

A Multimodal Analysis of Visual and Textual Narrative of Resistance in EndSARS Social Media Posts

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Abstract

This paper explores the interaction between visual and textual narratives in shaping the discourse of resistance during the 2020 EndSARS protest in Nigeria. The #EndSARS in Nigeria marked a pivotal moment in youth-led resistant ideology. This study examines how multimodal elements such as memes, placards, infographics, images, and videos shaped public discourse and mobilised collective action during the protest. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) and Papacharissi's (2015) Social Media Ecology Theory, ten purposively selected social media posts were analysed through qualitative content analysis. Key themes such as violence and suppression, solidarity, anger, and calls for justice emerged. The findings reveal that the multimodal interplay between visual and textual elements generated emotionally resonant content that influenced public opinion in Nigeria and sustained global awareness throughout the protest. The study affirms the resonant impact of multimodal contents shared on social media platforms and offers insights into its potential to mobilise public sentiments and the need to mitigate potentially inflammatory narratives in the digital space.

Key words: Visual and Textual Narratives, Resistance, Multimodality, EndSARS, Symbolism

Introduction

The EndSARS protest of October 2020 in Nigeria stands as one of landmark youth-led protests in the country's history. The protest sparked by acclaimed decades of widespread brutality, extortion and human rights abuses perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigeria Police Force. The protests began as a localised online agitation to the perceived systemic abuse and authoritarian conduct of SARS operatives, who were regarded as representatives of the entrenched state power. However, the protest soon gained national and international attention due to multimodal resources deployed online (Adisa, 2021). The EndSARS movement, akin to the Arab Spring of 2011, Bring Back Our Girls of 2014, Fess Must Full of 2016, the Black Lives Matter protest of 2020, and the Hong Kong Protest of 2019, began as an online campaign against police brutality. Over time, it transformed into a broader demand for a comprehensive institutional reforms in Nigeria. The online agitation and its attendant effect later metamorphosed into offline street protest. Maclean (2021) affirmed that EndSARS was primarily triggered by viral video footages of alleged police brutality against Nigerian Youth. Internet-savvy young Nigerians learned from the Black Lives Matter movement and the Arab Spring which were sometimes described as the 'Twitter revolution' (Ijioma, 2023, pp. 18-30). The youth therefore used social

media to coordinate protests across the country on a scale that drew the attention of the Nigerian authorities.

Social media is a computer-mediated technology that facilitates the rapid, transnational exchange of ideas and content using the internet. It supports varied modes of communication including text, visuals, audio, and gestures (Adekunle, 2022). This aligns with the theory of multimodality, which posits that meaning-making is not restricted to language alone, but involves an integration of multiple socially developed semiotic modes (Kress, 2010; Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasise that images, like language, have their own grammar codes. The incorporation of multimodal content is a significant factor in enhancing communication, particularly on social media platforms.

The dynamics of information sharing across multiple communication channels are essential for effective communication patterns. Effective communication is not a self-contained or a one-way approach because human beings do not rely solely on a linguistic mode for adequate meaning creation and exchanges. This implies that human communication as the foundation of life's engagement is multimodal. Multimodality is thus seen as a mode of communication hinged on the multiplicity of modes, all of which have been socially developed for adequate meaning negotiation (Benzemer & Maver, 2011; Kress, 2010; Jowitt, 2009). Modes such as linguistic, visual, aural, gestural and spatial, for instance, are conceived as sets of organised semiotic resources that certain societies have developed over time, each to a greater or lesser level of articulation in different social groups to make meaning, express and shape values, ideologies, and power relations (Grijspaardt, 2021; Jowit, 2009). When other modes are integrated with linguistic modes, they do not merely accompany the verbal language, rather they contribute specific functional significance to the meaning convey by the overall message. Multimodality refers to the use of diverse modes and tools people use to communicate beyond spoken language (Bezemer & Maver, 2011, p.1).

