A Multimodal Discourse on Social Media: Whatsapp, Facebook, and Twitter (X) as Sites of Political and Social Interaction in Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of social media has changed how people in Nigeria engage politically and socially. It has created platforms where citizens negotiate their identities, share their opinions, and organize civic actions. This study looks at communication on WhatsApp, Facebook, and X (Twitter), focusing on how language, images, and symbols interact to convey meaning, shape public opinion, and influence collective actions. Using a qualitative approach, we analyzed forty-five carefully chosen posts from the three platforms through Multimodal Social Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings show that users intentionally combine text, images, videos, and hashtags to create messages that express political criticism, social insights, and civic support. WhatsApp is centered on close, community-focused chats. Facebook prioritizes multimedia content and public engagement, while X supports brief, real-time discussions. These various resources not only deepen meaning but also play key roles in promoting resistance, humor, and mobilization. The study points out how technology and individual actions work together, showing how social media users in Nigeria navigate issues of power, identity, and societal conditions. By placing multimodal communication within broader social and political settings, this research helps us understand how digital platforms influence public conversations, civic involvement, and political awareness in modern Nigeria.

Keywords: Multimodal discourse, Social Media, WhatsApp, Facebook, X (Twitter), Political Engagement, Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Social Semiotics

Introduction

The emergence of social media has profoundly altered the methods by which individuals communicate, participate in public discourse, and navigate their social and political identities. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have become essential components of daily life for Nigerians, functioning not only as spaces for informal conversation but also as dynamic venues where political discourse, social activism, and civic engagement are increasingly visible. Unlike traditional media, social media promotes interactive, participatory, and multimodal communication, where text, images, videos, emojis, links, and various visual symbols converge to form complex layers of meaning. This integration of modes provides users with powerful tools to express opinions, influence public perception, and unite communities around shared causes. In Nigeria, these platforms play a crucial role in shaping political awareness and social interactions.

WhatsApp is widely used for group discussions that can rapidly disseminate political information, mobilize voters, or influence opinions within localized networks. Facebook provides a broader public space for sharing multimedia content, engaging with diverse audiences, and fostering collective action on social issues. Twitter, recognized for its brevity and viral potential, enables real-time commentary on political events, social crises, and policy discussions, allowing citizens to participate in national conversations that transcend geographical boundaries. These interactions illustrate how multimodality, the interplay of linguistic, visual, and symbolic elements, empowers users to create meaning in ways that are both personally relevant and collectively impactful.

Despite the growing significance of social media in Nigeria, there remains a considerable gap in research that comprehensively examines the multimodal dimensions of communication across different platforms. Most existing studies focus on individual platforms or traditional media, overlooking the interconnected strategies and practices that define the social media landscape.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Nigerians engage politically and socially through multimodal discourse, highlighting the richness, complexity, and creativity inherent in digital communication within the modern context. In doing so, the research enhances our understanding of how social media influences public discourse, affects civic engagement, and mirrors broader social dynamics in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Social media has emerged as a vital space for political expression, social interaction, and public discourse in Nigeria. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have transcended their original purpose of personal communication; they now function as venues where citizens actively participate in political discussions, social mobilization, and civic engagement. Despite their increasing significance, there is still a limited understanding of how Nigerians utilize multimodal resources—such as text, images, emojis, videos, and hyperlinks—to create meaning, sway opinions, and negotiate identities across these platforms. This gap has resulted in a considerable deficiency in understanding the intricate interplay of semiotic resources that influence modern communication practices in the nation.

Numerous studies have investigated various facets of social media communication in Nigeria. For example, Adeyanju (2018) examined the role of Facebook in political mobilization, underscoring its influence on voter perceptions. Likewise, Okeke and Eze (2019) analyzed WhatsApp political groups, highlighting the rapid dissemination of information that often lacks thorough scrutiny. On Twitter, Musa (2020) studied hashtag activism, revealing its capacity to elevate social issues while also acknowledging the transient nature of engagement. Other research, such as that by Ojo (2017), focused on the effects of digital discourse on public opinion, and Lawal (2021) looked into multimodal strategies in online news media interactions. Although these studies provide valuable insights, they frequently concentrate on individual platforms or prioritize textual communication, overlooking the multimodal, cross-platform characteristics of contemporary digital discourse.

As a result, it is essential to conduct an extensive study that addresses these gaps by examining multimodal discourse on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. This research will shed light on how Nigerians concurrently utilize linguistic, visual, and symbolic resources to navigate social and political identities, sway public opinion, and create meaning within digitally mediated environments. Tackling this gap is vital for comprehending the wider consequences of social media in influencing civic participation, political consciousness, and social involvement in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

This research investigates social media as a domain of multimodal discourse, concentrating on WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter as venues for political and social engagement in Nigeria. The theoretical framework is based on the premise that communication within these environments transcends simple text, incorporating various semiotic

resources such as images, videos, emojis, hyperlinks, and typographic elements to create meaning. This framework emphasizes the interplay between users, platforms, and social contexts in shaping the creation, distribution, and interpretation of messages. Three fundamental concepts support this research.

