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## Language and Framing of Insecurity on Social Media: A Content Analysis of Posts

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### Abstract

*The social media (SM) platform has become a news breaking centre for information of any sort. It has reengineered social awareness, political discourse, and mobilization, advancing social and national insecurity in Nigeria. For some years now, individuals and groups have used social media to disseminate information on terrorism, agitation and propaganda, using various forms and language to facilitate their course. This study sets out to identify the connection between language and social media frames by examining how Facebook frames security issues, and the influence of such news to public attention and perception of readers. The study also identifies frames adopted by social media users in reporting security issues. About four social media accounts were picked. Posts on security matters were analysed to find out their language use, context, frame types; their link to insecurity in Nigeria were examined using frame theory. The research method is qualitative. The data were collected from Facebook account of four individuals. Findings indicate there are frame effects of fear, panic and uncertainty seen from the comments of readers.*

**Key words:** language, framing, frame effect, insecurity, social media.

## **1. Introduction**

The challenge of insecurity has in recent times witnessed an upsurge and assumed a more dangerous dimension which unfortunately, has become part of the daily happenings in Nigeria. Hardly will one listen to the news of the day, go to social media or read the dailies without coming across the issue of insecurity. It has become such a menace that it forms the major news headline in various online platforms, local and national dailies and television channels. The social media is not left out in disseminating this discursive subject. Being a tool to stamp one's stance, social media has engendered this subject and presented it to the public using various frames. These frames are portrayed with language, which is the most fundamental medium of communication in any social environment (Eggins, 2004). According to Yule (1996), language is a dynamic entity which performs several functions including building, destroying and creating the society.

In the view of Bamidele and Adama (2019), insecurity is the inability of a particular country to ensure absence of violence, lawlessness, civil disorder and insurgency. Also, Adejumo (2011) defines insecurity as the inability of a country to keep peace within her governing territories. Some of the security issues challenging the country include terrorism, religious and ethnic crisis, attacks on oil installations, kidnapping, armed robbery, extra judicial killings, attacks by herdsmen, hoodlums, bandits, unknown gunmen and the likes. Government in attempt to tackle and eradicate this menace (insecurity) and restore peace and security in the country for sustainable development, has adopted the strategic security partnership on intelligence sharing with her borderline neighbours – Cameroun, Niger, Mali and Chad. Efforts of the law enforcement agents and the millions annually budgeted by the government as security votes are notable in combatting this threat.

Insecurity in Nigeria is a threat to life, property, national development and investment, both for local and foreign investors. It seems that all efforts by the government to nip this hydra-headed monster in the bud, has been defied. The masses insinuate that the process of getting a solution to this national issue has been compromised. This is because corruption has penetrated the Nigerian system which makes it difficult for them to trust the government thus, breeding social unrest. The masses have therefore, taken to social media especially, Facebook to express their stance on the issue of insecurity. The growing readership on Facebook calls for attention on the relationship between language, social media, and insecurity. This study attempts to fill this gap by carrying out an in-depth study of the language use on Facebook as it concerns insecurity using the frame theory. The present study investigates the various ways language is being deployed in the discourse of insecurity in Nigeria using different linguistic frames and audience reaction to information and, to understand how social media frames and language use draw public attention and affect the perception of online community.

## **2. Literature Review**

Okeke (2012) examines effective use of language in ensuring national security and avers that appropriate choice of words in communication is more powerful and subtle than military force in tackling the issue of national security. He claims that words that do not constitute threats, anxiety or danger for human existence will contribute more to the development of a nation and at the same time engender development. He concludes that the problem of national security should not be left for government alone rather, Nigerians should collaborate with government to ensure national security by strategically figuring what and how to say things while

understanding other people's opinion. This, he believes is a comprehensive measure to tackle Nigeria's insecurity challenges.

Oluwadoro (2017) explores language-based solution to the problem of insecurity in Boko Haram dominated North Eastern Nigeria, he notes that indigenous languages like Arabic, Kanuri, Hausa and Fulfulde should be deliberately promoted by the government in administration, education among others especially, in the North Eastern states. Also, language of immediate environments should be incorporated into the trainings of the security forces (the police, the military and other related personnel) and be considered during their postings. Alabi (2018) examines Nigeria's security challenges from a sociolinguistic approach and asserts that government should assign more roles to the indigenous language in order to use them to tackle the issue of insecurity. He observes that the use of indigenous language in disseminating security information will enable proper sensitization of the public against security threats. Also seen as helpful is exchange of security information between government agencies and the public, especially those who do not understand English on the activities of suspected criminals, kidnappers and terrorists in their communities.

