

Discursive Strategies in Newspaper Opinions on EndSARS Protests in Nigeria

Mohammed Ayodeji Ademilokun
Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

Abstract

This paper examines the discursive strategies deployed in editorials and opinion articles in representing the 2020 EndSARS protests. Data for the study comprise six newspaper editorials and six opinion articles selected from *The Punch* and *The Guardian* being major newspapers with wide readership in Nigeria that featured editorials and opinion articles on the EndSARS protests. The data spanned the whole of October 2020 being the time of the protests and the peak period on media representations and discussions of the protests. van Dijk's (2004) socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis was employed for the analysis of the data. Data analysis revealed that the editorials and opinion articles were characterised by discursive strategies such as actor description, evidentiality, number game, comparison, authority and victimisation. The discursive strategies were used to depict the extent of police brutality against the youths in order to obtain sympathy for them and promote the ideas of improved policing and better conditions for Nigerians and Nigerian youths in particular that they were advocating for through the protests.

Keywords: Newspaper editorials, opinion articles, EndSARS, discursive strategies, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Social protests have a long history in the Nigerian nation, as protests had held even before the existence of the nation. This fact is captured by Adisa (2021:n.d.) when he states that "agitations, demonstrations, protests and confrontations have always been held in the Nigerian socio-political space". Indeed, the road to the independence of the country was characterised by social protests against colonialism by Nigerian nationalists such as Chief Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaja Tafawa Balewa, among many others. Post-independence Nigeria also continued to witness social protests as there were the SAP riots of 1989, Ali Must Go Crisis of 1978 and the June 12 protests of 1993. However, the prolonged military rule in Nigeria negatively affected the organisation of social protests and marred the outcomes of such protests as many of the military Heads of State were often ruthless in dealing with the protesters. Therefore, the military rulership in Nigeria negatively impacted on the protest culture in the country. In fact, the stifling situation of the military rulership of the time made Aiyede (2003:2) to state that the "the relations between state and society under authoritarian rule in Africa has been described as a case of states without citizens".

However, the re-establishment of democracy in 1999 in the country opened the way for social protests and citizen civic engagement. This was further corroborated by the boom in Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), especially the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, among many others, which have been aiding public civic engagement and have fostered group collaboration. The anonymity afforded by such social media and their ubiquity have made it easy for Nigerians to coordinate themselves for major

social and national protests. This explains why social protests such as #Occupy Nigeria, Bringbackourgirls and recently the EndSARS protests have been able to not only hold but also record great successes.

In particular, the #EndSARS protests, which constitute our focus in this study, represent a watershed in the protest culture in Nigeria considering the fact that it was largely organised by the youth in the country. The significance of this lies in the fact that even though the youth in Nigeria according to Mochizuki (2009) had been quite active in protesting for social change in Nigeria's pre-independence years and immediately after its independence, they have slid into inactivism in the recent years. The many years of deprivation of Nigerian youths arising from lack of empowerment due to high unemployment rate and the growing erosion of values in the society had made the youth to lose their voice in Nigeria prior to the EndSARS protests.

However, the EndSARS protests were a reaction to the total annihilation of Nigerian youths by a section of the Nigeria Police Force known as Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS). SARS was formed in 1992 to stem all forms of violent crimes, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, etc. (Nnadozie, 2017). Although SARS was remarkably effective in much of the early nineties, the unit later became notorious for extorting money from Nigerians, especially the youthful population. SARS later started stepping beyond its bounds by arresting, extorting and even maiming young internet fraudsters known as Yahoo-yahoo in Nigeria in a bid to enrich themselves, even though there is a government agency that has the responsibility of checking internet fraud in the country. According to Iwuoha and Aniche (2021, p. 3), Amnesty International (2020) noted that people in SARS custody "were subjected to a variety of methods of torture including hanging, mock execution, beating, punching and kicking, burning with cigarettes, waterboarding, near-asphyxiation with plastic bags, forcing detainees to assume stressful bodily positions and sexual violence".

Therefore, the EndSARS protests came as a result of the inability of the youths to continue to bear the brunt of the oppression and brutality of SARS officers and Nigerian police officers at large against them. The protests began to trend on social media such as Facebook and Twitter on October 4, 2020 and by October 8, it had become a nationwide protest with the youths occupying major cities simultaneously in Nigeria and in some foreign cities such as London and New York (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021).

