ENDSARS PROTESTS: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECT SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated a multimodal discourse analysis of select social media adverts on EndSARS protest across Nigeria. The objective of the study was to find out the multimodal resources employed by the protesters during the EndSARS protest. To achieve this, the data for the study was drawn from the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp from 8th to 22nd of October, 2020, during the period of the protest across the media platforms stated above. For data analysis, the descriptive method of analysis was adopted, wherein the multimodal resources in the EndSARS protest adverts were described analytically with the guide of the Social Semiotic theory. Based on the foregoing, the findings reveal that the use of colour, iconicity, symbols, and verbal material are multimodal resources to convey a deeply emotional message to the Nigerian government and the rest of the world about the predicament faced by Nigerians in the hands of SARS.

KEYWORDS: Multimodal discourse analysis, EndSARS, protest and five demands

Introduction

The actions of the police force have been gruesome, especially in the fight against crime. The indiscriminate and unprofessional fight against crime in the operations of the federal police, particularly the Special Anti-Rubbery Squad (henceforth referred to in this study as SARS), has amounted to extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody, unceasing cases of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment in police detention centres across the country. No thanks to the public concern over crime, which has increased the pressure on the police to arrest as many armed robbers as possible. Regrettably, this worthwhile concern of the population has also been used by the Nigerian police to systematically justify human rights violations as being an unavoidable part of this fight against crime. According to Amnesty International (2002), the poor performance of the Nigerian police in effectively tackling crime and the sense of mistrust which they inspire among Nigerians have facilitated the creation of armed vigilante groups at local and state levels, with the tacit, and sometimes explicit, endorsement from some state governments and state houses of assembly as well as wide popular support.

Unfortunately, this endorsement only made the abuse of human rights by SARS much more legal, thereby leaving the Nigerian populace helpless in the whole situation. The incessant harassment of armless citizens, especially the youths, in the guise of fighting cyber crime (Yahoo) by the men of SARS also heightened the loss of confidence in the police force and preempted the need for police reform. More than ever, it is now clear to Nigerians that the Nigerian police system has failed and must at least be reformed. A broad overhaul of its

conceptual principles and mission must match the new structures on which it must operate. This necessitated the EndSARS protest nation-wide. The EndSARS movement has made police reform an urgent priority in addition to the primary call for the disbandment of SARS by the protesters. Although no one was traced to be the leader of the movement, the arrowheads of the movement used the incident of police brutality and an angry youth response to it to mobilize what is now a worldwide movement.

As long as this protest lasted before the Lekki massacre, protesters amplified the call to end police brutality, human rights violations by the police, good governance, and a better Nigeria with inscriptions on their placards, T-shirts, banners, caps, and posters, as well as the different hash tags (#) on their social media handles. It also characterized the use of visual resources such as vests, headwears, dance, and surrogate language, among others, to communicate meanings in the discourse for the main purpose of a better Nigeria for all Nigerians. Interestingly, there has not been a protest of this magnitude in Nigeria since the dawn of democracy, speaking with multimodalities and semiotic resources as highlighted above. It is against this background that this study attempts to analyze some of the multimodal resources employed by the protesters during the EndSARS protest. The specific objectives of this study, therefore, are to

1. Find out the multimodal resources employed by the protesters during the EndSARS protest

2. Analyze how these resources are used to win the support of the citizens.

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

El Falaky (2019) observed that Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) has been adopted by researchers as a multifaceted approach of analysis that focuses on "denotational" and "connotational" readings of discourse (O'Halloran et al., 2011; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). For O'Halloran et al. (2011), denotative processes realize the literal message of what is being depicted, while connotational processes refer to socio-cultural ideological ideas and values. That is, connotation represents a "second layer of semiotic meaning construction" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p.96).

