

## **Discursive Strategies in the Tweets and Comments of Virtual #Endsars Protesters**

Temitope Balogun & Richard Akano  
*Osun State University*

### **Abstract**

The #EndSars protest surfaced as a social movement that vociferously agitated the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria. While there are existing language-based literatures on formal and functional analyses of electoral campaigns, manifestoes, inaugural speeches, speeches by political icons, civil unrest and other socio-political movements; this study attempts to investigate an innovation of public protest discourse using the #EndSars tweets and comments as data. The study, therefore, examines discursive strategies in tweets and comments of virtual #EndSars protesters. One hundred (100) tweets and comments hashtagged #EndSars between October 1 and 31, 2020, were purposively extracted, representing the data for the study. Theoretical insights from Fairclough's socio-cultural approach to Critical Discourse Analysis and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar guide the study into linguistic and discourse analyses. Findings show that tweeters and commenters employed linguistic and

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Temitope Abiodun Balogun, PhD.  
Department of English and Literacy studies  
Osun State University, Ikire, Osun State, Nigeria  
Phone: +2347034929259; Email: [temitope.balogun@uniosun.edu.ng](mailto:temitope.balogun@uniosun.edu.ng)  
&  
Richard Damilare Akano  
Department of English and Literacy studies  
Osun State University, Ikire, Osun State, Nigeria  
Phone: +2348156297262; Email: [richard.akano@uniosun.edu.ng](mailto:richard.akano@uniosun.edu.ng)

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discourse styles such as vocative interpersonal resource, prevalence of imperatives, repetition, praise, deictic expressions for inclusion and exclusion, allusions, slang, prayer, amongst others to project their focus, as well as call for youths' participation in governance with respect to 2023 elections. These discursive strategies projected by lexical and discourse elements, advance the politics of language within the context of power imbalance and abuse, extra-judicial practices, marginalisation, and other social injustices. The study concludes that virtual protesters deploy these discursive strategies to sensitise, persuade, motivate and mobilise the virtual community on the goal of the #EndSars protest, to sustain their solidarity in the struggle and to coordinate the protest.

**Keywords:** Discursive strategies, Tweets and comments, #EndSars protest, Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar.

### **Introduction**

The spread of democracy and subscription to it as a political ideology and system by modern societies have encouraged the citizenry in active involvement in political processes. One of the dividends of democracy is social activism. Citizens have constitutional right to elect and reelect leaders into public offices for a specific period of time and can as well hold them accountable for perceived administrative irregularities and misnomers. Social protest is a form of social activism engaged in by social group(s) to express grievances, perceived deprivation, injustice, frustration, and to further tender demands that are considered to be panacea to these inhumane experiences. Social protest which can be in form of industrial actions or strike, sit-ins and occupy protest, boycotts, street demonstration against peculiar and recurring unwanted social issues such as unemployment, mismanagement of public funds and personnel, high cost of living, and many others, has been employed by social groups, individual activists, trade unions, labour force, civil right groups,

organised mass population, students in tertiary institutions, in bringing about positive social change (Hari, 2014; Chilwa, 2018).

Protest can be peaceful or violent. Most protests set out initially to be peaceful, however, the nature of such protest changes when protesters begin to engage and openly confront security agents, thus culminating in the use of rubber bullets, tear gas or water to dispel the protesters. Some violent protests have resulted in loss of lives and destruction of properties. Such protests also degenerate into looting and sabotage of public properties thereby resulting in the use of force by security agents for maintenance of order (Chilwa, 2018).

Public protest discourse has enjoyed researchers' attention in recent years. Among the avalanche of language-based researches on public protest, Wood (2000) explores the urban protest and discourse of popular nationalism in post-Revolutionary Mexico. Ukeje (2004) underscores gender identity and alternative discourse of social protest among women of Aba and Ugborodo in the Oil Delta of Nigeria. Kasanga (2014) examines mobile signs, code choice, symbolic meaning and territoriality in protests associated with the 'Arab Spring's revolution in Northern Africa. While Hari (2014) expounds on the role of social media in the #OccupyNigeria fuel subsidy removal protest, Chilwa (2015) examines a critical analysis of Facebook posts on the same social movement. Chilwa (2018) analyses the discourse structure and discursive strategies employed as language of protest by a Nigerian secessionist group that demands referendum for independence of the Igbo ethnic group. This study sets out to uncover, through the lens of Systemic Functional Grammar and Critical Discourse Analysis, the discursive strategies employed in the virtual #EndSars protesters' tweets and comments as a system of persuading, mobilising and coordinating the activities of the protesters.

### **The Digital Media and Social Activism**

The evolution of digital media has widened the scope of social activism across the globe. This development is characterised by massive awareness creation and evasiveness of information. The

internet has been a formidable force behind access to information by a networked population and has also served as instruments for coordination in socio-political protests and movements (Shirky, 2011). The invention of the social media is instrumental in digitalising socio-political activism such that interest groups, organised individuals, extremist organisations, secessionist movements, militant groups have been able to project their agendas and also influence the virtual space (Chiluwa, 2018). The rise of digital media in social activism can be traced to the 'Arab spring', owing to the strategic roles played by the social media in the movement. The outcome of the Arab spring is notable to have revolutionised social activism. Social Media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, were weapons for information dissemination and massive mobilisation in the protest that ousted Hosni Mubarak, the Former Egyptian president. This same virtual protest strategy was successful in Tunisia and also spearheaded the dethronement of Mu'ammarr Gaddafi of Libya (Chiluwa, 2015).

