party but also making a daring choice given a political landscape where older politicians are popularly referred as dinosaurs. Her stance on the value of political mentors speaks again to elevating her *ethos* as a young but intellectually mature candidate who chooses to avoid reductive criticism and engage in political *construction*, her guiding trope throughout her performance.

Language also acts as a persuasive tool (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016). Diolle makes appropriate linguistic choices which align well with the substance of her RC. She uses a clear, precise and simple language, devoid of typical political jargon rife with vague, indeterminate symbols. While constructing herself as being honest, simple, humble and linguistically accessible to her constituents, she nonetheless asserts her status as a professional political scientist and as a learned and experienced voice by moderately using technical terms like “neophyte”, “parliamentary democracy”, “collegial philosophy”, “statesman” and “electoral sovereignty”.

Even though Diolle displayed a constant relaxed demeanour, there is room to argue that her tone may not have been the most persuasive device in her rhetorical arsenal. Almost monotonous through the entire performance, Diolle failed to convincingly elevate her *ethos* as a serious contender in the election. Her language, elevated at times and accessible most of the time, combined with her casual demeanour projected honesty, humility and understanding – which are not traditionally associated with strength and determination.

#### *4.1.2 Diolle’s Viewertariat Persuasion*

Diolle’s interview garnered low engagement, comparative to both Boolell and Bhadain’s interviews. The 43-minute interview attracted a total of 15 242 viewers (comprising of both lurkers and viewertariat), who left 259 reactions, and 156 comments, averaging to about 1 comment every 20 seconds. The 156 comments constitute the overall viewertariat response and zooming in on RC reduces this sample to 93 viewertariat comments. After filtering out disproportionately partisan comments and non-argumentative ones (like ‘Go Tania!’ Or ‘Tania the best!’), a final sample of 71 comments was analysed.

A real-time viewing of the viewertariat behaviour showed very little exchange between candidate and viewertariat. Low engagement and low persuasive exchanges amongst the viewertariat was also observed. Interestingly, the viewertariat did not respond directly to the political persuasion through agreement or rejection of the RC (only 3 such comments, all

rejections) were observed through the sample. The viewertariat largely behaved as a traditional audience, assuming the position of audience within a political performance with the candidate as performer. Users at times offered passing thoughts on the performer's performance, commenting "No chance", "a PM in the making", or "impressive .. future prime minister" (trans.). Rather than engage with the RC in an interactive and deliberative manner, the viewertariat seemed to prefer consuming the performance as traditional audience members, within a one-to-many communication structure with the candidate as the performer.

Switching the point of reference, and positioning the viewertariat as performer provided valuable insight in terms of viewertariat behaviour.

Even though there was little engagement over specific RC, the viewertariat did engage in political persuasion, but rather than demonstrate overt acceptance or rejection of specific RC, the viewertariat made claims of their own in the form of candidate representations and CR; only 8 comments attempted to persuade on the compatibility of the candidate relative to the constituency.

Of the total sample (n=71), 55 were candidate representations, a significant majority (77.5%) of which attempted to define the candidate. In defining the candidates (n=41), the comments relied on *ethos* appeals most of the time (85.4%). These *ethos* appeals were mainly constructed on claims about the status of the candidate and the candidate's stance and values. Of these 41 definitional representations, 27 contained no high-inference language (HIL); of the 14 which did, 9 were positive HIL and 5 negative HIL. As expected, given her status as a first-time candidate, barely any *ethos* appeal were made regarding her track record. Of the 4 comments arguing about her track record, all were referring to what she had said during the interview rather than any tangible political track record.

Overall (n=71), only 13 comments included logical fallacies (18.3%), with 8 dogmatic appeals, 3 'Guilt by association' fallacies, and 2 *Ad hominem* attacks. Of all comments, 69.0% did not employ HIL. Of the 22 comments that did (30.1%), half were positive HIL and half negative.

All of these results point to a moderate viewertariat, who mostly sought to persuade others (both lurkers and viewertariat) about the character of the candidate, more precisely about Diolle's status, and values and stance. Her status as a young candidate is evident in comments like "Need to give chance to youngsters like her" (trans.) or "Hats off! The youth is here" (trans.). Comments about her values and stance argued about her intelligence, experience, competency and honesty. Largely moderate language was also a key trait of Diolle's

viewertariat, pointing to a group of citizen-users who are less inclined to indulge in strong opinions (see Gambetta, 1998). This is substantiated by the extremely low presence of the name-calling tool of *antomasia*, which was only used twice (albeit both times with negative connotations). Of the rhetorical tools that targeted the candidate (equivocation, *antomasia*, rhetorical question and *hypophora*), 5 had positive connotations and 7 negative ones – still of little consequence amidst the overall sample and spread of comments.

Overall, an analysis of the different members of the viewertariat revealed that the 71 comments were left by 47 users, who left 1.5 comments on average. More than half of the viewertariat (56.3%) commented only once while only the most vocal 10 percent participated more than the average, that is, left 2 or more comments. This top 10 percent included 7 users, with an average of 4.4 comments within this bracket. Amongst all users, the top commenter (male), with 14 comments, demonstrated clear and moderate pro-Diolle sentiment, seeking to provide constructive feedback to Diolle and actively seeking to engage in a direct one-on-one communication with the candidate. The second and third top commenters, with 4 comments each, were anti-Diolle and moderate pro-Diolle respectively. They were also male users, along with the other 4 users within the most vocal 10 percent group.

An overview of the specific performance of the top 10 most vocal reveals that these most prolific members of the viewertariat exhibited more moderate persuasive discourses, using less dogmatic appeals (6.5% compared to 11.3% overall) and abstaining more from resorting to rhetorical fallacies (90.3% compared to 81.7% overall). Although the use of HIL was on par between the top 10 most vocal and the average viewertariat member (71.0% and 69.0% respectively), the most vocal were significantly more likely to use HIL with positive connotations than the average user, with two-thirds of the top 10 members using HIL with positive connotations against only half of all viewers using such HIL. It can thus be deduced that Diolle's overall viewertariat may have been slightly skewed towards positive representations by the most vocal viewertariat members. It remains that, overall, Diolle's viewertariat exhibited moderate political persuasion with little to no polarization, and with little signs of aggressivity and uncivility in their persuasive discourses.

## **4.2 Long-time candidate Boolell**

### *4.2.1 Rhetorical Analysis*

Of the 36 RC made during his interview, Boolell relied on 25 SR, 5 CR and 6 COR. Throughout these 36 RC, he made a total of 62 sub-claims, comprised of 35 sub-SR, 19 sub-CR and 8 sub-

COR. Unlike Diolle's RC, observations here point to a less balanced and thus less persuasively effective use of RC. By choosing to focus primarily on sub-SR (56.5% of all sub-claims), it can be deduced that Boolell's way of persuading his audience revolved around making (at least more than half of the time) claims about himself. At almost a ratio of 4:2:1 between SR:CR:COR, Boolell privileged persuading about his self-representations twice as much as persuading his audience of what constituency he intends to represent, which again was twice as salient as the most crucial persuasive element of a representative claim, the compatibility between the representative (portrayed in the SR and sub-SR claims) and the constituency (portrayed by the CR and sub-CR claims). This speaks about the latent intentions and views about what political representation is about; this will be taken up in the next chapter.

Unlike Diolle, Boolell did not use a traditional rhetorical structure with an *exordium-narratio-confirmatio-peroratio* sequence and delved from the outset into the *narratio*, going over the problems facing the electorate. By starting with an overview of the issues "plaguing" Mauritius in RC 1 to 7, Boolell seeks to persuade about the sad state of affairs, mentioning three times that he "is worried" at the gloomy socio-political landscape. Albeit an unconventional way to open a rhetorical performance, starting with the problem statement points to two noteworthy deductions: a) he does not believe it is necessary to start by establishing trust with his audience (which the *exordium* would have sought to achieve), probably given his status as a long-time politician, and b) he quickly sets the tone for his performance, almost forcing a representation of Mauritius (as worthy of 'worry') as point of departure to his audience. This can be interpreted as a framing tactic (see Entman, 1998), establishing the bounds of the debate within which the performance is then to operate and to be assessed.

After his *narratio*, Boolell attempts, in RC 8 to 13, to pivot from the problem statement to solving the identified problem by means of his candidacy being the ideal one to solve the identified problem. In those claims, he resorts the typical Sawardian representative claim, constructed almost so explicitly it requires little interpretation. In the following excerpt,

Secondly, what concerns the constituents is road congestion – and I should remind you that, during the Labour Party era, we constructed several by-passes, St Jean-New Road, Phoenix-Flic en Flac. And then, they don't have a market fair... During the Labour era, we had identified the site to erect such a market fair... (trans.)

Boolell uses arguments of definition, where he defines, depicts and represents the concerns of the constituency as 'road congestion' and an 'absence of a market fair'. He employs the

rhetorical tool of comparisons, mentioning the constituents' concerns and rapidly contrasting them with what he represents (the solutions). This is a clear example of how, by representing constituency concerns and representing himself through PTR policies, Boolell is arguing that he is the 'best' representative of both the constituency so represented. Although he does not explicitly make the claim of being the ideal representative, his two sub-claims, b) about his constituency's concerns, juxtaposed to b) previous PTR policies which can resolve those concerns, lead to the only conclusion that c) he is therefore the best representative of that constituency.

The *confirmatio* takes a turn when the interviewer challenges Boolell's credentials, forcing the latter to embark on a delayed but lengthy *exordium*. From RC 14 to 33, Boolell is fully immersed into persuading viewers about his standing as a candidate. This is where the crux of his persuasion rests: on his self-representations.

When representing himself, Boolell employs a range of rhetorical tools, ranging from quotation, numerical rhetoric, to experience, track record, party association and language. He uses words like "accessibility", "humility", "proximity", "simplicity" and "hard worker" to depict himself. A significant part of his self-representation revolves around associations to the PTR whose "strength", "history", "legacy", "international recognition" and status as the "party of the nation" are hailed as powerful *ethos* appeals.

Aside from quoting the World Bank and Alstom (French multinational transportation company), Boolell uses language to project a specific *ethos*, one of experience and sophistication. He uses technical terms in relation to Parliamentary proceedings and drug-prevention programmes as well as substantiates his claims with facts and figures from a range of sources as evidence of his experience and suitability as a candidate for a seat in the National Assembly. Boolell's mastery of language is what differentiates him from Diolle; he frequently uses phrases like "transcending the barriers", "cross-cutting themes", "process of restructuration" and "cohesive strength" to further elevate his *ethos*.

Language is not always his most effective rhetorical tool though. In fact, Boolell frequently relies on symbolically or auditorily complete rhetoric which nonetheless rests on blurry or even missing premises. These missing premises take the form of "so that I can be what I am today" or "What we did in Rose Belle, that is what they appreciate in me", where Boolell omits to furnish the premises 'what *is* he actually?' and 'what did he actually *do* in Rose Belle?' respectively. These auditorily complete rhetorical units may sound right to a partisan audience

but could position Boolell's persuasive position vulnerable to counter-persuasion. This will be explored in the viewertariat section.

Symbolic rhetoric is another a recurrent trope and, while less vulnerable to rejection and counter-persuasion by the viewertariat, is valuable in understanding Boolell's persuasive techniques. When Boolell says that he wants "a new society for a new Mauritius" or wants to "build the country because the country begs to be built for a new society", he is employing strong symbolic rhetoric that, albeit sounding complete or lofty to the audience, is devoid of real meaning since he does not provide any explanation for what the 'new society' looks like nor 'how the country should be built'. Such empty rhetoric is unfortunately frequently used by Boolell, whose persuasion ultimately seems to revolve, to a significant extent, on empty, cosmetic rhetoric (see Lurie, 2014).

Unlike Diolle, Boolell did not attempt to define his constituency in any definitive or precise manner. Rather than strategically representing himself in relation to a specific constituency, he used equivocation to amplify the concerns of the electorate to the concerns of the population as a whole. This rhetorical tool speaks to the persuasive attempt at convincing viewers of the national scope of the PTR, thereby blurring the candidate/party and constituency electorate/national electorate distinctions. He allows himself to speak on behalf of the youth, of vulnerable and poor families, of parents, and of the nation as one entity throughout his performance, each time using arguments about his track record to convince his audience of his credibility as both ideal candidate and representative of the electorate.

Unlike Diolle, Boolell's use of rhetorical genres was not deliberative-focused. Rather than deliberate on policies (although he did mention the spread of drugs, party financing and the economy), Boolell's core argument was self-celebratory. He uses 14 epideictic claims (half of which were about himself, three claims celebrating the PTR, and three celebrating the Mauritian population), 10 of which were in the second half of his performance – where the crux of his argument happens.