The review of CDA literature is influenced by the works of Fairclough (1992) as well as the dominant critical investigation of the notions of power and ideology by van Dijk (1997, 1998) as cited in El Falaky (2019). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) describe CDA as analyzing real social interactions within their linguistic structure. That is, CDA views the complex relationship between language and society. In other words, "it is a form of intervention in social practice and social relationships" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258 as cited in El-Falaky, 2019). This, in turn, as van Dijk (1997a) claims, attracts attention to its interdisciplinary nature, as it combines diverse perspectives in its own analysis in order to project a vast number of social problems. Therefore, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is capitalized on both critical linguistics and visual grammar (VG), retaining its importance in the integration of both approaches.

According to El Falaky (2019), MDA is a critical practice of discourse analysis, accentuating the importance of interspersing visual images and concepts of verbal discourse. Scholars claim that MDA accommodates both the construction and representation of meaning (Wodak, 2002; O'Halloran, 2008). Their claim is based on the fact that visual structures can express ideological meanings and contribute to the overall meaning of texts as much as linguistic structures in a given context. Similarly, van Leeuwen (2008) pinpoints the significance of CDA when analyzing visual semiotics. According to van Leeuwen (2008), integrating the

two approaches plays a central role in maintaining and legitimizing inequality, injustice, and oppression in society by using appropriate discursive methods.

CDA entails detailed analysis that explains and uncovers the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words (Habermas, 1973, cited in Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2013). The CDA primarily focuses on sociopolitical issues that extend beyond the textual border. It employs analytical tools that include both linguistic and non-linguistic parameters to address societal challenges relating to class, gender, and culture.

In the view of Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2013), matters like social relations, objects and instruments, time and place, belief system, societal values, and knowledge are the paradigms used to unravel the hidden reasons behind utterances or statements. CDA is thus close to social semiotics with a thin line of demarcation. Social semiotics, according to Hodge and Kress (1988) as cited in Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2013), studies meaning design and interpretation. This covers the study of how semiotic systems are shaped and adapted by social interests and ideologies. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) consider language as a functional medium which incorporates a number of semiotic systems organized and described through three fundamental metafunctions: the ideational metafunction accounts for the representation and interconnectivity among various semiotic resources; the interpersonal metafunction describes the role-relations between the addresser and the addressee; and the textual metafunction describes various ways in which cohesion can be achieved in multimodal texts.

Although Van Dijk (1991) emphasizes that CDA provides critics with a tool for studying communication within socio-cultural contexts and how ethnicity affects our ideological thinking as well as utterances. Van Dijk states that conversations reflect cognitive, social, historical, cultural, or political contexts. Therefore, Thompson (2002) warned that we should not consider utterances neutral; rather, we should be conscious of the underlying meaning of the words. Our words are politicized, deliberately or not. Similarly, institutions or individuals such as courts, governments, and academics play an important role in determining the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of issues.

CDA's overtly political agenda is targeted at providing accounts of the production, internal structure, and overall arrangement of texts (Dellinger, 1995). Fairclough (1992b), as cited in Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2013), previously stated that those groups that control the most influential discourse have a greater chance of controlling the minds and actions of others. Action is controlled by our minds, which, in turn, is influenced by our utterances and statements. For instance, threats and persuasions will definitely come as reactions to the way our minds interpret certain expressions. While some people only have active control over everyday talk, others are more or less passive targets of text or talk. For instance, bosses simply tell their subordinates what to do, believe, or not to do. One may then be prompted to ask the following questions:

a. How do (more) powerful groups control public discourse?

b. How does such discourse control the minds and actions of (less) powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality? On the other hand, members of more powerful social groups and institutions have more or less exclusive access to and control over one or more types of public discourse. Those who have more control over more discourse are, by that definition, also more powerful. All these discursive practices are embedded in a multimodal discourse in order to create particular kinds of

meanings. It is a methodical approach to studying how meanings emerge from the interaction of linguistic text, visual image, and historical representation.