Multimodality

Multimodality signifies the concurrent utilization of diverse modes of communication to express meaning. In the realm of social media, users do not depend exclusively on written text but rather amalgamate visual, auditory, and symbolic resources to enhance, clarify, or underscore messages. For example, a political post on Twitter may combine text, hashtags, images, and GIFs, resulting in a nuanced meaning that cannot be fully grasped through any single mode. In this research, multimodality is viewed as both a strategic instrument and a semiotic practice, where users deliberately choose and integrate modes to fulfill communicative objectives. The selection of mode is shaped by the platform's affordances: WhatsApp facilitates private, textual, and audio-visual messaging; Facebook promotes public multimedia sharing; and Twitter prioritizes succinct text, hashtags, and trending visuals. By conceptualizing communication as multimodal, the research encapsulates the intricacies of social meaning-making in digital interactions. Social Interaction Social interaction, in this framework, is the dynamic process through which individuals and groups share ideas, negotiate meaning, and forge relationships within social media platforms. Unlike face-to-face communication, social media interaction frequently occurs asynchronously and can engage extensive audiences, enabling content to spread widely beyond the initial participants.

The research perceives social interaction not just as the transfer of messages but as a venue for negotiation, influence, and the construction of identity. Users utilize multimodal resources to persuade, inform, mobilize, or entertain, thereby creating a complex communicative environment. Political discussions, advocacy campaigns, and social debates are all facilitated through multimodal interaction, underscoring the function of social media as both a medium for dialogue and an instrument for shaping public perception.

Ideology

Ideology is intricately connected to political discourse, encompassing the fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and values that influence the production and interpretation of messages. Within social media platforms, ideological positions can be explicitly articulated through language, symbols, hashtags, and visuals, while at other times they function in a more implicit manner, shaping audience perception and reactions. Analyzing the ideological aspects of posts enables the research to reveal power dynamics, social prejudices, and cultural standards that affect communication and audience understanding in Nigerian online environments. Political Discourse Political Discourse constitutes another essential component of the conceptual framework, highlighting how social media acts as a channel for the spread, challenge, and reinforcement of political ideologies. Posts may encompass campaigns, advocacy messages, political commentary, or satirical content, all serving as instruments for persuasion, mobilization, and public involvement. Grasping political discourse in the digital realm necessitates a focus not only on the substance of messages but also on the manner in which they are conveyed, as multimodal elements frequently enhance or subtly modify meaning.

Political and Civic Engagement

Political and civic engagement on social media includes activities through which individuals engage in governance, articulate views on political issues, and mobilize social initiatives. In Nigeria, platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter are essential tools for educating citizens, promoting social reform, and tracking political changes. This research defines civic engagement as both a result and a catalyst of multimodal discourse. The manner in which users integrate text, images, videos, and emojis can enhance political messages, affect audience perception, and foster participatory networks. Engagement is assessed not only through likes, shares, or comments but also through discursive techniques that disclose users' positions, intentions, and ideological affiliations. By incorporating multimodality into the examination of civic participation, the study offers a detailed understanding of how digital communication influences public discourse in Nigeria.

Technological Affordances

Technological affordances denote the opportunities and limitations presented by digital platforms that shape communication behaviors. Each platform possesses distinct features that affect how multimodal resources are utilized. WhatsApp facilitates private group conversations, sharing of multimedia content, and voice messages; Facebook offers public visibility, comment threads, and multimedia integration; while Twitter prioritizes conciseness, hashtags, and trending topics. Grasping technological affordances is vital as they mediate user actions and dictate the reach, reception, and influence of messages. This concept places users' communicative practices within the structural possibilities of the platforms, emphasizing the interaction between human agency and digital infrastructure in shaping social and political engagement.

Meaning Construction

Meaning construction refers to the process through which individuals generate, negotiate, and comprehend messages derived from diverse forms of text. Within the realm of social media, meaning is derived from the interplay of various modalities, such as text, images, videos, and symbols. This process is shaped by social contexts, cultural standards, and political circumstances. This research posits that meaning construction is context-specific, practical, and dependent on situational factors. Users employ multiple modalities to convey their beliefs, articulate emotions, and engage with audiences. By examining the construction and interpretation of messages, this study underscores the impact of social media on public opinion and its role in fostering collective action.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on social media discourse in Nigeria has examined its role in political communication, civic engagement, and meaning-making, though often with limited attention to multimodality across platforms. Adeyanju (2018) investigates Facebook as a tool for political mobilization in Nigeria, demonstrating how users engage in political persuasion and opinion formation. The study highlights Facebook's capacity to shape voter perceptions through interactive communication; however, its primary focus on textual exchanges overlooks the role of visual and symbolic resources in meaning construction.cd`]\54/

Similarly, Okeke and Eze (2019) explore the dynamics of WhatsApp political groups, emphasizing the platform's efficiency in the rapid dissemination of political information within closed networks. Their findings reveal that WhatsApp facilitates grassroots political

engagement and informal deliberation, yet the study pays little attention to how multimodal elements such as images, voice notes, and emojis contribute to discourse formation and ideological framing.