The EndSARS protests thus generated a lot of discourse within and outside Nigeria. Apart from the creative use of language by the protesters to express their grievances, the media also contributed to the discourse through various means such as news reports, editorials and opinion articles. Since according to Harlow and Johnson (2011, p. 2), "how the media portrays protesters influences not only how the public will perceive the protesters and their claims but also whether the public will support the protesters", we consider the media representation of the protests, especially in editorials and opinion articles important. Specifically, we are interested in the discursive strategies deployed by the media through the editorials and opinion articles to present the protests to the public. This is because as Mcleod and Hertog (1999) have observed, such discursive strategies may relegate or (de)legitimise the protesters and their demands and portray them as heroes or villains. Our focus on editorials and opinion articles is hinged on the fact that they constitute an opinion discourse that is used to sensitise the public on important issues and influence the judgment of the people on such issues. Shi-xu (2000)

captures this fact when he says that opinion is a “cognitive mechanism (sometimes called “attitude” or “evaluative belief”) that influences behaviour”. Therefore, our focus in this study is to examine how discursive strategies are used to convey the thoughts of writers of editorials and opinion articles in Nigerian newspapers on the EndSARS protests and slant the perceptions of the protests by the wider society.

2. Perspectives on Social Protests in Nigeria

Studies on social protests in Nigeria have been from disciplinary perspectives such as political science, sociology and linguistics. Political science studies on social protests in Nigeria have focused on the use of violence in social movements in Nigeria (Hazen 2009), the impact of social protests in making the government to attend to the needs of the citizenry focusing on the Bringbackourgirls protest (Aluko 2020), the character of the Nigerian state in relation to the issues that fuelled the EndSARS protests and the role of the government in arresting police brutality in Nigeria (Iwuoha & Aniche 2021; Okoye 2021), transformation of social movements in Nigeria (Ajala, 2021), among others. Sociological studies on social protests have focused on the activities of Nigerian youths in organising social protests, especially the EndSARS protests (Abimbade, Olayoku & Herro, 2022) and the use and influence of social media in organising social protests in Nigeria (Adisa 2021; Ajisafe, Ojo & Monyani 2021; Maradun, Yar’Adua & Msughter 2021).

Linguistic studies on social protests in Nigeria have focused on resistance in secessionist discourse (Chiluwa 2012), media representation of social protests (Egbunike 2015; Osisanwo & Iyoha 2020), multimodal features of social protests (Abdullahi-Idiagbon 2014; Onanuga & Ademilokun 2014), placards as a language of civil protests (Agbedo 2012), discursive strategies in media interviews of participants in social protests (Akinwotu 2014). In particular, the studies from diverse linguistic perspectives have centred on the major protests that have held in Nigeria especially since the beginning of the current fourth republic in Nigeria. Agbedo (2012) studies the use of placards as a language of civil protest in Nigeria during the 2012 fuel subsidy crisis. The study showed that the protest transcended the issue of fuel subsidy to important issues such as official corruption, high cost of governance and crash in public expectations of a Jonathan presidency. Onanuga and Ademilokun (2014) carry out a multimodal analysis of selected graphic protestations on fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The analysis showed that the protest images conveyed surreal, realistic and humorous meanings. Egbunike (2015) examines the frames employed by traditional and new media to represent the fuel subsidy removal protests in 2012. The study showed that the newspapers performed better in the framing of the protests and they presented a heterogenous narration of the protests. The study concludes that newspaper contributes to the discourse of the fuel subsidy removal protests better than the social media.

Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) examined stance and engagement in Bring Back our Girls (BBOG) campaign on Twitter and Facebook using appraisal theory and critical discourse analysis. The authors reported that the campaigners made a great use of affect. Jibril (2017) examines the framing of BBOG campaign by some Nigerian online newspapers. The study showed a favourable coverage of the campaign with 81.3% of the stories favouring the protests. The study concluded that the newspapers made concerted efforts to cover the campaign

positively. Bashir and Ahmed (2018) also carry out a critical discourse analysis of reports on Bring Back our Girls campaign in Nigerian newspapers. Using Fairclough's dialectical relational approach to CDA, the analysis showed that narration and criticism were prominent in the reports while rationalisation, narrativisation and argumentation were prominent discursive strategies in the reports. The study showed that the language used was negative and that the reports largely reflected the narrative and argument of the group against the government.