One crucial difference is that CDA seeks to provide a critical dimension in analyzing a text as well as their textual imports, which, in a way, gives a clue about who the voice belongs to, such as elected politicians, corporation presidents, union leaders, bureaucrats, laborers, criminals, etc. According to Fairclough, Jessop, and Sayer (2004), CDA varies in theory, methodology, technique, and thematic preoccupation, and it finds an ally in systemic functional linguistics. Halliday (1985) argued that the lexical and grammatical features of texts are encapsulated in three discourse fields: tenor, mode, and trio. He asserts that the field portrays the social and natural world; tenor constructs social relations, while mode focuses on how coherence is achieved through a channel. It is within this context that we intend to examine the impacts of a multi-modal channel of encoding a campaign advert and its implications in terms of how it is encoded and decoded by the speaker and hearers, respectively.

This is because not only will a multimodal means offer a broad opportunity to study a message, but also because emphasis is rapidly shifting from monomodality to multimodality in channels of communication. O'Halloran, Tan, Smith, and Podlasov (2011) observe that:

> discourse analysts are increasingly required to account for multimodal phenomena constructed through language and other resources (e.g. images, sound and music) and to relate higher-level critical insights on the social motivations of these texts to their realizations in lower-level expressive phenomena, and vice versa (p. 19).

According to these scholars, a discourse not only determines how it is to be interpreted, but it also serves as a tool to measure the analyst's own competence and expertise through the amount of critical insights available to him, as observed in the analysis of such discourse.

Five Demands of the EndSARS Protesters

On Sunday, 11 October 2020, the protestors made a list of five demands to be met by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The demands, which were signed by "A Nigerian Youth," demanded the immediate release of all arrested during the protests, as well as justice and compensation for all who died through police brutality in Nigeria. They also demanded that an independent body be set up within 10 days to investigate and prosecute all reports of police misconduct. The protestors also asked for the psychological evaluation and retraining of SARS operatives before they are deployed to any other police unit. Lastly, they asked for an adequate increase in the salaries of officers of the Nigerian police (Premium Times, October 4, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for this study is the Social Semiotic Theory. The Social Semiotic theory was introduced by Michael K. Halliday in 1978 but later developed into a full-fledged theory of multimodal sign-making in the works of Hodge, Kress, and van Leeuwen (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2019). In Hallidayan theory, language is a product of social processes; the resources of a language are shaped by the functions it has developed to satisfy the communicative needs of people's lives.

Kress and Leeuwen (2001) remarked that a primary consideration in the approach is that "media of communication are shaped and organized by a culture into a range of meaning-making systems and modes in order to articulate the meanings demanded by the practical and social requirements of different communities" (p.11). Therefore, the approach to semiotic analysis sees signs not only as culturally constructed but also interpreted within certain cultural purviews. Put differently, the current study appreciates the view that cultural meanings are created and communicated through the interplay of signs. The artifacts under analysis in the present study are comprised of textual and visual elements. Furthermore, social semiotics adopts Halliday's metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) in the analysis of semiotic ensembles, showing how the various meanings are communicated by the verbal and visual signifiers in a semiotic ensemble (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Social semiotics is related to discourse analysis in that it concerns how people make meaning from cultural artifacts, but social semiotics also includes signs and images in addition to verbal and linguistic materials. The authors developed social semiotics in response to what they considered the limitation of verbal language in their earlier work and to reflect their view that "social structures and processes, messages and meanings are the proper standpoint from which to attempt the analysis of meaning systems" (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001, p. xii).

In the context of this study, social semiotic theory will be appreciated in the form of its metafunctionality in the arena of protest and demonstration, with specific attention to EndSARS placards and advertisement messages on the social media. The relevance of the theory is premised on the fact that the present study centers on multimodal discourse analysis, which covers images, color, texture, inscriptions on placards, hats, vests, etc.

Methodology

Data for this study was drawn from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp. The data for the study was gathered from 8th to 22nd of October, 2020, during the period of the protest across the media platforms stated above. 10 materials in connection with the EndSARS protest were purposively sampled for this study owing to the several communicative elements they contain. The multimodal resources were selected randomly from all the protest centers across the country. The decision to select randomly was due to the similarity of the messages that the multimodal resources conveyed, irrespective of the protest center. The newspaper publications that carried multimodal resources were subsequently scanned and converted to word documents for data presentation and analysis. The analysis of the data was based on a multimodal discourse analysis approach.