On Twitter, Musa (2020) examines hashtag activism and its influence on political participation in Nigeria. The study underscores the significance of hashtags in aggregating discourse, mobilizing users, and amplifying social movements such as #EndSARS. While Musa acknowledges the importance of symbolic markers like hashtags, the analysis remains largely text-centered and does not fully account for the interaction between linguistic and visual modes in shaping meaning.

In a broader perspective, Ojo (2017) analyzes digital discourse and its impact on public opinion in Nigeria, arguing that social media platforms function as alternative public spheres where citizens negotiate political realities. The study demonstrates how online discourse challenges dominant narratives and redistributes communicative power. However, it largely treats discourse as linguistic, without sufficiently addressing the multimodal complexity of digital communication.

Addressing multimodality more directly, Lawal (2021) examines multimodal strategies in Nigerian online media interactions, highlighting how text, images, and layout combine to enhance meaning and audience engagement. The study provides valuable insight into intersemiotic relationships but is limited to online news media, leaving a gap in understanding how everyday social media users deploy multimodal resources across platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate the growing importance of social media in shaping political and social discourse in Nigeria. However, they tend to focus either on single platforms or predominantly textual analysis, thereby neglecting the cross-platform and multimodal nature of contemporary digital communication. This study builds on existing research by offering a comprehensive analysis of how linguistic, visual, and symbolic resources interact across WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter to construct meaning, express ideology, and facilitate civic engagement in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs a dual-theoretical framework, integrating Multimodal Social Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate political and social interactions on WhatsApp, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) in Nigeria. This integrated framework offers a thorough perspective for analyzing both the construction of meaning in multimodal posts and the social, ideological, and political implications of these interactions. Multimodal Social Semiotics, as articulated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), asserts that communication transcends language to encompass various modes such as images, typography, layout, emojis, videos, and other visual or auditory elements. Within the realm of social media, users strategically utilize these semiotic resources to convey meaning, express their identities, and influence their audiences. By scrutinizing posts across WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, this study investigates how textual and visual components interact to form coherent messages that engage audiences, shape perceptions, and construct social realities. The theory highlights three metafunctions—representational, interactive, and compositional—that clarify how ideas are represented, how communication captivates audiences, and how elements are

organized to convey meaning, all of which are crucial for analyzing the multimodal nature of social media discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly as articulated by Norman Fairclough (2015), enhances this viewpoint by examining the interplay between discourse and power. It emphasizes how language and various semiotic modes can either uphold or challenge social hierarchies, ideologies, and political agendas. CDA facilitates the exploration of who dictates the narrative, the manner in which political ideologies are conveyed, and how social norms are either negotiated or contested on online platforms. Utilizing CDA permits an analysis of the sociopolitical ramifications of multimodal communication, pinpointing how interactions on social media mirror, reproduce, or resist prevailing power dynamics in Nigeria. By merging Multimodal Social Semiotics with CDA, the research connects form and function in the analysis of social media discourse. Multimodal Social Semiotics equips researchers with the means to analyze the structural and semiotic elements found in posts, while CDA contextualizes these elements within wider social and political frameworks, uncovering their ideological importance. This synthesis guarantees a comprehensive understanding of social media interactions, illustrating both the process of meaning creation and its significance in influencing political and social discourse in Nigeria. This theoretical framework directs the study in tackling the research inquiries, which concentrate on the types of multimodal resources employed in political and social communication on social media, the ways these resources construct meaning and engage audiences, and the ideological, social, and political consequences of such interactions on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter.

Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative research design to explore multimodal discourse within social media interactions on WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter in Nigeria. The qualitative methodology is suitable for capturing the intricate nature of meaning-making processes and the sociopolitical contexts in which these meanings are generated and understood. The study is informed by Multimodal Social Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which facilitates an investigation into both the semiotic construction of meaning and its ideological ramifications. The data for this research comprises forty-five (45) intentionally selected posts, sourced from WhatsApp (15), Facebook (15), and X (Twitter) (15), created between 2022 and 2025. The posts were chosen based on their relevance to political and social discourse, the inclusion of various semiotic modes (such as text, images, emojis, videos, hashtags), and their capacity for significant interpretation. Data collection involved gathering publicly available posts and, for WhatsApp, messages obtained from participants who provided consent. All data were anonymized to maintain ethical standards. The analysis was carried out in two phases.

Initially, Multimodal Discourse Analysis was employed, concentrating on representational, interactive, and compositional meanings to investigate how different semiotic resources collaborate to create meaning. Subsequently, Critical Discourse Analysis, adhering to Fairclough's framework, was utilized to examine the ideological and power aspects of the discourse, taking into account how meanings are generated, disseminated, and contextualized within wider social practices. To ensure methodological rigor, the study incorporated triangulation across various platforms and modes, along with iterative analysis to enhance interpretations. This

methodological framework offers a thorough understanding of how multimodal resources influence social and political interactions in Nigerian digital environments.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Whatsapp Excerpts (WA01-WA015)

WA01
Date: Mar 2022
Type: Text + Emoji
Excerpt:
"Fuel don increase again ☹️☹️… how we go survive like this?"
Context: Economic hardship

WA01 demonstrates how linguistic and paralinguistic resources combine to construct meaning. **Representationally,** the post encodes economic hardship through Nigerian Pidgin, grounding the message in everyday lived experience. The use of emojis intensifies affect, contributing to multimodal density. Interactively, the rhetorical question invites shared frustration, aligning users in a collective stance. From a CDA perspective, the post implicitly critiques economic governance, revealing how ordinary citizens articulate resistance. This directly addresses RQ1 and RQ2 by illustrating the deployment and interaction of textual and emotive modes.

