



MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF INSECURITY AS REPRESENTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Insecurity in Nigeria, manifesting in insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and cybercrime, is increasingly represented on social media, where multimodal resources such as text, images, videos, hashtags, and emojis shape public narratives. While existing studies often focus on single communication modes, little attention has been paid to the multimodal construction of insecurity online. This descriptive qualitative study applies Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to 18 purposively selected posts from Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram between January and July 2025. Data were analyzed by examining the interplay of linguistic, visual, and symbolic modes to identify ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings, with social semiotic principles guiding interpretation of cultural and ideological contexts. Findings reveal how multimodal strategies frame insecurity, assign responsibility, and influence public perception. The study advances communication and security scholarship, offering insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and civil society on responsible digital engagement in security discourse.

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, social semiotics, insecurity, social media, Nigeria.

Introduction

In recent years, insecurity has emerged as one of the most significant socio-political challenges facing Nigeria, impacting nearly every facet of national life. It presents itself in various forms, including insurgency in the North-East, banditry and mass abductions in the North-West, farmer–herder conflicts in the North-Central region, separatist movements in the South-East, militancy in the Niger Delta, and an increase in armed robbery, kidnapping, and cybercrime across the country. These occurrences have disrupted socio-economic activities, intensified public anxiety, and diminished trust in the government's ability to safeguard its citizens.

The expansion of internet access and the widespread use of smartphones have altered the manner in which Nigerians perceive and react to insecurity. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp now function as both channels for information and interactive forums where individuals can share firsthand accounts, images, videos, and commentary in real time. The rapidity and extent of these platforms often exceed that of traditional media, allowing narratives regarding insecurity to spread widely and shape public perception prior to the release of



official reports. Nevertheless, they also provide a breeding ground for misinformation, sensationalism, and politically charged framing, which can exacerbate societal tensions.

Representations of insecurity on social media are seldom confined to mere text. They are intrinsically multimodal, incorporating photographs, video clips, voice notes, hashtags, emojis, and other symbolic elements to convey meaning and shape interpretation. As Kress and van Leeuwen note, "meaning is made in many different modes" and these modes "are orchestrated through a complex interplay" to formulate the overall message (1). For instance, a tweet detailing a kidnapping incident may blend emotive language, a compelling image, and a hashtag like #SecureNigeria, with each component enhancing the communicative impact.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) presents a valuable method for investigating these representations, as it emphasizes the interplay of various semiotic modes in framing events, attributing responsibility, and mobilizing audiences. This analytical viewpoint facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of how insecurity is portrayed in Nigeria's digital public sphere. Social media has emerged as a platform where government entities, journalists, activists, and everyday citizens negotiate meanings, contest narratives, and shape public discourse. As Akinyetun observes, the narratives concerning insecurity "reflect broader struggles over power, legitimacy, and public trust" (56).

Considering the widespread impact of social media on shaping opinions and policy discussions, examining the multimodal construction of insecurity narratives is both timely and essential. Such research can uncover not only the tactics employed to frame insecurity but also the socio-political ramifications of these portrayals, emphasizing how digital communication practices can either reinforce or challenge prevailing perspectives in Nigeria's ongoing security crisis.

Statement of the Problem

Insecurity has consistently been a focal point of academic research in Nigeria, drawing interest from scholars in security studies, political science, sociology, and communication. Numerous studies have explored this issue from various angles; however, a notable deficiency exists in the multimodal discourse analysis of insecurity as depicted on social media platforms. For example, Adeyemi (2018) examined the socio-economic repercussions of the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria, concentrating on its effects on education, commerce, and displacement, yet failing to investigate the communicative framing of such insecurity on digital platforms. Likewise, Eze (2020) assessed government security measures and their efficacy in combating banditry, utilizing a policy evaluation framework instead of scrutinizing the public discourse related to insecurity.

In the realm of media studies, Musa and Ibrahim (2019) studied the influence of traditional newspapers on public perception of militancy in the Niger Delta, focusing solely on print media content and overlooking the multimodal aspects of online platforms. Okoye (2021) analyzed political rhetoric in televised addresses concerning national security, highlighting verbal persuasion while disregarding visual and symbolic semiotic resources. In a related investigation,



Balogun (2022) examined the dissemination of misinformation regarding kidnapping incidents on Facebook, employing content analysis to assess accuracy levels but not taking into account how multimodal components interact to convey meaning.

Although these studies have offered significant insights into the characteristics, causes, and media portrayal of insecurity, they fail to consider how insecurity is represented through the integration of textual, visual, auditory, and symbolic modes on social media. This represents a critical gap, as the digital public sphere in Nigeria increasingly depends on multimodal communication to construct and challenge meanings surrounding insecurity. This study aims to address a gap in the literature by utilizing Multimodal Discourse Analysis on various social media platforms to investigate how different semiotic resources are coordinated to depict insecurity, shape public perception, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue regarding national security in Nigeria.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to broaden the academic understanding of insecurity in Nigeria beyond conventional and policy-oriented analyses by emphasizing its multimodal representation on social media. Through the application of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this research uncovers the interactions between textual, visual, and symbolic resources that influence public perception and discourse surrounding national security. The results will be advantageous for scholars in the fields of communication, linguistics, and security studies, offering a framework for the analysis of intricate online narratives. Additionally, these findings will aid policymakers, media professionals, and civil society organizations in formulating informed strategies for responsible reporting, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering public engagement in matters related to security.