Findings and Discussions

The current section deals with the analysis and discussion of findings of select protest placard/pictorial messages. The multimodal discourse analysis of the select placards/pictorial messages of the EndSARS protest which constituted the data for this study is presented below. The data characterized the peak of the highly-spirited global protest tagged: EndSARS both online and offline. The visual materials are analysed based on their semiotic contents. The multimodal discourse analysis of the select EndSARS protest placards and its multimodal resources are built around the participants' appeal to security and safety of life, appeal to human right abuse, appeal to non-religiosity and ethnicity, etc. those are considered major tropes in the materials. The materials are analysed and discussed in relation to their appeals below.

Protest against the Rise of Nigeria against Nigerians

Certain visual signifiers are purposively used in the messages to create some emotional crisis in the minds of the ordinary citizens. Presenting the Nigeria Police Force in bad light is top in the designer's priority. Here, the producer makes conscious attempts to convey the following discrediting messages against SARS operatives:
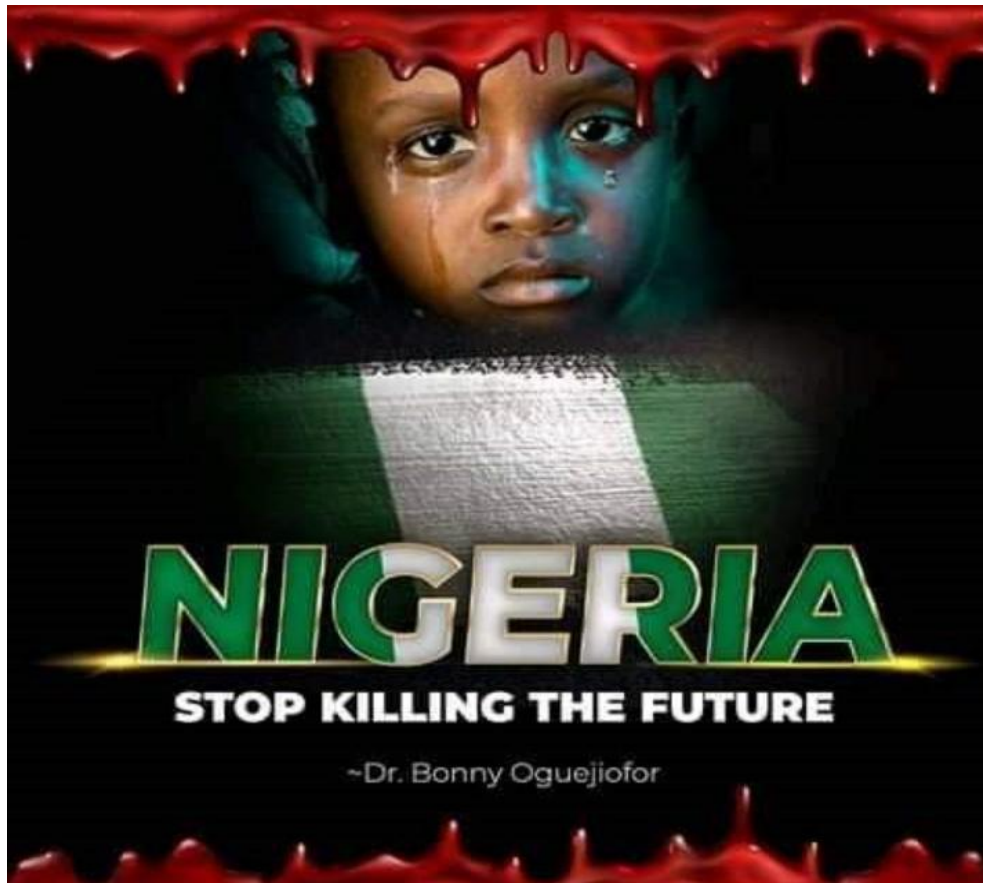