WA02
Date: Apr 2022
Type: Image + Caption
Excerpt:
(A picture of a crowded bus)
Caption: "This is not transport, this is suffering 😭 #NaijaLife"
Context: Cost of living

WA02, combining an image of a crowded bus with a caption, foregrounds visual representation as a primary meaning-making resource. The image depicts overcrowding, while the caption reframes it as "suffering," creating intersemiotic reinforcement. The hashtag #NaijaLife situates the experience within a shared national narrative. Interactionally, the crying emoji guides emotional interpretation. CDA reveals how systemic infrastructural failures are normalized yet subtly critiqued. This speaks to RQ2 and RQ3, showing how multimodal resources construct and evaluate social realities.

WA03
Date: Jun 2022
Type: Forwarded Message + Text
Excerpt:
"Forwarded as received: Please vote wisely this time. We cannot continue like this."
Context: Electoral awareness

This reflects the role of intertextuality and circulation in WhatsApp discourse. **Representationally**, the message invokes electoral responsibility, while compositionally, the "forwarded" label signals secondary authorship. **Interactionally**, it functions as a persuasive appeal. From a **CDA** standpoint, authority is diffused rather than centralized, illustrating how ideology circulates horizontally in digital spaces. This aligns with RQ3, highlighting ideological dissemination

WA04
Date: Aug 2022
Type: Meme (Image + Text)
Excerpt:

(Image of a tired man)
Text: "When salary finishes before 10th 😂"
Context: Economic satire

Here a meme about salary exhaustion, relies on visual-textual juxtaposition. Representational meaning emerges from the image-text pairing, while the laughing emoji introduces irony. Interactionally, humour fosters solidarity among users experiencing similar conditions. CDA reveals humour as a form of soft resistance, allowing critique of economic conditions without direct confrontation. This addresses RQ5 on satire as a communicative strategy.

WA05
Date: Jan 2023
Type: Voice Note + Text
Excerpt:
"Listen to this—things are really bad in the market o!"
Context: Economic commentary

WA05, involving a voice note, introduces auditory modality. Representationally, the spoken message conveys urgency and authenticity. Interactionally, voice creates intimacy and credibility. Compositionally, the instruction "Listen to this" foregrounds the audio mode. CDA highlights experiential authority, where lived experience challenges official narratives. This relates to RQ2 and RQ3.

WA06
Date: Feb 2023
Type: Text + Hashtag
Excerpt:

"We need change now! #Election2023 #NigeriaDecides"
Context: Political mobilization

WA06 employs hashtags (#Election2023, #NigeriaDecides) as central semiotic resources. Representationally, the message calls for change; compositionally, hashtags anchor the discourse within broader ideological movements. Interactionally, they invite participation. CDA reveals hashtags as ideological markers that align users within political camps. This directly addresses RQ4.

WA07
Date: Mar 2023
Type: Video + Caption
Excerpt:
(Video of election queue)
Caption: "We stand for our future 💪"
Context: Civic participation

In this excerpt, (video of election queue) demonstrates multimodal layering. Representationally, the video depicts civic engagement; compositionally, the caption reinforces determination. Interactionally, the flexed arm emoji signals strength and solidarity. CDA interprets this as participatory democracy, where citizens assert agency. This aligns with RQ2 and RQ3.

WA08
Date: May 2023
Type: Text + Emoji
Excerpt:

"New government, same old story □▒♂□"
Context: Governance critique

WA08 ("New government, same old story □▒♂□") uses brevity and emoji to convey disillusionment. Representationally, it encodes political continuity; interactionally, the facepalm emoji guides interpretation toward frustration. CDA reveals skepticism toward political authority, illustrating ideological contestation. This addresses RQ3.

WA09
Date: Jul 2023
Type: Image + Text Overlay
Excerpt:
(Image of empty wallet)
Text: "POV: Nigerian after paying bills 🔥"
Context: Economic hardship

(empty wallet image) employs visual symbolism. Representational meaning is anchored in the image, while the "POV" framing personalizes the experience. Compositionally, text overlays guide interpretation. CDA reveals economic hardship as a shared social condition, reinforcing collective identity. This relates to RQ2.

WA10
Date: Sept 2023
Type: GIF + Caption
Excerpt:
(GIF of someone laughing sarcastically)

Caption: "When they say things will get better 😊😂"
Context: Social satire

This highlights temporal and visual sequencing. The GIF conveys irony through motion, while the caption anchors meaning. Interactionally, laughter emojis guide audience alignment. CDA shows how sarcasm undermines official optimism, functioning as subtle resistance. This addresses RQ5.