There are also linguistic studies on the pro-Biafra protests that have rocked the Southeastern part of Nigeria. For instance, Chilwa (2012) studies how social media networks have been used in recent times to champion social protests and resistance against oppression and political power abuse. The study applies a sociolinguistic-based CDA to investigate how virtual community, identity, language variations, and social interactions are used to project self-determination and the struggle for political independence. Osisanwo and Iyoha (2020) also examine the discourse representation of the pro-Biafra protest in selected Nigerian newspapers. Using van Leeuwen's representation of social actors, the study showed that the protesters were represented as freedom fighters, economic saboteurs and law-abiding citizens. Also, the strategies of passivisation, nomination, association, disassociation, exclusion, aggregation, functionalisation, differentiation, indetermination, and collectivisation were indexed in the representational strategies.

The most recent EndSARS protests which constitute our focus in this research have however only enjoyed scant linguistic attention. While Onwubiko and Egwim (ibid) is not a stand-alone study as it examines data on Covid-19 and EndSARS, Alfred and Oyebola (2021) only analyses the speech of President Buhari of Nigeria in reaction to the EndSARS protests. There has not been any noticeable linguistic study that has examined the discursive strategies of the protesters or the media representations of the protests. It is therefore in this light that we study in this paper, the discursive strategies employed in some newspaper editorials and opinion articles to perspectivise the EndSARS protests and to condition the perception of the protests by the Nigerian populace.

3. Methodology

Data for the study comprise six newspaper editorials and six opinion articles selected from *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers. The newspapers were selected because they featured a reasonable number of editorials and opinion articles on the EndSARS protests. The data spanned the whole of October 2020 only being the peak period on media representations and discussions of the protests since the protests happened in the month and received immense media attention in that same month. The editorials and opinion articles were purposively selected paying attention to their length and the depth of the issues that they cover. To analyse the data, after studying the tenets of van Dijk's (2004) categories of ideological discourse analysis, we marked the different parts of the data that reflect the paradigms for analysis in the theories.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis, especially his 2004 categories of ideological discourse analysis. The socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis is based on the assumption that cognition mediates between society and discourse. van Dijk's (2004) ideological discourse analysis features the overall strategies of what is called the ideological square. This mainly borders on emphasising our good things, emphasising their bad things, de-emphasising our bad things and de-emphasising their good things. The various categories that are used to achieve the above are actor description, authority, burden, categorisation, comparison, consensus, counterfactuals, disclaimers, euphemism, evidentiality, example, generalisation, hyperbole, implication, irony, lexicalization, metaphor, negative other-representation, norm expression, number game, polarisation, positive self-presentation, populism, presupposition, vagueness and victimisation.

Actor description has to do with the way social actors are described in discourses while authority has to do with the way authorities, usually people or organisations, are used to support cases. Categorisation has to do with the way people are categorised while comparison is concerned with comparing the outgroup and the ingroup. Counterfactuals have to do with giving opinions that are contrary to already presented facts while consensus has to do with unity of opinions, especially in a nation. Disclaimers save face by mentioning our positive characteristics and focusing on their negative attributes. Euphemism is concerned with stating offensive things in a mild way while evidentiality has to do with the presentation of evidence or proof for knowledge or opinions. Example has to do with illustrating points being made while generalization is concerned with formulating prejudices.

Hyperbole has to do with exaggeration while irony is concerned with formulating prejudices. Hyperbole has to do with exaggeration while irony is concerned with the stating of the opposite of what one intends. Metaphor is concerned with direct comparison between two things while national self-glorification has to do with presenting one's nation in a positive light. Negative other-presentation is concerned with representing others in a negative light while number game has to do with the provision of numbers and statistics for objectivity. Polarisation has to do with drawing a line between two groups while positive self-presentation has to do with the positive presentation of the self. Victimisation tells horrible stories about victims of negative occurrences.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section, we examine the discursive strategies that are prominently used for representation of the EndSARS protests to the public in some editorials and opinion articles on the protests in Nigerian newspapers. The analysis is done in turn as we examine the discourse strategies one after the other.

