Narratives of Resistance: Discursive Strategies in Nigeria's 2020 #EndSARS Protest

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Abstract

The #EndSARS hashtag, which started in 2017, was one of the tools used to share, on Twitter, experiences and advocacy on police brutality in Nigeria. Extant works have explored the use of social media for civic engagement, consciousness re-awakening, counter-narratives and societal disruption, amongst other uses. The present study focuses on how discursive strategies of resistance were deployed to create and sustain agitations using Twitter as a mobilising force of mass movement to achieve political goals. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with insights from computer-assisted textual analysis was used to analyse a corpus of 1,000 tweets with the #EndSARS hashtag. Findings show that blame attribution, recontexualisation of events, categorisation, victim positioning, and cross-border appeal are discursive resistance strategies used to sustain solidarity, create bonds and negotiate power among the marginalised people. Through these, protesters were able to create defiance and directive acts in the people. These strategies not only create a contest for political power between the government and the masses but also help in the construction of a resistance ideology among the people. Hence, new perspectives on social media should consider the paradigm shift that has resulted in how narratives are sustained and negotiated during online social movements.

Keywords: Digital activism, discursive strategies, #EndSARS, social media, Twitter, social movements.

Introduction

Recent trends in social media have generated the interest of scholars who critically examine how information dissemination has evolved in recent times. Advances in communication have increased the level of political participation as users of social media now engage in political activities in their environment online (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020; Uwalaka, 2021). This underscores the impact and role of social media in the present-day democratic era. To a large

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extent, politics in Nigeria has also been shaped by social media usage. Digital technologies have shaped the nature of political interactions, and they have become powerful tools for mobilisation, activism and agitation by groups of people who feel there is a need to critically engage the political state of affairs. The dissemination of information, exchange of ideas, and manipulation of public opinion have all been simplified through technological means. Nigeria is caught in this emergent digital activism as active online citizens deploy the use of the Internet to challenge the present state of politics in Nigeria. Research suggests that the traditional media is less effective in its capacity to trigger protest (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009), although relationship between traditional and social media is increasingly characterized by a hybrid interdependency (Bailo & Vromen, 2017). For instance, Christiansen (2018) reports how the print news media in New York framed a protest noting that traditional media focused more on protest activity rather than the protest message. This suggests that bias may find its way into news presentation in the traditional media. This may not be the case in the new media.

Before the #EndSars movement, there had been a series of online movements that also dominated the Nigerian Internet space and addressed issues of great concern to Nigerians. In April 2014, there was the #BringBackOurGirls (also tagged #BBOG) on Twitter to demand the release of close to 276 secondary school girls abducted from Chibok Secondary School, Bornu State, Northern Nigeria. Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) examine how the use of affective stance reflects the mood of people in reacting to the rights of the female gender in the #BringBackOurGirls campaign on social media. Maxfiled (2016) also expresses feminist concerns in the campaign to demand the release of the abducted girls, while Berents (2016) argues that there is a problematic framing of girls in certain ways to portray them as either victims or icons, which in turn, narrows the conceptualization of girlhood. #OccupyNigeria was also a prominent agitation that occurred after the removal of fuel subsidy in January 2012 by the government of President Goodluck Jonathan. Egbunike (2015) gives a comparative analysis of framing of the protest in newspapers and social media and concludes that there is a heterogeneous narration by the newspapers when compared to social media. Concerns on sexual extortion of female students in African universities were also raised through #SexForGrades. On the world scene, there have been occurrences such as #BlackLivesMatter, #WallStreet, #Ferguson, and so on to champion the causes of people who felt marginalised. The findings from these studies confirm the view of Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008: 1831) that "identity is not an individual characteristic." Instead, its expression in social network sites affords people the ability to create virtual identities for themselves in a certain way and also construct perceptions about others.