WA11
Date: Nov 2023
Type: Text + Emoji + Code-switching
Excerpt:
"This country tire person ☹️ but we go still survive 💪"
Context: National sentiment

WA11 ("This country tire person…") demonstrates code-switching between Nigerian Pidgin and English. Representationally, it reflects national frustration; interactionally, it builds solidarity through shared linguistic identity. CDA reveals how vernacular language indexes authenticity and resists elite discourse. This aligns with RQ5.

WA12
Date: Jan 2024
Type: Forwarded Video + Text
Excerpt:
"Watch this and share!!! This is the real situation of things."
Context: Awareness/advocacy

WA12 (forwarded video urging sharing) emphasizes circulation. Compositionally, capitalization ("share!!!") creates urgency.

Interactionally, it mobilizes audiences. CDA highlights digital activism, where users act as agents of dissemination. This addresses RQ3 and RQ4.

WA13
Date: Apr 2024
Type: Text + Hashtag
Excerpt:
"Speak up or nothing will change. #EndBadGovernance"
Context: Activism

WA13 ("Speak up or nothing will change. #EndBadGovernance") is explicitly ideological. Representationally, it frames silence as complicity. The hashtag anchors the message within activist discourse. CDA reveals direct resistance to power structures, demonstrating how discourse mobilizes action. This aligns strongly with RQ3.

WA14
Date: Aug 2024
Type: Meme (Image + Emoji)
Excerpt:
(Image of confused student)
Text: "ASUU strike again? 😩"
Context: Education discourse

WA14 (ASUU strike meme) uses humour to address educational instability. Representationally, the confused image reflects uncertainty; interactionally, emojis guide emotional response. CDA reveals how recurring institutional failure is normalized yet critiqued through satire. This addresses RQ5.

WA15
Date: Feb 2025
Type: Video + Caption + Emoji
Excerpt:
(Video of street protest)
Caption: "Enough is enough ✊🟦🔥"
Context: Protest discourse

WA15 (protest video with caption "Enough is enough ✊🟦🔥") represents peak multimodal intensity. Representationally, the video documents resistance; compositionally, emojis reinforce urgency and defiance. Interactionally, it calls for collective action. CDA interprets this as overt ideological resistance, where discourse moves from critique to mobilization. This addresses RQ3 and RQ4.

Facebook Data Excerpts (FB01–FB15)

FB01 – Political Commentary (Image + Caption + Emoji)
"Another promise, another disappointment 😒NG… when will things really change? #Governance #Naija"

The analysis begins with **FB01**, which presents a political commentary combining text, emoji, and hashtag. From a **representational perspective**, the post constructs governance as cyclical failure through the lexical pairing of "promise" and "disappointment." The inclusion of the Nigerian flag emoji (NG) situates the discourse within a national frame, while the sad facial emoji (😒) encodes affective dissatisfaction. In terms of **interactive meaning**, the post invites shared frustration, aligning the audience

emotionally with the speaker. Compositionality is achieved through the sequencing of text followed by hashtags, which function as ideological anchors. Addressing **RQ1 and RQ3**, the post demonstrates how multimodal resources (text + emoji + hashtag) are deployed to **construct meaning and express ideological discontent**, reinforcing CDA's view of discourse as a site of resistance to political authority.

FB02 – Economic Hardship (Image + Text + Emoji)

"Prices don rise again 😟🔥… even garri is now luxury 😩 #CostOfLiving"

In **FB02**, economic hardship is foregrounded through a multimodal blend of text and emojis (😟🔥😩). Representationally, "garri" operates as a culturally loaded signifier of basic survival, thereby intensifying the discourse of deprivation. The emojis visually amplify emotional distress, contributing to **semiotic density**. From an **interactive standpoint**, the exaggerated emotional cues solicit empathy and identification. In relation to **RQ2**, the convergence of linguistic and visual elements produces **intersemiotic reinforcement**, where meaning is intensified rather than merely layered. CDA reveals that the post critiques structural economic conditions, indirectly challenging institutional responsibility.

FB03 – Political Meme (Image + Text)

Meme caption:

"Leaders during campaign: 'We will transform Nigeria' NG✨

After election: 😊□🇳🇬"

FB03, a meme, exemplifies multimodal contrast. The representational meaning is constructed through a binary opposition between "campaign" and "post-election" realities. The clown emoji (🤡) functions symbolically to delegitimize political actors. Compositional meaning emerges from the juxtaposition of expectation versus reality, a classic meme structure. Addressing **RQ4**, the meme demonstrates how visual-textual interplay performs satire, while under CDA, it constitutes a form of ideological critique through ridicule.

FB04 – Election Discourse (Text + Hashtag + Emoji)
"Vote wisely this time o 🙏🗳️🤡… our future depends on it!
#NigeriaDecides"

In **FB04**, electoral discourse is constructed through directive language ("Vote wisely") combined with prayer (🙏) and ballot (🗳️🤡) emojis. **Representationally,** the post frames voting as both civic duty and moral obligation. The interactive dimension is persuasive, directly addressing the audience. In relation to **RQ3**, the post reproduces democratic ideology while simultaneously urging reform. The hashtag #NigeriaDecides functions as a discursive aggregator, aligning the post within a broader ideological community.