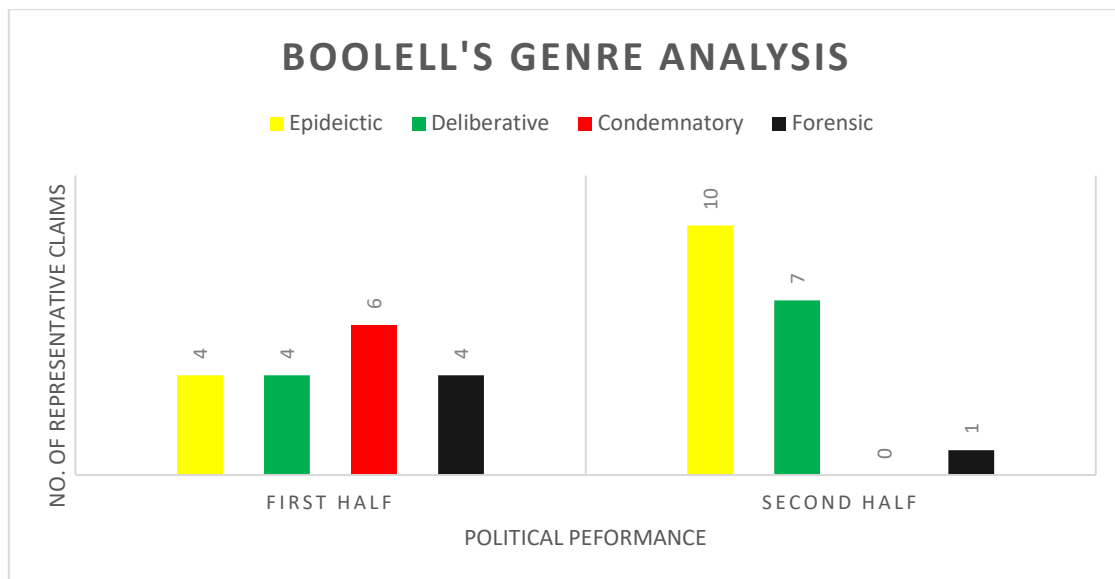


Figure 4- Boolell's representative claims per rhetorical genre during performance

As shown in Figure 4, although Boolell uses deliberative claims in the second half (at 38.9 %), he focuses on epideictic rhetoric (at 55.6%) in crafting his main argument: celebrating himself as the ideal candidate. This aligns with findings about the structure of his overall argument whereby Boolell embarks on a lengthy *exordium* well within the performance when the interviewer challenges his credentials.

#### 4.2.2 Boolell's Viewertariat Persuasion

Boolell's interview garnered robust engagement, especially in relation to Diolle's interview. The 68-minute interview attracted a total of 19 199 viewers (both lurkers and viewertariat), who left 456 reactions, and 975 comments, averaging to about 1 comment every 4 seconds. Only capturing comments left when RC were made reduces the sample of 975 comments to 388 viewertariat comments. Further filtering out disproportionately partisan and non-argumentative comments, a final sample of 328 comments was analysed.

A real-time viewing of the viewertariat behaviour showed some direct exchange between candidate and viewertariat, with the latter showing clear acceptance or rejection of representative claims. For example, when Boolell mentions the worrying state of the national debt (t = 00:14:37), users respond with "Lol, he is talking about debt, they left us a national debt of 245 billion" (t = 00:15:10) and "he left us with a 245 billion debt" (t = 00:15:43). The viewertariat is able to zoom in on the *logos* proof Boolell is using, the national debt, and counter-argue by using *logos* proofs of their own, like the national debt figure at the end of PTR mandate in 2010. Irrespective of the veracity of the figures used, the viewertariat here

shows an acute understanding of argumentation and is seemingly able to reject the performer's argument in a matter of seconds.

While Boolell's viewertariat showed some direct acceptance and rejection of RC, it seemed more eager to communicate amongst its members *about* Boolell rather than *to* Boolell himself. Of the comments representing Boolell (n=215), 129 were definitions (60.0%) while only 64 (40 exhortations and 24 questions), that is 29.8% of that sample, showed some type of effort at communicating directly with the candidate. In other words, the viewertariat was twice as likely to engaged in many-to-many communication (defining the candidate to others) than many-to-one communication, from viewertariat to candidate.

Exploring those attempts at re-representing Boolell sheds light into the viewertariat's persuasive power. Almost all of the 129 definitions (93.0% or 120 definitions) made use of an *ethos* argument, relying primarily on 'status', 'track record' and 'values and stance', with 40, 37 and 20 such *ethos*-driven definitions respectively. Of the 120 *ethos* definitions, almost two-thirds (60.8%) included HIL which was mostly (86.3%) negative in connotation. Despite an almost 50-50 split between negative connotations (52.5%) on one hand and neutral and positive connotations (47.5%) on the other, it is interesting to note that only 30 *ethos* definitions relied on rhetorical fallacies (2 Bandwagon appeals, 7 *Ad hominem* attacks, 15 'Guilt by association' arguments, 6 Dogmatic appeals) and only 32 included the use of *antomasias* (although all of them were associated with negative connotations). *Antomasias* like "Macaronisaurus", "Dinosaur", "dada" (local vernacular for 'old man'), despite being derogatory, are name-calling tropes rooted in facts (about a past scandal, political affiliations and age) and thus do not constitute entirely uncivil discourse. Overall then, these findings point to two essential traits of Boolell's viewertariat: a) while the viewertariat seemed polarized between partisans and opponents almost at par with each other, b) there was a relatively civil discourse (low reliance on rhetorical fallacies used as a proxy for civility) overall when re-representing Boolell.

Overall, the viewertariat comprised of 323 comments with users classes as persuaders, 3 as both persuader and persuadee, and 2 as unclear. No comment was from a user that sought to only be persuaded; they were all actively engaged in political performances within the live thread. It is noteworthy to point out the significant discrepancy between levels of participation in viewertariat performances. While the bottom 50% of the viewertariat commented only once, the most vocal 10 percent accounted for nearly 60% of all comments. These 8 most active users collectively posted 194 comments, with an average of 24 comments per user.

As shown in Table 1, amongst the top 8 commenters, anti-Candidate and anti-PTR sentiment was dominant. The only pro-Boolell and pro-PTR voices were from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most active commenters whose participations were well below the average of 24 within the most vocal 10 percent. In aggregated form, the most vocal 10 percent demonstrated anti-Boolell and anti-PTR sentiment nearly 6 times more than pro-Boolell and pro-PTR. This finding will be explored in the following chapter.

*Table 1- Boolell's top 10 percent most vocal viewertariat*

<i>Viewertariat member</i>	<i>No. of comments</i>	<i>Overall stance</i>
Top commenter (male)	43	Anti-Boolell
Second (female)	34	Anti-PTR
Third (male)	29	Anti-Boolell
Fourth (male)	24	Anti-PTR
Fifth (male)	24	Anti-Boolell & Anti-PTR
Sixth (male)	17	Pro-Boolell
Seventh (male)	12	Anti-Boolell & Anti-PTR
Eighth (male)	11	Pro-PTR

A comparative analysis between the top 10 percent most vocal and the viewertariat as a whole reveals that the top 10 percent were somewhat more inclined to use ‘Guilt by association’ fallacies (9.8%) than the viewertariat overall (6.4%); the top 10 percent was also, interestingly, less likely to use dogmatic appeals than the viewertariat overall (5.7% to 9.1%). The most significant difference between the most vocal members and the average member is the use of HIL. The top 10 percent used HIL at 50.5% while the average member used it at 43.0%. Finally, while the top 10 used HIL with almost always negative connotations (93.9%), the average member only used HIL with negative connotations at 84.4%, showing that the top 10 percent, while not engaging in significantly different level of civility (as measured by the use of rhetorical fallacies), does engage in a more negative tone than the average member, albeit not to an overly significant degree.

There is thus little room to deduce that the top 10 most vocal viewertariat skewed the tone, narrative and level of civility of Boolell’s overall viewertariat performance. Overall, then, the viewertariat showed poor favourability of the candidate, using negative HIL in almost every other comment.

### 4.3 Incumbent candidate Bhadain

#### 4.3.1 Rhetorical Analysis

Bhadain's political performance is structured very differently from both Diolle's (clear, traditional, oratorical speech structure) and Boolell's (more contemporary, problem-solution-pitch strategy). Bhadain, similar to Boolell, opens with the *narratio*, depicting at length (from RC 1 to 14) the problems plaguing Mauritius. It is in this early part of his performance that his scare tactics and amplification tools are mostly used. After his lengthy *narratio*, Bhadain proposes the solution (again similar to Boolell's structure) which he believes is the by-election; in RC 15 to 25, Bhadain represents the by-election as the ultimate solution, a powerful 'gift' that he has bestowed upon his constituents. It is in this second act that Bhadain resorts to prophetic and paternalistic tones, carefully and persuasively depicting himself as the saviour or benefactor of both constituency and country.

It is after his *confirmatio* that Bhadain's performance diverges from Boolell's problem-solution-pitch structure. Instead of embarking on making his 'pitch' (persuading people of his ability to solve the problem), he goes back to his *narratio* and engages in more representations of problem. This move allows Bhadain to contemporaneously remind his audience of the problems requiring attention (debt, infrastructure and political renewal) while also use his track record in Parliament and as a government minister to embark on a much awaited *exordium* – crucial in establishing trust with his audience (Brandt, 1970). Not only is this *exordium* too late in the performance to serve its purpose, but its substance does not clearly position Bhadain as the ideal representative of the constituency. Using his track record in Parliament actually reminds his audience of his ties to the 'corrupt' government he seeks to denounce – this will prove to be a weak point in his persuasive discourse, one which the viewertariat will exploit.

A significant observation is Bhadain's heavy use of Forensic rhetoric, which he uses as par with deliberative rhetoric (with 14 RC each). As predicted, all his forensic rhetoric comprises of either claims about recent Parliamentary actions (6 RC) or ministerial achievements (8 RC). This is not surprising for an incumbent candidate seeking re-election; it is nonetheless surprising that Bhadain associates himself so much with a government he otherwise attempts to denounce.

From RC 32 to the very last one, 40, Bhadain tangents back on problems and solutions, engaging in what seems like an early *peroratio*. He again reminds his audience of the dangers

looming over Mauritius, positioning the by-election as the ultimate solution while reminding his audience that he is the one to have made the by-election possible. Therefore, unlike Diolle and Boolell, Bhadain's overarching representative claim is a revisited tripartite claim: i) he constructs his constituency (Constituency No. 18 and Mauritius as a whole) as endangered, then ii) represents the by-election as the ideal solution (in lieu of self-representations the ideal solution to the problem), and iii) then argues that he is the ideal representative because he is the one who made the by-election possible in the first place (his revisited compatibility representation). This is demonstrated by his reliance on deliberative claims on the significance of the by-election; of the 14 deliberative claims, 8 focused on the by-election.

Bhadain's political persuasion thus ultimately rests on his ability to convince that his election-as-solution sub-claim is in fact *the* solution to the problem and that he is in fact responsible for this solution. As explored below, Bhadain relies to a large extent on rhetorical ownership – using rhetorical devices to claim and reclaim responsibility over policies and successes while rejecting and distancing political failures from his track record.

#### *Structure & claims*

Of the 40 RC made during his interview, Bhadain constructed 30 around SR, 5 on CR, and 5 on COR. Throughout these 40 RC, he also made a total of 73 sub-claims, comprised of 48 sub-SR, 20 sub-CR and 5 sub-COR. Similar to Boolell, findings from the rhetorical analysis of Bhadain's political performance point to a skewed representative claim structure. Like Boolell, Bhadain also chose to focus on self-representations as a persuasive tool but the ratio of sub-SR to sub-CR to sub-COR, of almost 10:4:1, shows how the link between the representative and the electorate is perceived as even less important, less relevant and less useful in his political persuasion. According to Saward's understanding of representative claims (2006), Bhadain failed to present a coherent tripartite representative claim but rather sought to persuade his audience of his credentials almost 10 times more than seeking to persuade that he is the ideal representative for a specific constituency.

It is important to note that even though Bhadain used 20 sub-CR claims, the majority of these claims were strategically used not in an effort to construct an imagined constituency he would be the best representative of but rather in an effort to point to himself as the ideal representative of constituency interests (which are normally instances of self-representations). Effectively, Bhadain frequently blurs the line between CR and SR, using quotations from his constituency

as an additional way to construct himself as the ideal representative. For example, when saying “Everyone I meet when I go door-to-door, well they tell me only one thing; they tell me ‘we need to get you back into Parliament’” or even, “You come to our doorsteps to tells us that you have the future of our kids at heart”. In both these constituency representations, Bhadain blends CR and SR, in an effort, it seems, to expedite the persuasiveness of his representativeness and further amplify his constructed status as the ideal representative.

### *Key tropes*

His overt and recurrent focus on himself is further consolidated by his abundance of SR and sub-SR claims. While Bhadain uses terms like “self-less”, “honest”, “daring”, “convictions”, “dutiful”, “patriotic”, “knowledgeable” (in economics, parliament, law, constituency characteristics), it is his use of third-person to refer to himself that characterizes his distinctive *ethos* as confident (or over-confident to some) and proud (or arrogant to others). In one of these references, Bhadain, saying “because Roshi Bhadain incarnates renewal, Roshi Bhadain incarnates alternance, Roshi Bhadain incarnates a new thing that has never existed all this time, since Ramgoolam, Jugnauth, Boolell, et cetera in Mauritius” (trans.), inadvertently damages, more than helps, his *ethos* as a humble and down-to-earth candidate, while simultaneously pointing to one of the key tropes of his political performance: amplification.

When Bhadain claims to personify what has never existed since pre-independence Mauritius, he is actively seeking to amplify his *ethos* as the ideal representative, as the single ‘best’ choice for the electorate. Throughout his performance, he uses amplificatory rhetorical devices like singularity (as in the previous quote) and hyperboles like “it is so important for our country”, “everything I have told them is at stake”, and “putting everything into perspective” where he seeks to persuade his audience that the election is an ‘either-or’ scenario, where “Good will triumph over Evil” (trans.).

His use of amplification is frequently complemented by a prophetic tone, together crafting his *ethos* of the saviour of the constituency. He uses divine or providential terminology, constructing his choices as “taking the right path” and arguing that “when you are a person who is fighting for a noble cause, for a just cause, when your *niyat* [Hindi word for intention] or your intention is good, no one can stop you from achieving your objective.” He uses divine analogies, citing the Quran and Bible, and even narrating a story of him meeting a “Hafeez” [Urdu word for Muslim priest] who told him about God’s helping hand in elections, and how

the “will of the people is the will of God” (trans.) and that God will bless constituents who choose to do the right thing.