Language use in crisis situations is of great interest to researchers because, to a large extent, it reflects the worldview of the people about events and issues. Reality is mostly constructed by the narratives made available by the media. The use of social media for resistance building has changed the nature and form of social protests in Nigeria. There have been

studies on various forms of resistance in the country. Notable among the studies are those on the media construction of the Niger Delta militia (Chiluwa, 2011), representational strategies of pro-Biafra protesters (Osisanwo and Iyoha, 2020; Iyoha and Alugbin (2023), Biafra protests on social media networks (Chiluwa, 2012), Yoruba secessionist agitation (Osisanwo and Akano, 2023a; Osisanwo and Akano, 2023b) crisis during fuel subsidy removal driven through #Occupy Nigeria (Akinwotu, 2014, Hari, 2014, Egbunike and Olorunisola, 2015), and discursive strategies on the Bakassi-Peninsula conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon (Igwebuike, 2018). While most of these studies have examined how social mobilisation for protests was driven through social media such as Facebook and Twitter, others have also examined how newspaper reports on issues become sources of ideological struggle in times of crises. The growing interest in social movements also attracted wide interrogation from the social constructionist theory as they accounted for how social media can be a tool for social mobilisation (Kolker, 2004; Zelinska, 2021). The concept of frame is another angle from which scholars have examined how individuals identify with social movements and their goals (Benford and Snow 2000).

There have also been great impacts from online-triggered social movements across the world, which indicates that social media is a potent tool for social mobilisation across the world (Ojedokun, 2016.) Social media was very instrumental to the experiences of revolution witnessed in the Middle East. While Ghareeb (2000) points out the contribution of 'information revolution' in the dissemination of information in the Arab world, Chiluwa (2012) connects the dots by drawing attention to 'Twitter revolution' to refer to the Egyptian revolution. This shows that new technologies created opportunities for people to negotiate interests and freely express themselves in the 2011 Egyptian revolution (Chebib and Sohail, 2011; Chiluwa, 2012). Breuer, Landman and Farquhar (2015) also argue that social media was a catalyst for the 2010/2011 revolution in Tunisia. This study diverts from previous studies as it is designed to (i) identify the thematic representations in the 2020 #Endsars tweets and (ii) examine the discursive strategies deployed in the tweets to raise resistance ideology.

2020 #EndSARS Protest

In October 2020, Nigerians, mostly youths, took agitations from Twitter where it originated to the streets to demand an end to police brutality in the country. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is a unit of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) created in 1992 and saddled with the responsibility of combating crimes that have to do with robbery, stealing, car-snatching among other related crimes. The unit is not a special creation of the law but just a unit of the NPF which implies that its existence is at the behest of the Inspector General of the NPF. The momentum about the need to scrap this unit of the NPF has been growing mainly on Twitter and passively on other social media outlets since 2017. It reached a climax by October 2020, when the demand to scrap the police outfit was taken from Twitter to Nigerian streets. With the first point of convergence starting in Lagos – a southwestern state in Nigeria, it spread to

other parts of the country and the scope of the demands later broadened beyond the need to end the special police outfit but to address other socio-political issues affecting Nigerians and mainly, the youths.

The Hashtag as a Social Movement Call
Social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram offer a great advantage to connect with people across the globe and share experiences with them. It provides a means for people to bond and affiliate. One thing about the use of Twitter is its affordance in the creation of varied social contexts in interacting and sharing information. This implies that social interactions are largely driven and maintained by contexts within which they occur. The hashtag as a paralanguage has also afforded users on social media to creatively deploy language for their use since the hashtags can be added to any word or string of words (Zappavigna, 2015). It thus becomes a means to create a language on its own, though not independent of the existing language. It has been argued that the Internet serves as a site for citizens' engagement in democratic happenings in their environment. Apart from offline campaigns, mobilisation for support is also done through the internet (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). This confirms the major shift in the primary function of social media as a means to merely pass information among users. During the 2019 presidential campaign in Nigeria, online campaigns were very pervasive on social media. Politicians, including President Muhammadu Buhari, the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), and other political parties used social media to bridge the gap between offline campaigns. It helped them close up on people who are difficult to be connected physically. Beyond the campaign for elections, citizens are also able to contribute to governance through the critical engagement of government policies after the election.

Mahfouz (2020) claims that the use of hashtags started in 2007 on Twitter before it spread to other social platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. It was, however, officially incorporated by Twitter in 2009. The hashtag allows users on Twitter to categorise their posts based on discourse topics. This makes it easy to track and search the posts. The function of hashtags in the present time is not only limited to the categorisation of posts into discourse topics. Mahfouz (2020: 85) reports that the hashtag is also used for 'expressing emotions, supporting movements, promotion and publicity'. Notwithstanding the various functions that the hashtag has reportedly served, there has been an argument about the evolving functions of the hashtag and the dangers it poses for the use of language. The scope of the present study is to examine the discursive strategies of representation in the #EndSars protest. The study of ideology in online-based discourse shows that ideological interplay is also pervasive in online communities. This shows that in online discourse of resistance, the Internet becomes a site of ideological contest between the rulers and the netizens. The use of social media as a tool for resistance confirms the argument of Foucault (1998: 63) that power can be found everywhere. However, the forms, methods and styles of expression will differ. Thus, hashtags are a special form of metadata that serves the purpose of interpersonal management and construction of structural meaning apart from being a topic marker (Zappavigna, 2015).