Several studies that have examined the EndSARS protest, focus more on either the linguistic or visual dimensions in isolation. Studies by Adisa (2021), Adekunle (2022), Ajisafe, Ojo and Monyani (2021), and Awopetu and Aseniserare (2021) offer valuable insights into social media's role and visual communication in activism. However, limited attention seems to have been given to the interplay of visual and textual narratives which is what this study identifies as multimodal narratives of resistance.

This study fills these gaps by examining how textual and visual elements within multimodal narratives shaped the discourse of resistance during the EndSARS protest and contributed to its widespread impact. Broadly, this study contributes to the broader understanding of digital activism and its sociopolitical implications. The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it seeks to identify the textual and visual elements employed in expressing resistance during the protest. It further examines the ways in which these textual and visual elements contributed to the construction of resistance narratives. Finally, the study investigates how social media platforms facilitated the spread of and reinforcement of resistance ideologies during the protest.

Literature Review

This literature review contextualises the multimodal analysis of visual and textual resistance narratives within #EndSARS social media posts. It synthesises scholarship on social media's role in protest, the construction of online resistance narratives, multimodality theory, and the impact of algorithmic environments through Social Media Ecology Theory. These perspectives are crucial because multimodal resources on social media have fundamentally reshaped protest discourse.

Social media platforms are central to modern protest, enabling "networked protests" (Castells, 2012, p. 119) and "internet-driven protest waves" (Tufekci, 2017, p. 2). Twitter and Instagram facilitate rapid mobilisation, information flow, and grievance amplification (Shirky, 2008, p. 104). Hashtag activism, as seen in #EndSARS, forms organising nodes and digital archives (Freelon et al., 2020, p. 55), while "digital witnessing" empowers citizens to bypass traditional media, sharing real-time, emotionally charged content (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 28; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 20). In Nigeria, social media has historically supported civic engagement, with #EndSARS marking an unprecedented peak in digital activism (Oladipupo, 2021, p. 32). However, its emancipatory power is checked by issues such as slacktivism (Morozov, 2011, p. 187), digital inequality, surveillance, and algorithmic suppression (Tufekci, 2017, p. 147).

The EndSARS protest was a youth-led campaign against SARS brutality, evolving into a broader call for justice and good governance. Digital platforms like Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook became spaces for mobilisation, storytelling, and contesting official narratives (Mbah, 2021; Olumuyiwa & Oludayo, 2022). Hashtags like #EndSARS, #EndPoliceBrutality, and #SoroSoro not only indexed protest content but also served as emotional rallying cries (Ogunleye, 2021). These enabled the spread of multimodal content such as images, memes, videos, infographics which together crafted a compelling counter-narrative to state-controlled discourse.

Scholars of digital activism and visual communication argue that multimodal texts shape identity, meaning, and resistance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Rose, 2016). During #EndSARS, these texts functioned as civic testimony, visually and textually documenting state violence while mobilising collective action (Adebanwi, 2020). Storytelling and live reporting allowed users to challenge hegemonic structures and co-create alternative political imaginaries (Afolayan & Ayandele, 2023), reinforcing the movement's decentralised, participatory nature.

The protest also showed how digital platforms function as both symbolic and strategic arenas of resistance, blurring activism, journalism, and advocacy. A multimodal approach is essential to understanding the layered meanings that arise from the interplay of semiotic modes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). This study applies Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design, focusing on representational meaning (depiction of participants and actions), interactive meaning (viewer-image relations via gaze and perspective), and compositional meaning (element arrangement, salience, and framing).