FB05 – Public Policy Critique (Infographic + Caption)
"This policy looks good on paper, but implementation is zero 📉😡
#PolicyFailure"

FB05 adopts an infographic style, where representational meaning is rooted in the contrast between "policy" and "implementation." The visual-textual structure reflects compositional hierarchy, with the critique foregrounded. Addressing **RQ2**, the multimodal

configuration enhances clarity and authority. CDA reveals a critique of governance inefficiency, exposing the gap between institutional rhetoric and lived reality.

FB06 – Social Satire (Meme + Emoji)
Meme caption:
"When NEPA takes light during your favorite show 😒💡⚡"
😂😂😂

In **FB06**, humour emerges as a central semiotic strategy. The meme about electricity failure (NEPA) uses emojis (😒💡⚡) to dramatize a shared national experience. Representationally, the post encodes infrastructural instability, while interactively, it builds communal laughter. In relation to **RQ5**, humour operates as **soft resistance**, enabling critique without overt confrontation. The multimodal layering creates high semiotic density, reinforcing the message affectively.

FB07 – Cost of Living (Image + Caption + Hashtag)
"Salary no increase but expenses dey skyrocket 📈☹️ #Surv Mode"ival

FB07 focuses on economic survival, with the upward trend emoji (📈) visually representing inflation. Representational meaning is constructed through the contrast between stagnant salary and rising expenses. The interactive dimension fosters solidarity among economically affected users. Addressing **RQ2**, the integration of text and visual symbols produces **semantic expansion**, where the emoji concretizes abstract economic concepts.

FB08 – Political Cartoon (Image + Text)
"Big men dey smile 😊 while citizens dey suffer 😔… something is wrong!"

In **FB08**, a political cartoon contrasts elite comfort with public suffering. Representationally, smiling and sad emojis (😊 vs 😔) encode ideological polarity. Compositional meaning is achieved through juxtaposition, highlighting inequality. Under CDA, the post critiques class disparity and power imbalance. This directly addresses **RQ3**, showing how multimodality exposes and contests social hierarchies.

FB09 – Civic Awareness (Text + Emoji + Hashtag)
"Know your rights! ✊🟩📣 Don't let anyone silence you. #CivicDuty"

FB09 shifts to civic awareness, using imperative language and protest emoji (✊🟩📣). Representationally, the post constructs citizens as empowered agents. The interactive meaning is mobilizational, encouraging participation. The hashtag #CivicDuty anchors the discourse ideologically. This aligns with **RQ4**, demonstrating how multimodal elements shape audience engagement and interpretation.

FB10 – Protest Discourse (Image + Caption)
"We are tired!!! 😢🔥 Enough is enough! #EndBadGovernance"

In **FB10**, protest discourse is intensified through capitalization and emojis (😢🔥). Representationally, anger is foregrounded as a legitimate political response. The compositional emphasis on "tired"

and "enough" creates urgency. Addressing **RQ3**, the post exemplifies ideological resistance, while CDA highlights the redistribution of discursive power from institutions to citizens.

FB11 – Youth Expression (Text + Emoji)
"Sapa don humble everybody 😔💔 but we still dey push 💪"

FB11 employs Nigerian Pidgin ("Sapa don humble everybody"), which functions as a marker of cultural authenticity. Representationally, economic hardship is universalized. The emojis (😔💔💪) create a trajectory from suffering to resilience. In relation to **RQ5**, Pidgin operates as a multimodal resource for identity construction and solidarity.

FB12 – Cultural Identity (Image + Caption + Emoji)
"Proudly Nigerian 🇳🇬❤️ no matter the challenges!"

FB12 presents a contrasting ideological stance—national pride. The Nigerian flag (🇳🇬) and heart emoji (❤️) encode positive affect. Representationally, identity is constructed as resilient. This addresses **RQ3**, showing that ideological negotiation is not only oppositional but also affirmational.

FB13 – Social Inequality (Text + Emoji)
"Some people dey chop life 🍗🍾 while others dey struggle 😔⚖️"

FB13 foregrounds inequality through juxtaposition ("some dey chop… others dey struggle"). Food and wealth emojis (🍗🍾) contrast with sadness (😔). Representationally, class division is visualized.

CDA reveals critique of structural inequality, while **RQ2** is addressed through intersemiotic reinforcement.

FB14 – Humour + Pidgin (Text + Emoji)
"Dem say 'e go better'… na when abeg? 😂😂😂"

In **FB14**, humour and Pidgin intersect. The rhetorical question ("na when?") combined with laughing emojis (😂😂😂) creates ironic detachment. Representationally, hope is questioned. In relation to **RQ5**, humour mitigates critique, making it socially shareable while maintaining ideological resistance.

FB15– Advocacy Post (Text + Hashtag + Emoji)
"Support local businesses 🛍️🇳🇬… we grow by lifting each other ✊ #BuyNaija"

Finally, **FB15** shifts to advocacy. Representationally, local businesses are framed as collective responsibility. Emojis (🛍️🇳🇬✊) reinforce positivity and unity. The hashtag #BuyNaija functions as an ideological anchor, aligning users with economic nationalism. Addressing **RQ4**, the multimodal configuration shapes persuasive meaning and audience engagement.

