DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES AND POWER DYNAMICS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE #ENDBADGOVERNANCE PROTESTS

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Abstract

This study undertakes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the #EndBadGovernance protests, a social movement that swept across Nigeria in 2024. The protests, which were sparked by wide spread discontent with the government's handling of critical issues such as corruption, economic mismanagement, and human right abuses, presented a unique opportunity to examine the role of media discourse in shaping public opinion and influencing social movements. Using a CDA framework developed by Van Dijk, the researchers examine the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of the protests, including the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to construct and negotiate stance, ideologies, and power relations. The researchers also analyze the power dynamics reflected and constructed through the discourse, including the ways in which the newspapers position themselves in relation to the government and the protesters. The findings of this work reveal that Nigerian newspapers

employed a range of discursive strategies to construct and negotiate stance, ideologies, and power relations, including the use of evaluative language, emotive appeals, and intertextual references. Also, this study shows that the power dynamics reflected and constructed through the discourse were complex and multifaceted, with some newspapers aligning with the government's narratives while others supported the protesters' demands. This study contributes to our understanding of the role of media discourse in shaping public opinion and influencing social movements, and highlights the importance of critical discourse analysis as a methodology for examining the complex relationships between language, power, and social inequality. The findings of this research have implications for media practitioners, policy makers, and social movement activist seeking to understand the role of media discourse in shaping public opinion and influencing social change.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, media discourse, social movements, Nigerian newspapers, #EndBadGovernance protests, power dynamics, language and power.

Introduction

The #ENDBADGOVERNANCE protests that erupted in Nigeria in the year 2024 were watershed moment in the history of Nigeria. Protesters led by youths were responding to the growing discontent with the government's handling of the economy, corruption, and insecurity. Various protests were characterized by their wide spread nature, with demonstrations taking place in many cities across the nation. These protests also garnered significant attention on social

media, with the hash tag #EndBadGovernance trending on Twitter and other platforms.

The media played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing the narrative around the protests. Newspapers, in particular were instrumental in providing coverage of the protests, with many publications dedicating front page headlines and editorials to the story. However, the media's role in shaping public opinion is not neutral, as media outlets often reflect and reinforce existing power dynamics and social inequalities.

This paper argues the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers in reporting the #EndBadGovernance protests. Specifically, this study investigates how newspaper reports construct and negotiate stance, ideologies and power relations. It aims at contributing to our understanding of the role of media discourse in shaping public opinions and influencing social movement.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide insight into the ways in which media discourse shapes our understanding of social and political events. By examining the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers, this study aims to shed light on the ways in which media outlets reflect and reinforce existing power dynamics and social inequalities. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of the role of media discourse in shaping public opinion and influencing social movements.

The #EndBadGovernance protests of August 2024 emerged as a major expression of public dissatisfaction with economic hardship, governance failures, rising insecurity, high living cost in Nigeria. While newspapers played significant roles in reporting the protests, media coverage was not necessarily neutral. Studies indicate that

many newspapers framed the protests through narratives emphasizing disorder, violence, political conflict and security concerns rather than focusing on the protesters' socio-economic grievances. Such framing practices may reflect underlying power relations between media institutions, political actors and citizens. The study seeks to determine whether newspaper discourse legitimatized or delegitimized the protesters' demands. This study seeks to:

- To investigate how Nigerian newspapers negotiate power relations and social identities in their representation of the protests.

-Analyze the ideological assumptions embedded in newspapers coverage of the protests.

- Assess the role of language and linguistic choices such as lexicalization, metaphor, transitivity in shaping perceptions of the protests.

Conceptual Review

Critical Discourse Analysis

This is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of language and communication that focuses on the relationship between language, power, and social inequality as posit by Fairclough (1995:1) and Van Dijk (1993:249) respectively. Critical discourse analysis seeks to uncover the ways in which language is used to construct and maintain social relationships, institutions, and power structures as seen Foucault (1980:119).