While Bhadain’s tone is certainly prophetic at specific moments in his political performances, it constantly defaults to paternalism, blending the ‘saviour’ and ‘care-taker’ *ethos* into one father-figure portrayal. His paternalistic tone is evidenced by his second key rhetorical trope: ownership. He constantly reminds his audience that he is the reason that they are now able to use their vote to “change the future of Mauritius for the next 30, 40 years” (trans.), hammering down on his essentiality in “re-giving the inhabitants of Belle Rose-Quatre Bornes their right to vote” (trans.). He frequently reclaims ownership of governmental achievements, reminding his audience that he is the reason Mauritius received Rs 12.7 billion from India, that he made it possible because he negotiated and brought back home this ‘gift’ which then went on to subsidise household gas prices. From his track record in the financial services sector and as a legislator, Bhadain carefully and convincingly takes ownership of major political achievements and proudly wears these constructed political successes as medals of honour. Using impressively wide numerical rhetoric further consolidates his grip on the ownership of governmental successes; Bhadain uses statistics regarding the contribution of foreign direct investment in Mauritius’ GDP, recounts the millions and billions in negotiations about numerous national projects, and gives the number of families affected by an episode of financial collapse, to the unit, claiming to have helped “11 401 families amongst the 16 341 total” (trans.).

The importance of language as a rhetorical tool is also demonstrated by his use of combative and adversarial lexicon. He calls the election a “fight between the dinosaurs and the renewal” (trans.), arguing that he has “fought against everything that is wrong in the political system in Mauritius” (trans.), that everyone is positioning themselves to defeat him in this election. His use of such lexicon is even more persuasive given its juxtaposition to scare tactics (see Lunsford & Ruskiewicz, 2004), another significant trope in Bhadain’s persuasive arsenal.

Not only does Bhadain rhetorically construct himself as a saviour, care-taker, and father-figure who is pitted against adversaries set only to defeat him, but he also amplifies his *raison d’etre* given the gravity, severity and impending doom facing not only the constituency, but Mauritius as a whole. Throughout his performance, Bhadain reminds his audience that “the time is of the utmost essence and that everybody knows that” (trans.); that “the country is on the very edge of a precipice” (trans.); and that “they [the government] are going to kill people in Quatre

Bornes” (trans.). He frequently seeks to persuade his audience about the grave danger of massive debt, of a country that is on the brink of financial collapse, and of projects that will jeopardize the future of the youth, using words like death, uncertainty and “greatest gamble in Mauritian history” (trans.) – essentially crafting an urgent call to action by use of hyperboles, amplification, dogmatism, strong inference language and scare tactics.

#### 4.3.2 *Bhadain’s Viewertariat Persuasion*

Between all three political performances, it was Bhadain’s interview that garnered the most engagement. The 96-minute interview attracted a total of 46 196 viewers (both lurkers and viewertariat), who left 1419 reactions, and 2358 comments, averaging to about 1 comment every 2.5 seconds. Capturing only comments left when RC were made reduces the sample of 2358 comments to 897 viewertariat comments. Further filtering out disproportionately partisan and non-argumentative comments, a final sample of 556 comments were analysed.

A real-time viewing of the viewertariat behaviour showed, similar to Boolell’s viewertariat, some direct exchange between candidate and viewertariat, with the latter showing clear acceptance or rejection of representative claims. This direct exchange is clear when Bhadain (t=00:34:50 to 00:35:30) uses strong religious symbolism to represent himself only to be met by ridicule with “You’re the incarnation of *mahabarat* [sacred Hindu text] lol” (trans.) at t=00:35:02 or “*Niyyat* [intention in Hindi] as well!!!” (trans.) at t=00:35:16, or even “*Mowlana pandit* [Muslim and Hindi words for priest] Rossi [Bhadain] hahaha” at t=00:35:42. Similar to Boolell’s viewertariat, users responded to the candidate’s claims, sometimes even using the same rhetoric in an effort at counter-persuasion. In these three comments, the viewertariat appropriates the religious inference language Bhadain has been using in his self-representations to counter-argue these same representative claims.

Even though some comments were evidently made in direct response to RC, it was interesting to note the viewertariat was mostly involved in responding to Bhadain’s RC in tangential ways. Commenters seemed to listen to the claims but rather than respond directly by either accepting or rejecting them, they would use these claims as points of departure for tangentially related concerns. These tangents invited other commenters to do the same, resulting in numerous instances where the comment thread became a dialogical space with its own agenda; one no longer in response to the political performance but in effect creating and sustaining a new political performance, where the viewertariat repositions itself as performer and audience at the same time. The connecting link remains representative claims, where commenters engage

in making (un)representative claims, seeking to persuade others of the Bhadain’s *ethos*. In fact, overall, Bhadain’s viewertariat was observed as active, dynamic, and engaged in crosstalk, primarily from viewertariat-to-viewertariat but sometimes from viewertariat-to-candidate. The key focus of the viewertariat remained the candidate throughout.

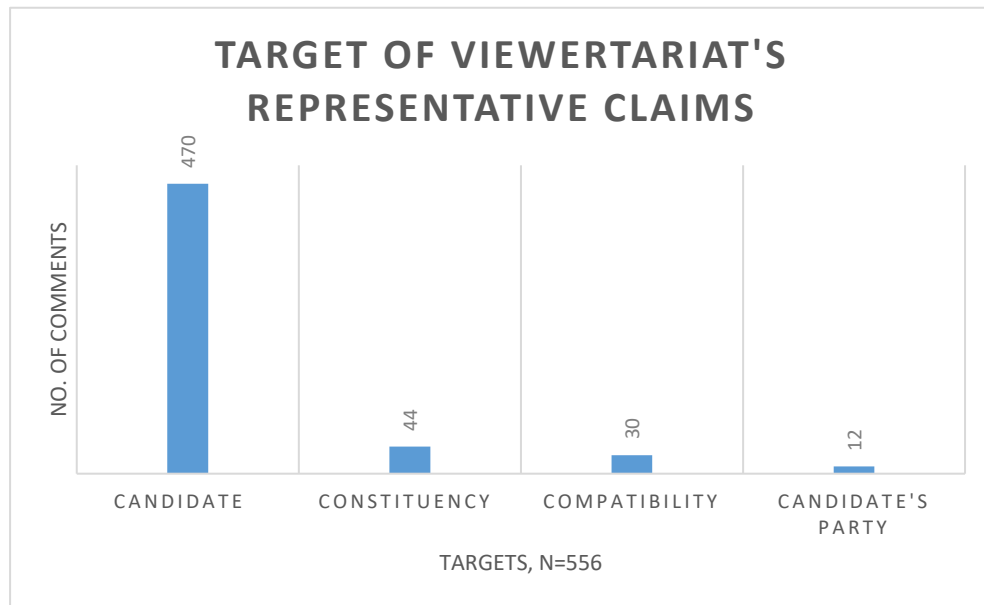


Figure 5 - Target of V-Bhadain

As shown in Figure 5, Bhadain was the subject of more than 80% of the viewertariat’s RC. It is important to acknowledge that 146 comments were excluded from the sample for analysis due to them making claims about neither the candidate, the constituency, nor the compatibility of both candidate and constituency. It is nonetheless valuable to note that these 146 excluded comments comprised of RC in the following manner: 34 on ION News, 34 Government, 17 Policy matters (mainly railway infrastructure), 13 Boolell, and 12 Other political parties. The ‘Candidate’s Party’ target was included in the sample given the observed reliance of candidates to use their respective parties as basis for self-representations.

Of the 470 comments about Bhadain, a majority (55.7%) were arguments of definition, seeking to define or re-define Bhadain. The second most used argument type was the rhetorical question with only 65 comments and the exhortation, in third, with 59 comments.

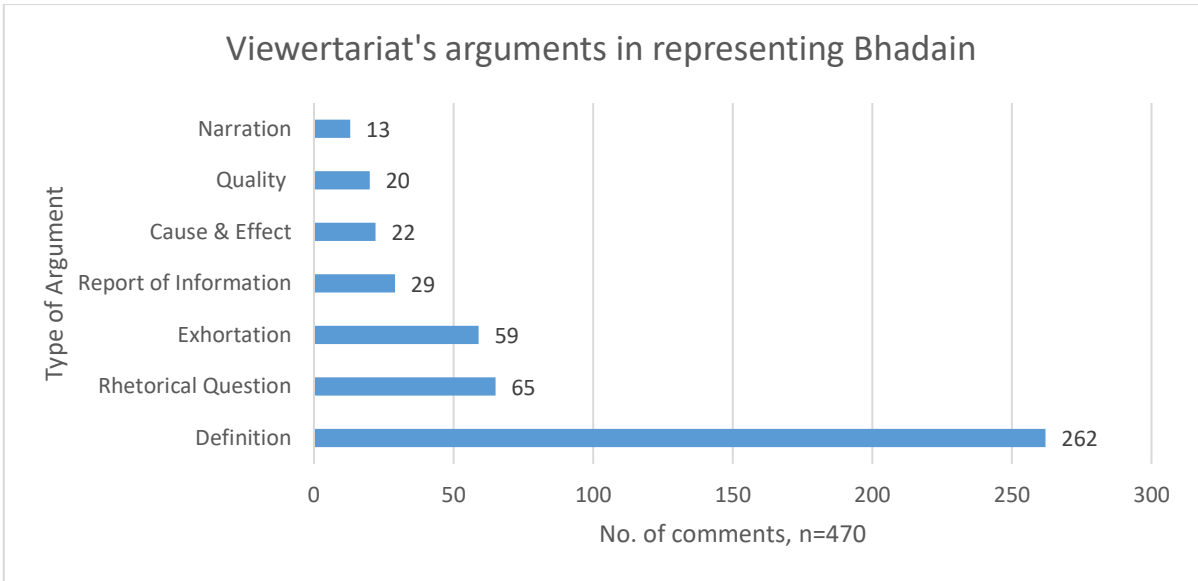


Figure 6 - Argument type in representing Bhadain

Of those 262 definitional claims, an overwhelming 95.8% relied on *ethos* appeals, with only 8 comments relying on *logos* appeals, and finally only 3 comments on *pathos* appeals. It is evident at this point that the main objective of Bhadain’s viewertariat was to actively engage in persuasion about Bhadain himself, focusing almost exclusively on his character as object of persuasion.

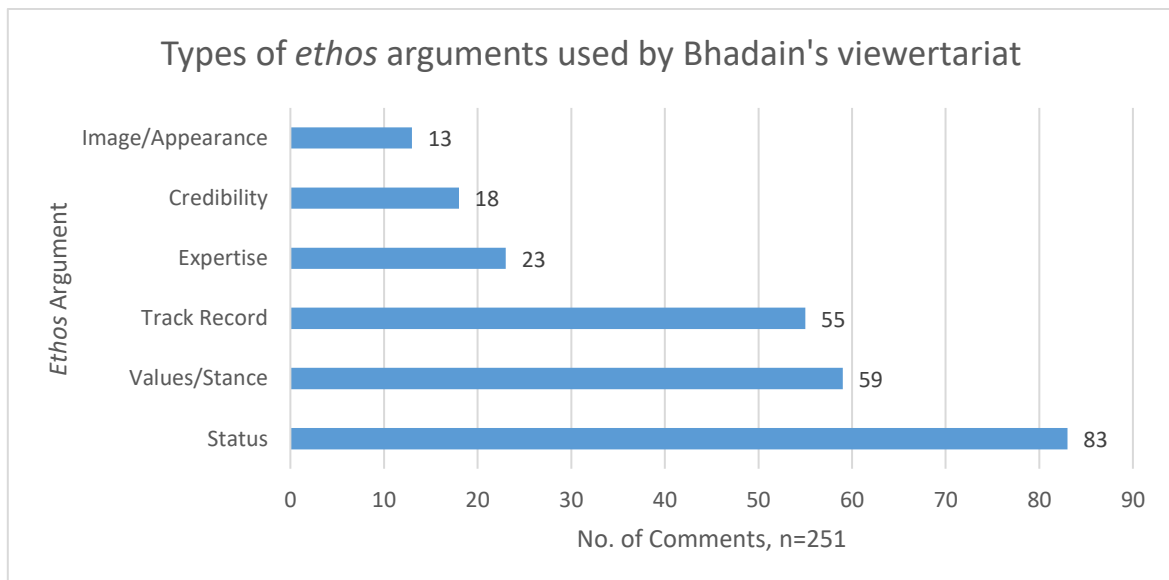


Figure 7 - Ethos arguments used in defining Bhadain

Status was the most used *ethos* argument in viewertariat’s RC about Bhadain’s character. Comments like “Saint mister the saint” (trans.) or “The greatest show man” employ rhetorical *ethos* appeals of status, as a saint and showman respectively, to define Bhadain. Interestingly, of these 83 status arguments, 24 comprised of *Ad hominem* attacks, 25 Dogmatic appeals, and

only 32 did not include rhetorical fallacies. Comments like “The new crazy *mamou* [local vernacular for ‘old uncle’]” (trans.) employ a status argument (an uncle, a familiar elderly figure) and append an *Ad hominem* attack (use of the adjective crazy) to represent Bhadain as unfit for political office. The high presence of rhetorical fallacies in these status arguments alone point to an overly aggressive viewertariat. In fact, 15.1% of all comments (n=556) included an *Ad hominem* attack; this is more than twice the amount of such rhetorical attacks observed in Boolell’s viewertariat, and five times more than those observed in Diolle’s viewertariat.

The tone adopted by Bhadain’s viewertariat was evidently less moderate and more polarized than Boolell’s. Of the 251 character definitions, commenters primarily used equivocations (n=60) and *antomasias* (n=44) as rhetorical device. While the equivocations were relatively moderate (with 14 positive and 24 negative connotations among the 42 containing HIL), the *antomasias* seemed, as a rhetorical device, to be reserved for derogatory name-calling. Out of the 44 *antomasias*, 43 contained HIL, of which 37 had negative connotations against only 4 positive connotations (2 were coded as unclear). *Antomasias* like ‘trash’, ‘dinosaur’, ‘thief’, and ‘liar’ were used to describe Bhadain. One commenter used ‘*hyposaur*’ as *antomasia* in a clever attempt at defining Bhadain as both a *hypocrite* and a *dinosaur* – itself an *antomasia* to imply the obsolescence of ‘old politics’. The level of derogatory name-calling was especially high in Bhadain’s viewertariat.