X Data Excerpts (X01–X15)

X01 – Civic Activism (Thread Starter)
"Nigeria deserves better. We can't keep normalizing failure 😤🇳🇬 #FixNigeria"

The analysis begins with **X01**, which foregrounds civic activism through a concise yet affectively charged statement: "Nigeria deserves better." Representationally, the nation is constructed as a subject of deprivation, while the phrase "normalizing failure" encodes systemic dysfunction. The angry emoji (😠) intensifies affect, contributing to **semiotic density**. From an **interactive perspective**, the post positions the audience as co-participants in dissatisfaction, inviting alignment. The hashtag #FixNigeria functions compositionally as an ideological anchor, linking the post to a broader protest discourse. Addressing **RQ1 and RQ3**, the post demonstrates how minimal multimodal resources (text + emoji + hashtag) can effectively articulate ideological resistance within a compressed digital space, aligning with CDA's emphasis on discourse as a site of contestation.

X02 – Governance Critique (Text + Image Reference)
"This is the same road they 'commissioned' last year? 🤡🚧 #Accountability"

In **X02**, governance critique is constructed through irony: the "commissioned" road is juxtaposed with its apparent failure. The clown emoji (🤡) symbolically delegitimizes authority, while the construction of quotation marks around "commissioned" signals skepticism. Representational meaning emerges through implied visual evidence (image reference), while **interactive meaning** invites audience judgment. In relation to **RQ4**, the multimodal combination shapes interpretation by guiding readers toward a critical stance. CDA reveals the exposure of institutional inadequacy and performative governance.

X03 – Electoral Politics (Thread)
"Elections are coming… please vote wisely this time 🏛️🗳️□
#NigeriaDecides"

X03 adopts a persuasive tone, urging electoral responsibility. Representationally, elections are framed as decisive moments, while emojis (🏛️🗳️□) encode both moral appeal and civic action. The interactive dimension is directive, positioning the audience as agents of change. Addressing **RQ3**, the post reinforces democratic ideology while simultaneously critiquing past electoral outcomes. The hashtag #NigeriaDecides aggregates discourse, illustrating how multimodal elements organize ideological communities.

X04 – Political Meme (Text + Caption Style)
"Politicians before election: 'My people' □
After election: 'My profit' 😂💰"

In **X04**, humour and satire are foregrounded through a meme-like contrast between pre-election and post-election rhetoric. Representationally, politicians are constructed as deceptive actors, with emojis (□ vs 😂💰) encoding emotional manipulation versus material gain. Compositional meaning is achieved through juxtaposition, a key feature of meme discourse. In relation to **RQ5**, humour operates as a strategy of **soft resistance**, allowing critique to circulate widely while maintaining entertainment value. CDA highlights the demystification of political authority.

X05 – Economic Policy (Infographic Reference)
"Fuel subsidy gone, but suffering increased 📈⛽😕 #FuelCrisis"

X05 addresses economic policy through the phrase "fuel subsidy gone, but suffering increased." Representationally, economic reform is reframed as hardship. The upward trend emoji (📈) visually encodes escalation, while (⛽😟) links policy to lived experience. Addressing **RQ2**, the convergence of text and emoji produces **intersemiotic reinforcement**, intensifying meaning. CDA reveals critique of neoliberal policy impacts and governance decisions.

X06 – Social Justice (Text + Emoji)
"We cannot keep silent anymore ✊🟩🔥 #EndInjustice"

In **X06**, social justice discourse is constructed through imperative language ("We cannot keep silent"). The raised fist (✊🟦) and fire emoji (🔥) symbolize resistance and urgency. Representationally, silence is positioned as complicity, while speech becomes activism. The interactive dimension mobilizes participation. In relation to **RQ3**, the post exemplifies ideological contestation, where multimodal resources function as tools of collective resistance.

X07 – Legislative Reform (Text + Image)
"Another bill, same old story (🟩♂️□📜 #ReformNow"

X07 critiques legislative reform using repetition and resignation ("Another bill, same old story"). The emojis (□🟩♂️□) encodes frustration, while the document emoji (📜) symbolizes bureaucracy. Representationally, reform is depicted as cyclical inefficiency. Addressing **RQ2**, the interaction of linguistic and visual elements produces a layered critique. CDA reveals skepticism toward institutional processes.

X08 – Fuel Price Discourse (Meme Style)
"Mood after seeing fuel price today: 💀😂⛽"

"Tomorrow we march! ✊🟥🔥 Who is ready? #EndBadGovernance

In **X08**, humour is condensed into a meme-like expression: "Mood after seeing fuel price today." The skull emoji (💀) signifies exaggerated shock, while laughter (😂) introduces irony. Representationally, economic hardship is reframed as shared experience. In relation to **RQ5**, humour functions as an affective coping mechanism, transforming critique into relatable content. Semiotic density is achieved through minimal yet potent symbolic resources.