Bamidele and Adama (2019) investigate the role of language in addressing Nigeria's multifarious challenges and observe that it is needful to deploy security agents to their state of origins. This, they opine, will enable them communicate intelligibly with the people in their indigenous languages, which will enhance proper investigation that will curb crime and incessant killings and kidnapping.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The theory adopted in this work is frame theory. The theory was first used by Erving Goffman in his book *Frame Analysis* (1974).

Goffman attests that audiences interpret situations around them through their primary framework. Framing theory tells how something is presented to audience “the frame”, through “metamessage”. Text, utterances are framed to influence the choices people make in line with how they digest their information. Agreeably, the objective of framing lies on the ability to interpret the metamessage and context that identify the frame-how the words are meant, and the meaning in the context. Terkildsen and Schenell 1997:881 as cited in Linstrom and Maris (2012) suggest that framing is important whenever an issue is presented in multiple ways which may potentially influence how people think about the issue. In this case a frame refers to the way social media as the information house presents topics, ideas, and event online. Frames as an “implicit answer as to what should be done about an issue” is important in influencing individuals’ judgement and disseminating information. Framing assumes that how an issue is characterised in news reports can have an influence over how it is comprehended by audiences (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

### **3.1 Social Media and Framing Effects**

Social media is a web-based platform also known as digital media, aids in spreading information on crises situation and violence. Their news breaking role is becoming more ground breaking and acceptable just like print media. Digital technology has ushered in a communication revolution that has fundamentally changed the nature of media and power relations among an organizational and grassroots communicators Hon (2015). It’s no stranger to reporting of events as they unfold and aptly the opinions and decisions of readers. According to Matthes (2009), framing implores effective tools like metaphors, messages and images to examine the salience of specific topic and events. This definition given by Matthes (2009) explores the context in which framing is effective and further

observes that there are certain tools or languages that the social media use to influence the opinion of their audience. Iyengar (2019) supports this definition by going further to state that framing occurs when opinions on an issue is altered by placing emphasis on parts of the issue. Nwofe (2016) noted that much of the power of framing comes from its ability to define problems – articulating cost and benefits - specifying causes, make moral assessments, and recommend solutions.

According to Entman (1993), framing involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993). This is why social media focuses attention on certain events and places them within a particular linguistic frame, inevitably to influence perceptions and interpretation of issues and these representations are adopted by their audience.

Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008) summarise that the media is in position to frame what the general public sees, knows and understands about the violence perpetrated by insurgent groups. Importantly, framing cannot only provide a foundation for choosing images and texts that can be used to reinforce key idea (the sociological aspect) but can also provide the basis for how people should take action (the psychological aspect), Li (2008). This work investigates the relationship between language, Facebook frames and effect on readers.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative content analysis. Lasswell, Learner and Pool (1952) see content analysis “as a technique which aims at

describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time” (p. 34). The qualitative content analysis describes the language use, and interprets meaning from the content of text data. In line with other views, Weber (1990) agrees that content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (p.9).

Pan and Kosicki (1993) describe framing analysis as a specific technique for content analysis to explain how the media promotes certain aspects of a perceived reality. The research design for this study embraced qualitative content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick cited by Linstrom and Maris (2012) explain that news frame analysis, as a form of qualitative content analysis, could be conducted for media research purposes:

- Describing communication content;
- Comparing media content to the “real world”; and
- Establishing a starting point for studies of media effects.