Actor Description

According to van Dijk (2006, p. 1), actor description borders on the positive or negative labelling of social actors in a discourse. Labelling is the process of identifying a person or people with a certain label or tag. Since the editorials and opinion articles border on the representation of the EndSARS protests of 2020 in Nigeria, which constitute a topical issue in

Nigeria, it therefore means that the writers of the opinion articles and editorials will expressly want to comment on the actors involved in all the matters pertaining to the protests. A close examination of the editorials and opinion articles shows that the discourse producers negatively described and labelled the SARS officers whom the people were protesting against over their actions. Below are excerpts showing the negative actor description and labelling of social actors regarding the protests and matters revolving around it:

Excerpt 1:

After another bout of the clamorous campaign against endemic police brutality resurfaced, the Inspector-General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, announced the disbandment of the sadistic outfit (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 13, 2020)

Excerpt 2:

Discontents against the anti-robbery squad formation didn't start overnight. Compelling evidence abounds that the formation is the most notorious, corrupt, brutal and dreaded ring of the Nigeria Police Force (Editorial, *The Guardian*, October 19, 2020)

Excerpt 3:

Thank goodness for the presence of mind of Nigerians. IGP Mohammed Adamu's Sunday disbandment of SARS would have made the impression he intended; protesters would have gone off the streets and few days after, this terror of men would come back on the streets and haunt Nigerians for daring to call them out. (Opinion Article, *The Punch*, October 15, 2020)

Excerpt 4:

From Lagos to Kaduna to Enugu and Port Harcourt, the common language spoken by everyone was an insistent demand for the removal of state-funded tyrants from the roads and the reformation of a police force that has turned against the people it was set up to serve. (Opinion Article, *The Punch*, October 15, 2020)

The excerpts above show how the discourse producers achieve negative actor description in the editorials and opinion articles by giving negative labels to the officers of Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS) of Nigeria Police. The negative labelling of the SARS men in the discourse manifests in two nominal groups: "endemic police brutality" and "sadistic outfit". The first nominal group constructs a negative image for the men of SARS by presenting police brutality which is a vice as pervasive in Nigeria. Also, the modifier "sadistic" in the second example is used to present the SARS officers as evil.

In excerpt 2, there is a more bare-faced negative labelling of the SARS officers in Nigeria as certain negative adjectives are used in reference to them. The negative adjectives are "notorious", "corrupt", "brutal" and "dreaded" which present the police officers as really terrible. While the adjective "corrupt" borders on the lack of integrity of the police officers which reflects their extortion of Nigerian citizens whether they are guilty of supposed offences

or not, the remaining adjectives indeed capture the monstrous nature of the SARS officers in the country. These adjectives capture the reported maiming, detention and abuse of Nigerians by the officers.

Excerpt 3 also captures the perspectivisation of SARS officers as brutal and deadly through the negative tag given to them through the nominal group expression “terror of men”. The nominal group presents the police officers as really evil and a body of people who usually terrify the citizens. Excerpt 4 also reveals the presentation of policemen especially the SARS officers as evil in Nigeria. The SARS officers are described as “tyrants” which further shows that the policemen had constituted themselves to threats to the survival of average Nigerians.

Apart from negative labelling of social actors in the discourse, there are also instances of positive labelling of social actors, particularly the EndSARS protesters in the discourse. Below are instances of positive labelling of the EndSARS protesters in the discourse:

Excerpt 5:

Therefore, the peaceful agitation of these young people is a persuasive call, as democracy works when there is inclusive participation by all segments of the society. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 19, 2020)

Excerpt 6:

The demonstrators were unarmed. It is the nature of youths to display energy, bravado which is what they have at their command in the process of development ... (Editorial, *The Guardian*, October 22, 2020)

Excerpt 7:

Unfortunately for the government, these protesters are not the organised labour unions and political activists that get instigated and bought off by deep pockets. They are not some sponsored protesters and miscreants that can be quickly whipped into line. These ones are different. (Opinion, *The Guardian*, October 15, 2020)

Excerpt 8:

It is also a clear signal of how mistaken anyone who imagines that Nigerian youths are lazy and incapable of holding their own is. The refusal to fall for and budge after Adamu’s Sunday bait is a warning to leaders that a majority of the youths are clear-headed and focused on the exact needs of the country. (Opinion, *The Punch*, October 15, 2020)

The excerpts presented above illustrate how the discourse producers deploy positive actor description to influence the perceptions of the public on the EndSARS protesters. In excerpt 5, there is the use of the adjectival lexeme “peaceful” to describe the protesters by the discourse producer. Such positive presentation of the protesters is strategic as it is implicitly used to legitimate the protests and also present the ultimate attacks on the protesters as uncalled for. This streak of positive presentation of the protesters continues in the discourse as the protesters

are also presented in excerpt 6 as “unarmed”. This is simply a rehashing of the positive actor description of the protesters in excerpt 5. But it is significant in the sense that it portrays the protesters as well-meaning and undeserving of the attacks.

Excerpt 7 is also characterised by positive actor description as the protesters are depicted as altruistic in their protests. The positive tagging of the protesters in this instance is achieved through comparison as the text producer compares the EndSARS protesters to political activists and labour unions who often protest or avoid protesting once they are bought over by the government. This kind of comparison presents the protesters in a positive light as it shows that they are interested in the protests only because they want to improve on the conditions of the Nigerian nation. Excerpt 8 further indexes the deployment of positive actor description in the discourse, as the youthful protesters are presented as “clear-headed” and “focused”. The two positive adjectives portray the protesters as full of understanding of what they want and determined to achieve their goal for the betterment of the nation.

Evidentiality

Evidentiality is the deployment of evidence to confirm a fact or to make an opinion plausible in a discourse. According to van Dijk (2006), “claims or points of view in argument are more plausible when speakers present some evidence or proof for their knowledge or opinions”. A close look at the discourse shows that it is laden with evidentiality as it is used by the discourse producers to present a graphical illustration of the extent of the issues that they are covering. In this particular instance, since the police brutality that originally informed the EndSARS protests involves real life actions of the officers and the experiences of the Nigerian victims, there are various evidence provided in the discourse. Below are examples of evidentials in the discourse:

Excerpt 9:

The list of SARS abuses is endless. Early in October, an online video of SARS atrocities in Ughelli, Delta State, went viral, showing how the officers shot a man and drove the vehicle away. In Lagos, Joshua Oghenekevwe, and four others travelling to Delta State were subjected to callous extortion early this month. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 13, 2020)

Excerpt 10:

Most police officers are poorly remunerated in the police barracks which are equally in an appalling condition, yet they are tasked with the duty of protecting the lives and property of Nigerians against the dare devil criminals... There have been ancient stories of how most police formations are grossly underfunded, and divisional officers are left with the option of devising means of generating funds for their daily operations, which in recent times now include provision of security details for VIPs, a situation that has reduced most police officers to pursue carriers and chauffeurs for wealthy politicians. (Editorial, *The Guardian*, October 13, 2020)

Excerpt 11:

Because of our poor record keeping, ex-convicts, including armed robbers and unfit persons were being recruited into the force. The conditions of training could only produce beasts. The hostels were not habitable, the foods were appalling...Firearms training was grossly inadequate...Recruits had to bribe to get official uniforms. (Opinion Article, *The Punch*, October 15, 2020)

Excerpt 12:

Amnesty International recorded a total of 82 cases of extortion, torture and ill-treatment by the SARS between January 2017 and May 2020. (Opinion Article, *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020)

Excerpts 9 to 12 above illustrate how evidentials were used by the discourse producers to convince the public on the issues they raise in relation to police brutality and the conditions that have fostered it. In particular, the excerpts capture the extent of the evil being perpetrated by officers of SARS in Nigeria and the rot in the Nigeria Police Force which can predispose them to committing atrocities. In excerpt 9, the text producer specifically gives evidence of the excesses of SARS officers through their oppression of Nigerians. Two instances of police brutality in Nigeria were specifically given to make Nigerians know that the EndSARS protests were indeed necessitated by the spate of violations of Nigerians by the SARS officers. The use of evidentiality to drive home the point that protests were totally called for by the discourse producers also manifests in excerpt 12. Here, the text producer gives an evidential through authority to present the extent of the havoc being wreaked on Nigerians by the police officers. In the excerpt, the text producers provide accurate information on the abuses of the SARS officers in Nigeria within a particular time citing an authority such as Amnesty International.