Finally, resistance communication is shaped by algorithms designed to maximize engagement (Gillespie, 2014, p. 167). These systems influence content

visibility, often reinforcing “filter bubbles” (Pariser, 2011, p. 9) and “echo chambers” (Sunstein, 2001, p. 64), which can amplify or obscure protest narratives (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 11). Algorithmic preferences for high-performing content affect visibility, reach, and protest momentum. From a Social Media Ecology perspective, platform architecture, affordances, user behavior, and algorithmic logic together create an ecosystem that shapes and sustains digital resistance (Scolari, 2012, p. 58; Zhao, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016, p. 135).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of ten purposively selected social media posts from Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) that were deployed during the EndSARS protest. Qualitative content analysis, as outlined by Schreier (2012) and Mayring (2012), was chosen for its capacity to interpret meanings embedded in texts, images, videos, and audios through thematic categorisation while preserving context. To ensure relevance and reduce bias, the posts were selected based on high engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) that were tagged with hashtags such as #EndSARS, #SoroSoke, #EndPoliceBrutality, and #JusticeForAll.

Twenty active EndSARS participants were contacted for permission to access public protest-related content on their platforms, and five granted access. The selection prioritised individuals who were actively involved in disseminating protest messages or participating in the demonstrations. Emphasis was placed on multimodal resources such as images, captions, memes, infographics, and videos that captured youth-led resistance discourse, emotional expression, and symbolic protest. The selected posts were also evaluated for linguistic patterns, communicative strategies, and how users constructed resistance narratives through digital participation.

Theoretical Framework

Two frameworks guided the analysis: Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Social Media Ecology Theory by Zizi Papacharissi (2015). GVD provides a structured approach for decoding visual content by focusing on representational meaning (how participants like protesters or security forces are depicted), interactive meaning (how viewers are positioned through gaze, angles, and proximity), and compositional meaning (layout, salience, and information flow within visuals).

Social Media Ecology Theory, developed by Papacharissi (2015), was used to understand how digital platforms shape the creation, distribution, and amplification of protest narratives. It considers platform affordances (e.g., hashtags, likes shares, retweets), user engagement patterns, and the broader communicative environment in which content circulates. The integration of both frameworks enabled a comprehensive interpretation of how visual and textual elements in the selected posts worked together to mobilise resistance, evoke emotion, and sustain digital activism in the context of the EndSARS protest.

Data Presentation

The selected posts spanned October to December 2020 and they were chosen for their relevance to EndSARS resistance themes. Each post was analysed for its multimodal content and the communicative strategies it employed to influence public perception. By focusing on posts that gained significant traction, the study ensures a representative sample of the key visual and textual narratives that defined the EndSARS protest online.

Data Analytical Framework

The multimodal analysis of the data is guided by the Grammar of Visual Design theory and Social Media Ecology theory which provides a set of structured frameworks for examining how visual and textual elements combine to create independent meaning in social media communication. In line with these frameworks, visual elements such as colours, composition, and symbols interact with textual elements such as hashtags, captions, and narrative discourse to convey narrative of resistant messages effectively. The aforementioned theoretical approaches allow a nuanced exploration of multimodal resources and their socio-cultural implications in the context of the EndSARS protest.

Theme 1: Resistance and Collective Action

Images Covered: 1, 3, 10



Image 1: the image displays several young men and ladies protesting in an urban area, some of them carrying placards with various inscriptions of EndSARS-related messages. Source: <https://www.X.com/com>



Image 3: the image of a woman raising her right hand in clenched fist posture and using her left hand to hold a placard with inscription – OUR MUMU DON DO, amidst protesters. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Endsarsmovement>



Image 10: the image shows a young lady in white T-shirt using her both hands to lift up a placard with different EndSARS related inscriptions <https://www.X.com/EndSARSResponse>

The first thematic cluster in this study centres on visual narratives that emphasise resistance and the collective energy of the protest movement. In Image 1, the sight of young Nigerian men and women occupying urban spaces with EndSARS placards represents not only their physical presence but also their digital visibility. This form of street occupation is a key strategy in social movements, symbolizing the refusal to be silenced (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The spatial arrangement of the figures within the urban landscape denotes ownership of the public sphere, transforming everyday spaces into political stages.

