

Transnational Activism in the Rhetoric of Politics among Nigerian Netizens

¹Chioma Deborah Sunny-Adikwu, ²Eberechi Chinenye Amadi

¹Federal University of Technology, Owerri ²Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
chiomaonwubikod@gmail.com; ec.amadi@unizik.edu.ng

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60787/jolan.vol6no1.471>

Abstract

This paper analyses the discursive and rhetorical strategies used by Nigerian netizens in their tweets, Facebook and WhatsApp posts to construct resistance against Nigeria's oligarchical government. Screenshots of tweets from X (68), Facebook posts (42) and WhatsApp posts (34) of Nigerians and a purposive sampling of 22 excerpts formed the data for this study. Informed by Critical Discourse Analysis and Aristotelian rhetoric, the analysis shows that Nigerian netizens deploy different forms of mobilisation, such as irony, satire, metaphors, hashtags, and intertextual references, to construct injustice and complex crises, to delegitimise corrupt leadership, to mobilise collective outrage, and to counter hegemonic narratives. This type of transnational practice is not only a form of resistance but creates solidarity, political consciousness as well as accountability though it also shows how weak national cohesion is when there are deepening governance crises. The paper contends that digital resistance is a strong form of socio-political intervention in Nigeria's democratic struggles.

Keywords: *National Cohesion; Nigerian Netizens; Resistance; Oligarchical Governance; Transnational Activism*

1. Introduction

Transnational activism is a border-crossing movement in pursuit of political and social change. Chiluwa and Ayodele (2019) explain transnational activism as the organic interactions that emanate from a local space but extend beyond territorial confines. Within transnational activism, "language is often characterized by emotional and compelling rhetoric with the intention of persuading and motivating individuals and groups to rally behind a particular cause or perspective" (Malkawi & Fareh, 2023). According to Etuk and Akpan (2023: 69), "It is through language that emotions,

desires, thoughts, religious and socio-political views and beliefs of individuals, groups of individuals and that of an entire community of people are expressed". This shows that language serves as a potent tool within the realm of activism, allowing activists to strategically convey their messages and drive societal change (Malkawi & Fareh, 2023). Erdem (2015:1) notes that "transnational activism has become an increasingly salient dynamic of world politics in several issues and areas, including human rights, environment, development, women's rights, and peace". Because of political activities, several social changes have occurred, transforming the nature of political participation. Thousands of transnational actors advocate for social change through digital means. Hence, transnational digital activism involves the use of online platforms and technologies to mobilise global collaborations and movements, share resources and coordinate online-offline actions across different regions. Through the activities of transnational actors, issues of importance become globalized, political causes circulate beyond their points of origination, and draw in international actors, using language to highlight certain realities and appeal to transnational audiences. The transnationalisation of activism occurs on both sides—organisers draw attention to their causes using the persuasive and low-cost power of online communication, while adherents can join (virtual) collectives with the click of a button (Giuliana & Delia, 2022).

Transnational digital activism as such is historically not a new phenomenon. In Nigeria, it dates to social movements such as #OccupyNigeria, #EndSars, #BringBackOurGirls, etc. Such movements were concerned with a broader range of issues that reached across state borders. These activist movements create social change. The #OccupyNigeria movement began in January 2012, occasioned by the removal of fuel subsidy, resulting in high cost of fuel, transportation and other logistics. In the infamous 'Bring Back Our Girls' (BBOG activism and End SARS campaign), wherein women protested for the release of kidnapped school girls, and youths trooped out to protest the unjust treatment and brutalisation of Nigerian youths by special forces in the Nigerian police. The #EndSARS movement in 2020, triggered by police brutality, showcased the potential for social media to unite young people in demanding police reform and government accountability (Olorunnipa & Kazeem, 2020), bringing the government to action.

The growing surge in transnational activism among Nigerian netizens engages individuals from Nigeria in global political discussions, advocacy, and activism through online platforms. Social media's impact on political activism is profound, offering new avenues for citizen participation and collective action (Keith, 2023).

Nigerian netizens, like their counterparts around the world, leverage the internet to connect, share information, and participate in global movements. Transnational activism among netizens is a significant force shaping the rhetoric of politics, challenging traditional boundaries, and contributing to a more interconnected global political landscape. In support of this, Tarrow (2011) recognizes that social media can quickly disseminate information and connect like-minded individuals.