Excerpts 10 and 11 are apt examples of the deployment of evidentiality to show the level of degradation in the Nigeria Police Force and the pitiable conditions under which the police officers function. In excerpt 10, to capture the poor conditions of the police institution in Nigeria, the text producers state certain facts about the police in Nigeria which indicate their deplorable condition. The text touches on the remuneration of the officers, underfunding of police formations and the deployment of police officers as security details.

Excerpt 11 also makes a lucid presentation on the terrible conditions of the police institution in Nigeria. The text gives factual information on the recruitment of unfit persons, the poor conditions of training, the inhabitable nature of the hostels, the appalling nature of the foods, the inadequacy of firearms and unavailability of uniforms. By providing all of the information, the text producer is showing how deplorable the police establishment is in Nigeria in order to sensitise the public on the need to consider the protests as important not only for eradicating police brutality in Nigeria but also fostering conditions that will prevent it.

Number Game

Another major discursive strategy in the editorials and opinion articles on the EndSARS protests is number game. Numbers and statistics are devices employed to paint vivid pictures of certain situations in an objective manner in order for the information presented to be credible

to the public or the audience. According to van Dijk (2006), number and statistics represent the major means to persuasively display objectivity. In the discourse in focus, number is very important since the discourse producers are interested in convincing their audience about the points that they raise especially regarding police brutality. Below are excerpts featuring number game in the discourse:

Excerpt 13:

Amnesty International has documented at least 82 cases of torture, ill-treatment, and extra-judicial executions by SARS since 2016. AL reported 58 cases of suspects who were tortured while in SARS custody. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 13, 2020)

Excerpt 14:

By 2018, the first EndSARS campaign drew attention. By 2019, SARS had been disbanded, reformed and decentralised for at least four times. Its notoriety only worsened. It is on record that at least 18 persons were killed by SARS without trial in the first quarter of 2020 alone. (Editorial, *The Guardian*, October 19, 2020)

Excerpt 15:

It is a warning that the country is running out of time to do good by its teeming youth population out of which only 14.7 million out of the 40 million eligible to work are not suitably engaged and a total of 13.1 million (more than the population of some countries) are unemployed. (Opinion Article, *The Punch*, October 15, 2020)

Excerpt 16:

...youth unemployment was 34.9 percent during the second quarter of 2020. Those who are lucky to get jobs are largely underemployed. (Opinion Article, *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020)

The excerpts above illustrate the deployment of numbers and statistics by the writers of editorials and opinion articles on the EndSARS protests for the depiction of the depth of the issues being discussed or in particular the portrayal of the gravity of the issue of police brutality central to the discourse. In excerpt 13, there is the presentation of the figures 82 and 58 representing the figures of persons tortured by officers of SARS within a timeframe in Nigeria. This is meant to make it clear that the issue of police brutality is a reality in Nigeria and to present a gory picture of the oppression of Nigerians by the SARS officers. Excerpt 14 also continues with the use of figure for presentation of the evil nature of SARS and their annihilation of Nigerian youths. This particular use of figure is significant in the sense that it borders on the spate of SARS brutality to Nigerians in the early part of 2020, the year in which the protests took place. This shows that indeed the oppression and murder of Nigerians had become perennial and the protests against that was well justified.

Excerpts 15 and 16 exemplify the use of figures in the discourse to further justify the oppression of the protesters, i.e., the Nigerian youths in the Nigerian society. This time around, it does not have to do with SARS but the lack of provision of employment opportunities for Nigerian youths to thrive. In excerpt 15, figures such as 14.7 million and 13.1 million are presented as representing the numbers of youths who are not meaningfully engaged out of the 40 million youths who are supposed to be engaged. This shows the level of economic suppression of the youths in Nigeria and indicates that the protests may not be about police brutality alone but a fight for the emancipation of Nigerian youths. Excerpt 16 further echoes the message in excerpt 15 as it gives a very worrisome figure of youth unemployment in Nigeria. This particular figure is also significant as it presents the situation before the protests, since it has to do with the figure of unemployed youths at the end of the second quarter of 2020, the year of the EndSARS protests. The alarming nature of the figure of the unemployed youths, 34.9, thus is presented by the discourse producer to drive home the point that EndSARS protests were inevitable.