Image 3 shows a woman with her right hand raised in a clenched fist, a globally recognised symbol of resistance. Her left hand holds a placard inscribed with "OUR MUMU DON DO," a Pidgin phrase signifying that the people have endured enough. The composition places her at the centre, establishing her as a vector of action (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and symbolizing collective resistance. The facial expression and posture reinforce emotional intensity and determination, appealing to the affective sensibilities of both on-ground and online audiences.

Image 10 continues this trend, showing a young lady raising a placard with multiple inscriptions. Her act symbolises the power of personal voice within a collective struggle, showing how resistance is both individual and communal. Her upward gaze and the angle of the camera provide a low angle shot that enhances her power and authority.

Through the lens of social media ecology theory, these images thrive in an ecosystem where virality, visibility, and networked activism (Castells, 2015) amplify the resonance of physical protests. The protest placards serve not just as textual artifacts but as multimodal tools for mobilisation and meaning-making creation. The combination of text and image within a viral digital infrastructure contributes to the construction of a participatory visual culture of dissent.

Theme 2: Symbolism and National Identity

Building upon the theme of resistance, the second thematic focus delves into the appropriation of national symbols, particularly the Nigerian flag, as both sites of solidarity and critique.

Images Covered: 2, 6, 8



Image 2: The image shows cross section of Nigerian celebrities and influencers holding a Nigerian flag stained with blood.
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/burnaboygram>



Image 6: The image of a supposedly young woman using the green – white – green Nigerian flag as a scarf with a sign of a bullet wound directly at her forehead, injured eye ball and an inscription. Source: <https://www.X.com/guardianng>



Image 8: the display of national flag symbol and inciting EndSARS related messages to re-awake the morale of protesters to continue staging stoutest. Source: <https://www.X.com>

In Image 2, Nigerian celebrities and influencers hold a blood-stained national flag. The visual impact of blood on the nation's symbol signifies loss and moral reckoning. This act is challenging the state's legitimacy. The fame and recognisability of the celebrities amplify the multimodal weight of the protest message, turning them into visual spokespersons for the oppressed. Image 6 deepens this symbolism with the portrayal of a young woman using the green-white-green flag as a scarf, marked by a bullet wound on her forehead. This visual combines elements of martyrdom and national grief. Her injured eye adds another layer of vulnerability and emotional intensity. The image embodies a tension between patriotic identification and state-inflicted violence. This is a construction of a powerful counter-narrative that challenges the dominant representations of the state as protector instead revealing it as a perpetrator of harm against its own citizens.

Meanwhile, Image 8 displays the national flag alongside inciting EndSARS messages, serving as a rallying call to sustain the protest momentum. The semiotic layering of the national emblem with emotionally provocative text creates a dual message of hope and indictment. The framing and salience of the national flag across these images suggest ideational meaning, where the flag is no longer a passive object but an active participant in the protest discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). These visuals are symbols seen within a digital attention economy, where the flag becomes a recurring motif of resistance. National symbols are reappropriated for civic protest, destabilising official meanings and producing new visual grammars of citizenship.

Theme 3: State Violence and Suppression

Flowing from the contestation of national identity is the third theme, which confronts the brutal reality of state violence and suppression experienced by protesters.

Images Covered: 4, 9



Image 4: The image of a group of protesters mainly boys running in disarray when they are being chased by a police hot water shooting vehicle.
Source: <https://www.X.com/guardianng>