In Nigeria, the social media championed the *#OccupyNigeria* protest, a social movement in response to the removal of fuel subsidy by the President Good luck Ebele Jonathan-led administration. The *#OccupyNigeria* protest drew inspiration from the non-violent 'Occupy Wall Street' protest against social inequality and corruption which was staged in New York and other cities in the United States. In similar light, Nigerians spontaneously took to the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry messenger, YouTube and several political blogs to express their outrage and displeasure on the increased price of petroleum products (Hari, 2014; Chiluwa, 2015). The *#BringBackOurGirls* social media campaign was another significant social movement in response to the kidnap of Nigerian school girls by Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram. This movement blazed the social media, became trendy for days, especially on Facebook and Twitter until its scope widened from being a national affair to a global affair (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015). During social protests, the social media posts have been 'effectively used to describe the identity of the actors, articulate their arguments and demands,

enunciate their activities and goals as well as provide information updates to the protesters' (Chiluwa, 2015:47). The foregoing is an apt description of the #EndSars protest movement.

### **The #ENDSARS Protest as a 'Glocal' Campaign**

Riding on the giant wings of digital media and technology, the #Endsars campaign is considered a local occurrence that sparked responses on a global scale. Hence it is referred to as a glocal campaign. The social media, as well as the print and electronic media, were instrumental in globalising the protest movement in ways that attracted attention and spurred responses from foreign political leaders, indigenous and foreign celebrities and international bodies. The Amnesty International, for instance, as a global agency, monitored the events leading to the October 20 'Lekki Toll Gate Massacre' by providing data and statistics relating to the protesters' activities and the government's response. Following the gory incident, the United States-based Cable Network News (CNN) released an investigative documentary of the killings in order to call the Nigerian government to action. Series of protests staged by Nigerians in diaspora in front of Nigerian Embassies especially in first world countries such as the UK, the US, Canada and France, served as reinforcement for protesters in Nigeria. It is noteworthy that the movement enjoyed funding and services from individuals and corporate bodies such as Flutterwave, a Fintech company; Citizen Gavel, a legal tech organization, and some legal practitioners who worked pro-bono to give the movement a legal backing (Ugwuede, 2020).

The masterminding of the #EndSars campaign by some human rights activists date back to 2017 to uncover the human rights violation perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police established in 1992. Prior to this time, calls have been made to the Nigerian government to checkmate the notoriety, the gruesome killings and extra-judicial practices by the SARS. There had been accusations of illegal arrest and detaining of citizens, murder of innocent people, illegal stop-and-search exercises,

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rape, extortion and other victimising practices levelled against the SARS. These terrorising activities were becoming unbearable and worrisome to an end that a detailed report of about 82 interviews compiled by Amnesty International and titled *Nigeria: Time To End Impunity* exposes cases of police brutalisation and violation of human rights by the SARS from January 2017 to May 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020; BBC, 2020).

Against the backdrop of preceding agitations calling for restructuring of the SARS unit and reform of the Nigerian Police, agitations surged few days after Nigeria @60 Independence Day celebration. The virtual #EndSars campaign's inferno was lit by a tweet that surfaced online on October 3, 2020 about a man shot by the SARS operatives and left dead in front of a hotel in Ughelli, Delta State (Ugwuede, 2020). The social media buzzed with posts that specifically demand immediate disbanding of the SARS unit. Twitter was particularly flooded with millions of tweets and retweets containing messages with #EndSars hashtag. By October 11, the discussion on Twitter had risen to a peak of 661,340 tweets and on October 16, about 3.3million tweets and 744,000 retweets with #EndSars hashtag had been recorded (BBC, 2020). Following this development, Nigerians took to the streets to engage in a peaceful protest march on October 8, 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020). The EndSars protesters stormed out with myriads of placards, banners, the Nigerian flag, branded clothes with inscriptions such as #EndSars, #EndSarsNow, #EndPoliceBrutality, #EndBadGovernance, and many others. Musical performances were staged by Nigerian celebrities and meals were made available to protesters just to attract the attention of the public. With increased population of physical protesters mainly characterised by youths, and the trendy nature of the online #EndSars campaign, the protest continued in different states in Nigeria for days and places such as major express roads, state secretariat, and other places of commercial importance became strategic points of convergence for the protesters.

### **Orientalions from CDA and SFG**

The foremost proponents of models of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, henceforth) view critical analysis of language from socio-cultural (Fairclough), socio-cognitive (Van Dijk) and discourse historical (Wodak) perspectives. CDA is a theoretical approach that attempts to systematically unveil 'opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts, events, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes' (Olutayo, 2016:266). Fairclough's model of CDA subjects language use in social interaction to concrete, linguistic and textual analysis (Lamidi, 2016). The analysis of the text revolves round Fairclough's three dimensional model of CDA: description, interpretation and explanation. Description examines the formal properties of the text; Interpretation synchronises text with interaction and shows how text is viewed in processes of production and interpretation through discursive analysis; and explanation links interaction with the social context within which the discourse emanates (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995). According to Osisanwo (2012:172), description represents 'discourse as text', interpretation represents 'discourse as discursive practice' and explanation represents 'discourse as social practice'. Notably, analysis in this study also reflects Fairclough's emphasis on intertextuality and interdiscursivity as contextual domains of CDA upon which discursive practices hinge. Therefore, Fairclough's CDA model is preferred in this study. The focus of CDA is 'how certain sets of vocabulary and grammatical structures in texts (tweets and comments in this case) reveal value judgements and ideological perspectives' (Chiluwa, 2012:222). The #EndSars campaign is an ideology-driven protest movement. The discursive practices among the virtual protesters are anchored on the #EndSars ideology and the need to achieve the goal of the protest. Therefore, CDA is chosen to reveal the hidden ideological projections that inspire the linguistic and discourse style adopted by the protester. This is in tandem with Van Dijk's (2005:24) position that "the coordination of social practices of group members

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for effective realisation of the goals of a social group and the protection of their interest".