An overall look at all 251 *ethos* definitions offers a clear understanding of the viewertariat behaviour. Nearly half of all these character definitions (121 comments) included HIL, of which 86 included negative connotations; only 26 were positive connotations while 9 were coded as unclear. Overall, a similar picture emerges: of the full sample (n=556), 38.5% included HIL. Of these 214 HIL comments, 43 had positive connotations, 155 negative ones, and 16 were coded as unclear. Juxtaposed to earlier findings about the level of aggressivity (measured through the use of *Ad hominem* attacks against the candidate), the tendency to use politically injurious HIL further consolidates the overall conclusion that Bhadain’s viewertariat engaged in an aggressive, borderline uncivil counter-persuasion strategy aimed primarily at the candidate himself.

The viewertariat was composed of 318 different commenters, who left an average of 2.8 comments. Unlike both Diolle’s and Boolell’s viewertariat, less than half of Bhadain’s viewertariat (44.7%) only commented once. Again in contrast to others, Bhadain’s most vocal

10 percent viewertariat only contributed to 45.6% of all comments, with an average of almost 8 comments per commenter within the top 10 percent.

The top half of the most prolific commenters (those who commented more than 8 times, the average of the top 10 most vocal viewertariat) were individually analysed.

Table 2 - Bhadain's top half most vocal viewertariat

<i>Viewertariat member</i>	<i>No. of comments</i>	<i>Overall stance</i>
Top commenter (male)	22	Pro-Bhadain
Second (male)	17	Anti-Bhadain
Third (male)	14	Anti-Bhadain
Fourth (male)	14	Anti-Bhadain
Fifth (male)	12	Anti-Bhadain
Sixth (male)	12	Pro-Bhadain
Seventh (female)	11	Anti-Bhadain, Pro-PTR
Eighth (female)	9	Anti-Bhadain
Ninth (male)	9	Pro-Bhadain
Tenth (male)	9	Anti-Bhadain
Eleventh (male)	8	Moderate Anti-Bhadain
Twelfth (male)	8	Anti-Bhadain

A closer look at these top 12 commenters reveals that of the 145 comments they collectively left, two-thirds (66.9%) did not include a rhetorical fallacy while only 18.6% contained *Ad hominem* attacks and 9.7% contained dogmatic appeals. These figures, in comparison to the proportions of similar fallacies within the viewertariat (69.4% of all comments did not include a rhetorical fallacy; 15.1% contained *Ad hominem attacks*; and 9.0% contained dogmatic appeals) as a whole point to the conclusion that the top commenters did not have much influence in skewing the viewertariat's behaviour. In fact, it seems the viewertariat as a whole engaged in rather similar claim-making.

#### 4.4 Comparative Viewertariat Persuasions

Comparing the overall viewertariats' political performances shines light on key similarities and differences between each one and attempts to answer RQ4. A key trait shared by all three groups of viewertariat, Diolle's vierwertriat (V-Diolle), Boolell's viewertariat (V-Boolell) and

Bhadain’s viewertariat (V-Bhadain), is the overwhelming tendency to make RC about the candidate (75.8% on average). RC about the constituency and the candidate-constituency compatibility lag far behind (almost ten times less candidate representations), averaging only at 6.2% and 7.7% respectively.

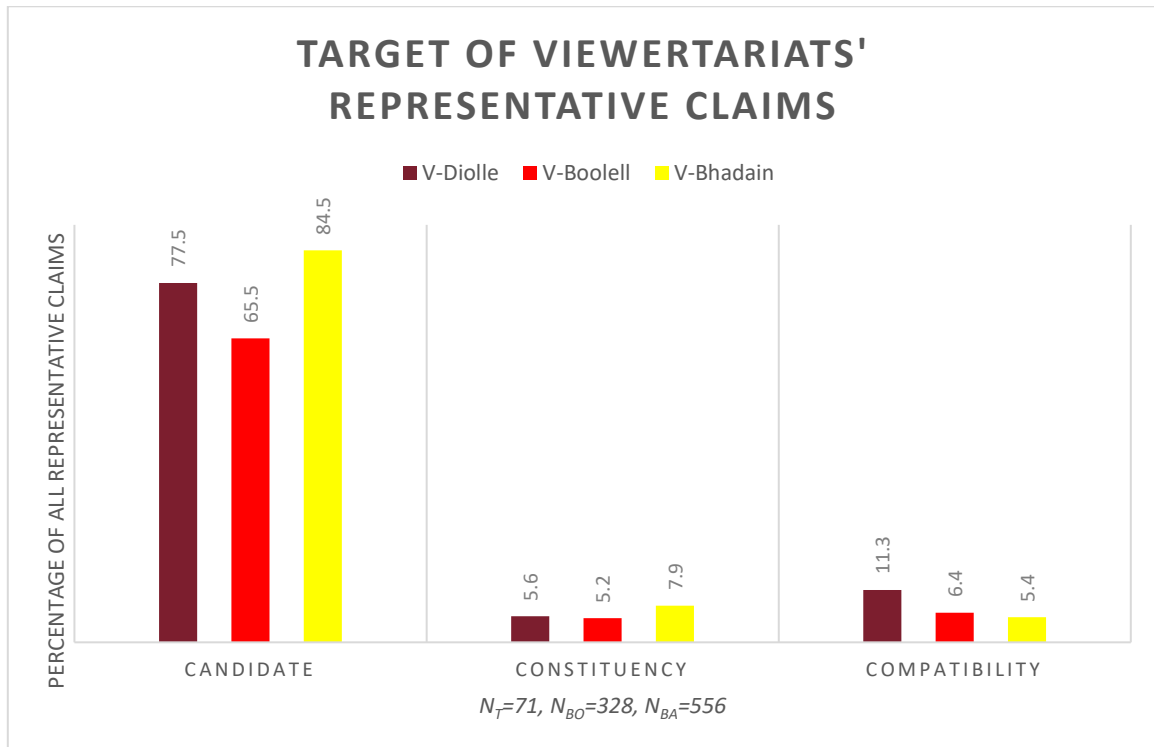


Figure 8 - Target of viewertariats' representative claims

Looking closer into candidate representations, V-Bhadain shows the most representations of the candidate at 84.5% of all claims. This can be explained by the fact that Bhadain, as leader and only nationally recognised member of the RP, may have called for a viewertariat discourse centred almost exclusively on himself. In contrast, due to both i) Boolell’s strong and frequent use of party associations in his self-representations and ii) the prominence of the PTR leader as a controversial politician amongst the general public, V-Boolell engaged in the least candidate representations, with only 65.5% of all claims about the candidate himself. The remaining 35.5% were split between RC about the PTR and PTR leader (combined 14%), individual users and viewertariat as a whole (combined 8.3%), and constituency and compatibility representations (combined 11.6%).

Interestingly, it is V-Diolle that made the most claims about the compatibility argument, making such claims almost twice more than V-Boolell and V-Bhadain; pointing to a possibly more reflexive viewertariat, one concerned not only about the standing of the candidate but as the standing of the representative as well.

### Similar profiles of arguments

A second major similarity is the profile of arguments used by the three viewertariats. As clearly demonstrated in Figure 9, V-Diolle, V-Boolell and V-Bhadain all exhibit very similar argumentative profiles, with a clear tendency to prefer making arguments of definition, then, to a significantly lower level, making exhortations. In third most used is the ‘report of information’ (argument based on *logos*) and finally, inferring cause and effect.

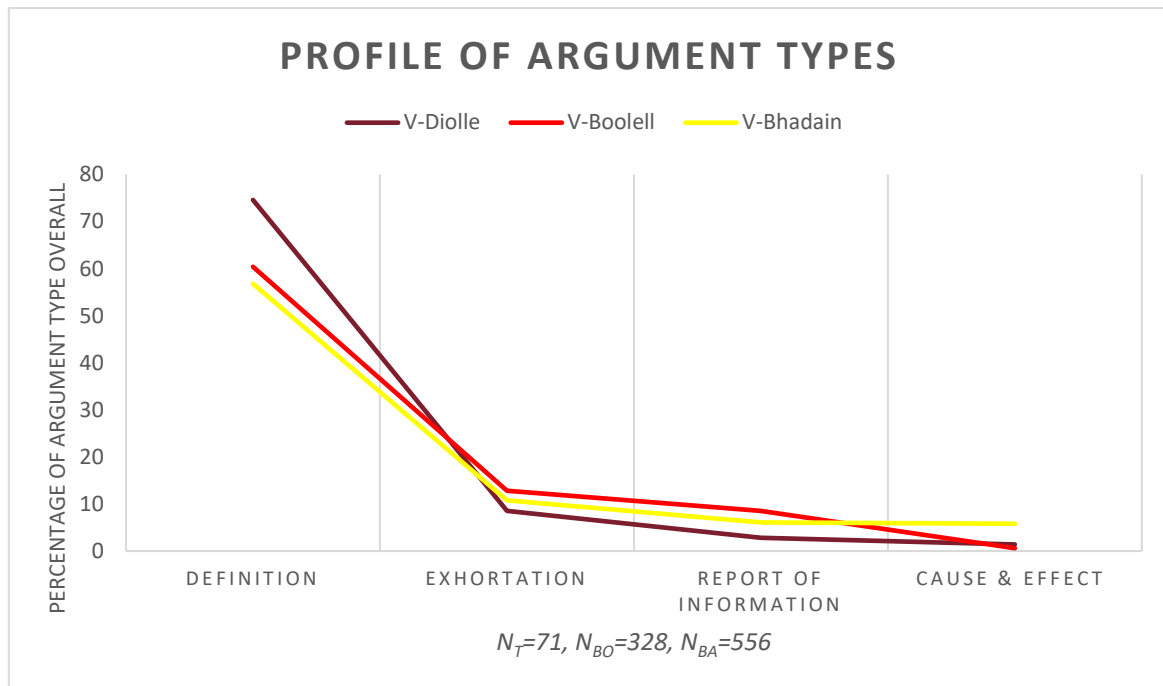


Figure 9 - Comparative view of profiles of argument used by viewertariats

### Ethos-centric viewertariat

Even though all three viewertariat demonstrated high tendencies to use *ethos* arguments in their RC (76.1% for V-Diolle, 77.4% for V-Boolell, and 85.8% for V-Bhadain), disaggregating the ethos-centric claims into specific ethos-type argument is particularly illuminating.

From Figure 10, three main differences emerge. The first, perhaps less surprising of all three, is the discrepancy in RC about appearances between Diolle and the two male candidates. It was found that 9.3% of all character claims about Diolle were based on appearance and personal image; 6.7% of similar claims about Boolell and, only 3.8% about Bhadain. A quick overview of such appearance-character claims reveals arguments about youth and beauty relative to Diolle; about old age and retirement for Boolell; and about oratorical style for Bhadain.

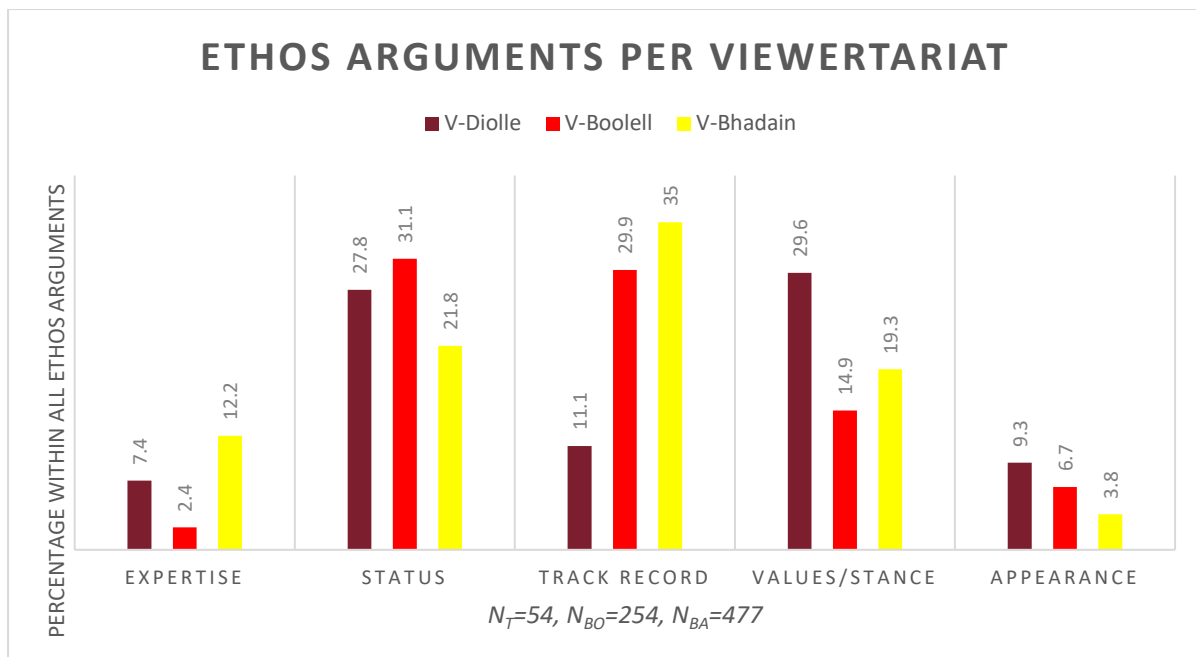


Figure 10 - Comparative view of ethos arguments per viewertariat

The second, also largest, difference, is the gap between track record claims about Diolle, the first-time candidate, and about both long-time candidate Boolell and incumbent Bhadain. While only 11.1% of all *ethos* claims were about Diolle’s track record, Boolell’s track record was the subject of *ethos* claims almost thrice more (29.9%). It is Bhadain’s track record, which received 35% of all the attention dedicated to *ethos* claims. These shares of track records claims mirror the reliance of track record as an argumentative trope in the different political performances, with Diolle using very little track record claims compared to both Boolell and Bhadain (who also used more track record claims than Boolell).