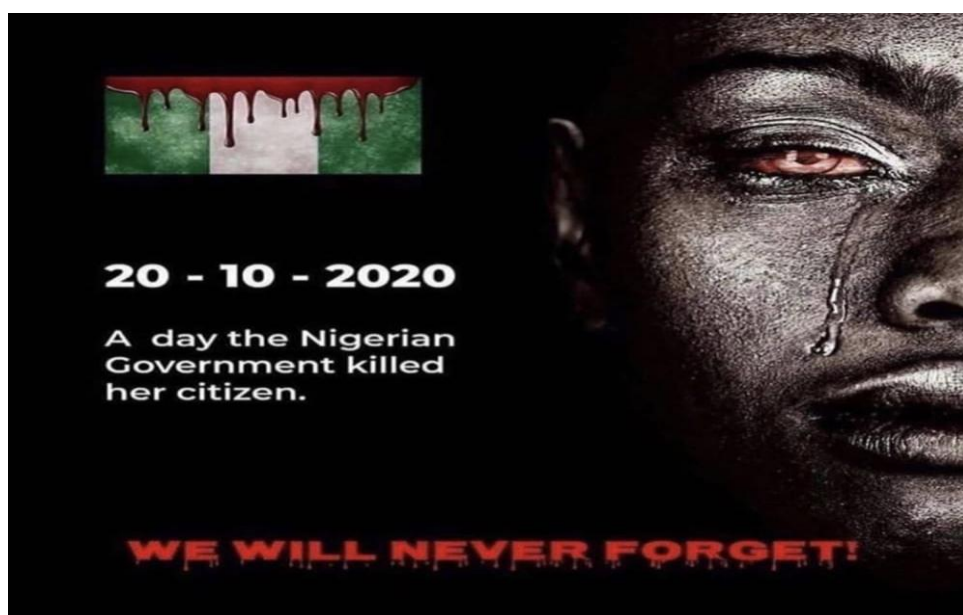


Image 9: The displays of Nigerian national flag stained with blood, half face of a young man with a red eye ball discharging tears and an inscription 20 – 10 – 2020. A day the Nigerian Government killed her citizen. WE WILL NEVER FORGET
Source: <https://www.facebook.com>

Image 4 portrays a group of mostly male protesters running in disarray as a police hot water cannon vehicle pursues them. The chaos in the composition reflects the asymmetry of power and the climate of fear surrounding peaceful protests. The energy to run in disarray suggests vulnerability and the urgent need to escape, reinforcing the antagonistic dynamic between state and citizen.

Image 9 intensifies this with a half-face portrait of a young man whose red eyeball discharges tears. Positioned next to a blood-stained Nigerian flag and the date “20-10-2020,” memorialising the Lekki Toll Gate massacre, the image serves as a visual archive of pain and historical injustice. The close-up on the eye and tears heightens emotional engagement and viewer empathy.

Both images serve as powerful indictments of state violence. Social media ecology theory suggests that such images disrupt official narratives and enable counter-storytelling (Fuchs, 2014). The Grammar of Visual Design allows interpretation of vectors, framing, and salience, illuminating how pain and resistance are conveyed through composition and symbolism. The circulation of such images online activates affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015), where users coalesce around shared feelings of grief and indignation, forging emotional solidarity.

Theme 4: Female Participation

Intertwined with the narratives of violence and resistance is the critical theme of female agency, highlighting women’s active participation in the EndSARS protest.

Images Covered: 5, 7



Image 5: EndSARS protesting women displaying their various inscriptions on placards at the market place.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/guardianng>



Image 7: A young lady on red T-shirt and black face cap carrying placard and number of protesters with security men in the her background.
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/gettyimages>.

Image 5 shows protesting women at a market place displaying placards with various EndSARS related messages. The women are actively displaying their placards which indicate their participation in the resistant protest and their desire to communicate specific messages to other market women. Their activity challenges patriarchal assumptions about women's roles in public discourse. The public and informal setting situates women's activism within familiar, everyday spaces, making their dissent both accessible and culturally resonant.

Image 7 depicts a young woman in a red T-shirt and black face cap carrying a placard, surrounded by protesters and security personnel. Her bold stance amidst possible state surveillance signals courage and agency. The camera's angle and her central placement emphasis her prominence and resolve.