Transnational activism among Nigerian netizens reflects the power dynamic within global political discourse, both national and international issues to which language plays an important role. Language, therefore, serves as a powerful tool to contribute to global conversations, advocate for change, and connect with a broader community of activists and supporters. It becomes a medium for conceptualisation, dissemination and negotiation of ideologies that underpin societies and discursive practices within a given culture. In other words, "...humans can use language to create what they think and feel" (Etuk & Urujzian, 2018). Thus, language could be employed to address social-political concerns, especially Nigeria's oligarchical governance, in times of chaos. The dynamics highlight how Nigerian netizens leverage global connections, transnational activism, digital platforms, appropriate language, and rhetorical strategies to address and discuss the challenges arising from the country's governance. Social actors use the opportunity to voice their concerns and seek support through rapid electronic communication, and the spread of the "script of modernity". The use of language in socio-political discourses among Nigerian netizens in response to Nigeria's oligarchical governance, particularly in times of chaos, becomes our concern.

The interest of this study is predicated on the premise that Nigerian netizens, through digital activism, challenge the fundamental socio-political issues affecting Nigeria. Hence, applying van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis to the language of activism in the discourses of Nigerian netizens allows for a nuanced understanding of how language shapes socio-political dynamics, the rhetorical strategies, and important devices deployed in achieving their goals. The paper argues that language plays vital roles in transnational activism. As such, the study will help reveal the impact of language, power relations, ideologies, and identity constructions embedded in the discourses, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed in response to oligarchical governance and chaos.

2. Literature Review

Various scholars have approached transnational activism from different perspectives, expanding the focus and emphasising different aspects such as identity (Vertovec 2001), migrations (Baubock and Faist 2010) and transnational activism within the confines of regions or a single locality (Tarrow 2005). However, despite the varied approaches, there is a consensus that transnational activism is a mobilisation for a collective course. It is a fundamental aspect of change and society. The goal of transnational activism is to promote changes on an international scale and development and challenge the existing status quo.

Giuliana and Delia (2022) explain activism as a process whereby collective actors are brought together by shared experiences and values to put their concerns on the public agenda as a way of forcing political structures into engagement. In this sense, activism is the art of using assertive campaigning and protest to give political or social voice and bring about change. Because of these political activities, several social changes have occurred over the last century, transforming the nature of political participation (Norris 2009, as cited in Nolas et al. 2017). People use language to frame issues in a way that suits their agenda, to turn public perception and attitude. Activism involves language wherein people communicate and interact to project goals. There are different kinds of activism: physical and media activism. Physical activism involves the physical presence of activists, wherein a goal is championed. Digital activism is the current trend that denotes a collection of activisms that uses information technology infrastructures and other electronic media to disseminate information across large audiences (Galis & Neumayer, 2016). Users have the freedom to decide the content of their tweets (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

Activists use their voices to attract attention. They affect public debates and, through that, play a part in shaping and changing norms, values, opinions and agendas: they exercise communicative power! (Olesen, 2011). According to Drok (2015), activism consists of efforts of impeding or promoting of social, political, ecological and economic changes or stagnation. Aver'janon (1993) cited by Drok (2015), opines that "activism can have a wide range from writing of letter to a newspaper to political campaigns and economic activity, such as boycott, meeting, strike, hunger-strike". These definitions buttress the fact that activism is action-oriented, which brings about constructive reforms in the order of things.

Digital activism significantly shapes the rhetoric of politics among Nigerian citizens by providing platforms for mobilisation, narrative construction, and engagement with political processes (Akeusola, 2023). Njoku, Ihechu & Njoku, 2025

opine that social media has transformed the political landscape in Nigeria, by playing a critical role in political mobilization and civic engagement of citizens. The paper explores the intersection of social media and political activism in Nigeria, by focusing on how platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube help citizens to organize, mobilize, and influence political outcomes.

Many scholars have argued that the rise of blogs and social media with its design for petitions have greatly impacted the political space and accelerated Nigeria's social revolution (Adesote & Akinbi, 2015; Mshelia, 2018; Boniface, 2025). Anchoring on Social Movement Theory (SMT), Mshelia (2018) examines the changing nature of online activism, its impacts on social development, and the general impact on Nigerian democracy. The study concludes that the challenges of misinformation, the digital divide, and government surveillance endanger the well-being of activists.

Izuogu, Umeonu and Okpara (2020) opine that the dynamic nature of digital activism in Nigeria makes it very engaging and impactful. They observe that the innovative nature of information and communication technologies have created more collaborations, making netizens to be more participatory, especially on democratic discourses. They argue that the 2020 #EndSARS campaign serves as a prominent example of how digital tools were deployed to push for citizen activism regarding political accountability and empowerment. They went further to state that during the 2019 general elections, digital media played a significant role in political participation among Nigerian youths. The shift from traditional media to digital engagement amplifies the people's voices and it is more impactful as evidenced in the campaign, notwithstanding the inherent challenges. This type of activism makes the coordination of activities easier and enables prompt information dissemination.