Figure 1

The above *fig.* reveals the use of color, iconicity, symbols, and verbal material to convey a deeply emotional message to the Nigerian government and the rest of the world about the predicament faced by the Nigerian child in the hands of SARS. There are three predominant colors evident in the above *fig;* the **red**, the **green,** and the **white**. The use of the above-stated colors is highly semiotic as portrayed by the producer of the advertisement message. The red, as portrayed in the above *fig,* represents the blood of innocent Nigerians that has been wasted by the SARS operatives across the country. The green and white rapped around the child's body is the Nigerian flag, revealing his Nigerianness. In other words, the designer of the multimodal material attempts to reveal how the blood of the Nigerian child is gruesomely shed on the Nigerian soil by those who should be protecting its rightful course.

Tears literarily can only flow from the eyes of humans and animals. A number of reasons account for why the human eye drops tears. The tears of the innocent looking child and the blood dropping like water symbolize the pain, anguish and lives of Nigerians that are unlawfully and extra-judicially terminated by the SARS operatives. The Nigerian child is in pain hence, cannot help but cry in expression of his helplessness and frustration in the system. The tears won't stop flowing perhaps because nothing has been done to put an end to

all the human right abuses meted on him. The blood on the other hand is raining from all quarters across the country and dropping on every part of the Nigerian soil. This symbolizes the lives of Nigerians that are unlawfully terminated by SARS operatives. Evidently, the blood dropping from all sides of the top to every part of the ground is an indication that it is not just the whose image is shown by the protest advert producer. Rather, there are more victims of brutality, extra-judicial killing and inhuman treatments by the Nigeria police force.

Another multimodal resource is the verbal material **"NIGERIA STOP KILLING THE FUTURE"** in the above material. The emphasis placed on Nigeria is evident by the way the protest advert producer enlarges the word to have a bigger font size than the others. This foregrounding attempt is intended to reveal the identity of the perpetrator of the claimed bastardly act. Also emphatic is the introduction of the subject in the imperative construction. Of course, it is known and understood that imperative sentences usually have null subject. But in this case, the producer for emphasis, clarity and particularity sakes mentions the subject (Nigeria).

Protest against the Notorious Activities of the SARS

SARS officers have been alleged to profile young Nigerians, mostly males, based on fashion choices, tattoos and hairstyles. They were also known to mount illegal road blocks, conduct unwarranted checks and searches, arrest and detain without warrant or trial, rape women, and extort young male Nigerians for driving exotic vehicles and using laptops and iPhones (Kazeem, 2020). The table below reveals the extent of alleged notorious activities of the SARS operatives as conveyed in the advert message below.

Figure 2

The above advert material is evidently simple with its verbal material which reads: "STOP THREATENING UNARMED CITIZENS WITH RIFLES". On the material above is also the picture of a man in **black** hair tie and T-shirt. This is to say that the material above basically

presents two multimodal resources as stated above. The first which is the use of the verbal material "STOP THREATENING UNARMED CITIZENS WITH RIFLES" makes central to its appeal common sense. The producer of the said material raises two focal points even while appealing to common sense of the SARS operatives. The producer of the said material consciously and tactically reminds the SARS operatives that the people they threaten with riffles are unarmed. By implication, it doesn't make any sense going by the assessment of the right thinking members of the public, chasing after people who have no riffle (that is, harmless) with ammunitions. People who are supposed to be chased after with weapons ordinarily are those with weapon. Therefore, the producer ridicules the SARS operatives by portraying their action stupid to even think of.

The other focal point that the producer raises is the citizenship of these unarmed people threatened with riffles. Unfortunately, it is not only unreasonable but also a deviation from the purpose of the establishment of the special squad. The basic aim of any security agency is to protect lives and property of the citizens of its country. Following the verbal material presented above, the producer is saying that even if for whatsoever reason they should threaten unarmed people with riffles (which shouldn't be), it should not be citizens whose lives and property they had sworn to protect. It becomes a complete aberration that those who were supposed to protect the citizens are those threatening their lives.