These images foreground gendered dimensions of resistance. Using GVD, women are placed in salient positions with strong gaze vectors, demanding viewer engagement and asserting presence. Social media ecology theory reveals female protestors as central to the movement's circulation of emotional and symbolic capital online (Papacharissi, 2015). They function as affective agents whose visibility transforms the protest into a more inclusive and intersectional arena.

Theme 5: Emotion, Anger, and Affective Intensity

Underlying and intersecting with the previous themes is the powerful emotional core of the protest marked by anger, grief, and defiance which serves as both fuel and form for resistance.

Images Covered: 6, 9, 10

Image 6's injured female protester draped in the Nigerian flag evokes patriotic sorrow and betrayal. Her blood-stained forehead and wounded eye conjure visceral reactions, turning her body into a canvas of state violence and emotional trauma.

Image 9 embodies rage and remembrance with a red-eyed protester shedding tears beside the date "20-10-2020" and a bloodied national flag. The caption "WE WILL NEVER FORGET" functions as a communal oath, transforming personal pain into collective memory. The subject's intense gaze invites viewers to witness and participate in the emotional archive of injustice.

Image 10 shows a young woman raising a placard with determination and indignation. Her upward gaze and clenched posture dramatise how personal anger becomes political through public visibility and digital circulation.

Employing GVD, these images use strong emotive vectors such as gaze, tears, blood, posture, and colour to evoke and transmit emotion. Social media ecology theory frames these affect-laden visuals as catalysts for "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2015), where shared emotional experiences foster solidarity and virality. Anger emerges as a resource for resistance, coalescing around symbolic elements like blood, eyes, and the flag to produce a compelling visual discourse of protest.

Theme 6: Digital Grieving, Memorialisation, and Trauma

Images Covered: 9

Image 9 powerfully captures the enduring trauma and collective mourning resulting from the Lekki Toll Gate massacre. The close-up framing of the young man's face, particularly the red, teary eye, anchors the viewer's attention on embodied pain and grief. Using the Grammar of Visual Design (GVD), the eye functions as a vector pointing outward to the viewer, inviting emotional engagement and empathy. The blood-stained Nigerian flag in the background, combined with the date inscription "20-10-2020," serves as a semiotic indexical sign that link the personal trauma to a historic national tragedy. This image operates as a mnemonic artifact, memorialising both individual suffering and collective loss.

Within the Social Media Ecology Theory framework, this image transcends the individual to become part of a digital mourning space. Platforms like Facebook and X serve as communal gravesites where users share, comment, and re-appropriate such images to collectively grieve and challenge official narratives that deny or minimise the event. These affective publics, as conceptualised by Papacharissi (2015), transform trauma into sustained political action by keeping the memory alive digitally. The circulation of such images disrupts dominant state narratives, asserting a counternarrative that resists erasure and denial.

Moreover, the performative aspect of digital grieving involves ritualistic sharing, hashtagging (#EndSARS, #LekkiMassacre), and the creation of virtual memorials that engage global audiences. This extends the protest temporally and spatially, fostering a transnational affective solidarity centered on trauma and justice.

Theme 7: Perpetrators and Victims

Images Covered: 4, 6

The visual dialectic between perpetrators and victims is vividly depicted in Images 4 and 6. Image 4 shows protesters running away from an advancing police water cannon vehicle, symbolising a dramatic asymmetry of power. The dynamic composition uses vectors of motion, where the fleeing protesters are oriented away from the imposing police vehicle. Their vulnerability and the coercive force of the state apparatus are being reinforced. The chaotic spatial arrangement conveys fear and urgency, visually narrating state repression.

In Image 6, a young woman with a bullet wound on her forehead wears the Nigerian flag as a scarf, embodying the paradox of national identity and victimhood. The visible injury serves as a corporeal signifier of state violence, while the flag becomes a contested symbol that perhaps indicative of both protective and bloodied. The interplay of the green-white-green fabric and the stark red blood creates chromatic contrast that draws focus to the trauma embedded within national belonging. Her upward gaze adds complexity that suggests resilience despite victimisation.