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) sees the internal relationship in language as a system network and as a tool for social interaction (Akindele, 2016). The choice of SFG is borne out of its affordance of 'the use of the tools of linguistics...in explaining structures and strategies that influences social and ideological meanings in language events' (Oyeleye & Oduola, 2016:428). SFG beams its flashlight on the linguistic resources that are used contextually to project the ideology of the protesters. Halliday's meta-functions of language is emphatic on meaning in context and contextualisation of meaning.

The blend of insights from CDA and SFG as ideal frameworks for this study is an attempt to explore the role of language in the society and to give this study a sociolinguistic purview. With deliberate choice of these theoretical approaches, emphasis is placed on textuality and intertextuality as phenomenal features of functional linguistics. SFG enables the interrogation of linguistic structures and discourse styles in the tweets and comments of the virtual #EndSars protesters. Features of Halliday's meta-functions of language play out evidently in the construction of tweets and comments. In the ideational sense, protesters' tweets and comments are constructive representations of world-views and experiences engendered by socio-political malaises and the resort to protest as a correctional mechanism. Tweets and comments are evidences of interchange of ideas through grammatical mood among participants, and performs interpersonal function in building power and solidarity. Tweeters and commenters continue to maintain their stance on the goal of the protest. Reference, choice lexical items, repetition, sloganeering and other rhetorical styles constitute the textual elements of the texts which serve as building blocks to construct the discourse of this protest. On the other hand, CDA pays attention to social issues of ideology, power relations, marginalisation and oppression, and other social occurrences from which the discourse of social protest stems. Orientations from CDA



connect the protesters' constructed texts with ideological underpinnings of abuse of power, victimisation, injustice, extra-judicial practices, protest movement as retaliation, representing the social context that foregrounds this discourse.

### **Methodology**

The corpus data was got from *#EndSars* tweets in random Twitter handles. The advance filter machinery allowed for streamlining of tweets and comments with only *#EndSars* hashtag and these tweets and comments were posted between October 1 and October 31, 2020. This timeframe is preferred because it was a period the *#EndSars* protest was at its peak, a period of consciousness raising and massive awareness creation. Out of 100 tweets and comments that were purposively and randomly sampled, 43 were extracted to represent the data for this study. The tweets and comments were coded TWT and CMT for the purpose of easy of reference.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The *#EndSars* protest discourse is grounded in ideology. This study was inspired by the notion that the viral nature of the virtual *#EndSars* protest is credited to the power of language and discourse. Following a critical study of the drawn data, certain discursive practices among virtual protesters were unearthed. These linguistic and discourse strategies, well exploited by online protesters, proved to be backbone for communicating the *#EndSars* movement's agenda. These discursive strategies engaged by tweeters within the social realities of abuse of power and extra-judicial practices and by extension, bad governance in Nigeria are: deictic pronouns indicating inclusion and exclusion, vocatives, allusion, prayer, praise, prevalence of imperatives, slanguage, and repetition; all of which are instrumental in projecting the tweeters' focus and desire as well as calling for youth participation in governance. These discursive strategies are discussed with respect to the contextual ideological underpinnings responsible for this discourse construction.

### **Deictic Expression for Inclusion and Exclusion**

Obvious among the many discursive strategies in the virtual #EndSars protesters' tweets and comments, as revealed in the data, is the strategic use of deictic pronouns. Deictic items are highly contextual expressions and instruments of reference. #EndSars tweets and comments are replete of deictic elements aimed at achieving inclusion and exclusion effects. In essence, through these deictic personal pronouns, there is a sense of dichotomy in definition of the roles of social actors involved in the public protest. Person deictic expressions signal the emergence of two groups engaged in ideological battle. There is recurrence of the plural forms of first-person pronouns (we, us) and third-person pronouns (they, them). The virtual #EndSars protesters who are a reinforcement team to the #EndSars on-site protesters are considered a social group mainly characterised by youths who are up against the impunities and atrocities overtime perpetrated by the underfired law enforcement agency, SARS. The "other" social group is a conglomerate of security operatives and Nigerian politicians who are referred to as "the government". Due to the contextual nature of these deictic pronouns, there is a registered notion of two conflicting groups whose opposition stances were triggered by rampant unfavourable socio-political issues.

TWT1: Am glad **we** "Nigerians" can stand up and  
fight for **our** rights  
Impressive!!!!  
**We** are not Lazy as claimed..  
**We BOLD, STRONG AND FEARLESS**  
God bless y'all♥  
#EndSarsNow #EndPoliceBrutality #EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/graceiammy/status/1314716453338337281>

TWT2: **We** go again tomorrow and tomorrow and  
tomorrow, till **they** #EndSARS and #EndSarsNow

<https://mobile.twitter.com/FEMMY466/status/1314715707192619014>

The extract above gives a picture of a set of people "we" who have been a victim of a political system that downplays the fundamental human right. By stating the referent "Nigerians", the tweeter uses the deictic item "we" non-deictically to categorise all Nigerians as inclusive casualties of the sociopolitical realities of power abuse and marginalisation. These deictic elements suggest strong solidarity and motivation among virtual protesters. By this sense of inclusion, the virtual community is being mobilised and further implicated by the goal of the #EndSars struggle.