Furthermore, the work of Argyropoulou and Ypsilantis (2017) is a broad synopsis of the Aristotelian strategies of persuasion. Ethos expresses the credibility and competence of a speaker in making assertions that can be trusted by his audience; this may include his personal experiences, citing credible sources, his eloquence and carriage. The objectivity and effectiveness of a speaker's claim have to do with logos. This includes expert testimonies, definitions, statistics, and relatable analogies that help strengthen the speaker's arguments. Conversely, pathos involves the use of vivid language, imagery, symbols, comparisons, and emphasis to enhance a speaker's opinion, thus creating emotional impact on the audience.

Malkawi and Fareh (2023) examine the rhetorical and linguistic devices employed in one of Hanan Ashrawi's speeches to support the Palestinian cause and

promote her perspective. Using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, the work identifies and analyses the thematic patterns of her speech, the semiotic dimensions of text analysis, including contextual, semantic, and lexico-grammatical features. The findings demonstrate the significance of rhetorical and linguistic devices in advocacy language, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The use of metaphors, repetition, parallelism, and nominalization is found to be particularly effective in enhancing the persuasiveness of language advocacy. Additionally, the findings reveal a clear connection between the thematic patterns identified in the speech and the dominant types of processes used, such as the Material process in discussing U.S. policy towards Israel and Palestine and the mental process in discussing hope and resilience amidst the oppression and injustice practised against the Palestinians.

Aboh (2024) reveals that digital activism among Nigerian citizens employs sophisticated rhetorical strategies to construct political narratives, legitimize resistance, and mobilize civic engagement through social media platforms. The study analyzed 1000 social media posts to identify these strategies. The study analysed how #EndSARS protesters discursively construct SARS officers, hold the Nigerian government accountable, and demand social change through strategies in their tweets and Facebook comments. Drawing on social media critical discourse analysis (SMCDA) and social movement theory, it was found that three strategies were predominantly used: constructing SARS as oppressors of the people; representing the Nigerian government as insensitive to their plight; and issuing a clarion call for action by deploying local linguistic resources to appeal to emotions. These strategies enabled protesters to construct victim-aggressor categorization that legitimizes resistance against police brutality and demands change. The study further reveals how protesters mobilize local linguistic resources and ideologies to appeal emotionally to other Nigerians to join in the protest. This study shows how digital political mobilization can catalyse reform in Nigeria by holding leaders and law enforcement agencies accountable for their (in)actions. It also contributes toward developing interdisciplinary studies on SMCDA and digital activism.

Alugbin & Iyoha (2024) attest that digital activism in Nigeria's #EndSARS protest employed discursive strategies like blame attribution, recontextualization, categorization, victim positioning, and cross-border appeal to sustain solidarity and negotiate power, as evidenced by the analysis of 1,000 tweets. The study reveals that Nigerians use the #EndSARS hashtag as one of the tools to create awareness on Twitter, share experiences and draw attention to police brutality in Nigeria. Using van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complemented

by computer-assisted textual insights, the findings indicate that blame attribution, event recontextualization, categorisation, positioning victims and cross-border appeal are some of the discursive resistance strategies employed here to maintain solidarity among marginalised people and create bonds and negotiate power among marginalised people. That is how these protesters created defiance in the people through these strategies. Such strategies not only create a contest for political power between the government and the masses but also help in constructing an ideology of resistance among the people.

Transnational activism in critical discourse analysis reveals how activism transcends national boundaries and utilises global discourse as a tool to advocate for change, challenge norms, and influence activities. As time goes on, there is an increasing knowledge on the importance of transnational actors in world politics, attention shifted from earlier fixations on multinational corporations to the proliferation of social action in a range of new and old issues (Klotz, 2002:50).

In utilizing discourse as a tool in transnational activism, actors use social networks to disseminate information across borders. Importantly, they frame their claims and ideas online to express a shared membership of transnational identity by collaborating with other movements and sharing similar frames with those abroad (Bourne, 2017). For Chilwa and Ayodele (2019), the very goal of transnational activism is to present ideas and exhibit features that defy boundaries. Also, transnational activism plays a significant role in international politics, aiming for global justice aligned with cosmopolitan values and universal norms. Social platforms such as Twitter become important as it communicate clusters according to physical space, language and nation using mechanisms such as cross-hash-tagging. The use of online platforms and street protests highlights the ability of political activism to transcend borders, harness technology, and channel the energy of young populations into meaningful change (Keith, 2023). However, it allows engagement on a particular topic using different narratives that are specific to regions. Through these forms of engagement and language used, X (Twitter) and other Social Networking Sites (SNS) challenge norms and advocate for change.