Previous studies on the #EndSars discourse

Scholars have examined the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria with focus on the causes of the protest, the management of conflict during the protest, and the role of social media in championing political participation (Dambo et al, 2020; David-Ojukwu, Orabueze and Okoye-Ugwu, 2021; Wada, 2021; Nwabunnia, 2021; Akinwotu, 2021). Studies have also examined the semiotic resources deployed by the protesters. Examining the #EndSARS protest as a social and political event, Bamgbose and Alugbin (2022) analyse the ideological content of protest placards on Twitter using Halliday's transitivity system and van Dijk's ideological square. They explore government brutality, youth self-vindication, and the de-emphasis of social prohibitions. The study shows how youth distanced themselves from specific identities and projected a new image through relational processes. While this study takes a semiotic approach, the present study examines the protesters' tweets.

Dambo et al. (2020) critique the limitations of relying on social media for social change in Nigeria's political environment. David-Ojukwu, Orabueze, and Okoye-Ugwu (2021) argue that the #EndSARS protest was inevitable due to the country's poor governance. Nwabunnia (2021) credits queer activists for the protest's success, highlighting their inclusive approach and organization of online and offline meetings. Akinwotu (2021) examines how government officials managed the crisis, finding that President Buhari's and Governor Sanwo-Olu's speeches used collective pronouns to show solidarity, although the President's speeches weakened rapport. Aboh (2023) uses social media critical discourse analysis and social movement theory to study the #EndSARS protest, focusing on Twitter's role in facilitating social movements and portraying SARS as oppressors. In contrast, Afolayan (2022) explores how the government limits democratic engagement by labeling some protesters as "hoodlums" to delegitimize the protest, arguing this rhetoric justifies state violence and depicts protesters as chaotic.

Studies on #EndSARS from the historical angle have established the causes of the protest. For instance, Wada (2021) compares the historical evolution of the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US and Nigeria's #EndSARS protest because both address the problem of police brutality, and the study claims that the #EndSARS protest was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the US. Despite the stark differences in the socio-political landscapes of the two nations, the study relies too much on the Black Lives Matter movement to assess what constitutes appropriate behavior during the #EndSARS demonstration.

From the foregoing studies, it can be concluded that the 2020 #EndSARS protest was a complex and multifaceted event that requires a nuanced and interdisciplinary approach to understanding its causes, discourse structure, and discursive strategies. Also, contextualizing social movements in their historical, political, and cultural contexts is important to gain a better understanding of the events.

The Corpus and Methodology

The study relies on a corpus of #EndSars tweets made accessible at GitHub database. The database contains over one hundred and thirty thousand tweets on the hashtag #EndSars between May 2020 and December 2020. The database is a historical collection of tweets on various datasets with specific keywords or hashtags. The study uses hashtags as a sourcing tool to generate tweets on the discourse. The month of October 2020 marked the peak of the protest during which there was a national lockdown in major parts of the country. The study gathered 500 tweets before 20 October, 2020 and 500 tweets after this period. During the data processing, special characters, HTML characters, stop-words and URLs were removed so as not to impede the visual analysis of the data. The metadata on gathered tweets originally consisted date of the tweets, tweet Ids, the content of the tweets, usernames, locations, and the dates of account creation. The analysis in this study focuses on the texts' contents. Voyant, a tool in digital humanities is used to visualise the data for further interpretation. Voyant is very useful for visualisation of data to enhance a close analysis of texts. This study acknowledges Garrett's (2006) view that the lack of a unified framework to examine the interface of online social movement and activism may impede coming up with a unified perspective about the phenomenon. However, a hybrid and multidisciplinary approach will go a long way to harmonise perspectives and give a holistic view of the findings. For the discursive strategies, only relevant tweets (Twt) from 1 to 1000 are represented in the analysis. The study applies tools in digital humanities with a combined insight from critical discourse analysis. The study adopts a keyword-based analysis by examining the keyword-in-context.