These images function as visual testimonies countering official state discourses that often portray protests as lawless and violent. Instead, they humanise victims and expose the brutality of perpetrators, mobilising affective responses from global audiences. The viral circulation of such visuals amplifies calls for accountability and justice which invariably positioning the state as a violator of citizens' rights. These images also challenge the conventional media framing of protests because it presents victims not as faceless masses but as individuals bearing the scars of repression, thus reclaiming agency through visual storytelling in digital environments.

Theme 8: Transitional Solidarity

Images Covered: 1, 2, 5, 7

Transitional solidarity manifests in the visual representation of diverse participants unified in a common cause. Image 1 shows young Nigerian men and women occupying public spaces, asserting visibility in urban centers. Image 2 includes celebrities holding a blood-stained Nigerian flag, signifying the intersection of popular culture and activism, which amplifies the movement's reach. Images 5 and 7 highlight women actively protesting in traditionally gendered spaces, such as markets, asserting female agency within the collective struggle.

Through GVD, the compositional emphasis on central figures with direct gaze vectors creates a sense of presence and engagement. The spatial arrangement often situates individuals as protagonists within a collective field, visually narrating a coalition that transcends ethnic, gender, and social boundaries. The use of iconic symbols such as the Nigerian flag further cements a shared national identity amidst political unrest.

In line with the tenet of Social Media Ecology Theory, digital platforms facilitate this coalition-building by enabling the widespread sharing and remixing of images, videos, and slogans. The movement's visual culture thrives on networked circulation, where diverse actors contribute to an evolving narrative of unity and resistance. This

solidarity is “transitional” because it bridges existing social divides, creating a new participatory citizenship that is fluid and digitally mediated. Moreover, the involvement of celebrities and influencers adds symbolic capital that legitimises the movement and increases visibility across different social strata, which helps sustain momentum both on-ground and online.

Theme 9: Memes of Resistance

Images Covered: 3, 5, 7

The visual and textual integration in protest placards such as “OUR MUMU DON DO”. Image 3, along with the inscriptions found in images 5 and 7 functions as multimodal memes that are easily replicable, succinct and rich in cultural significance. According to GVD, the size, positioning, and font of the textual elements within these images maximise legibility and salience which ensure the message’s rapid consumption and re-sharing.

In the ecosystem of social media, these images function as political memes, which are not just humorous or satirical but mobilise public sentiment and critique power structures. They encapsulate complex grievances into accessible and viral visual-textual units. The memetic quality allows slogans to be adapted, remixed, and spread across platforms to embed protest narratives into the digital commons.

Social Media Ecology Theory frames these memes as nodes in a larger networked activism. They act as “calls to action,” rallying dispersed participants and generating affective resonance. The memes become digital badges of identity and affiliation that reinforce group cohesion and amplifying resistance narratives through humor, irony, and defiance. Furthermore, these multimodal memes enable participation beyond physical protests, allowing those who cannot join on the streets to engage through digital solidarity and activism.

Theme 10: State Surveillance and Media Control

Images Covered: 7 (background security presence)

Though less overtly depicted, the persistent presence of security personnel in the background of Image 7 symbolises the omnipresence of state surveillance and control during the protests. The composition situates security forces as vectors of control, juxtaposed with the central, active protester embodying resistance. Using GVD, the contrast between the foreground protester’s assertive gaze and posture and the secondary, watchful stance of security actors visually encodes the power dynamics of surveillance. The framing suggests a contested space where visibility is a double-edged sword that protesters seek to be seen to make demands, yet are surveilled and potentially repressed.

This dynamic is critical in understanding how digital activism both challenges and is shaped by state media control. Governments may deploy censorship, misinformation, or internet shutdowns to stifle protest narratives. However, protesters counteract through the real-time sharing of images and videos that document state presence and potential abuses, turning surveillance into a spectacle

that undermines its intended function. This theme highlights the layered struggle for narrative control in both physical and digital spheres.