X09 – Protest Mobilization (Thread)
"Tomorrow we march! ✊🟦🔥 Who is ready?
#EndBadGovernance"

X09 exemplifies protest mobilization. The declarative "Tomorrow we march!" combined with (✊🟦🔥) constructs urgency and solidarity. Representationally, protest is framed as collective action. The interactive dimension directly recruits participation, while the hashtag #EndBadGovernance situates the post within an established ideological movement. Addressing **RQ3**, the post demonstrates how multimodality facilitates real-time political organization.

X10 – Governance Critique (Video + Caption)
"Watch this and tell me things are improving 😒📹 #RealityCheck"

In **X10**, the inclusion of video ("Watch this") introduces a richer multimodal layer. Representational meaning is anchored in visual evidence, while the caption ("tell me things are improving") introduces irony. The emoji (😒) guides interpretation toward skepticism. Addressing **RQ2**, the integration of video and text produces **semantic expansion**, where meaning emerges from cross-modal interaction. CDA highlights the use of evidence-based critique in digital discourse.

X11 – Youth Expression (Text + Emoji)
"Sapa no get respect 😔💔 but we go survive 💪"

X11 employs Nigerian Pidgin ("Sapa no get respect"), which functions as a marker of cultural authenticity. Representationally, economic hardship is universalized. The emojis (😔💔💪) create a progression from suffering to resilience. In relation to **RQ5**, vernacular language operates as a multimodal resource for identity construction and solidarity, reinforcing communal alignment

X12 – Humour + Pidgin (Text)
"Dem say 'e go better'… we still dey wait o 😂😂😔"

In **X12**, humour and Pidgin intersect. The phrase "we still dey wait" combined with laughing emojis (😂😂😂) produces ironic detachment. Representationally, hope is deferred. Addressing **RQ5**, humour mitigates critique, enabling ideological resistance in a socially acceptable form. The multimodal layering enhances affective engagement.

X13 – Social Inequality (Text + Emoji)
"Same country, different realities 😒⚖️🏚️💵"

X13 foregrounds inequality through the phrase "Same country, different realities." The scale emoji (⚖️🏚️) symbolizes imbalance, while (💵) indexes wealth disparity. Representationally, class division is constructed as systemic. In relation to **RQ2**, the interaction of text and emoji produces **intersemiotic complementarity**, reinforcing the critique. CDA reveals underlying tensions in socio-economic structures.

X14 – Cultural Identity (Text + Hashtag)
"Proudly Naija 🇳🇬❤️ no matter what! #NaijaSpirit"

In **X14**, national identity is constructed positively. The Nigerian flag (🇳🇬) and heart emoji (❤️) encode pride and affective attachment. Representationally, identity is framed as resilient despite challenges. Addressing **RQ3**, the post illustrates that ideological negotiation includes affirmation as well as resistance.

X15 – Advocacy (Text + Hashtag + Emoji)
"Support your own 🏍️🇳🇬 let's build together 🤝 #BuyNaija"

Finally, **X15** presents advocacy discourse. Representationally, local economic support is framed as collective responsibility. Emojis (🏍️🇳🇬🤝) reinforce positivity and unity. The hashtag #BuyNaija functions as an ideological anchor, aligning users with economic nationalism. Addressing **RQ4**, the multimodal configuration shapes persuasive meaning and audience engagement.

Findings of the Research

The findings of this study show that multimodal discourse is central to political and social interaction across WhatsApp, Facebook, and X (Twitter) in Nigeria. Users consistently combine text, emojis, images, videos, hashtags, and memes to construct meaning, with emojis and hashtags emerging as key resources for expressing emotions, attitudes, and ideological positions. While WhatsApp supports more private and informal exchanges, Facebook allows for more elaborate multimodal expression, and X (Twitter) emphasizes brief, high-impact communication.

The study reveals that meaning is largely created through the interaction of multiple modes, as images, text, and emojis work together to reinforce and extend one another. Social media also functions as a space for ideological negotiation, where users critique governance, express dissatisfaction, and promote civic engagement. In this context, discourse becomes a tool for challenging dominant narratives and redistributing communicative power.

Additionally, hashtags and visual elements play a significant role in mobilizing audiences and connecting individual posts to broader political and social movements. The use of humour, satire, and Nigerian Pidgin further reflects culturally grounded strategies of expression and subtle resistance. These forms make discourse more relatable while still conveying critical perspectives.

The findings also show that platform features influence how communication occurs, shaping the style, reach, and impact of messages. Overall, the study demonstrates that multimodal discourse in Nigerian social media is dynamic and purposeful, serving not only

as a means of expression but also as a tool for shaping public opinion and encouraging social and political participation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that multimodal discourse is a powerful vehicle for political and social interaction on WhatsApp, Facebook, and X (Twitter) in Nigeria. Users strategically combine text, images, emojis, videos, hashtags, and memes to convey meaning, express emotions, negotiate identities, and critique social and political realities. Multimodality enables richer, more nuanced communication, while platform affordances shape how messages are constructed, circulated, and received.

Social media emerges not only as a space for expression but also as a site of ideological contestation, civic engagement, and subtle resistance, where humour, satire, and vernacular language strengthen solidarity and cultural resonance. The study underscores the significance of multimodal resources in amplifying voices, mobilizing audiences, and influencing public discourse, highlighting the transformative role of digital communication in contemporary Nigerian society.

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