The third, and most politically-revealing, difference is the share of ‘values/stance’ claims between V-Diolle and the two other viewertariats. V-Diolle employed values/stance claims almost twice as much as V-Boolell. V-Bhadain made such claims only slightly more than V-Boolell, with 19.3% against 14.9%. This again speaks to a viewertariat (V-Diolle) much more concerned with policy positions than politicking.

#### *Persuasive language & connotations*

Another major difference between the three viewertariat lies in their distinctive use of persuasive language. Overall, V-Diolle demonstrated the most neutral and moderate language with only 31% of all claims comprising of some HIL. V-Bhadain follows with 38.6% claims with HIL, and V-Boolell is third with the least neutral language at 42.8% HIL claims.

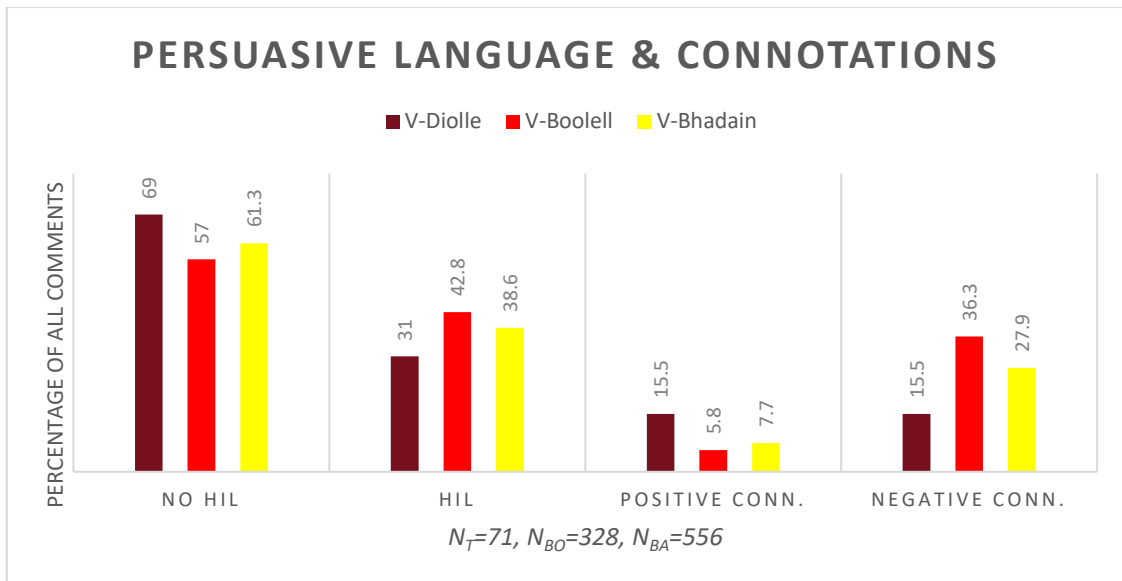


Figure 11 - Comparative view of viewertariats' use of language and connotations

Not only did V-Diolle exhibit the most neutral persuasive discourse, but the HIL claims were also surprisingly split equally between positive and negative connotations, resulting at an overall neutral position on the spectrum of celebratory to condemnatory persuasion.

V-Bhadain, with 7.7% overall positive connotations and almost four times the negative connotations (27.9%), falls on the condemnatory side of the spectrum but does slightly better than V-Boolell. As a matter of fact, V-Boolell used negative connotations more than 6 times more than positive ones, resulting in V-Boolell being the most condemnatory viewertariat of the three.

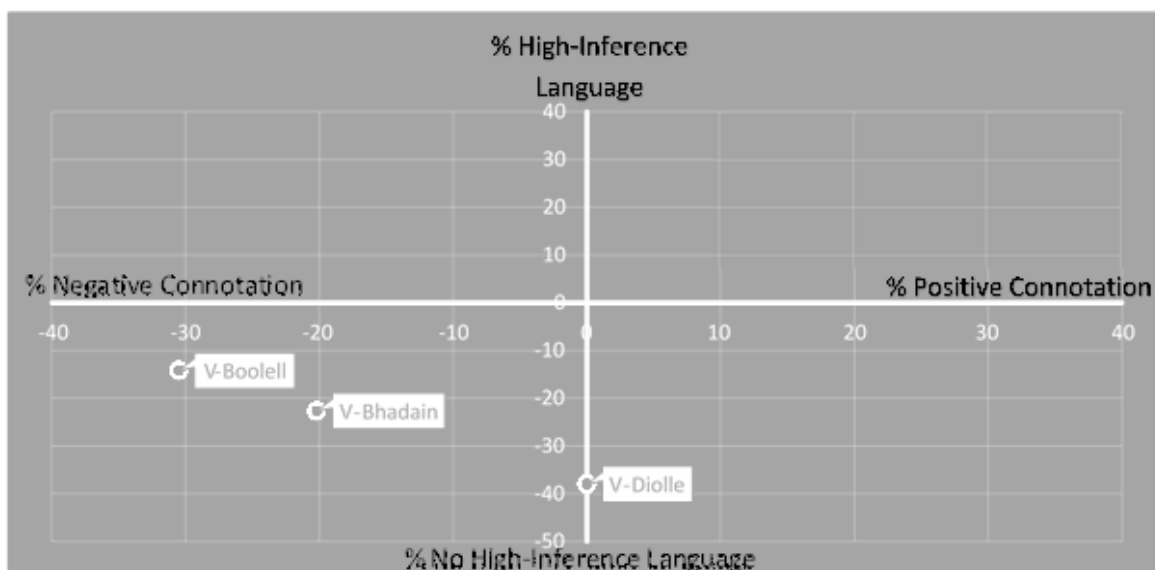


Figure 12 - Scatter plot illustrating viewertariat position across the connotative and inference language spectrum

The final difference of significance is level of uncivility – measured by proxy via the presence of different rhetorical fallacies.

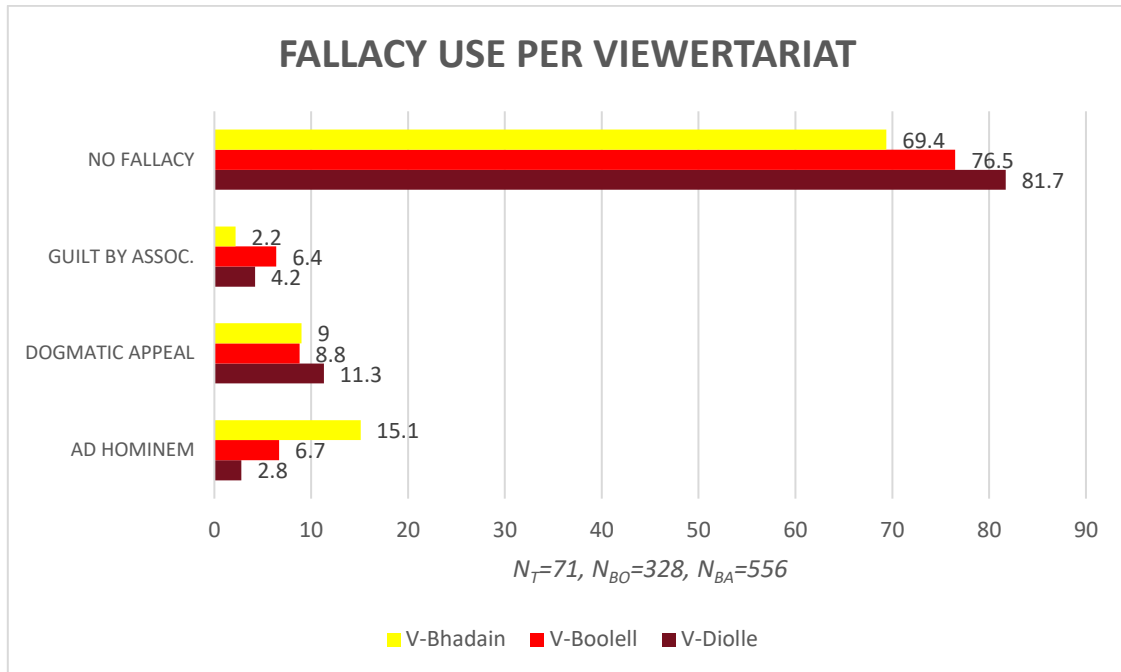


Figure 13 - Comparative use of fallacy per viewertariat

Although it is comforting to note an overwhelmingly large absence of rhetorical fallacies in all three viewertariats, it is V-Diolle that employs the least rhetorical fallacies with 81.7% of all claims free from such fallacies. V-Boolell comes second with 76.5% claims being fallacy-free, and V-Bhadain in third with almost 70% fallacy-free claims.

It is surprising that V-Boolell used three times more ‘Guilt by association’ fallacies than V-Bhadain given that Bhadain i) was a former government minister, ii) was involved in major controversies while in government, iii) and relied on his track record in government at length in his political performance. Boolell was represented as guilty by association almost always in relation to the PTR leader and the latter’s ‘coffers’ controversy (see Moorlah, 2019; Ramasawmy-Mohun, 2019; Wan, 2015).

While V-Diolle seemed to have used more dogmatic appeals than both V-Boolell and V-Bhadain, the small sample size for V-Diolle may have skewed this result. Given the much larger samples for V-Boolell and V-Bhadain, there is little value in unpacking this unexpected comparative result.

The striking result remains the findings on *Ad hominem* attacks, which show that V-Bhadain engaged in personal attacks twice more than V-Boolell, and five times more than V-Diolle. One

in every 7 comments left by V-Bhadain included an *Ad hominem* attack, positioning V-Bhadain as the most aggressive viewertariat group. Juxtaposed against the overall use of rhetorical fallacies, it can be concluded that V-Bhadain demonstrated the highest levels of aggressivity and uncivility of the three viewertariat.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In attempting to answer the overarching question of *who is persuading who and of what online*, this study has found convincing evidence that candidates – although incumbent and long-term candidates more than first-time candidate – sought to persuade viewers (viewertariat and lurkers) that they were the best electoral choice; not the best representative relative to a specific constituency, but merely the best candidate. This is a problematic persuasive discourse in democratic settings and will be discussed below.

The viewertariat, in response to the candidates, also engaged in political persuasion, counter-arguing the candidate's claims. In effect, the viewertariat sought to persuade viewers (again both lurkers and viewertariat, and sometimes even the candidate) that the candidate is not the best electoral choice. The viewertariat's consistent push-back against candidate's persuasive discourses calls for a review of how political persuasion operates online. The implications of these findings for rhetorical performances as a conceptual framework will also be explored, before concluding this chapter with a cursory overview of the limitations of the study.

### 5.1 Candidate claims versus Representative Claims

The comparative findings on the overwhelming focus on self-representations by candidates, candidate representations by the viewertariat, and *ethos* arguments by both candidate and viewertariat point to a heightened focus on the candidate as object but also means of political persuasion. A clear contrast was observed between an over-reliance on candidate and self-representations against an overall limited use of compatibility representations: of all RC by candidates, 71.1% of all claims and 55.8% of all sub-claims were SR while only 15.5% of all claims and 14.1% of all sub-claims were COR; of all RC made by the viewertariats, 77.5% were candidate representations while only 6.2% were COR. This is not surprising given the lack of attention given to the electorate as an aggregation of constituency interests; only 6.9% of all comments included CR, while only 30% of all representative claims were CR, and only 13.4% of all sub-claims were CR.

This focus amounts to the primacy of the 'candidate' over the 'representative'. As argued by Saward (2006), one is a representative by virtue of representing oneself in relation to a set of constituency interests and thereby arguing that one is the ideal representative of these interests. In syllogistic – argumentative – logic, a representative claim takes the form of:

- *Premise 1 (CR)*: Constituency has a set of interests A,
- *Premise 2 (SR)*: Candidate has abilities that speak to interests set A,
- *Syllogistic argument (COR)*: Candidate is thus the ideal representative for that constituency.

There is no representativeness without conceptual boundaries defining the constituency one aspires to represent. The less one represents the constituency, the less representative the candidate can claim to be. In fact, an exaggerated focus on self-representations against an under-representation of the constituency points to a discrepancy between representative claims and the practice of political persuasion in Mauritius. Rather than persuade audiences (voters, citizens, media consumers, *viewertariat*) of their claims to be representative, it seems that the incumbent and long-time candidates (to a lesser degree the first-time candidate) centre their persuasive discourses on claims about their respective candidacies.

The low salience of COR adds further support to the deduction that the candidates do not seek to persuade others of their ‘representativeness’ to the actual constituency going to the ballot boxes. Given the reactionary nature of the *viewertariats*’ political performances, it is understandable that similar low salience of COR was observed in *viewertariat* discourses. Although it is true that the incumbent and long-time candidates afforded much less attention to COR compared to the first-time candidate, the overall low salience of COR in both candidates’ and *viewertariats*’ performances is democratically worrying.

The primacy of SR within candidates’ political performances and candidate representations within *viewertariats*’ political performances points to a candidate-centric electoral discourse; one where the candidate is not discussed in terms of his representativeness but merely for his ‘*candidativeness*’ – a measure of how much of a candidate one really is. Attributes like party belonging, status, track record, and values and stance were key rhetorical markers in the performances. Comments like “You are too arrogant and guilty of the BAI crash” (trans.), or “The Mouvement Patriotique is the new politics” (trans.), or even “So what have you done for in 9 years in power” (trans.), seem to point to the general way of assessing the political candidate: that is, which party do they belong to, what is their track record, and where do they stand in terms of political values. While it seems the *viewertariat* exhibits traits of retrospective voting behaviour (see Lohmann, 1998), there is no explicit mention of what commenters think the constituency wants in a candidate; rather, commenters are abundantly clear in what they do not want from a candidate: arrogance, past scandals, smeared track record,

old style politics, and abuse. While these were all strong rhetorical markers used in arguing for or against candidates, they collectively point to how the viewertariat wants to persuade and be persuaded about: they are engaged in political persuasion over the *candidativeness* of the politician rather than his/her *representativeness*. It thus seems that the elected representative ought to be, according to viewertariats and candidates' preference for SR and candidate representations, substantively the best *candidate*, not necessarily the best *representative*.