Critical discourse analysis and computer-assisted textual analysis

The digital form of interaction allows scholars to analyze diverse data, such as images, sounds, and graffiti, through computers. While computer-assisted analysis is limited to identifying word frequency, critical discourse analysis (CDA) complements this by emphasizing the context of text production. This study uses van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of CDA to examine how discursive strategies in tweets justify resistance against the government, highlighting how power and dominance are manifested in discourse. CDA explores how language shapes perspectives and reinforces value systems, examining how group interests are controlled in public discourse. According to van Dijk (1998), ideology influences and is acquired through discourse, sustaining power and dominance in society. Texts are seen as sources to produce, construct, and contest reality, reflecting inequality. van Dijk (2004) notes that ideologies are the basis of social representations shared by group members, viewing ideology as a socio-cognitive concept where norms and values become mental models that influence attitudes (Oktar, 2001; van Dijk, 2006). Therefore, CDA is a critical tool for understanding how tweets can mobilize people to protest.

The 'us-them' polarisation reflects how conflicting interests are negotiated based on in-group and out-group categorisations (van Dijk, 2000, 2006). This implies that a group to

which one belongs is positively represented while the out-group will be presented with emphasis on their negative traits. These discourse strategies enable positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation while negotiating interest in situations of group conflict. van Dijk (2006) proposes four steps through which ideological polarisation can be pursued. They are:

i.   Emphasise what is good about us.
ii.   Emphasise what is bad about them.
iii. De-emphasise or suppress what is bad about us.
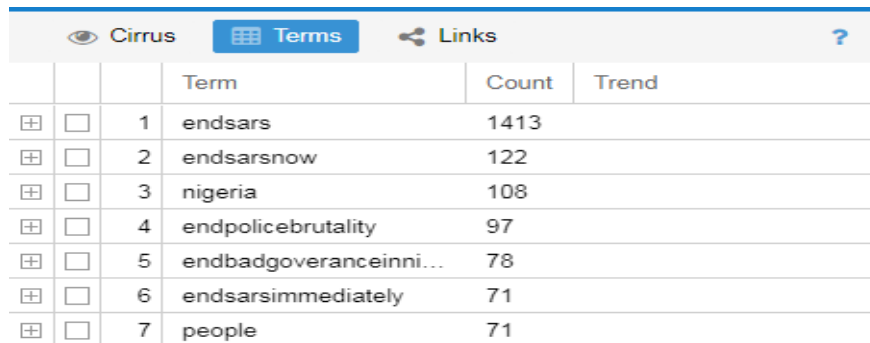iv.   De-emphasise or suppress what is good about them.

The four steps, also known as the 'ideological square', present how social groups raise group interests to produce and sustain ideologies. Notably, ideology is not only about how dominance is legitimised in discourse but also how it can be resisted. Oktar (2001: 314) notes that ideology "may serve to legitimize or resist power or dominance, or they may represent social problems or contradiction." These practices are mainly expressed and reproduced in language during interactions. So to understand how ideologies manifest, it is important to examine the discursive displays that occur in the discourse contexts of language use. While computer-assisted discourse analysis will provide important indices in the data, the application of CDA will be useful to further interpret the data based on the socio-cultural environment of the text.

Analysis

A word cloud analysis is used to present the thematic concerns and how it reflected in the entire discourse on the 2020 #EndSars protests. Words are also examined in their contexts to complement the analysis of the frequency of word distribution in the data.

Thematic representations in tweets on 2020 #EndSars Movement

While an end to police brutality and the scrapping of the special police arm 'SARS' make the list of the main issue that triggered the protest, there were other issues raised in the discourse on #EndSARS in the tweets. The figure below shows the frequency of keywords in the tweets.