At its core, critical discourse analysis is concerned with the ways in which language is used to exercise power and control over individuals and groups, says Fairclough, (1995). It further involves examination of how language is used to create and maintain social hierarchies, to

legitimate or challenge dominant ideologies, and to shape public opinion and policy in the opinion of Van Dijk (1993).

Critical discourse analysis draws on a range of theoretical and methodological approaches, including linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies according to Fairclough, (1995). It also involves a systematic and detailed analysis of language data, which includes texts, talk, and other forms of communication as viewed by Van Dijk (1993).

One of the key concepts of critical discourse analysis according to Fairclough is the idea of "orders of discourse" (1995). This refers to the network of social relationships and institutions that shape the way language is used in a particular context. Orders of discourse are composed of "genres" like news articles, academic papers, "styles" like ideologies, beliefs as observed Fairclough (1992).

Critical discourse analysis also emphasizes the importance of "interdiscursivity" Fairclough (7) says. It refers to the way in which different discourse and genres intersect and influence one another. Interdiscursivity highlights the complex and dynamic nature of language and communication, and the ways in which different social and cultural contexts shape the meaning and interpretation of language, Van Dijk (1993) argues.

Finally, critical discourse analysis is a powerful tool for examining the relationship between language, power, and social inequality. Through analysis of language data in a systematic and detailed way, critical discourse analysis can also help to uncover the ways in which language is used to construct and maintain social relationships, institutions, and power structures.

Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis

- Discourse as Social Practice: CDA views discourse as a form of social practice that shapes and is shaped by society. It analyses how meaning is constructed through language within the context of the social world, Wodak and Meyer, (2009)
- Power Relations: CDA examines how power relations are established and reinforced through discourse. It highlights how language can be used to exercise power and control over individuals and groups.
- Ideology: CDA investigates how ideologies are constructed and disseminated through discourse. It reveals how language can be used to shape public opinion and influence social attitudes.

Power Dynamics

This refers to the complex and multifaceted ways in which power is exercised, maintained, and contested in social relationships, institutions, and societies as opine Foucault, (1980) and Lukes (1974). Power dynamics involve the interplay of various forms of power, including coercive, persuasive, and ideological power as Gramsci (1971) and Lukes (1974).

One of the key aspects of power dynamics is the concept of "power relations" says Foucault, (1980:121). Power relations refer to the complex networks of relationships through which power is exercised and maintained. These relationships can be formal or informal, explicit or implicit, and can involve individuals, groups, institutions, or societies Lukes, (1974) opines.

Power dynamics also involve the concept of "hegemony" says Gramsci (1971:12). Hegemony refers to the process by which dominant groups or individuals establish and maintain their power and influence over subordinate groups or individuals. This can involve the use of coercive force, ideological manipulation, or cultural domination in the words of Gramsci (1971).

Furthermore, power dynamics involve the concept of "resistance" Foucault (1980:125) voiced. Resistance refers to the ways in which individuals or groups challenge, subvert, or transform dominant power relations. This can involve various forms of resistance, including overt opposition, covert-subversion, or cultural resistance as seen in Scott (1985:29).

However, power dynamics involve the concept of "inter-sectionality" according to Crenshaw (1989). Inter-sectionality is the way in which different forms of power and opposition intersect and interact to produce complex and inequality. This can involve the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression as seen, Crenshaw (1989).

Finally, power dynamics are complex and multifaceted, involving various forms of power, power relations, hegemony, resistance, and inter-sectionality. Understanding power dynamics is crucial for analysing and addressing issues of power and inequality in social relationship, institutions, and societies.

#EndBadGovernance

The #EndBadGovernance protests that erupted in Nigeria in 2024 championed by youths have been a central moment in the social and political landscape of the country. These protests were a response to the country's growing economic hardship and bad governance, with

demonstrators demanding the reversal of economic reforms implemented by the president Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration. The protests highlighted the deep-seated grievances of Nigerians against the government and the need for urgent reforms to address the country's economic and governance challenges.