#### *Significance of 'candidativeness' over representativeness*

This finding resonates twice, first with the candidates, and then with the viewertariat. The dominance of the candidate (in the electoral sense) over the representative (in the political sense) sheds light on how Mauritian politicians perceive the electoral process: one where elected representatives are representatives by form but candidate by substance. For example, if politicians viewed elected representatives as representatives in form and substance, a higher salience of both CR and COR would have been observed – but the opposite was observed. A continued preference by candidates to focus on SR is thus firstly problematic within democratic representational systems, and doubly consequential for its repercussions on online and offline public opinion.

The 'candidate over representative' discursive and persuasive phenomenon resonates with the viewertariat as well. Given the reactionary nature of the viewertariat, politicians' discursive and persuasive discourse about the primacy of the candidate (in lieu of the representative) becomes the discursive base upon which viewertariats discuss. Although there was little evidence of direct causal links between an argument made by a candidate and a timely direct reaction to that argument by the viewertariat, there is sufficient exploratory data to view the viewertariat discourse as at least significantly guided by politicians' performances. It is not surprising then that the viewertariat discourse was also equally, if not more, preoccupied with the persuasiveness of the *candidativeness* rather than that of the representativeness of the candidates. Using such an approach in arguing for or against an electoral candidate shields the candidate from appealing to a constituency-specific audience. This is perhaps why both the incumbent and long-time politician, unlike the first-time candidate, do not attempt to define in specific terms who they aspire to represent; Bhadain used prophetic language in seeking to persuade his audience of his 'right' and 'good' efforts, path and ambitions, while Boolell used indeterminate language like 'working together' so that a collective 'we' can build a 'new Mauritius'. Using such persuasion brands the candidate as a sophisticated and populist orator

(‘good’ candidate trait) while reduces the need for the candidate to be representative of specific interests. For example, ‘good’ is a universally acclaimed measure; ‘new Mauritius’ is a reasonable collective policy preference for the average voter, but there were no consistent constituency-specific ‘good’ used by the candidates.

Thus, we are confronted with a situation where electoral candidates seem to be assessed by how *good* of a candidate the politician is; how *good* a candidate is measured by candidate-centric criteria which seems to revolve around i) a *good* track record (devoid of past scandal, of abuse or corruption), and ii) a *good* political manifesto. This *good* manifesto relies on self-representations of values and stance, which were, for the three different candidate-types, almost similar across the board: all three argued they represented a new way of doing politics, all espoused values of humility, simplicity and honesty. Only first-time candidate Diolle attempted to argue about her representativeness by referring to the democratic need of Constituency No. 18 for a new form of political representation; she did use *logos* arguments in that respect. On the other hand, both Bhadain and Boolell focused on arguing that they were the best candidates because they demonstrated the most ‘good’, not because they were the best representative of No. 18. They both privileged arguments of pride (see Gambetta, 1998); such persuasive political discourse translates into a personalisation of politics, where politicians matters more than policies; such a focus on persons rather than policies can have detrimental effects for democratic discussion. In fact, such democratic discussion become rife with arguments of pride rather than arguments of reason. Such a situation fosters Gambetta’s (1998) strong opinion culture, where those who are ‘heard’ and ‘valued’ the most are those most aggressive, adversarial, and loud rather than the most sensible, moderate and knowledgeable. Not only are those situations more prone to populist appeals, but they also rest on winning arguments rather than learning from one another.

## **5.2 Political Persuasion and Reliance on Doxa**

Studying political persuasion is valuable for its treatment of both manifest and latent meaning. One persuasive device that allows rhetoric to use manifest meaning to infer latent meaning is the *doxa*, the pool of “common references and opinions” (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016, p.164) shared by a group. During political performances, politicians frequently use *doxa* as a rhetorical technique in order to make a point faster and thus more efficiently; they skip premises (assumptions or supporting claims) which they believe their in-group audience already knows and accepts, and proceeds to state the claim without the supporting premise. Skipping premises,

which is evidenced by use of indeterminate language or missing explanations, arguments or information, is thus central to the determining the *doxa*, and ultimately determining the imagined audience, and, in this context, the imagined voter.

A close look at the missing premises from the political performances reveals that all three candidate types had a clear imagined audience. For Boolell, his imagined audience comprised of long-time PTR supporters. Throughout his performance, Boolell continually refers to ‘the experience he has’, to the ‘work he has done’ and the ‘results he has achieved’, relying on his listeners’ collective memory to mentally substitute his unsaid premises and indeterminate language (about what experience he is referring to, what work, and what results in particular). These missing premises only work if his audience recognise the experience, work and results he speaks of; such an audience would have to be comprised of PTR supporters. That some of his missing premises are linked to forensic rhetoric – when Boolell uses past (up to pre-Independence Mauritius times) – in his performance further consolidate his imagined audience as staunch long-term PTR supporters.

Bhadain’s *doxa* is also rooted in missing premises and indeterminate language about his track record as a government minister but also as an independent Member of Parliament and leader of the RP. Bhadain frequently uses terms like “they know” and “they want” (indeterminate *they*, missing premise of ‘who is *they*?’) while also using self-celebratory quotations from voters pointing to an in-group audience. Bhadain’s strong condemnation of the governing parties can also suggest that part of his assumed audience are voters ‘fed up’ with the government. Taken altogether, it seems that, Bhadain’s assumed audience are party supporters who may have become party supporters by deserting the ranks of those in government.

Diolle’s use of *doxa* is less apparent because the first-time candidate avoids using missing premises and indeterminate language. Throughout her political performance, Diolle adopts clear and precise rhetorical language which calls for a second-order *doxa*, much more speculative than first-order *doxa* like in Boolell’s performance. In order to identify latent *doxa*, we must look beyond latent meaning and into manifest form and content. By evaluating her tone, overall language, and use of balanced representative claims as manifest form and content, it is possible to speculate that her imagine audience is a young, moderate, educated, and ‘policy-over-politics’ voting group – one where using a *doxa* rooted in moderation, simplicity and rationality would prove appealing.

Relying on the appropriate *doxa* is crucial for political persuasion. In a political rally, adapting to the *doxa* of the audience is easier to a politician simply because the audience is comprised of party supporters and missing premises are automatically filled with “common references and opinions” (Atkins & Finlayson, 2016, p.164) from the party vernacular. Bhadain and Boolell’s performances would have been highly effective in a rally scenario. Online though, adapting to a Facebook Live audience is trickier because both partisans and non-partisans have easy access to the performance. From a persuasive point of view, it is Diolle’s performance that is the strongest persuasive performance as it barely uses any missing premise. Boolell, on the other hand, makes the mistake of relying on faulty *doxa* and skipping premises. His imagined audience (long-term PTR voters) is in reality comprised of both supporters and non-supporters, with non-supporters being more vocal than supporters. By using faulty *doxa* to an extremely vocal out-group viewership, Boolell’s performance becomes vulnerable, as does Bhadain’s to a similar degree, to viewership exploiting missing premises when making counter-persuasive claims.

Boolell’s reliance on the *doxa* of his imagined audience (long-term PTR voters) allowed his actual audience (viewership and lurkers from all political affiliations) to respond to these unsaid premises by filling in those missing premises with premises of their own.

For example, when the interviewer asks about his credibility as a candidate, Boolell replies with (t= 00:35:11), “The experience that I have. The work that I have done. The results that I have achieved, as a politician, as a grassroots politician, and as a minister.” In this attempt to add to his *ethos* by using his track record, Boolell assumes that the interviewer and his viewers would understand what he means by ‘experience’, ‘work’ and ‘results’ and Boolell does not recognise the need to support these claims with premises which would have defined the specific experience, work and result as evidence of his track record. In response, the viewership cleverly reclaim these unsaid premises, filling in those gaps with arguments of their own. At t= 00:35:55, a user asks “Lol, what results, huh?” (trans.), ironically insinuating through a rhetorical question that Boolell has no result to boast about. A few seconds later, another user comments with “Experience in robbery!” (trans.), both answering the earlier question and making an argument about Boolell’s ‘experience in robbery’, a hyperbole about the PTR’s alleged practice of accepting commissions through public tender projects. Another user also adds “Share what? Macaroni?” (trans.), reclaiming another unsaid premise Boolell relied on when he claims that he is “simply here to share; to listen and to share” (trans.). Here, the user

insinuates that Boolell is going to ‘share Macaroni [French for pasta]’, relying on Boolell’s track record of allegedly bribing voters with pasta in 2012 (see Earally, 2012) to argue that he is not a credible candidate, thus pushing back on Boolell’s self-representation by exploiting the candidate’s use of missing premises and filling in with new premises.

This viewertariat behaviour of ‘filling in’ the missing premises is also observed in Bhadain’s performance, where, similar to Boolell, the viewertariat is frequently pushing back on the candidate’s self-representations with counter-claims. The more a candidate used unsaid or missing premises, the more vulnerable his or her persuasive position was. That is not to say that avoiding missing premises protected the candidate from viewertariat re-representation. In fact, all viewertariats demonstrated consistent re-representations by counter-arguing specific claims. This was evident in all three viewertariats, albeit to a higher degree in Boolell and Bhadain’s performances.

Comparative findings between the top most vocal viewertariat and the average viewertariat adds insight into understanding viewertariat persuasion. While it was found that all viewertariats exhibited similar levels of aggressivity, uncivility and similar tone with the most vocal 10 percent, there was invariably high dispersion in terms of viewertariat participation (variance  $\sigma^2 = 19.43$ ). While some posted only once within a political performance (running between 43 to 96 minutes), some commented more than 20 times and yet others posted the same comment more than twice.

The motivations of the most vocal viewertariat might lie in their political status as non-partisans. In fact, 75% of the most vocal viewertariat were anti-candidate (using Boolell and Bhadain’s viewertariats; Diolle’s most vocal viewertariat was excluded due to low overall participation); the most vocal were also over 80% male. The affordance of easy access to non-partisans online might prove extremely important in online political persuasion; not only does the most vocal viewertariat dominate the live comment thread, but these serial-commenters could also alter the tone and nature of the political performance for the larger audience – the thousands of lurkers watching both the live interview and live thread at the same time.

### **5.3 Candidate Persuasion versus Viewertariat Persuasion**

While overall, political persuasion is used by candidates online in a similar fashion as in offline settings, the persuasiveness of the same rhetorical repertoire decreases online, where some rhetoric becomes vulnerable to active and adversarial viewertariat counter-persuasion. Even

though the performer's persuasive power is reduced online, the direction of persuasion is unchanged from offline to online. Candidates still use vertical, top-down persuasion within a one-to-many communication structure.

Online live media platforms alters the uni-directionality of persuasion: by enabling the viewertariat to engage in real-time not only with the candidate but also with one another as well as with a secondary audience, lurkers, platforms like Facebook Live afford citizens-users with both vertical persuasion (bottom-up, from viewertariat to candidate) but also horizontal persuasion within a few-to-few (viewertariat-to-viewertariat) and few-to-many (viewertariat-to-lurkers) structures. This tiered structure is what dilutes the persuasive power of the candidate, enabling traditionally excluded citizens from countering the candidate's rhetorical power. While it is true that most of the observed citizen engagement looks more like persuasive noise rather than persuasive discourses with clear objectives, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that political persuasion is altered online. Moreover, given the ease of access and low cost of monopolising viewertariat discourse (through high participation and repetition), it is highly possible that a small group of citizen-users, organised in support or in opposition to a candidate, could mobilise offline in order to dominate online viewertariat discourse. Evidence about pre-viewertariat connections (in the form of user-to-user dialogue within the live threads) lend further support to the possibility of minority viewertariat discourse domination for partisan purposes.

#### **5.4 Re-thinking Rhetoric Online**

In light of the findings about the active and sustained counter-persuasion by all viewertariats analysed, a re-thinking of the theory of persuasion must be carried out with a view to establishing new modes of evaluation of political persuasion in contemporary democracies.

Platforms like Facebook Live enables researchers of rhetoric with real-time performance and feedback data that can be used to test the effectiveness of rhetorical devices. Are *ethos* arguments still the strongest (most persuasive) type of argument available to an online performer? Findings indicate that *ethos* arguments, while being the most popular appeal type with candidates, were also the focus of counter-persuasion by the viewertariat. It seems that the longer the political career of the candidate, the easier it was for the viewertariat to push-back against the candidates' self-representations, turning *ethos* arguments from most used to most abused, and thereby less persuasive, within the viewertariat at least. It seems that *pathos*,

arguments using emotions, were the least likely to be the object of counter-persuasion. While too few *pathos* arguments were used by the candidates for a definitive conclusion about their persuasive strength be made, it remains that *pathos* arguments were the least likely be countered by the viewertariat, thereby positioning *pathos*, and not *ethos*, arguments as the strongest rhetorical appeal-type online.

The use of *doxa* must also be revised for online persuasion. As demonstrated, it is essential for candidates to break from the traditional *doxa* of an imagined empathetic in-group audience. Online, not only do both partisans and non-partisans have easy access to the performance, but the latter also tend to be the most vocal, especially when it comes to exploiting unsaid and missing premises. A shift to an *online doxa* is imperative for performers to be successful online; such a *doxa 2.0* would force performers to i) constantly avoid using unsaid premises which appeal to partisans only, ii) imagine a broader politically-diverse audience, and thus iii) use less divisive and more moderate language and tone.