Comparison

Comparison also features in the editorials and opinion articles on the EndSARS protests. Comparison in the discourse involves the juxtaposition of the conditions in Nigeria, especially regarding police brutality and the EndSARS protests in general, with the obtaining conditions in some other climes. Below are excerpts that illustrate comparison in the discourse:

Excerpt 17:

SMEs account for 62 percent of employment and 50 percent of national value added in Brazil. These outcomes derive from deliberate policies. But with over 200 million people and only about 6000 megawatts of electric power available (compared to South Africa's 51,000MW), creating jobs and reducing poverty amid a population growth rate of 2.6 percent is a mirage in Nigeria. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 28, 2020)

Excerpt 18:

We have not learnt the modern way of crowd control. Is there nothing we can learn from how it is done in other lands other than our proclivity to exhibit scant regard for the sanctity of lives? In other places, regardless of provocations by protesters, security operatives wearing shields would use water, baton, teargas, and in extreme cases rubber bullets. (Editorial, *The Guardian*, October 22, 2020)

Excerpt 19:

Nigerian youths have been protesting for over a week across the country without lifting shops. Instead of that, the protesters give food and drinks to even security operative, take care of the treatment of those who are injured, repair the vehicles damaged by hoodlums and security men, clean the streets after the day's protest, and ensure that there is no violence or lawlessness. This contrasts with similar

protests held in USA, South Africa and some other countries. (Opinion, *The Punch*, October 20, 2020)

Excerpt 20:

Nigeria is an amalgamation of two countries – one auspicious and the other inauspicious. The auspicious part of the land is inhabited by the influential few that are of the school of thought that Nigeria has never been better. In contrast, the inauspicious side of the country is home to the majority of the population. For them, Nigeria is hell on earth characterised by poverty, sorrow, tears and blood. (Opinion Article, *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020)

In excerpt 17, the text producer compares the availability of jobs in Brazil to Nigeria, in a bid to highlight the adverse effect of the lack of employment opportunities on the psyche of Nigerian youths and its predisposition of the youths to taking to the streets to protest. In the same excerpt, there is also an implicit comparison of the situation concerning electricity availability in South Africa to that of Nigeria. This was done to emphasise the fact that the Nigerian condition is unfavourable to the youths and therefore justify the EndSARS protests. Excerpt 20 presents a case of the use of contrast for the comparison of the rich and the wretched in Nigeria in order to highlight the fact that the conditions of the youth in Nigeria predisposes them to staging a protest such as that of EndSARS.

Excerpt 18 presents an example of comparison for negative representation of the Nigerian government and to attract sympathy for the EndSARS protesters. In the excerpt, there is the juxtaposition of how protesters are treated in developed countries with the way the EndSARS protesters were treated in order to show that the government was too harsh on the protesters. In excerpt 19, there is a positive deployment of contrast for positive representation of the EndSARS protesters as the text producer compared the orderly nature of the protesters to the chaotic situations created by similar protesters in other countries.

5.5 Authority as Discursive Strategy

Another prominent discursive strategy in the discourse is the use of authority. According to van Dijk (2006), in a discourse, one can mention authorities to support his or her case in an argument. In order to convince the audience about the issues that they raise regarding the EndSARS protests and other allied matters, the discourse producers deployed authority. Below are excerpts containing authority in the discourse:

Excerpt 21:

A 2016 report by the International Police Science Association and the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace rated the Nigeria Police as the worst in the world. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 13, 2020)

Excerpt 22:

Many notable Nigerians, including the First Lady, Aisha Buhari are speaking up in defence of protesters and their noble demands. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 19, 2020)

Excerpt 23:

Even with the claim of disbandment, policemen are still turning their guns on harmless protesters killing 10 according to the Amnesty International and maiming as we speak. (Opinion Article, *The Punch*, October 15, 2020)

Excerpt 24:

Amnesty International recorded a total of 82 cases of extortion, torture and ill-treatment by the SARS between January 2017 and May 2020 (Opinion Article, *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020)

The excerpts above illustrate how the producers of the editorials and opinion articles use authorities to substantiate the claims they make in relation to the EndSARS protests and other allied matters. In excerpt 21, there is recourse to the International Police Science Association and Australia-based Institute of Economics and Peace in order to lend credence to the fact that Nigeria Police Force is the worst in the world. This kind of presentation of the police institution in Nigeria was intended to make the public perceive them negatively and to solidarise with the protesters and perceive their concerns as legitimate.