Similarly, activists build solidarity and share a sense of identity through a social media campaign. They play significant roles in shaping public discourse and policy decisions. To gain global attention, activists use digital platforms to amplify the reach of transnational movements. Their actions catalyse significant social transformations, such as civil rights advancements, environmental policy changes, and the recognition of marginalized communities (Ojha, et al., 2022). Equally, the emergence of social

media has revolutionized political activism, providing a platform for marginalized groups, promoting dialogue, and fostering global solidarity (Keith, 2023:21). Milan (2015) argues that social media are not exclusively patterned along personalized identity and connective frames but rather amplify interactive and shared processes of collective action by providing platforms for continuity.

The existing literature has touched on social media used for civic engagement, reawakening of consciousness, counter-narratives and societal disruption among other uses. Therefore, new perspectives on social media should consider paradigm shifts that have resulted in changed conditions under which narratives are sustained and negotiated during online social movements.

3. Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's (1996) analytical approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is complemented by Aristotelian rhetoric, is adopted as the theoretical framework to analyse the data for this study. Van Dijk's analytical approach to critical discourse hinges on four key elements which are deployed in teasing out ideological representations of participants in discourse. The first is the actor description: participants are represented positively or negatively based on their actions and the perception of the netizens; second is the argument: this is an ideological tool that posits the stance of the netizens; third is the activity and goal description: this is hinged on the us-them dichotomy to describe the series of activities that justify or demonize the activities or actions of the actors; fourth is discourse strategies: these are both implicit and explicit representations that highlight positive and negative descriptions of the actors — to sympathize with or castigate them or to positively or negatively construct them.

Aristotelian rhetoric can significantly impact the analysis of digital activism in Nigerian politics by providing a framework to examine persuasive strategies and arguments. The theory highlights 'three pillars of persuasion' as: ethos, pathos and logos, also known as the rhetorical triangle (Akinmameji, 2018). Ethos (Credibility) analyzes how digital activists establish their credibility and authority in online spaces. Examine their use of personal experiences, expertise, or affiliations to build trust with their audience. Pathos (Emotion) investigates the emotional appeals used in digital activism. It assesses how activists evoke feelings like anger, hope, or solidarity to mobilize support and drive engagement. Logos (Logic) on the other hands evaluates the logical arguments and evidence presented in digital activism campaigns. It

examines how data, statistics, or reasoned arguments are used to support political claims.

4. Methodology

This study attempts to examine the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed by Nigerian netizens in transnational activism on socio-political issues. Purposive sampling was adopted in accessing 22 excerpts for analysis, out of a total of 144 tweets and posts derived from select conversations made on social media handles (X platform (68), Facebook (42) and WhatsApp (34)) of Nigerians. Posts and replies to comments were collated and analysed with the aim of finding how resistance is performed with language, describing the rhetorical strategies and the discursive methods used to critique social and political processes. The data collected covered discourses occurring within 2023 and 2025; this is because discourses produced on these Social Media handles during these times effectively carry the weight of transnational activity. The time for this study is a period in which Nigeria has faced high-handedness, bad leadership and socio-political and economic issues, ranging from election misconducts, judicial injustice, bad governance, insurgency and insecurity, etc. (Chigbu et al., 2024). Purposefully collected data were retrieved from online sources. In total, 22 online discourse excerpts were linguistically analysed. The lexical structure of these speeches is discussed using CDA and Aristotelian Rhetoric to examine the language and discourse used by netizens in online activism and to understand their impacts on international politics.

5. Analysis and Findings

(a) Enacting Resistance in Discourse

This section adopts Van Dijk's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal how Nigerian netizens deploy language in discourse to construct inequality, reinforce dominance and resist social power. In the excerpts analysed below, there is a calculated linguistic revolution by Nigerian netizens to resist systemic inequality, elite hypocrisy, and regional favouritism. For example:

Excerpt 1:

Let 2023 be the last time of Igbo interference in Lagos politics. Let there be no repeat in 2027. Lagos is like Anambra, Imo, any Nigerian State. It is not No Man's Land, not Federal Capital Territory. It is Yoruba land. Mind your business.