Within an online rhetorical performance, there is no longer a unique claim-maker, whose position as performer remains unchanged throughout the performance; there are multiple claim-makers whose roles and persuasive power shift throughout the performance. While it is true that the candidate-performer remains in the most powerful position in terms of salience (the candidate has the largest share of the visual space while the viewertariat is restricted to a small sidebar) throughout the performance, there are instances where the viewertariat reclaims persuasive power. Reclaiming persuasive power has been evidenced by the amount of counter-persuasion and level of re-representation by an overly adversarial viewertariat. It is possible that the viewertariat can divert attention away from the candidate-performer and onto themselves as co- and full-performers, but there is hardly any way to adequately measure attention as an activity; the main reason being that attention is an activity carried out by lurkers who, by virtue of being lurkers, cannot be studied via conventional data collection means (see Hill & Hughes, 1997).

#### *From audience to co- and full-performer*

Live media platforms such as Facebook Live not only bring performer and audience together but, in doing so, these platforms also alter the positions and roles of the different participants involved, enabling audiences to take on the role of both co-performers and performers. When responding to representative claims by candidates (reactionary claim-making), the viewertariat

engages in co-performance, using persuasion to make claims and counterclaims. When the viewertariat uses the live platform to make fresh claims about the candidates (non-reactionary claim-making), it ceases to behave as a co-performer and morphs into a full-fledge performer – albeit a side-performer – relying on persuasive discourse to construct fresh representations. A member of the viewertariat can be both co-performer and side-performer; it seems though that the most vocal top percent were more likely to behave as side-performers (with clear persuasive intentions) while the average viewertariat was more likely to behave as co-performer (reactionary intentions). Could there be a link between level of participation and persuasive intention? Findings indicate that this may be true, with highly vocal viewertariat showing commitment to one ‘act’ (either anti- or pro-candidate) while the average viewertariat only reacting to the candidate’s claims.

This has two significant implications for how rhetoric operates online. Firstly, a rhetorical performance is no longer confined to a single-performer performance. Online rhetorical performances include a main performer (candidate), co-performers (viewertariat reacting to candidate’s claims), side-performers (vocal viewertariat engaged in claim-making of their own), and the audience (lurkers). Secondly, online rhetorical performances spreads the power of persuasion to different actors and in different degrees. While the main performer retains most of the persuasive power given his or her dominant status within the performance, co-performers and side-performers enjoy differentiated persuasive power: the co-performer, being on average more reactionary and less vocal than side-performers, are less visible (and thus less effective) than side-performers (who are non-reactionary and on average more vocal than co-performers). Ultimately, it is the frequency of participation that affords persuasive power: the most vocal viewertariat will always enjoy more persuasive power (by repeated ‘appearances’ in the performance) than less vocal viewertariat. The key rhetorical tool here is repetition, which is abused by the most vocal viewertariat in order to amplify their claims, and skew the general viewertariat discourse in their persuasive direction. In fact, given the fast-pace at which comments are posted, there is a higher likelihood of a viewertariat claim being seen and reacted to by others should that viewertariat member make the same claim multiple times.

## **5.5 Rhetorical Performance Framework Revisited**

Re-thinking how rhetoric operates online implies a review of the rhetorical performance framework.

New media platforms like Facebook Live bring politicians and citizens together, dramatically reducing the barriers for vertical communication from the political sphere to the citizenry. By allowing real-time cross-talk, such live platforms blur the lines between performer and audience, enabling both parties to engage in political persuasion. As such, the traditional tripartite rhetorical performance framework with *performer-text-audience* changes to include main performer, representative claims (persuasive text), ‘audience’ (comprising of viewertariat as both co- and side-performers and lurkers).

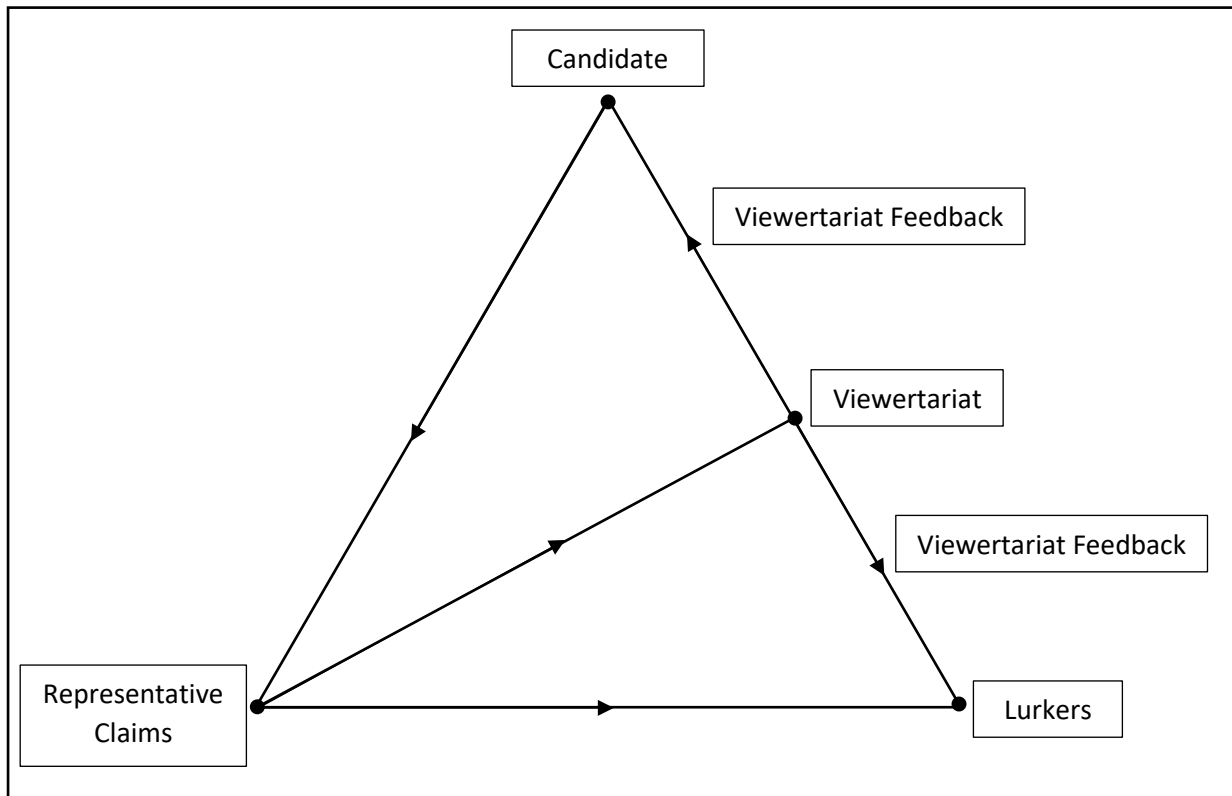


Figure 14 - Proposed online rhetorical performance framework

From this revised online rhetorical performance framework, the *performer-text-audience* structure is altered to accommodate the existence of the viewertariat as a fourth node in the political persuasion process. In this new framework, the term audience gives way to lurkers, who, by nature of their position, do not offer any form of feedback on the representative claims made by the candidate; lurkers are in this way ‘divorced’ from the performance. It is the viewertariat, which comes into being by those who “comment on events in real time through social media” (Ampofo et al., 2011, p.850), that take up the role of providing feedback: the viewertariat is the online equivalent of the audience in the traditional rhetorical performance framework.

Interestingly, the viewertariat does not only take up the structural position of the audience in the rhetorical performance framework, it can also take up the functional position of co- and side-performers. This is a complete re-invention of the former neatly distinguishable nodes of performer, text, and audience: online rhetorical performances allow a main performer and a main text to be consumed by lurkers while also allowing co- and side-performers together with new texts (some reactionary, some non-reactionary to the main text) to be simultaneously consumed by lurkers and possibly the main performer.

### *Revamping the Rhetorical Audience*

In line with the revised rhetorical performance framework, findings about the active role of the viewertariat in political persuasion calls for a re-assessment of key rhetorical term ‘audience’ – a group of people at the receiving end of a performance with the ability to react to that performance. When applying rhetoric to online communication, a rhetorical *audience* seems to be an oxymoron because its epistemological use obscures rather than clarifies the distinctions between those who react and those who choose not to; while both groups are engaging in some type of media consumption as audience members, they differ in their engagement with the performance: the viewertariat participates in giving feedback while lurkers do not. Thus, it may be more useful to substitute ‘audience’ with ‘viewertariat’ when researching rhetoric online.

### **5.6 Limitations of Study**

Finally, it is imperative for these findings to be put into perspective. The viewertariat samples did not comprise of all comments by the viewertariat; in fact, only 38.0% of all comments left on Bhadain’s performance were analysed, only 39.8% for Boolell’s, and 58.3% for Diolle. In actual terms, 2113 out of a total of 3489 comments were excluded from the sample for falling outside of the data capture timeframes. These timeframes were aligned with representative claims and excluded 52.3% of performances. In these aggregate non-sampled 109 minutes, candidates made claims, for example, about other parties, the government and even other candidates.

A larger scale study might find it worthy to sample all comments during an online live rhetorical performance; this would enhance the generalisability and completeness of the findings about viewertariat behaviour and discourses. A full analysis of comments would also prevent the arbitrary extra-capture window, which was +10 seconds for this study. This meant that all comments posted 10 seconds after the end of a claim were not included in the sample.

While this 10-second window was deemed large enough upon early viewing of the interviews, later viewings found viewers' direct acceptance or rejection of claims that fell outside the 10-second window. While this alone calls for an exploration of why some claims are rejected within 10 seconds and others require more time, it remains that valuable data was unfortunately not included in this exploratory study.

If we agree that lurkers (+15,000 viewers watched Diolle's interview, +19,000 users viewed Boollel's and +46,000 Bhadain's) can be influenced to some degree by the real-time comments (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Hill & Hughes, 1997; Reagle, 2016), then these findings can serve as a valuable avenue for discussion into the possible implications of aggressive, adversarial and polarized viewers' in an electoral context, on thousands of information-seeking lurkers. Perhaps future research on how lurkers consume live media events (do they focus on the main performance, on the side-performance or both at different times?) could shine important light on the possible repercussions of online political persuasion.

Sampling only part of the universe of comments meant that a narrative analysis was not possible; such an analysis may have produced findings on how persuasive tropes and narratives may have been led (and by who) in a certain direction (and for what reasons), and how organic or deliberate online political discussion actually is. In light of the findings about the most vocal 10 percent viewers', sampling all comments could also further substantiate the hypothesized possibility of minority viewers' discourse domination for partisan purposes.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In re-thinking rhetoric, this study asked *who's persuading who and of what online*, in a Mauritian electoral context.

Drawing from the concepts of viewertariat from Anstead and O'Loughlin (2011) and representative claims from Saward (2006), this study used a rhetorical analysis on the Facebook livestreamed interviews of three candidates (the incumbent, a long-time candidate, and a first-time candidate), in order to assess the nature of online political persuasion in the Mauritian electoral context. This study used a content analysis of rhetorical elements on real-time comments to evaluate how the viewertariat responded to these claims and whether they engaged in counter-persuasion, and if they did, to whom, what about and how.

The comparative analysis between the production and reception of representative claims, as well as between different candidate-types and their respective viewertariats resulted in a number of significant observations:

1. All candidates privileged self-representations, although the incumbent candidate was the most heavily focused on such claims, followed by the long-time candidate, and the first-time candidate last;
2. The first-time candidate was the only one to offer a persuasively strong overall representative claim by balancing her sub-claims almost equally between sub-SR, sub-CR and sub-COR; both the incumbent and long-time candidate employed skewed (and weak) overall representative claims;
3. The viewertariat participated at different rates, with the incumbent's viewertariat being the most active, followed by the long-time candidate's, and the first-time candidate's lagging behind quite dramatically;
4. Overall, the viewertariats engaged in counter-persuasion, primarily to each other about candidates' claims; they also showed willingness to construct their own (un)representative claims, thus engaging in persuasive discourse with both lurkers and viewertariat members;
5. There was a significant discrepancy in viewertariat participation, with the most vocal viewertariat being overwhelmingly male and largely adversarial in their persuasive positions relative to the candidate.

The significance of these findings were then discussed in relation to democratic considerations and to the field of rhetoric.

The reliance on self-representations and rhetorical analyses of these claims point to the primacy of the candidate over the representative, hence the use of the term '*candidateness*'. The candidates demonstrated more concern for winning the election than for representing a constituency; this was evidenced by a neglect of compatibility representations as well as a cosmetic use of constituency representations (particularly by the incumbent candidate). Overall, these demonstrate a heavily personalised electoral discourse, where politicians matters more than policies; such a focus on persons rather than policies can have detrimental effects on democratic discussion while also contributing to depressing voter engagement and voter turnout (see Adriaansen et al., 2010; Ansolabehere et al., 1994).

The findings also shed critical light on how to re-think rhetoric for contemporary networked and increasingly online electoral campaigns. Observations, primarily from the long-time candidate's performance, informed how candidates ought to re-adjust their imagined audience online: no longer can the imagined audience be an empathetic, partisan one; online audiences are not only diverse but those who actively engage in persuasion are primarily oppositional, even adversarial at times. There is thus a need to re-think rhetorical genres and devices which will garner positive responses or at least avoid generating negative reactions. One clear conclusion was the need to restrict the use of unsaid or missing premises as rhetorical tools, as they are, as observed, particularly vulnerable to effective counter-persuasion from the active and largely oppositional viewertariat.

The comparative candidate-to-viewertariat persuasive discourses also brought forward a new dimension within which persuasion operates online. No longer is persuasion only vertical (top-down from a performer to an audience) but it is also simultaneously horizontal (many-to-many). This dual but contemporaneous exercise of persuasion within one mediated platform calls for a re-assessment for the resultant persuasive power. This study proposed that horizontal persuasion dilutes vertical persuasion, in effect reducing the traditional performer's persuasive power; it made no claim as to whether horizontal persuasion was thus more powerful.