In this case, qualitative content analysis involves explaining the issue, describing, analysing and interpreting data on security frame, and also to understand the relational messages from social media post. Therefore, posts that address security issue on internet were looked into, using purposive sampling method; picking desired sample elements that conform to the predetermined characteristics (Dode 2002). Researchers went through 1207 posts to select a total of 60 Facebook posts. Selection of posts was done manually from January 2020 to January 2021. The sample size for this study comprises of posts from four Facebook accounts. The study considered accounts with visibility, that is, accounts with more than 5,000 active following, reason is that they are opinion shaper on

Facebook. We chose not to disclose real identity of selected Facebook account holders because opinion for disclosure was not sought. We identify them as Anonymous A, B, C and D. *Anonymous A*, is a known voice and opinion shaper on SM, his Facebook account is verified, with about 120k followers, followership, relevance and strong online presence. *Anonymous B* is an opinion shaper with large following, *Anonymous C* is an IPOB sympathizer and defender, with strong support opinion on activities of the sect. *Anonymous D* is neutral journalist that updates his follower on current news and trends. The selections were based on their wide followership, relevance and strong online presence.

## **5. Results Analysis**

### **5.1 Analysis on Language**

There was contextual use of linguistic metaphor on Facebook post to characterize event of violence to the audience, creating fears in people and playing with their emotion. This is seen in posts that has metaphor like “smashed” and “gunned down”, the metaphors are based on the horror of the insecurity event, “smashed” and “butchered” represent intense violence, “gunned down” is metaphorically viewed as death, they embed meaning in language. In using this linguistic metaphor reader get to understand what is going on, the level of insecurity and the situation at hand. Another instance is “shot at point blank”; “left barren”, the first metaphor was used to express loss of life. All show violence and crime rate. These metaphors have a way of stretching meaning of a subject matter. Many context-induced metaphors are seen running in some of the posts. There is persuasive language and tone of horror and pains observed.

### **5.2 Categorization of Frames**

As a major source of information, social media places certain events within a particular linguistic frame, using words to characterize the violence, social unrest and insecurity that invaded South East. We identify five categories of frames depicting insecurity in South East. Each frame is defined by a set of consequences of insecurity in South East of Nigeria, characterising what each frame category describes. The frames are ‘violence’, ‘protest’, ‘threat’, ‘crime’ and ‘economic and social disruption’.

### **5.2.1 Violence Frame**

Violence frame consist of three main themes: destruction of lives, destruction of properties and destruction of the future of Igbo people. Destruction of lives included languages that convey loss of lives. Some of the language and frames in this theme that depicted physical violence are; *shooting sporadically, burning of properties, gun down, bombing of places, declared dead, barbaric cutting of human body, beheading, self-inflicting injury, 6 cars set ablaze*, were reported predominant theme in the posts that coded violence. These words synced with tense tone style to capture and identify violence frame. Violence frame is projected in the way armed and cult groups were going about killing of citizens, destroying properties. The extra judicial killing of youths by police men, violence between Unknown gunmen and Nigerian police, the burning of government institutions, incidence such as unlawful killing and burning of properties, bombing of places, burning of vehicles, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and torturing. This frame talked about the impact of violence on people and also included the recommendation people made to call attention of the general public to the level of insecurity and unrest in the South East.

### **5.2.2 Protest Frame**

Protest refers to reactions and disturbances. This frame type focused on the action expressing an objection to something by the aggrieved

people. Frame themes like *demonstration, sit-at-home, no election order, agitation, banning, and dissent* were the themes captured in protest frame category posts. Protest was described by both Anonymous A and B as a demonstration of their unhappiness and marginalisation from the federal government, it is believed the government has been partial in appointment of people in key positions from South East, this informs the protest. This frame demonstrated uncertainty by the people, disturbance and ban action showing unhappiness were relatively evident in the actions of the aggrieved people in south East. Anonymous A and B captures posts around the incidents stating that “people are angry and don’t like the actions of the government”.

In a bid to cause tension at all cost, aggrieved groups declared sit at home, no movement, banned movement of human, animal or vehicle to further heighten the insecurity situation in the region. This frame registers disapproval and consequences.