The #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria were a series of decentralized mass protests that took place from 1st August through 10TH August, 2024. These protests were triggered by the rising cost of living in the country, exacerbated by record inflation, particularly on food prices, and economic hardships. The demonstrations were met with a heavy-handed response from Nigerian security agencies, resulting in significant human rights abuses.

The protests were sparked by economic hardship, hunger, and bad governance, with citizens demanding reliefs from the suffering caused by president Bola Tinubu's economic reforms. At least 24 protesters were killed while over 1200 people were detained, and several minors were among those arraigned and charged with treasonable felony. A journalist, Jide Onyekunle was also arrested while reporting on the protests. The police used excessive force together with live ammunition to quell the protesters, which lead to widespread condemnation from human rights organization.

Government of Bola Tinubu urged protesters to suspend further action to allow for dialogue, but the protests continued despite his address. Amidst prevalent hunger and economic turmoil exacerbated by alleged misallocation of scarce resources, Nigerians on on 1st August, 2024, under the #EndBadGovernance umbrella vented onto the streets in a resolute plea for transformation says, Ehigiator, (2024).

Theoretical framework

The analytical framework for this study is based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework developed by Van Dijk (1993) to examine the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of the protests, including the linguistic and rhetorical devices used to construct and negotiate stances, ideologies, power relations, and to analyze the power dynamics reflected and constructed through the discourse to ascertain the stand of the government and protesters through newspaper reports.

Empirical Review

It is worthy of note that social movement has taken place in several parts of the world in different times which was driven by concerns around economic inequality, corruption, and poor governance, countries like: South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, and Ethiopia, several scholars have equally carried out some research on the same. In 2024 Onu Sebastine Chigozie did a study on perceived effect of End bad Governance protests on poverty alleviation by academic staff of public universities in Enugu State, Nigeria. The researcher using descriptive survey design in conducting the investigation, convenient sampling technique was also applied in selecting data for the analysis. The findings revealed that 10 points end bad governance demand made by protesters did not help in reducing poverty and the Federal government's response did not help in any way to alleviate poverty.

Andrew Ubong Bassey did a study in 2024 on investigating the influence of social media on youth engagement in the #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. The researcher adopted a quantitative survey approach and the results revealed that social

media was instrumental in mobilizing and engaging young people during the protests.

Oluwakemi, E. Akerele-Popoola, Adesina Lukuman Azeez and Abiodun Adeniyi did a research on twitter, civil activism and EndSars protest in Nigeria as a developing democracy in 2022, adopting a qualitative approach, using in-depth interview as methodology and concluded that twitter can either enhance or degrade democracy depending on how its users use it in democratic process.

Falola and Heaton in 2008 studied on social media and protest politics in Nigeria's #EndSars campaign which is related but distinct from #EndBadGovernance. This study discussed the role of social media in protest politics, highlighting Nigeria's challenges, including ethnic and religious conflicts, political instability, corruption and economic struggles.

After careful study of researches earlier carried out by some scholars it presented a unique and deep rooted opportunity to carry out study on discursive strategies and power dynamics: A critical discourse analysis of Nigerian Newspapers' coverage of the #EndBadGovernace protests, to fill obvious the gap discovered because there is need to examine the role of media discourse in shaping public opinion and influencing social movements.

Methodology

The researchers employed a qualitative research approach, specifically critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers in reporting the #EndBadGovernance protests. The data for this study consist of newspaper articles published during the #EndBadGovernance protests in 2024. A total of 10 articles were purposively selected from

five major newspapers in Nigeria, namely: *The Punch, The Guardian, This Day, Vanguard and Daily Trust.* The articles were selected based on their relevance to the protests and their publication dates. The data was analyzed using critical discourse analysis (CDA), a methodology that examines the relationship between language, power, and social inequality. The analysis anchored on lexical analysis, syntax and semantics, pragmatics and discourse structure. The analytical framework was based on the CDA framework developed by Teun Van Dijk (1993).