			Term	Count	Trend
⊞	☐	1	endsars	1413	
⊞	☐	2	endsarsnow	122	
⊞	☐	3	nigeria	108	
⊞	☐	4	endpolicebrutality	97	
⊞	☐	5	endbadgoveranceinni…	78	
⊞	☐	6	endsarsimmediately	71	
⊞	☐	7	people	71	

Figure 1: *Frequency analysis of keywords in the data*

Figure 1 shows the frequency of keywords in the tweets. The word with the highest frequency is 'endsars' which shows that the tweets are speaking to the same thematic concern. In Figure 1, 'endsars' is presented as the word with the highest frequency, with other words in the data also represented based on the frequency of occurrence in the data. The word cloud analysis is helpful to identify the thematic concerns in the data. In number 5 in the figure above, the recurrence of the hashtag #Endbadgovernance is presented. This implies that the agitation of the people is not just about the need to scrap a police outfit named 'Sars' but to also demand that the institutions of governance are managed in a transparent and accountable manner.
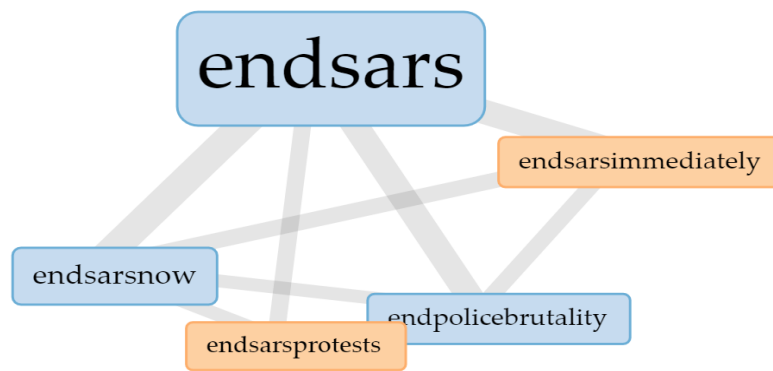

Figure 2: Link showing the link between closely related hashtags

The visual representation of the data indicates what constitutes the thematic concerns in the tweets. This shows that the issue of police brutality by an arm of the police known as SARS was the main factor that brought the youths to the streets. Other words also contribute to the overall thematic concerns in the texts. While #EndSars is the main hashtag used to drive the concerns of the people, there are other hashtags used alongside it to raise concerns about police brutality and other challenges faced by the people. Other words that trended in the tweets are:

> #EndNorthBanditry, #EndPoliceBrutality, #BuhariResignNow, #EnoughIsEnough, #BuhariResign, #AddressNigerians, #ReformPoliceNG, #EndASUUStrike, #EndNorthBanditry, #EndSocialMediaBill, #EndCorruption

The protests by the people were ignited by certain concerns, which are identifiable in the tweets before and during the conflict. The recurring themes in the tweets reflect various societal concerns that affect people, like insecurity, police brutality, corruption and misgovernance, maladministration, poor education, and social media freedom. This shows that the issue of police brutality is a triggering factor for other pending issues to be raised by the people. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria was on industrial action during the period of the protest. This meant that the gates of universities were shut against thousands of

students in public universities. The use of the hashtags led to an increase in the awareness of the concerns of the people. It enhanced political discussions as people were able to relate to the subject of discourse and raise other contiguous issues. Awareness about police brutality was broadly raised through the use of hashtags directed at calling for an end to SARS and police brutality. Tweets condemning acts of police brutality were followed by various hashtags. Thus, the use of hashtags greatly contributed to the promotion of the campaign to end police brutality on Twitter.

Blame attribution in #EndSARS discourse

Blame attribution is a representational strategy that aims to hold people responsible for acts they commit. This implies that the causality of actions cannot be taken for granted in the society as someone must take responsibility for the actions carried out. The tweets place the police as the causal agent of brutality and criminality rather than as a body to maintain peace and tranquility. This is realised through the categorisation of the actions of the police. A critical reading of the contexts in Voyant shows the attribution of the police agents to criminal activities that negate the expectations of their functions. Word-in-context is used to track the actions and representations of the keyword 'police' in the data. The term 'police' is also synonymous with the word 'Sars' as used in the tweet since both refer to the same security outfit that the people are protesting against.

> Twt 366: @UzoAduba Biko **SARS are** brutalizing, maiming, raping, extorting and killing Nigerian Youth. Let's #EndSARS!

> Twt 723: @Realnissybright @jidesanwoolu please can you order the arrest of Madam mojisola alli for stealing CACOVID palliatives and using them as souvenirs during her birthday

> Twt 938: @frankedoho His fellow possessed **'corruptician'** accused most Nigerian youths of being high on drugs when it takes more than the demons in drugs to use public palliatives for personal Birthday souvenirs.