The tweet exemplifies *exclusionary and nationalist discourse*, asserting ethnic ownership (“Lagos is Yoruba land”) while delegitimizing another ethnic group’s political agency (“Let 2023 be the last time of Igbo interference”). This is *discursive resistance inverted* — resistance not to dominate but to pluralism. The tweet enacts *ethnic resistance* to perceived “outsider’s” influence in politics. Van Dijk’s (1998) Ideological Square (van Dijk, 1998) is relatable here:

- Emphasise *our* good (Yoruba ownership).
- Emphasise *their* bad (Igbo interference).
- De-emphasise *our* bad (exclusionary politics).
- De-emphasise *their* good (Igbo political participation).

Through this framing, the discourse constructs Lagos as *ethnically bounded*, excluding non-Yoruba citizens from full democratic participation. Aristotelian rhetoric strategy, Ethos, is enacted by the actor, who leverages authority as a political insider and Yoruba elder; credibility is drawn from insider status. With Pathos, he evokes fear of cultural invasion and ethnic loss; hence appeals to identity and territorial pride. He logically presents a simplistic analogy (“Lagos is like Anambra”) as a rational argument, masking ethnic essentialism.

Other examples are categorised according to themes, rhetoric strategies and discursive devices as can be seen in the following tables:

Theme	Excerpt Evidence	Discursive Function (van Dijk)
Resistance to state impunity and hypocrisy	2 “ <i>Negotiate with bandits up north. Kill agitators down south. We are not ready yet.</i> ”	Reveals <i>ideological polarisation</i> — the unequal state response to northern violence vs. southern activism. Exposes institutional bias.
Exposure of elite privilege and corruption	3. “ <i>While tinubu is still testing his new jet, the hunger continues.</i> ”	Uses <i>contrastive irony</i> to highlight moral dissonance between ruling elites and impoverished citizens.
Delegitimisation of authoritarian power	4. “ <i>Is Tinubu a dictator, are we in a dictatorship?</i> ”	Employs rhetorical questioning to resist the normalisation of repressive governance.

Theme	Excerpt Evidence	Discursive Function (van Dijk)
Socioeconomic despair and systemic collapse	5. <i>“133 million Nigerians poor, says NBS”; “The nation is gone... you are finished.”</i>	Constructs a narrative of <i>collective victimhood</i> and decline, mobilising emotional resistance.
Ethical resistance to selective justice	6. <i>“He will be reunited into the society while Nnamdi is in prison. God is watching.”</i>	Frames inequality in justice as moral corruption; positions citizens as witnesses of injustice
Civic reawakening and collective solidarity	7. <i>“Cheers to resilience & standing up to the bullies.”</i>	Articulates <i>resistance identity</i> (Castells, 2012) — transforming grievance into political solidarity.
Economic resistance discourse	8. <i>“A 20-year-old car... 8 months’ salary for a professor.”</i>	Critiques structural economic injustice through <i>everyday material symbols</i> .

Through their words, everyday citizens become agents of change, rewriting the narrative of helplessness into one of moral protest.

(b) Rhetorical Strategies Through an Aristotelian Lens

Excerpt 9:

#All Eyes on the judiciary. Let justice prevail... Save our democracy

This excerpt reverses the discourse of exclusion by mobilising collective vigilance - a symbolic resistance to state manipulation of justice. Ethos is constructed to build moral credibility through civic virtue - justice, democracy, vigilance. The metaphorical eyes (Pathos) visualise the people’s surveillance of power, evoking collective urgency thus challenging dominance by exposing institutional opacity. Resistance is *enacted here as the discourse* shifts from ethnic to civic resistance, urging national unity with logical appeal for judicial accountability. The phrase “All Eyes”, serves as a powerful discursive strategy in decentralizing authority, placing the citizens as guards over the political elite. Other examples can be seen in the table below:

Rhetorical Mode	Excerpts as Evidence	Function in the Excerpts
Ethos (credibility)	10. <i>"I've read through the APC manifesto and I have about 40 questions..."</i>	The speaker establishes credibility through research and scrutiny. moral authority by aligning with truth, justice, and civic integrity.
Pathos (emotion)	11. <i>"The hunger continues"; "We live in two different Nigeria."</i>	Mobilizes emotional intensity, empathy and despair to motivate resistance and drive solidarity.
Logos (reasoning)	12. <i>"133 million Nigerians poor" provides empirical logic, while mentioning "3 months salary of a professor" applies economic reasoning.</i>	Speakers use evidence, statistics and contrasts to critique governance.
Irony & Sarcasm	13. <i>"Peace deal lol, When you are truly violent, Nigeria rewards you"</i>	These phrases undermine authority by ridiculing it, which diminishes the legitimacy of the elites
Moral Contrast (Ethical Rhetoric)	14. <i>"Legislators paid while lecturers suffer"</i> highlights the injustice and moral inversion at play.	This strategy sets up a clear distinction between moral citizens and corrupt elites.