Also largely evident in the material above is the use of the colour **black**. The carrier of the placard complements the message on the placard by dressing in black T-shirt and scarf. The colour black whenever it is portrayed in dressing conveys largely mourning and sorrow. This is the reason it is usually worn in burials. The above multimodal resource reveals a man who is in pain following the killing and threatening of the lives of unarmed citizens by their own security outfit. He therefore attempts to express his pain and sorrow by dressing fully in the colour black.

Appeal to Non-religiosity and Ethnicity

When the protest started, there were such insinuations that the protest was targeted to undo a particular religious sect while some others criticised it on the ground of its ethnic affiliations. These criticisms may have been following the usual secession struggle by some ethnic extremists in the country. It also may have been occasioned by the recurrent disagreement between the Christians and the Muslims in Nigeria. Following past incidents of such sort, it was easy to link the protest to religion or ethnicity. Therefore, having perceived these criticisms as an attempt to frustrate the essence of the protest, the protesters saw the need to debunk such claims using some semiotic resources.

Figure 3

The above cartoon-like semiotic resource centered mainly in communicating unity of purpose among the protesters irrespective of religion, gender or ethnic affiliation. This is exemplified in the way a Muslim woman is represented in the material above dressed in the full attire of a Muslim. The material therefore brings to the general knowledge of the public the commitment of some well-meaning Nigerians to the success of the protest not minding the religion or ethnicity. For them, it was Nigeria and not religion neither ethnicity. This is evident in the Nigeria colour (green and white) that the leader of the protesters uses to make her dress. As evident in the figure above, the leader of the protesters is seen to appear in green and white from her head to her ankle but for her shoes. The essence of this is to portray Nigeria and not any part of it as have been criticised. Another communicative element in the above multimodal is the presentation of a woman as the leader of the group with men as followers. This speaks volume the Nigerians quest for gender equality and the very high possibility of achieving that in the country. It presents to us the supremacy of capacity over gender. In other words, **"a woman can steal lead and the men follow"**.

Conclusion

This study has dwelled on the analysis of some placards and pictorials of the EndSARS mass protest across Nigeria. The study reveals that the messages reflect the frustration of Nigerians with the activities of the SARS operatives on the Nigerian soil. The multimodal resources of the adverts, which were socio-culturally conceived, were analysed under the broad themes of protest against the rise of Nigeria against Nigerians, protest against the notorious activities of SARS, and appeal to non-religiosity and ethnicity. These were the major tropes in the discourse. Central to the discourse is the extra-judicial killing of unarmed Nigerians by the men of SARS, as well as their notorious activities. The allegations of killing, robbery, snatching of cars and phones of the people they ought to protect gave rise to the nationwide protest. The centrality of the afore-mentioned to the discourse resulted from the oppression, intimidation, and frustration that the citizens have suffered in hands of the men of SARS. The

study also reveals the use of color, iconicity, symbol and verbal material as multimodal resources to convey deeply emotional message to the Nigerian government and the rest of the world about the predicament faced by the Nigerian citizen in the hands of the SARS. There are three predominant colors evident in the study: red, green, and white. The tears of the innocent-looking child and the blood-dropping like water are also multimodal resources used by the producer of the advert. The representation of a child crying is an iconic semiotic element representing the younger people in pain following the activities of the SARS. The study is also rich in verbal materials as a multimodal resource. One of such is: **"NIGERIA STOP KILLING THE FUTURE"** in the above material.

The study further shows that contrary to the expectation of some Nigerians that no matter how united they might have been in the protest that it was easy for religion and ethnicity to divide them; were disappointed completely. The semiotic resource communicates unity of purpose among the protesters irrespective of religious affiliations, gender or ethnic boundaries. This is exemplified in the way a Muslim woman is represented in the material above dressed in the full attire of a Muslim and right behind her are men and women whose religion and ethnicity are diverse as evidently shown in their dressing.

Recommendations

Following the findings of the present study, it is therefore recommended that further studies be carried out on a multimodal analysis of the choice of colour in the EndSARS social media advertisements. It is also recommended further studies be carried out to determine the communicative as well as the informative intentions of verbal materials on social media advertisements of EndSARS protests.

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