Tweet 366 exposes the failure of the security agency in living up to the expectations of their duties. Violent acts targeted at civilians by the police are listed in the tweet. Noteworthy, the youth are also the victims, as depicted in the text. This shows the ill-treatment of the youths is a reason behind the agitation by the youths for the abolition of the police unit. The tweets present an antithetical situation where the police unit that should protect the citizenry has become a tool of suppression of the same people they should protect. Violence acts targeted at civilians by the police are listed in Tweet 366. By explicitly listing the various forms of violence inflicted on Nigerian youth, the tweet highlights the gravity of the situation and seeks to elicit a strong emotional response from the reader.

Tweets 723 and 938 show the ineptness of the corrupt political class by attributing the failure in policing to incompetent political leadership in the country. Tweet 723 challenges the

dominant narrative that portrays political elite as being immune to the law and not being held accountable for their actions. During the lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were relief packages meant for members of the public to cushion the effect of the lockdown. A politician was reported to have used these packages for birthday souvenirs. Tweet 938 uses neologism, a combination of "corruption" and "politician" to create "corruptician" and reflect the corrupt activities of the politicians. The tweet also challenges the stereotypes and generalisations made against Nigerian youths, showing that the writer is attempting to resist negative labelling and stereotyping. The tweets de-emphasise the negative perceptions about the youths and assign responsibility for negative actions to the political class as a result of their selfish actions.

Recontexualisation of Events
The essence of this strategy is to point to other aspects of human life that are also faced with numerous challenges. This implies that Nigeria's problem is not limited to that of the #EndSars alone. There are other aspects of lives also affected. This is why the hashtags are not limited to #EndSars. Recontextualisation has to do with how an event in a particular context is reproduced in other situations. What recontextualisation of the topic in the tweets does is reframe a particular experience in another context. This helps to identify how ideological moves are woven around the tweets. The fluid nature of the messages makes it possible to further the discourses on #EndSars through other contexts. This validates the opinion of Wodak and Wright (2006: 254) that it is interesting to 'study how discursive practices are relocated or recontextualized through various genres and political fields and ultimately adapted to new interlocutors, arguments, and situations'.

> Twt 290: @trafficbutter If SARS Kill 10 Cows This Night They'll Be Scrapped By Morning #EndSARS #EndSARSProtest
>
> Twt 103: @AishaYesufu Let them put that energy to curse boko haram for now and later for looters. #EndSARS"
>
> Twt: 779 @zikokomag Today is Friday. As we pray in the mosques lets also pray for those who are directly or indirectly affected by kidnappers, police brutality, injustice. May Allah accept our Ibadah #EndSARS

Tweet 290 is a reflection of the division that is ongoing in the political affairs of the country. It indicates the neglect of the rights of humans while premium attention is paid to those of animals. It reflects the ongoing farmer-herder clash where the government has been accused of not taking decisive actions to mediate and find a lasting solution to the problems created by open grazing of farmlands which has affected farmers in many ways. The tweet situates the #EndSars protest in the context of Nigeria's farmer-herder clashes, which indirectly points to the incompetence of the government in resolving conflicts on an age-long problem that has claimed many lives and threatened to be a cause of hunger in the country.

Tweets 103 and 779 point to the failure of the security outfits in Nigeria. The tweets draw attention to the fact that many Nigerians have lost their lives to insecurity. Nigeria has been facing serious security challenges in combating *Bokoharam*, an Islamic sect that opposes western education. Many school children have been abducted without hope of return. Kidnapping is another security challenge facing the Nigerian nation. In the light of this, the tweets draw attention to what should be the priority of the security outfit, which suggests the need for the police to redirect their energy to addressing and fighting insecurity and corruption.

Victimhood Positioning

The narratives of the #EndSars tweets are also built around victimhood positioning to negotiate their position as targets of brutal police acts. Victimhood positioning is a strategy geared towards presenting the self as innocent victims of the negative actions of the out-group. The tweets give narratives about how law-abiding citizens were unjustly attacked and brutalised by the police. The narrative of victimhood is a potent technique to gain the sympathy of readers and the masses.