Finally, the findings demonstrated the inadequacy of the audience as a theoretical term in studying rhetoric online. The audience, this study proposed, ought to be replaced by two concepts: viewertariat and lurkers. The viewertariat, albeit their informative role observed by

Anstead and O’Loughlin (2011), should also, given their prominence on platforms like Facebook Live, be reconceptualised to incorporate their status of co- and side-performers within the political performance. Altogether then, the study proposed a new rhetorical performance framework incorporating the main performer, persuasive text, viewertariat and lurkers as a starting point to re-think rhetoric online.

## **6.1 Recommendations for further research**

In line with continuing to expand research on contemporary Africa as well as furthering the exploration into the electoral behaviours of citizens online, a number of avenues for further research can be contemplated.

The most evident one being to replicate this research to a larger scale, and to other electoral campaigns with a view to confirming rhetorical traits associated with each candidate-type. Given the methodological framework, this study can be replicated to non-Mauritian campaigns, in a further effort to offer a comparative assessment of candidate’s use of persuasion across the continent as well as of diverse viewertariats’ engagement with political persuasion.

An interesting follow-up study may also focus on the persuasive behaviour of only the most vocal viewertariat. A cursory overview of the most vocal viewertariats revealed that some active members in one viewertariat did participate in the other two viewertariats as well. Some even demonstrated familiarity with specific users, even engaging in a one-on-one dialogue within the live thread. Do the most vocal viewertariat belong to some form of active, politically-engaged online community? A rapid look at the profile pictures of those vocal viewertariat members (where many signified their party belonging by means of party symbols) begs the question: are the most vocal viewertariat also the most politically-active citizens offline?

Exploring the most vocal viewertariat should also be of academic interest because of the ultimate democratic implications of their behaviour. If they are largely adversarial in their persuasive positions, could they skew viewertariat discourse online so much as to affect citizen’s perceptions of public opinion offline? As Gambetta (1998) cautions, if technology “thrives on strong views and definitive remarks” (p.40), should we be concerned that those most likely to be visible are also most likely to engage in polarised, adversarial, and borderline uncivil discourse?

Aside from the above avenues for research, this study is evidence of the crucial need to re-think rhetoric; while this research makes a much-needed contribution to the field of rhetoric and contemporary African electoral communication, it stands as a call for others, interested in understanding the dynamics of democratic politics on new media platforms, to continue asking *who's persuading who and of what online*.

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## ANNEX 1: SAMPLE OF REPRESENTATIVE CLAIMS

[Sample set: Diolle Performance,  $n=21$ ]

ID	Time start	Time finish	RC	Genre	RC Text ( <i>trans. from Mauritian Kreol</i> )
1	00:01:14	00:02:03	SR	D	[Full RC] In fact, the MP is a party which is about 3 years old. So it's a party that wants to build and to wield more influence in other regions. But also, at its origins, the MP was a party which wanted to become like a lifejacket for all those who have been deceived and wanted to do something different. So it wanted to adopt a collegial philosophy, and it – well, it began with that philosophy. So relative to my candidacy, for them it was – the by-election was a good way to build the party even more. Because in elections, participation allows every party to have a good structure as well as to develop foundations. A foundation based on political ideas; because it is during electoral campaigns that voters are much more receptive to political ideas. In that sense, it was the right candidacy at the right time. Even more because the MP gave me their trust given that I already had some experience in Quatre Bornes, administrative experience for the town of Quatre Bornes as well as me being a political scientist.
2	00:02:46	00:04:04	SR	F	[Extract] But when they reached a decision on my candidacy, it was unanimous. That's something else. So given the information I had... so at the start, my candidacy was not the problem. It was about the direction the party had to take in this election.
3	00:06:38	00:07:35	SR	E	[Extract] So to being with, I am the youngest candidate, that is, at this time given that nomination day has not yet passed. Moreover, I am not a neophyte, not at all; I have a very good knowledge of the administration of the town of Belle Rose Quatre Bornes... and I know my limit, of what I can and cannot do. And for what I cannot do, I know what to do in order to make that happen. So I think that's what is going to make the difference.
4	00:07:54	00:08:16	SR	D	[Extract] Relative to the Standing Orders, I understand what they mean, what I can do, what I am restricted to do, but also the knowledge of previous interpretations... and who could give us that information, it is indeed those elders, those who were here before and who participated in erecting our parliamentary democracy.
5	00:09:50	00:10:23	BR	D	[Extract] You will realise that it is not Tania Diolle who is gnawing away at the MMM electorate. The MMM electorate... On the other hands, the electorate that is looking for renewal, irrespective of party, then yes I do tend to go towards them because I believe this is an electorate with whom I can build. I will not build with the foundation of another party, because we at the MP are building a party.
6	00:11:07	00:12:12	SR	C	[Extract] I was disappointed. You know very well, because for 2 years he [MMM leader] did not see in me a valuable person. So I left in 2015, 2017, someone young who the MMM was not interested in... Because he is a person who has known adversity in politics relative to his political path. But I do not hold a grudge against him.
7	00:13:30	00:14:57	CR	D	[Extract] To be honest, the reason that pushed me to stand as candidate in this election is that I think that something can be done in this election... It is not true that mainstream parties are winning over more supporters.

					This is not true. They can win over nostalgic partisans but, the youth, the younger, that's not true.
8	00:15:07	00:15:26	CR	F	[Extract] I think in 2014, the electorate sent a strong signal, a signal where the electorate was asking mainstream parties, especially the supposedly biggest parties to re-invent themselves... It's not true that these individuals, after 2014, are hopefully again because mainstream parties did nothing different.
9	00:15:59	00:16:58	SR	D	[Extract] Now the electorate will evaluate a candidate relative to his or her program, to her ideas. Even I, I do not promise them all... My program relates to the vision of the Mouvement Patriotique, relates to the mode of representation. This is what renewal is for us.
10	00:17:25	00:18:25	SR	E	[Extract] You know, at the MP, we are doing politics in a very responsible manner. For one, we are not making personal attacks, to none of our adversaries... a person cannot say they know everything. In Quatre Bornes, there is a lot of expertise, there is a lot of people who have lots of ideas; If I want to become their voice, I have to listen to what they have to say.
11	00:18:38	00:20:15	CR	F	[Extract] You know, there's a lot of people who speak about the issue of water draining, there's some of that; lots others speak about the Metro Express but not the Metro Express in the sense that ... There's a lot of people who speak about what the possible reforms of public institutions like the Parliament, even the executive because there are a lot of people who think that the Prime Minister is too powerful; so these are their preoccupations. Corruption! On that, everyone has something to say.
12	00:20:25	00:22:13	SR	E	[Extract] It's true that people on the ground have told me no to do like others, saying "you will go and then tell us that a deputy of the opposition cannot do much". No, this is false... it's false to believe that when you are in opposition, you cannot speak about public infrastructure projects, or about water drainage, or about corruption. You can go and apply pressure on the government. That is what politics is about.
13	00:23:08	00:24:30	BR	D	[Extract] In truth, I represent a balance because, you know, there is wisdom in traditional methods and everything that is old, in everything traditional... they explain their problems. Don't think that we promise them anything; we actually explain how together we can achieve solutions; what power they have. So that's what we are currently doing, Rabin.
14	00:26:20	00:27:00	SR	D	[Extract] Rabin, if i did not think that I had a change, I would not have joined the race so easily. Because it is one of the considerations; it is because I understand how the electorate... If I have become a threat, then that means I am in the race. And as soon as I'm a contender, then I have my change. I simply have to work in a sustainable and systematic manner.
15	00:27:40	00:28:57	SR	D	[Extract] I will tell you honestly, this is exactly how we are different from the other opposition parties. At no point during my campaign did I... Even if people speak about my opponents with me, I don't, I listen, but I do not have any gossip to share on anyone. I don't have stories to share about anyone.
16	00:31:30	00:32:00	SR	D	[Extract] But on the other hand, we thought that we needed to go see the Electoral Commissioner and indeed,

					sit down together to discuss the matter... And everyone is doing it, even the extreme leftist parties. So the town will become a total mess. I would be agreeable that we don't all resort to this.
17	00:32:40	00:33:40	SR	D	[Extract] Haven't we told you? We are campaigning as statesmen and stateswomen who respect the electorate, who respect individuals, who respect the territory... This is how we approach politics. So let's all sit at one table, all parties, and discuss the use of party banners. We cannot have 8 banners per street, it becomes ridiculous. I 100% agree with this.
18	00:33:53	00:35:10	BR	D	[Extract] Because we are party who wants to build. And of course this is a test to show if we have been able to convince people that we are the renewal... it's actually about the way to do politics, which is not a noble way, which is not one based on elementary principles of every other statesman. This is what is at stake for us.
19	00:38:14	00:39:01	SR	D	[Extract] You know, I am a political scientist, I will not lie to you; our electoral system does not allow a party to face off with the electorate on its own... a new way of doing politics. And that is our priority. But it is true that as political scientist, I will not lie to you; there comes a time, until our electoral system does not change, that we will need to consider an alliance.
20	00:39:23	00:39:56	BR	D	[Extract] For the next elections, I hope that, with my victory in No. 18, if I win, if the electorate of Quatre Bornes gives me its trust... it is not leaders who have to decide – interrupted – I will continue Rabin. I began my political career with this election, and you will find me again in No. 18.
21	00:40:56	00:42:12	SR	E	[Extract] You know, the direction of my political engagement is one of construction; it's with the aim of doing something different and new. I see my future in the MP... And where it is not possible, we will try to find a solution. So that's what I appreciate. I did not join – interrupted – my political engagement started this is aim Rabin.

## ANNEX 2: CODEBOOK

1. **ID**  
001, 002, ...,  $n$ ,  $n$  = total number of units in sample
2. **Timestamp**  
HH:MM:SS format
3. **Username**  
Text [anonymised as per research ethics considerations]
4. **Comment Type**  
0 = Comment  
1 = Reply  
2 = Response  
3 = Unclear  
4 = Partisan Comment  
*If Comment Type = 4, proceed to coding next unit.*
5. **Text**  
Insert full comment
6. **Comment Target**  
0 = Politician  
1 = Constituency  
2 = P-C Link  
3 = Viewertariat  
4 = User  
5 = Party  
6 = Party Leader  
7 = Other  
8 = Unclear  
9 = Other Party  
10 = Other candidate  
11 = Policy  
12 = Government  
13 = ION News  
*If Comment Target = Other, skip to next unit of analysis.*
7. **Statement Type**  
0 = Definition  
1 = Quality  
2 = Cause & Effect  
3 = Exhortation  
4 = Narration  
5 = Question  
6 = Report of information

7 = Other

*If Statement Type = Other, skip to next unit of analysis.*

**8. Appeal type**

0 = ethos (character)

1 = pathos (emotion)

2 = logos (logic)

3 = no appeal

*If Appeal type = 0, skip Variables 10, and 11.*

*If Appeal type = 1, skip Variables 9 and 11.*

*If Appeal type = 2, skip Variables 9 and 10.*

*If Appeal type = 3, skip to next unit of analysis.*

**9. If appeal is ethos, it is based on:**

0 = Expertise

1 = Status

2 = Credibility

3 = Track record

4 = Personal values/stance

5 = Physical appearance/personal image

6 = Other

**10. If appeal is pathos, it is based on:**

0 = fear

1 = pity/sadness

2 = frustration/anger

3 = hope/joy

4 = social values or need

5 = other

**11. If appeal is logos, is it based on:**

0 = hyperlink

1 = data/statistics/date

2 = testimony/anecdote

3 = enthymeme

4 = syllogism

5 = other

**12. From the appeal, is any fallacy observable?**

0 = Appeal to ignorance

1 = Appeal to tradition

2 = Bandwagon appeal

3 = Ad hominem

4 = Guilt by association

5 = Dogmatism

6 = No observable fallacy

**13. Is high-inference language present?**

0 = No

1 = Yes

*If HIL = No, skip to Variable 15.*

**14. If high-inference language is present, is the connotation predominantly:**

0 = positive

1 = negative

2 = unclear

**15. Rhetorical devices used:**

0 = Antithesis/contrastive pair

1 = Equivocation

2 = Repetition

3 = Antomasia

4 = Rhetorical question

5 = Hypophora

6 = Hyperbole

7 = Downplaying

8 = Pun

9 = Other

**16. Which type of figurative trope was used:**

0 = No figurative trope

1 = Analogy

2 = Simile

3 = Metaphor

4 = Other

**17. Viewertariat position:**

0 = persuadee

1 = persuader

2 = both

3 = unclear

### ANNEX 3: APPLICATION OF CODEBOOK

[Sample set: V-Boolell]

1. ID : 334
2. Timestamp : 00:26:56
3. Username : *Anonymised for study*
4. Comment Type : 0 (Comment – comment is not aimed at one specific audience member)
5. Comment Text : The opportunist will get into parliament so he can defend coriander lover (translated from Mauritian Kreol\*)
6. Comment Target : 0 (Candidate)
7. Statement Type : 0 (Definition)
8. Appeal Type : 0 (Ethos – character appeal made through mention of past mistress and hidden money scandals)
9. Ethos Type : 2 (Credibility – linking candidate to party leader’s past scandal)
10. Pathos Appeal : N/A
11. Logos Appeal : N/A
12. Logos Fallacy : 6 (No observable fallacy)
13. HIL : 1 (Yes – opportunist and ‘coriander lover’)
14. Connotation : 1 (Negative – inference to self-interested [opportunist] and party leader’s past scandal [coriander lover])
15. Rhet. Device : 3 (Antonomasia – opportunist and ‘coriander lover’ are both name-calling devices used to represent the candidate and party leader)
- 16: Figurative trope : 3 (Metaphor – coriander lover is a metaphor to point to the PTR leader’s extra-marital affair with a former coriander seller)
17. Position : 1 (Persuader – does not ask a genuine question and makes a claim by using an *ethos* appeal, thus qualifying as a persuader)

\*Original Comment Text: *Opportunist pou rentre dan parlement pou Ki Li defan cotomili lover*