The rhetoric in the above excerpts flows between lamentation, mockery, and moral outrage, which is key persuasive elements in grassroots political resistance. The following excerpts (tweets) relies on *divisive emotional rhetoric*, while the poster uses *moral and civic rhetoric* to unite and resist corruption.

(c) Discursive and Linguistic Devices Used by Netizens

Device	Illustration from Excerpts	Purpose
Contrast / Juxtaposition	15. <i>"Negotiate with bandits... kill agitators."</i>	Exposes inequality through parallel structures.
Interrogative rhetoric	16. <i>"Are we in dictatorship?"</i>	Challenges state narratives without direct accusation.

Device	Illustration from Excerpts	Purpose
Irony & Hyperbole	17. <i>“Nigeria rewards you with a peace deal.”</i>	Amplifies moral and emotional stakes.
Metaphor of dual Nigeria	18. <i>“We live in two different Nigeria.”</i>	Frames social injustice spatially (“two Nigerias”).
Sarcastic inversion	19. <i>“Make Nigeria Yamayama till 2027.”</i>	Turns state slogans upside down to ridicule power.
Personification of nation	20. <i>“The nation is gone... you are finished.”</i>	Constructs an emotional connection with national suffering.
Digital intertextuality	21. <i>“While Nnamdi is in prison...”</i>	References current injustices (e.g., Nnamdi Kanu, bandit amnesty) to sustain collective memory.
Collective pronouns (‘we’, ‘us’)	22. <i>“Cheers to every Obidient out there.”</i>	Reinforces unity and shared struggle.

From the table above, Nigerian netizens deploy different discursive strategies to resist the political elite’s systemic injustice and subjugation. They achieve this through counter-narratives that challenge political abuse of power and reveal systemic contradictions. Van Dijk’s CDA uncovers deep-seated power imbalances in governance and its linguistic challenges, while Aristotelian rhetoric reveals how citizens ethically, emotionally, and logically confront state narratives. Ultimately, resistance is challenged through irony, questioning, factual evidence, and emotional resonance, transforming social media into a vibrant public space. These techniques illustrate van Dijk’s (1996) concept that online discourse is a battleground for ideas, where language serves both to assert and challenge power dynamics.

6. Discussion

Nigeria’s digital activism is a strong reflection of global movements towards sociopolitical emancipation and restoration of democratic principles. Globally, marginalised voices have garnered attention through digital activism, for instance, the Arab Spring, the Black Lives Matter movement or Nigeria's own #Bring back our girls and #EndSARS protests. Harnessing the power of collecting solidarity in digital spaces, visibility and moral conviction is a common factor in all these movements. Relatedly, Nigerians create digital communities on social media base on shared emotions,

mobilize support for democracy since the government engages the traditional media, which is more expensive and restricted.

Conversely, global activism thrives in a steadier democratic lens, whereas Nigerian case is the opposite. Hashtags like #SaveOurDemocracy, #AllEyesOnTheJudiciary, and #SecureNorth illustrate how Nigerian activists combine digital innovation with cultural context to appeal for a steady democracy. By using these discursive strategies - local humour, satire, Pidgin English, memes, and symbolic images, various social issues are addressed simultaneously. The digitalization of local expressions, religious references and cultural beliefs localizes technology into a culturally rich form of resistance.

Nevertheless, Nigerian activists face the dilemma of empowerment and fragmentation. While it has significantly improved democratic participation, empowered marginalised groups to challenge dominance, shape narratives and build transnational solidarity, it has, on the other hand, led to polarization, misinformation, and performative outrage, thus reflecting the ethno-religious, and intergroup rivalries in society. Nigeria's digital activism reflects the struggles in achieving modern democracy exposing the intricacies of achieving socio-political liberation. Digital activism will in a long run result in a more civilised engagement that will birth democratic institutions and transform Nigeria. Essentially, Nigerians activism is transnational and can be described as both radical and fragile, enabling yet fractured, but it is a powerful proof to the resilient push for democracy in the face of disillusionment, validating the authenticity of language as a tool for legitimising justice in a digital society.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

Democratic resistance has been reinforced by digital activism globally. In Nigeria, this engagement has transformed people's disappointments into collective moral awareness. Through various discursive strategies, online campaigns have become a formidable tool for Nigerian citizens to challenge power dominance, injustice and subjugation. The complex nature of digital connectivity is intended to propel government to initiate a more participatory system that will spread across Africa. The data reveals a transformative wave, which in van Dijk's view, counters hegemony. The discursive devices inherent in the data such as irony, rhetorical questioning, metaphors, contrasts and shared language are deployed by citizens to contest injustice and authoritarianism, beam light on government's hypocrisy to reconstruct civic identity and bolster the citizens' prerogative to social wellbeing.