TWT3: **We** are trying to get paid. I wonder why uniform men be trying to handcuff **us**? Why do **they** have to tag **us** 'bad boys' cuz wer are from the hood like it's our fault. Life is a movie, what roll are **you** playing to #EndSARS @NTANewsNow @channelstv @CNN @Mohzix @ROGMusicAfrica [https://mobile.twitter.com/Realest\\_Punch/status/1314716395297538056](https://mobile.twitter.com/Realest_Punch/status/1314716395297538056)

TWT4: going to bed slightly happy cuz this time yesterday, no one knew what was going on. but look what **we**'ve done in 24 hours. **we**'ve created awareness, now it's to put more pressure. **we** can do this. we can #EndSARS <https://mobile.twitter.com/zYEchii/status/1314715537243541505>

TWT5: **We** are the generation of Nigerians "**they**" never saw coming. **They** thought it is business as usual with the oppression and exploitations. Well, when **we** #ENDSARS, **we** will unveil the next "package." #Sarsmustend

<https://mobile.twitter.com/Zorracs/status/1315441603809509376>

Again, TWT3 and TWT5 establish the social issues of power imbalance, exploitation and oppression suffered by some Nigerians in the hands of some members of SARS and the police force as the ideology behind the #EndSars protest. In lieu of this, the "we" inclusive group stands up to challenge the "they" exclusive group or outgroup on a status quo that continuously threatens their humanity. Inclusion effect tends to make all Nigerians share the sentiments of the protesters, see the protest as a national struggle and identify with their group.

### **Vocative Interpersonal Resource**

In every political discourse, there are social actors who play social roles within the context of different social issues. Having established the inclusion and exclusion groupings of social actors through deictic pronouns, it is clear that acts of challenging and confrontation are performed by the #EndSars protesters in-group against recurring acts of marginalisation and extra-judicial practices in the Nigerian society. The virtual #EndSars protesters engaged in a discursive practice of calling out some social actors and directly addressing them in respect of the pressing social issues. Vocative is a grammatical system of direct address to participants in any speech event. Vocative is a resource of the interpersonal meta-function of language within the tradition of the Systemic Functional Grammar which is employed to draw attention of concerned participants and establish interpersonal relationship. In the realities of this discourse, virtual #EndSars protesters called the attention of salient social actors whose social roles would influence and directly impact the essence of the social struggle. The vocative case is so strategic in creating awareness so much that social actors who are called and directly addressed can easily get the message of the protesters through the instrumentality of the Twitter feature of tagging Twitter handles. In this case, messages

appear on the profile of the tagged Twitter handler. Therefore, the directly addressed social actors cannot deny being oblivious of the tweeters' message. By deploying the vocative case grammatical tool, the protesters are strategic in calling out three categories of social actors as revealed in the data.

**TWT6: Dear @ProfOsinbajo** is that why you waited till 11PM to tweet that thread there explains nothing to NIGERIANS? Dey supposed seize your tablet! #EndSARS is the movement, you are a failure. A disappointment and this is the last time it will ever happen again! #BuhariResignNow  
[https://mobile.twitter.com/Apex\\_Zy/status/1317253907060502529](https://mobile.twitter.com/Apex_Zy/status/1317253907060502529)

**TWT7: Dear IGP,** arrest the Policemen involved in these atrocities, parade them like you parade regular Armed Robbery suspects and then charge them to Court. Then your actions would have spoken loudly and you can be taken seriously.  
#EndSWAT #EndSARS  
#EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/yemiTM442/status/1316388047710191616>

**TWT8: @OoniAdimulaIfe** we need your voice on this journey. You should speak the voices of the gods.  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Okikiomokadiri/status/1317978729549803521>

The first category of the directly addressed social actors is key government officials and political leaders. The Tweeter in TWT6 calls out the Vice-President of the federal republic of Nigeria in a confrontational fashion that shows disgust at the government's

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disposition, effort and actions towards the protest. The tweet shows displeasure, disappointment, and disregard for the Vice-president, tagging his administration a failure and calling for the resignation of President Buhari. In TWT7, the tweeter advises a seemingly clueless inspector general of police to prosecute and punish erring police officers; this would have appeased the raging protesters. TWT8 calls out the Ooni of Ife, a prominent traditional ruler in Ile-Ife, a city in Southwestern Nigeria. The tweeter rides on the wings of a political thought that says "the voice of the people is the voice of the gods" and challenges the king to speak the voice of the gods, knowing that the voice is capable of resonating the protest movement. Directly addressing these members of outgroup is to call for their prompt positive response to the demands of the protesters.

**TWT9: My fellow online protesters**, let's remain motivated and inspired, remain focus only on d Goal which is #EndSARS & #EndBadGovernanceinNIGERIA we need to have a society where a Son of nobody can become somebody without knowing anybody According to Aisha Yesufu. Oya retweet fast.  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Adegreatt/status/1317253891814268928>

**TWT10: Dear southern and northern brothers**, unity first before anything!!! We've been united through our journey to #EndSARS and that's bringing us success, they now think of dividing us to make us lose focus.... One Nigeria is possible  
[https://mobile.twitter.com/3ple\\_\\_a/status/1316455873112346627](https://mobile.twitter.com/3ple__a/status/1316455873112346627)

The virtual protesters and youths, considered as in-group social actor are strategically addressed. TWT9 is a profound call for the virtual protesters to maintain their stance in the struggle. By making

reference to the words of one of the frontline protest leaders, the Tweeter reminds 'fellow online protesters' on the need to stay inspired, motivated and focused on the agenda of ending police brutality and bad governance in Nigeria. In TWT10, emphasis is laid on continued solidarity and unity as requisite weapons for winning the battle. Attention is called to the gimmicks and tactics of the opposing actors who are poised at tearing the protesters apart and redirecting their interest in active participation in the protest. The strategic use of lexical items such as "brothers" and "one Nigeria" indicates unity of purpose among the protesters.