Discussion of Findings

The multimodal analysis of ten purposively selected EndSARS protest related images reveals a dynamic interplay of resistance, identity, emotion, and symbolic communication. These findings confirm Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) assertion that images are not inherently neutral but function as meaning-making resources that reference sociopolitical action. In the EndSARS context, offline physical street protests were transformed into symbolic arenas of defiance that echo Castells' (2012) idea of "networked protests," where online and offline spheres merge to create new political spaces of contention.

The analysis shows those Nigerian youths particularly women asserted agency through posture, gaze, and compositional prominence. This resonates with Rose's (2016) emphasis on how visual mode shape identity and opinion. This further extends her argument by highlighting the gendered visibility of women within the protest, a feature less pronounced in earlier Nigerian protest. Similar to Olumuyiwa and Oludayo (2022), the findings reinforce the centrality of youth voices in leveraging social media as both a mobilisation tool and a space of symbolic empowerment.

National symbols such as the blood-stained Nigerian flag were re-appropriated as counter-hegemonic resources that challenged state legitimacy. This reflects Adebani's (2020) observation that civic testimony through multimodal texts documents state violence while simultaneously mobilising resistance. However, the findings of this study go further to show that the flag, in particular, operated as both an object of grief and a weapon of resistance, an emotional duality that resonates with Ogunleye's (2021) point about hashtags functioning as emotional rallying cries.

The purposive selected images further highlight the stark contrast between the acts of state agents and citizens, thereby reinforcing the narratives of injustice. This reflects Mbah's (2021) argument that social media platforms became spaces for contesting official narratives. The diversity of participants represented across images suggests a horizontal and inclusive movement structure, which differs from earlier Nigerian protests that often fractured along ethnic and political lines (Oladipupo, 2021).

Multimodal resources deployed during the protest served as shorthand for resistance. This corroborates Shifman's (2014) insight into memes as political discourse, while also supporting Freelon et al.'s (2020) observation that hashtags function as organising nodes and archives. Yet, the EndSARS case adds a novel dimension because these multimodal resources deployed during the protest were not just ephemeral but vehicles for participatory mourning and enduring archiving. It further extends the scope of what Olumuyiwa and Oludayo (2022) describe as youth digital engagement.

Finally, the findings highlight how digital platforms enabled visibility, solidarity, and memory preservation. This is consistent with Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) argument that algorithmic systems shape the visibility of protest narratives.

However, the study analysis underscores how EndSARS protesters strategically exploited social media platform affordances through vivid imagery, memes, and emotionally charged hashtags to overcome algorithmic suppression (Tufekci, 2017). From a Social Media Ecology perspective (Scolari, 2012; Zhao, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016), the interplay of platform architecture, user behaviour, and multimodal creativity created an ecosystem where resistance was mobilised, documented, and memorialised in Nigeria's digital public sphere.

Conclusion

This study examined the intersection of visual communication and civic resistance in the EndSARS movement by analyzing selected social media images through the lens of Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) and Social Media Ecology Theory. The analysis revealed that EndSARS was more than a protest against police brutality, it was a broader cultural and political movement where Nigerian youth reclaimed both physical and digital spaces to demand systemic reform. Visual elements such as placards, national symbols, colours, postures, and gaze powerfully conveyed dissent. Four dominant themes emerged: resistance and collective action, national identity and symbolism, state violence, and gendered protest, all reflecting the emotionally charged and symbolically rich nature of protest communication.

Social media acted as a counter-hegemonic platform which allows activists to bypass mainstream media and create alternative narratives. It enabled the formation of emotionally connected communities bound by shared experiences of trauma, resistance, and hope. The central presence of women in protest imagery disrupted patriarchal norms and affirmed their role in the struggle for justice. Overall, the study shows how protest images serve as potent tools of political expression, collective memory, and civic engagement in digitally networked societies.

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