Three key elements of the Aristotelian rhetoric, ethos, pathos, and logos play important roles in the discourse. From the ethical standing (ethos) expressed through reliable accounts, to the passionate (pathos) detailing of real-life experiences behind the activism, and the rational (logos) bases for the reassessment of the realities of everyday life of the people, they become empowered to resist domination and salvage their jeopardised existence from the political elites. Thus, the digital space becomes the democratic field where citizens demand accountability from their leaders. Nevertheless, the Nigerian situation still drags as digital activism faces government repression, sabotage and undue surveillance.

7.1. Contributions to knowledge

The study will significantly contribute to studies in linguistics, particularly in the Nigerian context, where research on digital activism within the Aristotelian framework is limited. By localizing the Aristotelian framework in Nigeria's digital space, it reflects its dynamism and reveals how innovative rhetorical strategies are realised and documented, thereby providing linguists, activists and policymakers with persuasive tools, which are evidence-based for constructing social realities and redefining active citizenship in this digital age. The study would also help international bodies like the United Nations, Electoral bodies and other stakeholders understand Nigeria's political language and how it transforms the democratic participation, which will aid them in crafting culturally sensitive policies and programmes that resonate with the masses. The findings of this study position Nigeria's political scene within a broader perspective, emphasising the need to embrace digital activism to expose injustice, promote digital rhetoric and attain national liberation. It is hoped that the study will bridge the gap in existing literature and foster further studies on digital activism.

7.2. Recommendations

1. There is need for Nigerian government to integrate digital frameworks in policy making and implementations for quality representation and feedback mechanism, thereby transforming the digital space into a collaborative engagement void of bitterness, fostering a stronger context between leaders and the masses.
2. Digital activism has come to stay; hence government should adopt it and provide a policy that manages information flow justly and protects the rights of the citizens' online freedom of expression.

3. Embracing digital activism will enhance the broadband access to a more inclusive society devoid of division, marginalisation and dominance.
4. The digital space can be harnessed to build enter-ethnic and religious collaborations leveraging on influencers and emphasising national identity.
5. Finally, the need for African framework that relies on digital rhetoric to propagate oral traditions and indigenous system/expressions of Activism cannot be overemphasised. This will broaden the scope of African digital studies, situating Nigeria's online activism within an expanded postcolonial narrative. At this instant, technology has become a tool for freedom and reflecting social realities.

References

- Aboh, S. C. (2024). 'It will never be well with SARS': A discourse analytic study of the #EndSARS protests on social media. *Discourse & Society*, 35(2), 153–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265231200994>
- Adesote, S.A. & Akinbi, J.O. (2015). Social media and political transformation of Nigeria: Lessons from the advanced democracies. *Multi-disciplinary Journal of Research and Development Perspectives*, 4(1), 74-84.
- Akinbobola, O. (2021). Twitter ban and political participation in Nigeria. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 13(2), 299–314. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00045_1
- Alugbin, M., & Iyoha, O. (2024). Narratives of resistance: Discursive strategies in Nigeria's 2020 #EndSARS protest. *Àgídìgbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities*.
- Argyropoulou, V., & Ypsilantis, G. S. (2017). Persuasive strategies in argumentative/persuasive discourse written in Italian by Greek second language learners. In *19th Annual Conference of the English Department of the University of Bucharest, Romania* (September 15, 2019). <http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/289014/files/GRI-2017-19167.pdf>
- Bauböck, R., & Faist, T. (2010). *Diaspora and transnationalism: Concepts, theories and methods*. Amsterdam University Press.