**TWT11: Dear @Twitter**, you have over 39.6 million users in Nigeria who are all protesting against police brutality with #EndSARS. But you haven't tweeted a word about us like you did during Black Lives Matter. Show us solidarity & change your avatar to #EndSARSinNigeria.  
Retweet this!  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/YoungHerbalist/status/1316360192175505408>

**TWT12: Dear @Apple** Nigerian policemen kill young people for owning an iPhone.  
**Dear @MercedesBenz** Nigerian policemen kill young people for buying your cars.  
**Dear @Nike @adidas** Are you aware young people are killed for buying your trainers?  
Pls lend a voice. Help us.  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Richmartins2/status/1317978600193298433>

Furthermore, some multinational corporations, considered co-implicated but neutral social actors, are called out to lend their voice of influence to the struggle. TWT11 makes reference to the impacts of

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Twitter on the success of the Black Lives Matter struggle, a racial discrimination-inspired protest that rocked Europe and world continents; questioning the commitment of the organisation in the #EndSars struggle by laying hold on the patronage Twitter has enjoyed from Nigerians over the years. TWT12 hinges on the transnational business dealings of corporations such as Apple (a mobile phone and computer system producing firm), Mercedes-Benz (an automobile manufacturing firm) and Nike (a firm prominent for manufacturing clothing and foot wears) with Nigerians. The direct call appeals to business and economic sentiments and seeks to gain allegiance of these corporations in articulating the protesters' demands.

**Allusion**

Allusion is a discourse strategy that creates flashback effects by referring to past experiences. Allusion reflects and beams the light of past attitudes and incidents on current issues with an attempt to find a suitable panacea from the problems encountered in the present. The virtual #EndSars protesters engaged religious and socio-political allusion to persuade and enlighten the virtual community on the need for renewed zeal and enthusiasm in the protest.

TWT13: Ok. Back to the Moses analogy I used in the morning:

Do you know how many times Pharaoh announced that he was letting the Israelites go and it turned out to be audio announcement?

Even the 5th time, he let them go, then started pursuing them.

[https://mobile.twitter.com/Nwankpa\\_A/status/1315389988511645696](https://mobile.twitter.com/Nwankpa_A/status/1315389988511645696)

*CMT1*: This Egyptian (SARS), you see, you shall see them NO MORE!!!!!!



<https://mobile.twitter.com/stephenedu/status/1315448962153934848>

*CMT2*: And I love the ending of the story so much. Pharaoh and his hordes perished in the sea. Exactly how it's going to be too in this one because even God is on our side against the wickedness and injustices of our government.

#EndSARS

#NigerianYouthsUnite

#EndPoliceBrutality

<https://mobile.twitter.com/EttahHope/status/1315418177229258763>

In the extract above, a prototype and metaphoric description of the Nigerian political leaders and the SARS officials is offered in TWT13. Being a religious allusion that alludes to an incident in the Bible, the tweet and comments delineate a negative portrayal of an ancient tyrant and headstrong king of Egypt who refused to grant the wishes of Israelites. The hard conditions in Nigeria could be compared to the Israelites many years of servitude and patriotism in Egypt. By referring to the audio announcements of Pharaoh on five occasions, the tweet draws readers' attention to numerous failed political promises that have over the years characterised the Nigerian political system. However, in the light of the #EndSars protest, the various actions taken by the government do not match up with the demands of the people. As a way of sustaining the hope for projected victory in the struggle, a prediction of the aftermath of the protest was made and optimism expressed. CMT1 pronounces the exact verdict of God to the Egyptians on the SARS agency while CMT2 expresses trust and hope in God to drown the corrupt Nigerian system and heartless political leaders in the sea of the protest.

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TWT14: Fela saw our future. That man is truly an  
Abami eda #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria  
#EndSWAT #EndSARS #SARSMUSTEND  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/homeboymeelano/status/1316165466658942977>

TWT15: FELA can finally rest in peace.  
We can handle it from here.  
Kindly extend my humble regards to Nelson Mandela.  
#EndPoliceBrutality  
#EndSarsNow  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/ponskiblaze/status/1317253778500878336>

TWT16: To me Nigeria didn't gain independence in  
1960 of the British just gave the power to black skin  
British to take over, now is the time for our real  
independence from these black colonial criminals  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/enigma0006/status/1316891500681232384>

The extract above alludes to the historic revolutionary figures who were at the heart of sociopolitical transformation envisioned in their society. The memories of the legendary Afro-beat singer Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was an ideological force that is instrumental in projecting the social change demanded by the protesters. The music and life of Fela majored on satirising both the civilian and military government, while also exposing the high level of corruption and social atrocities that embattled Nigeria's politics after Independence. TWT14 eulogises Fela and calls him an *Abami eda* (a mysterious being) who at his time saw what would become of the national politics - that the oppressed masses would rise and with one voice demand for the cleansing of Nigeria's political system. Enshrined in the music of

Fela are fond memories of the socio-political quagmire Nigeria has found herself in. TWT15 notes that the ravaging spirit of Fela is finally being appeased following the breakout of the nationwide #Endsars protest, a dream Fela would have loved to see come to pass. TWT15 also alludes to the impacts of Nelson Mandela, a revolutionary and visionary leader who, coming out of lengthy spell of imprisonment, led South Africa to the land of Eldorado after years of affliction under the apartheid system. Protesters are called to draw inspiration from the life of Fela and Nelson Mandela. TWT16 makes reference to Nigeria's independence in 1960, describing Nigeria's present leaders as black-skinned British. This only shows that the leaders are shadows of themselves as they refuse to reflect true Africanity.

### **Prayer**

Religion has always been core in the fabric of the African society. Almost every Nigerian subscribes and submits to the tenets of a religion. The virtual protesters took the #EndSars struggle into a spiritual dimension especially with the outspokenness of prominent spiritual leaders across the country. Nigeria is a nation rich in religious heritage and little wonder why spirituality becomes a perfect blend with activism in the #EndSars struggle. Within the consciousness of the vanity of life without religion, virtual protesters become more motivated having known that their efforts are backed up by spiritual forces - spiritual forces are considered greater and fearsome than physical forces. Prayer therefore is one of the discursive strategies employed by virtual protesters in persuading the online community about the goal of the #Endsars protest. Prayer is communicating with trustworthy supernatural being in order to forge out a supernatural solution to a problem considered supernatural. Nigerians, in a bid to express hope for a better nation, regard God as the only solution provider of Nigeria.