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research question 1:

In representation of the protests, how do Nigerian newspapers negotiate power relations and social identities?

Nigerian newspapers negotiate power relations and social identities in their representation of protests through various strategies, thus:

a. Framing- Newspapers frame protests as either legitimate expressions of grievances or illegitimate disruptions, influencing public perception. For instance: “Rowdy protesters clashed with police”. “Demand for justice vs unreasonable requests”. “Citizens demand change”
b. Language – The choice of words and the tone can convey sympathy or criticism towards protesters, governments, or stakeholders. Example: “Protesters bring city to a standstill”. “police maintain order vs authorities crack down on protesters”
c. Sources- Newspapers’ selection of sources can amplify or marginalize certain voices, affecting the narratives.
d. Visuals: Images and videos can humanize or dehumanize protesters, influencing public opinions.

Excerpt 1:

"Citizens demand change"

Macro- level Analysis:

- Topic: The topic is citizens' demand for change.
- Global coherence: The statement implies a sense of collective action and urgency for reform.

Micro-level Analysis:

- Lexical choices:

a. "Citizens" emphasizes the collective nature of the demand, framing it as a broad-based movement rather than a fringe group.
b. "Demand" conveys a sense of assertiveness and urgency, indicating that citizens are no longer passive but are actively seeking change.
c. "Change" is a broad term that can encompass various issues, such as political, social, or economic reforms, allowing for multiple interpretations depending on the context.

- Syntax: The sentence structure is direct and assertive, reflecting the determination of the citizens.

Social Cognition:

- Ideological assumption: The statement assumes that the current state of affairs is unsatisfactory and that change is necessary for improvement. This reflects a belief in the potential for progress through collective action.
- Identity constructs: The term "citizens" constructs a sense of unity and shared identity among those demanding change, emphasizing their role as active participants in the political process.

Power Dynamics:

Power relations: The statement highlights the power dynamic between citizens and those in authority. By demanding change, citizens are asserting their agency and challenging the status quo, potentially shifting the balance of power.

Access to discourse: The ability of citizens to articulate their demands publicly indicates their access to discourse, whether through traditional media, or public demonstrations. This access is crucial for mobilizing support and influencing public opinion.

Excerpt 2:

"Protesters bring city to a standstill".

Macro- level Analysis:

- Topic***:*** The topic is the impact of protesters on the city's functioning.
- Global coherence: The statement implies a sense of disruption and chaos caused by the protesters.

Micro-level Analysis:

Lexical choices:

a. "Bring city to a standstill" is a hyperbolic expression that emphasizes the extent of the disruption, potentially framing the protesters as a significant threat to normalcy.
b. "Protesters" is a neutral term, but in this context, it may carry negative connotations depending on the reader's perspective.

- Syntax: The sentence structure is direct and attention-grabbing, reinforcing the idea of a dramatic impact.

Social Cognition:

- Ideological assumption: The statement assumes that the smooth functioning of the city is paramount and that disruptions are inherently negative. This reflects a perspective that priorities order and stability over dissent.
- Stereotyping: Protesters are portrayed as disruptors or trouble makers, which can influence public perception and potentially justify negative reactions towards them.

Power Dynamics:

- Power relations: The statement highlights the power dynamic between protesters and city authorities. By framing protesters as causing a standstill, it positions them as a force that challenges the authority's control over the city.
- Access to discourse: The way the media or authorities frame the protests can shape public discourse, potentially marginalizing the protesters' message and emphasizing the disruption instead.

Research Question 2:

How do Nigerian newspapers through language represent and construct the #EndBadGovernance protests?