### **5.2.3 Threat Frame**

This frame refers to the fear put on people, to control their mind, and achieving their objective. It is another predefined frame identified from the reviewed studies, Anonymous B and C, structures their post to convey message of fear, public panic, threats to the lives of the defenceless citizens of the country and a peaceful region. The post in this category had a negative sentiment, for instance, *killing of people that went about their daily activities, pictures of wounded people and dead bodies* conveyed threat frame, depicting security situation. Open statement like *every Mondays is a sit-at home* – made people to avoid activities on Mondays. *Every uniform Igbo man should resign from uniform job-* order for every uniform personal from Igbo extraction to resign immediately was given. *Don’t buy Fulani’s cow* –People were forced to stop buying and eating cows from northern Nigeria. *Avoid anything from north:*

*disobey IPOB order and die* – this was used to make people to adhere to IPOB to totally avoid items from north. These statements were used to convey threats and to frighten the people in the region. Citizens lives were threatened, even all-security apparatus in states were threatened to leave their duty post and southeast land. IPOB group threaten people to support IPOB, because according to them they are acting to liberate the Igbo land. Many became victims; people and uniform personnel. In fact, it was the second highest frame through which fears and uncertainty were displayed.

#### **5.2.4 Crime Frame**

The crime category focused on violent activities that frightened people, attack by state-actors, armed attacks, violence crime such as kidnapping, robbery, cultism, assassination, rape, burglary, beheading, gun-battle with security forces. This frame also consisted of writing expressing the damage done by the criminals and call for help from the government. For instance, *4 killed, students abducted by gunmen in south east Nigeria, we voted a government that stays to watch her people killed, gallant soldiers, four IPOB members killed in Anambra. Military engages gunmen in shootout. Police final bust the hideouts of those criminal element terrorising Orlu people.* These tweets frame southeast as unsafe place, a region criminal element have taken over and causing serious harm to the people, it shows the level if criminal activity besieging southeast.

#### **5.2.5 Economic and Social Disruption**

This frame refers to the instability in people’s daily activities, the disruption of business and change in social lives. This theme focused on the negative impacts that caused changes in social and economic lives of South East people. The post is structured to narrate how businesses are packing up, people closing up shops before 7 pm for fear of attacks, people living in fear, busy places

becoming deserted. Economic and social disruption set the region backward economically, having enjoyed relative peace over time.

### **5.3 Measuring Media Frame Effect**

This study adopted cognitive bias approach where people are influenced by positive or negative connotations. Following Plous Scott (1993), this study defined cognitive bias as framing effect where people decide on options based on whether the options are presented with positive or negative connotations; e.g., as a loss or as a gain. The media frame effect was measured by the readers' engagement on security issues in South East. Media effect was measured by the reaction of readers on positive and negative words and phrases. Positive post got little reaction while negative post got emotional comments and reaction. Context factor such as position and credibility of writer affects the way readers take information.

### **5.4 Discussion**

This research identified language techniques and frames use by selected Facebook account holders in framing insecurity in South East. Observations are made on the use of tense tone, contextual use of linguistic metaphors on post to characterize a mental event of insecurity to the audience, creating fears in people and playing with their emotion. Most importantly, the Facebook posts select particular language to pass a message of insecurity "smashed the windscreen", "gunned down", "we closed down". The metaphors are based on the horror of the insecurity event. The term *smashed* represents violence, *gunned down* is metaphorically viewed as death. Many context-induced metaphors are seen to be embedded in some of the posts made.

Drawing attention to the online community, there are sensational post and misleading information spread online. Importantly, there were also subjective analysis of events that characterized the security situation in southeast compared to the

reality on ground. It reflects in the language and choice of frames presented, that manipulate and amplify incidence, distorting information and heightened fear and panic among inhabitants of South East and outsiders.

## **6. Conclusion**

The media landscape in Nigeria is one filled with vigour Jinmi-Ahisu and Osah (2021), where users use language to frame their messages; however, the messages convey certain meaning to readers. Users carefully word their posts in order to control public perception and shape public opinion on specific topics. In the bid to understand how social media framed insecurity in South East of Nigeria, and how people view the region, the framing theory was used, and five frames were picked to enhance understanding of language employed by the social media to frame violence, unrest related issues in the region. A common practice amongst social media is presenting matters in a way to catch attention (readership) and reaction, they do so by carefully choosing words to influence minds, and pass message. However, the extent to which these influences affect readers remains insufficiently investigated. Four Facebook accounts with constant updates on security matters were used and analysed. We observed social media such as Facebook has significant impact and brings about public awareness on trending issues. There is no direct link or relation of security updates on Facebook and insecurity in SE. What we observe is presentation of sensitive topic with subjective views that makes readers form opinion, accept every narrative as authentic. Information gotten from Facebook create fear, panic and uncertainty in the minds of readers.

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