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TWT17: God please protect everyone going out to protest later in the day, please guard them, go with them, fight for them, God we're taking action now, we're fighting for our right, help us win this fight, please God, AMEN #EndSars #EndSarsNow #EndPoliceBrutality  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/enightan/status/1315440695080091648>

TWT18: Dear Lord!  
Take control of this day!!!  
Take control of the dawn!!!!  
#EndSarsNow #5for5 #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria #EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/suluxuryhair/status/1315804308118671363>

TWT19: Dear God please keep us safe tomorrow let there not be any sad news of death tomorrow, I pray all of us going to protest tomorrow are protected #EndSARS #SARSMUSTEND #PeacefulProtest #SarsMustGo #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria  
[https://mobile.twitter.com/ge\\_icecream/status/1315803916215476230](https://mobile.twitter.com/ge_icecream/status/1315803916215476230)

TWT20: Lord all we pray and ask for, is justice, pls grant us our heart desires. Amen #FallenHeroes #EndSARS #EndPoliceBrutality #ENDBADGOVERNANCE #EndBadGovernmentinNIGERIA #EndInsecurityNow  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/ChimaAustine/status/1317253941562834944>

TWT21: There is a prayer walk going on in yaba and they are currently at Sabo....  
Let's join them, dear Christians...  
Come and kabash  
#endsars #SARSMUSTEND #EndSWAT  
#SWATMUSTEND  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Zuchradio/status/1316326412752752641>

In the above extract, TWTS17-19 show prayers being offered to God for security and protection of protesters on protest grounds. This prayer arises from the rising challenge of insecurity that has long embattled the nation. It is noteworthy that in a nation where true democracy is represented, citizens are protected in the event of any protest or uprising. In the Nigerian situation, prayers to God for protection is a clear indication that security agents are instead given order to dissipate protesters. Again, the virtual community is lured to share the sentiment of the protesters and to resort to divine intervention through prayers. TWT20 is a passionate plea for justice to be served. TWT21 suggests that prayer is seen as force to reckon with in causing the radical change demanded by the protesters. Protesters are invited to join various prayer walks organised in strategic places across the country. As they walk around the city in their multitude, the protesters exercise their spiritual authority and makes declarations over the nation. The call to 'kabash' is a slangy expression for praying in tongues, a prayer system common among the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostals.

### **Encomium**

Encomium is a rhetorical strategy used concurrently by virtual #EndSars protesters in encouraging the virtual community to throw its weight behind the #EndSars struggle. As an emotional appeal, encomium extols heroic deeds of an individual to trigger admiration and followership. Notable leaders of the #EndSars protesters are

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called out and lavished with encomium for their influence in the struggle. Also, protesters praise their fellow protesters for resilience and solidarity demonstrated in the protest. Metaphors are linguistic resources that portray these individuals.

TWT22: You see the role these women played eh...  
I'm just speechless. Fk Abudu should be a national treasure, Aisha Yesufu has always been at the forefront, she just waited for us. I can't even continue coz y'all are too many.  
God bless you people.  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/only1austine/status/1315441797469007872>

TWT23: Dear @jack thanks for supporting our #EndSARS #EndSWAT plight. Have you met the stallion @AishaYesufu? We call her the Flag of Nigeria Statue of Liberty. On behalf her teeming fans. I request that you verify her account. Thanks in advance.  
Comrades, RT if you're with me.  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/WizkidtheLegend/status/1316518588250030080>

TWT24: Nigerians, I am proud of you all. We found our voices and they are jittery.  
PROTEST DO WORK!  
#ENDSARS  
#EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria  
#SARSMUSTEND  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/AishaYesufu/status/1316038644805885955>  
CMT3:

You started this fight way before any of us gathered enough courage to do it. You are phenomenal. Thank you for not quitting despite the pressure.

<https://mobile.twitter.com/cissyeko/status/1316046818418008066>

TWT25: To all 43 of you that kept the weak ember glowing all night on cold unforgiving asphalt.. You are the unsung hero, Thank you. Posterity will remember your sacrifice. Your resilience will birth a new nation. #EndSARS #EndSWAT

#SARSMUSTEND #EndPoliceBrutuality

<https://mobile.twitter.com/Mcwerleigh/status/1316166807292710916>

In the above extract, women are the focus of exaltation and admiration for their impacts in the struggle. Encomium is poured on women such as Aisha Yesufu and FK Abudu as seen in TWT22 and TWT23. The tweeter is full of adoration for Fk Abudu and calls her a 'national treasure'. Stallion is a symbol of strength and perseverance. The metaphoric representations of Aisha Yesufu in TWT23 are "stallion" and "flag of Nigeria statue of leadership". Stallion symbolises strength, vitality and perseverance, qualities exuded by Aisha during the protest and 'Flag of Nigeria statue of liberty' describes her quality of being a firm, patriotic and outstanding in demanding humanitarianism. More so, CMT3 proves that she is being admired for being phenomenal. In TWT25, some protesters are lauded and tagged "unsung hero" for choosing physical inconvenience just to create a heavy physical presence for the protests.

### **Prevalence of Imperatives**

Imperatives are utterances within the scope of grammatical mood which appears in forms of request, command, instruction, question and advice. The multifarious instances of imperatives in the data indicates that the #EndSars protest is purely based on requests and

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demands. Therefore, it makes it easy for the virtual community to understand the essence of the protest.