The use of authority for legitimisation of the EndSARS reflects in excerpt 22 also. In this instance, the authority referenced is the wife of the President of Nigeria who is quite respected in the nation because of her critical stance on important national matters. Therefore, by emphasising that Mrs Buhari supports the demands of the protesters, the protests and the protesters are being positively framed in the discourse, further showing the orientation of the discourse producers which is slanted in favour of the protesters.

Excerpts 23 and 24 also reflect the deployment of appeal to authority to legitimise the opinions of the discourse producers on the EndSARS protests and protesters. In both excerpts, there is reference to Amnesty International which is an important organisation that keeps records on many social problems across the nations of the world to capture the police brutality that the EndSARS protesters were fighting against. The presentation of Amnesty International gives credence to the fact that there is indeed police brutality in Nigeria.

Victimisation

Victimisation is a discourse strategy that typically borders on the presentation of the negative actions of others and how those actions impact on the victims, who constitute the self (van Dijk, 2006). However, for the present purpose, victimisation focuses on the negative actions of the government and its impact on the EndSARS protesters. In a bid to attract sympathy for the protesters and garner support for them and their campaign, the writers of editorials and opinion articles in Nigeria present gory pictures of the negative experiences in the hands of the police officers in Nigeria. Below are excerpts showing victimisation in the discourse:

Excerpt 25:

Nigerian youths have suffered in the hands of the police and other security agencies. They are summarily killed, detained, extorted and brutalized, especially by SARS. (Editorial, *The Punch*, October 19, 2020)

Excerpt 26:

SARS operatives crossed the line by tagging every youth a criminal and flippantly killing many of them. That action made every young person a potential corpse in the hands of the rogue SARS. One could be sleeping at home and still be arrested by SARS because there was a report that some “bad eggs” were in the neighbourhood. One could be returning from work and be arrested. And once arrested, one’s chances of coming out were very low. (Opinion Article, *The Punch*, October 20, 2020)

The excerpts above are poignantly deployed to create a bad image for the officers of SARS and portray the Nigerian youths as victims of the brutal actions of the police officers. Indeed the strategy of victimisation is central to the study as the discourse of the protests in Nigeria generally hinges on the oppression of the youths. Therefore, for the discourse producers to influence the judgment of the public and skew public opinions in favour of the protesters and the protests, they present the details of the oppression and suffering of the youths by SARS officers. For instance, in excerpt 25, the verbal lexemes “killed”, “detained”, “extorted” and “brutalised” capture the agonies of Nigerian youths occasioned by the brutality of the SARS officers. Excerpt 26 even goes further to present a picture of the annihilation of Nigerian youths. The metaphorical expression “potential corpse” used in reference to the youths gives a picture of the height of the elimination of the youths by SARS. Even though the expression may be said to reek of some hyperbolism, the spate of SARS elimination of the youths in Nigeria prior to the protests was alarming.

6. Conclusion

This paper has shown that the editorial and opinion writers for Nigerian newspapers carefully deployed language to convey their opinions on the 2020 EndSARS protests and tilt the perceptions of Nigerians on the protest. The paper shows that the discourse is characterised by the careful selection of discursive strategies for positive representation of the protests and negative representation of the SARS officers. Specifically, through actor description, the discourse producers positively labelled the EndSARS protesters and condemned the SARS officers. Also, through the use of evidentiality, authority and number game, the discourse producers tried to give a graphic detail of the horrendous level of police brutality against the youths in Nigeria in order to show that the claims of the protesters are not spurious and that they really deserved pity. Furthermore, the discourse producers used comparison for the purpose of comparing the conditions in Nigeria with regard to police brutality with the conditions elsewhere in order to further show the deplorability of the situation regarding the brutality of the people to the youths of Nigeria.

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