- Boniface, U. E. (2025). Social media as a catalyst for democratisation and good governance in Nigeria. SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5364613>.
- Bourne, A. (2017). Social movements as arenas and actors in transnationalising public spheres. *Journal of Civil Society*, 13(3), 223–230.
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. Polity.
- Chigbu, G. U., Aboh, S. C. & Ganaah, J. (2024). Religious othering in Nigeria's electoral discourse: Towards a critical religious tolerance. *Discourse & Society*, 1–21. DOI: 10.1177/09579265241257628
- Chiluwa, I. M., & Olaniyi, A. T. (n.d.). Constructing transnational identity through Twitter activism: A discourse study of #EndSARS.
- Chiluwa, I., & Ifukor, P. (2015). War against our children: Stance and evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls campaign discourse on Twitter and Facebook. *Discourse & Society*, 26(3), 267–296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926514564735>
- Erdem, E. (2015). Transnational activism and world politics. *International Journal of Economic and Administrative Studies*, 8(15), 313–326. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2202757>
- Etuk, J. A., & Urujzian, V. (2018). Language and ideology in number plate slogans of the 36 states of Nigeria and Abuja: A new horizon. *The Intuition*, 8(1), 86–95.
- Etuk, J., & Akpan, I. (2023). Language and gender ideology in Tekno's "Woman." *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies*, 6(4), 69–80.
- Galis, V., & Neumayer, C. (2016). Laying claims to social media by activists: A cyber-material détournement. *Social Media and Society*, 2(1), 1–14.
- García, C. (2019). Political activism and online media. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 20–22.
- Ifukor, P. (2010). 'Elections' or 'Selections'? Blogging and Twittering the Nigerian 2007 general elections. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(6), 398–414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610380008>

- Izuogu, C., Umeonu, D., & Okpara, O. (2020). Digital media and political participation among Nigerian youths in the 2019 general elections. *Addaiyan Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(7), 21–34.
- Keck, M. E., & Sikkink, K. (1998). *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Keith, D. M. (2023). The impact of social media on political activism. *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 16–29. <http://www.carijournals.org/>
- Klotz, A. (2002). Transnational activism and global transformations: The anti-apartheid and abolitionist experiences. *European Journal of International Relations*, 8(1), 49–76.
- Malkawi, R. J., & Fareh, S. (2023). The role of language in advocacy: An SFL analysis of Hanan Ashrawi’s speech on Palestinian rights. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(2), 2276554. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2276554>
- Meraz, S., & Papacharissi, Z. (2013). Networked gatekeeping and networked framing on Egypt. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 138–166.
- Mercea, D. (2018). Transnational activism in support of national protest: Questions of identity and organization. *Global Networks*, 18(4), 543–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12179>
- Milan, S. (2015). When algorithms shape collective action in social media and the dynamics of cloud protesting. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 887–900.
- Mshelia, W.M. (2018). The political power of social media in Nigeria: A case study of the 2014 #bringbackourgirls Campaign. An Unpublished MA Thesis Submitted to the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- Njoku, C. N., Ihechu, I. P., & Njoku, O. G. (2025). Social media in political mobilization and civic engagement in Nigeria: A conceptual approach. *British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research*, 5(2), 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.52589/BJMCMR00XLMDEV>
- Nwachukwu, O., & Uzuegbunam, C. (2022). Digital protest and counter-rhetoric: The case of #EndSARS in Nigeria. *Information, Communication & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2098847>

- Ojebuyi, B. R., & Salawu, A. (2022). Hashtag activism and national unity in Nigeria: Examining #BringBackOurGirls. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 14(1), 57–74. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00077_1
- Ojha, H., Nightingale, A. J., Gonda, N., Muok, B. O., Eriksen, S., Khatri, D., & Paudel, D. (2022). Transforming environmental governance: Critical action intellectuals and their praxis in the field. *Sustainability Science*, 17(2), 621–635.
- Okunola, O. O., & Adeyemi, T. (2022). Rethinking Nigerian youth activism: #EndSARS as a case study. *African Studies Review*, 65(3), 487–509. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.25>
- Olorunnisola, A., & Martin, B. (2013). Influences of social media on political mobilisation in Africa. *Telematics and Informatics*, 30(1), 15–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2012.03.002>
- Sorce, G., & Dumitrica, D. (2022). Transnational dimensions in digital activism and protest. *Review of Communication*, 22(3), 157–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2022.2107877>
- Tarrow, S. (2001). Transnational politics: Contention and institutions in international politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4(1), 1–20.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- Uwalaka, T., & Watkins, J. (2018). Social media as the fifth estate in Nigeria: An analysis of the 2012 subsidy protests. *African Journalism Studies*, 39(4), 127–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2018.1502889>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1996). Power and the news media. In: Paletz D. L. (ed.). *Political Communication in Action: States, institutions, movements, audiences*. New Jersey: Hampton Press, pp. 9– 36.
- Vertovec, S. (2001). *Transnational challenges to the new multiculturalism*. Oxford University Press.

¹Chioma Deborah Sunny-Adikwu, ²Eberechi Chinenye Amadi

¹Federal University of Technology, Owerri ²Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
chiomaonwubikod@gmail.com; ec.amadi@unizik.edu.ng