TWT26: Isn't it ironic that Nigerians have to be scared of both "Police and Thief"?  
Stop this madness!  
#EndSARS #EndSarsNow  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/FeyiMac/status/1314716161079152642>

TWT27: Give the people what they want, make the necessary reforms and the protests will end. Period!  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/debbyadara/status/1315803669531688961>

TWT28: Send #sars to maiduguri to help us fight #BokoHaram and not to shoot on us the innocent youths #EndSARS #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/VictoryMonday5/status/1315441326490562561>

TWT29: We do not request for a change of name, we request for a change of people, we request for full security over our lives and property, we refuse to keep living in deceit, We request for the change that was promised  
#EndSWAT  
#EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria  
#EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/TunmeeS/status/1316165944872501248>

TWT30: Retweet this aggressively if you're a Nigeria youth and you're protesting for #EndSARS



#EndSWAT #SarsMustGoNotReDePloy  
#SarsMustEnd #SarsMustGo  
#EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria..please retweet  
aggressively if you see this..thank you so much  
follow and i follow back in secs promise  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/omobolasuccess/status/1316164437846511617>

In the extract above, imperatives are directed to the government. TWT26 laments the devastating and ironic situation of being hunted by the terror of both armed robbers and the police force. This is in contrast with the security motivated slogan commonly used by Nigerians: "the police is your friend". Constructed in an imperative form marked by the verbal item 'stop', the tweet is a directive act of commanding, calling for an end in such 'madness'. TWT27 is an instance of instructing, appearing in the form of an imperative mood. It clearly outlines what would benefit both parties and bring the protest to an end. TWT28 attempts to advise the government on how the right placement of security agents while TWT29 is a clear form of request directed to the government. The imperative utterance in the extract above is aimed at motivating the virtual community not to rest on their oars and not to relent littering the Twitter platform with the demands of the #Endsars campaign.

### **Repetition**

Repetition creates emphasis. The protesters employed repetition as a discursive strategy to emphasise the purpose of the movement. To create this effect of emphasis, every tweet that campaigns for the #EndSars struggle are usually ended with the hashtag #EndSars and/or #EndPoliceBrutality.

TWT31: What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS

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What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
What do we want? #EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/LanreMorax/status/1315441309650481152>

TWT32: ARE WE TIRED?? NOOOOO! WHAT DO WE WANT?? END SARS NOW!  
ARE WE TIRED?? NOOOOO! WHAT DO WE WANT?? END SARS NOW!  
ARE WE TIRED?? NOOOOO! WHAT DO WE WANT?? END SARS NOW!  
#EndSARS #EndSARSProtest #EndSarsNow  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/AniebietPeter/status/1316891574106730496>

The extract above shows that the demands of the protesters are simply and unequivocally stated. Protesters demand the disbanding of the SARS operative unit, and seek to end all forms of brutalization they have suffered in the hands of some police officers. The call-response discursive style in TWT33 is to motivate the virtual community and sustain their interest, allegiance and solidarity to the protest.

TWT33:  
Police killed 8 people in Ogbomosho.  
Police killed 8 people in Ogbomosho.  
Police killed 8 people in Ogbomosho.  
Police killed 8 people in Ogbomosho.  
Police killed 8 people in Ogbomosho.  
Police killed 8 people in Ogbomosho.  
LET THE WHOLE WORLD BE AWARE.  
End no protests. #EndSars

<https://mobile.twitter.com/Taymedhayor/status/1315440544596852742>

The extract above is to capture the attention of readers, evoke empathy for the victims and disgust for the perpetrators. By tweeting such unfortunate incident with much emphasis and sense of urgency, the tweeter intends to update the virtual community on the reality of killings and judicial atrocities in the society. This tweet subtly endears the virtual community to join the campaign, lend their voice to amplify the agenda of the #EndSars protest by massively retweeting and commenting.

### **Slanguage**

Slanguage is a coined term for use of slangy language. Slang is an informal style of language use peculiar to a group of people who are intimate or enclosed and are identified with particular social attitudes and behaviours. Slangy word and expressions are highly contextual and are often blend of lexemes from indigenous languages with the Standard English. Noteworthy is the fact that tweets of #EndSars protesters largely appear in unofficial form of language use such as colloquialism, vulgarism, provocative language, codemixing and codeswitching, therefore, it is not surprising that slang is deployed to intimately communicate the goal of the protest.

TWT34: We're still in darkness.... *Eh soro soke werey* Mr @MBuhari  
#endsars #EndPoliceBrutality  
#EndBadGoveranceInNigeria  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/wahlexmiicky/status/1318990949951901696>

TWT35: *Soro soke werey ODE*

We don't need y'all apologies wee need the change now, y'all have fooled us for many years The day of reckoning has come.

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#ENDSARS  
#ENDSWAT  
#ENDBADGOVERNANCE  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Doubleg2012j/status/1317253820343345152>

TWT36: @jidesanwoolu what the *fuvk* are you saying... Your people are the ones not giving us peace... You better *soro soke werey*. #EndSARS #EndSARSImmediately #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeriaNOW #EndBadGoveranceInNigeria  
[https://mobile.twitter.com/O\\_JadesolaOluwa/status/1318849070203535362](https://mobile.twitter.com/O_JadesolaOluwa/status/1318849070203535362)

TWT37: *Jazzzzz Up!!!!* Don't loose Focus! #EndSarsNow #EndSARS #SARSMUSTEND  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Pweedyfisayo/status/1315440927029297152>

TWT38: Aluta to you sir, *jazz up* you dey lose concentration. You no even add #EndSARS to your kyn *shalaye*...o wrong now  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Khaldro53307429/status/1315804257774383104>

Within the context of unequal power relations, victimization and other socio-political atrocities that this study is anchored on, #EndSars protest is a form of retaliation to the status quo, and retaliation is first communicated by speaking. *Soro soke* is a Yoruba expression which means to 'speak up'. In the context of this study, it is taken as slang to motivate protesters and spur more reactions from them. *Soro Soke* is a slang adopted by protesters to speak with one voice. It is a contextual expression that calls for outspokenness and vociferousness; that it is

high time Nigerians spoke up against oppression, unequal power relation, subservience, criminality, corruption and many others. TWT35 shows that irate Nigerians want drastic change and not apologies from the government. Through the typographical strategy of calling which is an inclusive feature of Twitter, a call is made to '@JideSanwoOlu', the Governor of Lagos State and '@MBuhari', President Muhammadu Buhari to 'speak up' and come up with sensible resolution on the demands of the protesters which would bring peace. Slang is often vulgar and provocative. Such instances in the extract are the inclusion of *WEREY* (lunatic), *ODE* (fool) *F\*CK* (F-word). The use of such expression suggests rage and also total disregard for the addressees. Furthermore, TWTS 37 and 38 record "*jazz up*" as slang in form of a phrasal verb. It is a call for protesters to regain focus, concentration and enthusiasm. "*Aluta to you sir*" is a form of salutation often used in public protests. Codemixing and codeswitching gave good ground for the slangs used by the protesters to thrive.