Nigerian newspapers have played a significance role in shaping public opinion and discourse around the #EndBadGovernance protests. Here, they represented and constructed the protests through language, thus:

a. Critical tone: Newspapers like: *The Guardian, The Punch, and The Vanguard e*mployed a critical tone when reporting on the government's handling of the protests. They highlighted the economic hardships faced by Nigerians, including inflation and

unemployment, and questioned government's practices. For instance: "information blackout"

b. Support for protesters: Some newspapers expressed support for the protesters demands, framing their actions as a legitimate response to economic hardship. They used language that emphasized the need for government accountability and responsiveness to citizens' concerns.
   Example: "The war of hungry Nigerians"
c. Protest coverage: Nigerian newspapers provided extensive coverage of the protests, including eye witness accounts, photographs, and analysis. They reported on the protests' impact including damage to property and clashes between protesters and security forces.
   Example: "Citizens demand justice in peaceful protest"
d. Editorial commentary: Editorials in newspapers like: *The Guardian and The Punch* offered commentary on the protests, arguing that they were a manifestation of deeper structural issues in Nigeria's economy and governance. Example: "protests are threat to national stability: government must take action"
e. Language and outrage: Some newspapers used language that conveyed outrage and frustration, mirroring the emotions of the protesters. This helped to amplify the protests' message and create a sense of urgency around the need for government action. For instance: "government save our soul"

Excerpt 1:

"#EndBadGovernance protests: citizens speak out against corruption"

Macro- level Analysis

- Topic: The topic is the #EndBadGovernance protests and citizens' demands for an end to corruption.
- Global coherence: The statement implies a sense of collective action and demand for change.

Micro-level Analysis

Lexical choices:

a. "#EndBadGovernance" is a hash tag that frames the protests as a movement against bad governance.
b. "Citizens speak out" implies a sense of empowerment and collective voice.
c. "Against corruption" clearly states the objective of the protests.

- Syntax: The sentence structure is direct and assertive.

Social Cognition

- Ideological assumptions: Te statement assumes the bad governance and corruption are major issues that need to be addressed.
- Stereotyping: The government or those in power are implied to be corrupt or ineffective.

Power Dynamics

- Power relations: The statement highlights the power dynamic between citizens and those in power, with citizens demanding change.
- Access to discourse: The use of social media hash tag like #EndBadGovernance implies that citizens have access to discourse and are using it to mobilize and demand change.

Excerpt 2:

"Protests are threat to national stability: government must take action"

Macro- level Analysis

- Topic: The topic is the perceived threat of protesters to national stability and the government's response.
- Global coherence: The statement implies a sense of urgency and justification for government action.

Micro-level Analysis

- Lexical choice:
  a. "Threat to national stability" frames protesters as danger to the country, emphasizing potential chaos.
  b. "Government must take action" implies a need for strong measures, positioning the government as the protector of stability.
- Syntax: The sentence structure is assertive and prescriptive, reinforcing the idea that action is necessary.

Social Cognition:

- Ideological assumption: The statement assumes that national stability is paramount and that protesters are legitimate threat to it. This perspective often aligns with maintaining the status quo.
- Stereotyping: Protesters are portrayed as disruptors or enemies of stability, while the government is framed as the guardian of order and security.

Power Dynamics:

- Power relations: The statement reflects a power dynamic where the government asserts its authority to maintain order, potentially at the expense of citizens' rights to protest.
- Access to discourse: The government's framing of the issue may dominate public discourse, potentially marginalizing protesters' voices.

Conclusion and recommendations:

This research highlights the complex role of media in shaping public opinion and influencing power relations. Various discursive strategies were employed; newspapers can reflect and shape ideological perspectives, ultimately contributing to the narrative around social movement and protests. Based on the analytical framework the researchers recommends therefore:

- Newspapers should strive to provide balanced coverage of protests, highlighting both the grievances and the actions of protesters, as well as the responses of governments.
- Promote media literacy among the public to help them critically evaluate the information they consume and recognize biases or otherwise.
- Newspapers should strive to include diverse voices and perspectives in their coverage, including those of protesters, governments, and experts.

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