> Twt 208: we are peace-loving hard working committed Nigerian Youths and we are tired of your mess; PLS DONT REFORM #EndSARS #EndSARSImmediately #EndPoliceBrutality

> Twt 381: @BBCAfrica **Nigerian Police kill us** for Wearing good clothes Using an iPhone or android phone Looking good Having dreadlock Having fine haircut Driving car Boarding public transport and many more stupid reasons #EndSARS

> Twt 124: @unkonfined "@MobilePunch It's not a crime to use an iPhone. It's not a crime to keep dreads. It's not a crime to have a laptop. It's not a crime to have a car. It's not a crime to be young and looking good. Let's #EndSarsNow

> Twt 302: "Nigerian youths are tired of being pawns in your games. We are tired of being victims of your unaccountability and bad governance. We are tired of being labelled "lazy" and while we get busy, we end up with bullets in our body. #EndSARS #EndPoliceBrutality #EndSARSImmediately"

Tweet 208 is polarising as it emphasises the positive attributes of Nigerian youths while accusing the police as the cause of confusion. This presents the protesters, most of whom are youths in a positive light to showcase the fact that the evident good living the police see is a product of their creativity, innovation and resilience. Having emphasised the good thing about Nigerian youths, tweets 381 and 124 place emphasis on the negative actions of the Nigerian police. This is done to show that attacking Nigerian youths because of the opulent lifestyle they live is uncalled for. Tweets 381 and 124 list the brutal acts carried out by the police – the most brutal being killing. The reasons for the killing show that the acts of the police are unwarranted and unconstitutional. The youths in this context are being attacked by the police because of the evidence of good living. Tweet 302 also passes the message that the youth are

not only victims of police brutality. They are also victims of bad governance of the political leaders who were voted to protect the lives of the citizens but choose to satisfy their selfish desires. This shows that leadership failure is one of the reasons adduced in the post for whatever sorry state the youths find themselves in.

Evidentiality

Evidentiality is a strategy that gives credence to points that are raised in a discussion. Strategic deployment in the tweets clears doubt that the narratives being constructed are hearsay or rumour. When the source of a piece of information is provided in the tweet, it strengthens the belief of the readers in the cause of action of the #EndSARS protesters. Evidentiality is deployed as a strategy to strengthen the degree of source and knowledge of information passed across. This helps make a claim appear more definite, authoritative and reliable. This, thus, affects the way the discourse is perceived and interpreted.

> Twt 141: @BR_Doctor This is the dead body of Tiamiyu Kazeem (Kaka), a talented young footballer of @RemoStarsSC killed by the SARS officers being laid to rest. So many others that can't even be named. Dear Nigerian government, we aren't asking for too much but please just #EndSARS

> Twt 413: @DuchessT Aside when I was kidnapped 13th September, 2013. This is the first time I'm spending 2 straight nights without sleep or rest. We are neck deep in this matter, point of no return. Ahead ahead #EndSARSProtest #EndSARS #EndSarsNow

> Twt 240: "This is Sergeant E… A… attached to the Special Protection Unit, Base 16, Ikeja. He's the police officer that shot that lady in the mouth at Opebi, Lagos State yesterday. He is currently on the run. Pls retweet until he is found. #EndPoliceBrutalitynow #EndSARS

Tweets 141, 413 and 240 make marked use of evidence in the discourse to provide the real casualties of police brutality. To capture visual evidence of the consequences of police brutality, a footballer of a club in the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL), Tiamiyu Kazeem, was presented as the victim in Tweet 141. Other victims who are not named in the tweet are also used to strengthen the claim in the tweet. In Tweet 413, self-evidence from a first-hand victim was also presented about an abduction, which shows the rate of insecurity in the country. The first-hand experience and knowledge of problems being confronted are strategies to support the claim about police brutality. Tweet 240 provides specific identification of the police officer who shot a lady in the mouth at Opebi, Lagos State. By providing the officer's name and affiliation, the tweet seeks to hold the officer accountable for his actions and prevent him from evading justice. These establish facts and provide evidence to support the claims of the protesters.

Cross-border appeal

There is an appeal and call-out to influencing personalities, sports figures, notable world artists, political figures and big multinationals to transcend national boundaries and resonate with people across cultures and regions. This is done to notable world institutions, artistes and credible personalities. The tweets make pleas to people across the world who necessarily are not going through their hardship to also share in their problems. By emphasising the impact of police brutality on their daily lives and referencing global brands and organisations, these tweets attempt to appeal to a global audience and highlight the transnational nature of the issue.