### **2023 Impending Political Revolution**

One effect the #EndSars protest has had on the youth populace is consciousness raising. Many Nigerian youths seem to have arisen to their civic duties and have intentions to truly be part of governance. There is a sudden change in attitude towards politics and governance. A discursive strategy for mobilising the virtual community on the #EndSars protest agenda is a call for the youth's participation in governance. The youth believe it is time to take over the hem of affairs from the hands of the current crop of politicians. Since the old leaders have shut down platforms of democratic representation against the youth, it only becomes clear that they can be ousted by the youths' collective effort. Online protesters begin to sensitise and enlighten the virtual community about general elections of 2023. This would present them a golden opportunity to unanimously bundle out the bane of the nation.

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TWT39: By 2023, we should produce Nigerian youths that will run for president and vice president and other political positions. That should even be the target. A youth leader we can trust!!  
Our future Is Now!!!  
#EndSarsNow  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/thatedocutie/status/1314672209852538881>

TWT40: 2023!!!  
We, the Youths have to form our own political party!  
Whatever the name might be, I don't care!  
We have placed our lives in these old men long enough!!  
To hell with PDP and APC!!!!  
#EndSWAT  
#ReformNigeriaNow  
[https://mobile.twitter.com/Ben\\_ElohimRN/status/1316148471485825028](https://mobile.twitter.com/Ben_ElohimRN/status/1316148471485825028)

TWT41: YDP - Youth Democratic Party!!! No More APC/PDP #EndPoliceBrutalityinNigeria #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria #EndSARS  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/Richard18066389/status/1316166000283353088>

The extract above shows there is a call for non-alignment with any of the prominent ruling parties in Nigeria (PDP and APC especially). The youth believe that the ruling parties have constantly failed to deliver in terms of good governance. In place of this, YDP (Youth Democratic Party) came up as a solid option for the youth to speak with one voice and change the dismal sociopolitical status quo of the country. As envisaged, the aftermath of the protest is to change the political narrative of Nigeria.

TWT42: 2023 will be the ruling party against the youth. Let's stand for was right. Let's keep our pvc. Is time for the youth to stand up. #endsars #endsarsnow #endpolicebrutality [https://mobile.twitter.com/Rmd\\_\\_\\_\\_x/status/1315804420186177537](https://mobile.twitter.com/Rmd____x/status/1315804420186177537)

TWY43: On 2023, it's no longer APC vs PDP, but it will be YOUNG vs OLD. If we fail ourselves, we go know say nah we fail ourselves, instead of leaving our future in the hands of people who already failed themselves #EndSARS #EndPoliceBrutality #EndBadGovernanceinNIGERIA [https://mobile.twitter.com/weird\\_mb/status/1316164142450044930](https://mobile.twitter.com/weird_mb/status/1316164142450044930)

Change of power is one of the agitations of the #EndSars protesters. 2023 is considered a strategic date and time to finally end the era of bad governance in Nigeria. Online protester themed this much awaited incident 'the battle of the young against the old'. There is a registered notion of struggle for power in the country and the battle line between the youth and the ruling parties has been drawn. An agenda as futuristic as this is an attempt to gain the support of the youth across the nation and to unitedly fight to birth a new Nigeria. The #EndSars protest is not all what its nomenclature suggests it to be; it is a call to rebuild Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the various discursive strategies used among virtual protesters' tweets and comments. The #EndSars protest started as mild agitations of few Nigerian youths against brutalisation by the police. It then became a general struggle and boisterous agitations involving massive population of the youth across the country. Twitter is one of the theatre for this struggle and the influence of the new

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media in recent years aided the viral spread of mass awareness. The virtual protest served as fillip and motivation for the on-site protesters. The entrenched social phenomena of extra-judicial practices, insurrection and insurgencies, problems of insecurity, failed political promises, abuse of fundamental human rights, and brutality of the Nigerian police, formed the macro-context of this discourse and created solid ground for tenets of critical discourse analysis to thrive. The language of protest is also explored with some analytical resources of the systemic Functional Grammar. The study discovered vocative interpersonal resource, prevalence of imperatives, repetition, praise, deictic expressions for inclusion and exclusion, allusions, slang, prayer and call for youths' participation in governance with respect to 2023 elections as linguistic and discourse styles in the virtual #EndSars protesters' tweets and comments. The protest calls for a drastic cleansing of Nigeria's sociopolitical climate and calls for leadership and true representatives by youths in the coming elections. Ideological underpinnings as evinced through CDA are factors that triggered these discursive practices. Analysis shows that these discursive strategies were tactically used to mobilize, sensitize and persuade the virtual community on the goals of the #EndSars movement. This study is a major contribution to extant researches on social protest in Nigeria especially with the recentness of the #EndSars protest as case study. The relevance of the study is also pronounced in that through application of the Critical Discourse analytical approach and the tenets of Systemic Functional Grammar in engaging social issues, insights are given to the nature of #EndSars social protest and its effects on the political culture and social activism in Nigeria.



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