> Twt 375: Dear @Pornhub most of your subscribers and viewers in Africa are from NIGERIA. We are being brutalized by one notorious Police unit called SARS

> Twt 254: "@oxladeofficial @6LACK @saint @1GunnaGunna @RoddyRicch @smokepurpp @sza @theestallion @stefflondon @JColeNC We listen to y'all's music every day here in Nigeria. But I guess that might soon stop cus our lives are being threatened unless you lend us your voices to stop this #EndSARS

> Twt 250: @PinnickAmaju @thenff we need your support on this matter. We can't go out to watch Nigeria match anymore mainly because of SARS #EndSARS #EndPoliceBrutality #EndSARSImmediately #PoliceBrutality

> Twt 347: "Dear @Apple Nigerian policemen kill young people for owning an iPhone. Dear @MercedesBenz Nigerian policemen kill young people for buying your cars. Dear @Nike @adidas Are you aware young people are killed for buying your trainers? Pls lend a voice. Help us. #EndSars"

The texts above illustrate the concept of cross-border appeal, as the tweets reach out to international actors and brands to support their cause against police brutality. The tweets call upon international music artists, sports organisations, and global brands to use their influence and voice to raise awareness of the issue and pressure the Nigerian government to take action. Tweet 375 reports the brutality of the Nigerian Police Force. The tweet goes on to link the police unit as SARS. This confirms the connection and synonymous relation of the police to SARS as used in the data. The choice of the lexis 'notorious' creates a negative evaluation of the special police outfit. An appeal is made to @Pornhub, a leading free porn site. This shows the desperate condition of the Nigerian youth to get the attention of the international audience. There is an international appeal to sentiment in the discourse of #EndSars by globalising victimhood. This gave the #EndSars agitation such global appeal that it became impossible for notable world leaders, artists, and companies to overlook. The international community was thus drawn into the Nigerian experience during this period. Due to the widening youth bulge in Nigeria, millions of youths are followers of notable world artists. The youths leveraged this to call out their favourite artists to help retweet the #EndSars to avoid losing a large audience.

Tweet 254 invites notable music artists to lend their voices to end police brutality in Nigeria. In tweet 250, there is an appeal to the President of the Nigeria Football Federation, Amaju Pinnick, to come to the aid of Nigerian sports fans, many of whom are victims of the violence of the police. Tweet 347 points out the deficiency in the evaluation of criminals among Nigerian youths. The tweet presents good living by the youth as a condition of the vulnerability of abuse by the police unit. Thus, the tweets raise sympathy of other Nigerian youths and the world at large through the appeal to their sentiment. This raises sympathy not only among other Nigerian youths who do not have direct experiences captured in the tweets but also on the international scene from world celebrities, sports personalities and giant companies.

Conclusion

The findings revealed the use of various persuasion strategies such as blame attribution, recontextualisation of events, and victim positioning. These persuasion strategies were employed in the tweets to portray the rights of the people to righty demand an end to police brutality while also raising other socio-political concerns. The use of these strategies accounts for and connects how online protests evolve into social movements capable of effecting societal change. Through the strategies deployed, the tweets on #Endsars were able to (i) highlight the problems and concerns of the people (ii) contradict earlier narratives of the government and (iii) raise public awareness of people's rights and steps necessary to stir actions. This study has attempted an analysis of online tweets on the #EndSars movement which occurred in Nigeria in October 2020. The study applies insight from computer-assisted textual analysis coupled with critical discourse analysis. In the tweets, there is the positive presentation of self and negative presentation of others to create 'us versus them' dichotomy. There is a general construction of the #EndSars protesters as obedient citizens while the government and its various agencies are presented as violators of human rights. This is done by emphasising the bad things about the government while the protesters present themselves in a good light and present their demands as legitimate within the practicality of a democratic state. In online engagement, the tweets are embedded with directive and defiance acts that trigger psychological resistance in the people as a preparatory basis for the physical resistance.

The 2020 #EndSars movement was motivated by police brutality and violence on the people, poor governance, and disappointment in social expectations of the government. The Internet and the new media, not censored by the government like the print media, provide a new opening for contesting ideas, negotiating power and breaking government influence on the traditional mass media. Through the various strategies that appeal to the emotions of the masses, the tweets were able to communicate resistance which enabled the people to take a position on issues. The barrier of the digital divide was also broken as those who had access to information technology were able to raise the consciousness of those who did not. This accounts for the creation of alliances and solidarity which expanded an online agitation into mass-based street protest. The bridge in this communication greatly helped in the mobilisation

as people also engaged other media channels like newsletters, banners, posters and fliers to complement information dissemination.

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