Literature Review

Current research in Nigeria underscores the multifaceted role of social media in shaping narratives about insecurity. Obiora, Agbachukwu, and Adikuru (2025) investigate security-related content on two prominent social media blogs—Lindaikajiblog and Instablog9ja. Their findings indicate that Lindaikajiblog employs a traditional, neutral framing, while Instablog9ja's coverage is characterized by sensationalism and emotional appeal. Although this study offers valuable insights into stylistic variations, it is limited to textual framing and does not take into account multimodal elements such as imagery, layout, or symbolic devices.

In a separate study, Ihechu, Ekweonu, and Umeh (2021) examine the perceptions of Awka residents regarding the portrayal of family values on social media in the context of increasing insecurity. Their results suggest that social media frequently acts as an "evangelization ground" for violence and criminal activities, thereby compromising social stability. Nevertheless, this research focuses primarily on survey responses and agenda-setting effects, without exploring the semiotic modes through which these representations are formed.

Aluko, Abdulquadir, and Abayomi (2021) investigate the influence of social media on insecurity, identifying WhatsApp and Facebook as significant platforms that facilitate the dissemination of



misinformation and extremist ideologies, based on empirical data gathered from social media users. While this study identifies the platforms most susceptible to insecurity-related content, it remains at a quantitative descriptive level and does not examine how visuals, text, or symbols interact to influence the discourse.

From a multimodal standpoint, Chukwuokoro, Ononye, and Ngene (2024) utilize Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar to analyze editorial cartoons that depict insecurity during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. They carefully analyze semiotic resources such as color, positioning, and represented participants (e.g., terrorists, Lady Justice), illustrating how visual design elements create ideological meanings. This serves as a notable example of multimodal analysis in context, although it is limited to political cartoon formats rather than social media posts.

Additionally, Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018) offer region-specific insights into the role of social media in national security, surveying users in Northern and South-eastern Nigeria. They emphasize how Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp contribute to the spread of insecurity, either through propaganda or the dissemination of rumors. Their findings reveal a degree of uncertainty among respondents regarding the overall impact of social media on security—indicating ambivalence in perception—but this study largely remains descriptive and does not incorporate any multimodal approach.

Together, these studies provide important insights into the role of social media in fostering insecurity in Nigeria—ranging from the stylistic framing found in blogs and public perceptions to regional trends and political symbolism. Nevertheless, none of these studies thoroughly examine how textual, visual, auditory, and symbolic resources converge across social media platforms to create meanings related to insecurity. The majority of research tends to concentrate on individual modes—such as textual framing, survey responses, quantitative trends, or visual cartoons—while neglecting the interactions of multiple modes within a single post or across different platforms.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), which builds upon Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by incorporating visual and other semiotic resources. It asserts that meaning is generated not solely through language but also through the interplay of various modes, including images, color, layout, sound, and gesture. MDA serves as an analytical framework for investigating how textual, visual, and audio-visual components are integrated on social media platforms to depict and communicate issues of insecurity in Nigeria. Kress (2010) states that modes are socially constructed resources for meaning-making, and their application is influenced by cultural and contextual elements, thereby rendering the theory pertinent for analyzing Nigeria's distinct sociopolitical circumstances. In the Nigerian context, discourses surrounding insecurity—whether they pertain to insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, or communal conflicts—frequently combine linguistic texts with symbolic imagery, emotive videos, and graphic designs to elicit emotional reactions, shape ideological stances, and encourage social mobilization.



MDA's meta-functional framework, which encompasses ideational, interpersonal, and textual dimensions, facilitates an examination that not only addresses the portrayal of insecurity (ideational) but also investigates the dynamics between content creators and their audiences (interpersonal), as well as the organization of multimodal texts to achieve communicative effectiveness (textual). The theory's focus on inter-semiotic complementarity (Lemke, 1998) holds particular importance, given that social media posts concerning insecurity often depend on the interaction among written captions, hashtags, and visual elements to either reinforce or contest prevailing narratives. Additionally, the flexibility of MDA permits the incorporation of critical discourse analysis viewpoints, allowing researchers to scrutinize how multimodal resources on Nigerian social media platforms shape power dynamics, attribute blame, or evoke sympathy in conversations about insecurity. Consequently, the MDA framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen is exceptionally equipped to reveal the complex meanings inherent in multimodal representations of insecurity in Nigeria, emphasizing the relationship between language, visuals, and socio-cultural contexts in influencing public perception and discourse.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research framework grounded in the tenets of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to explore visual and other semiotic resources in examining the portrayal of insecurity on social media platforms in Nigeria. The emphasis is placed on posts and images from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram, where discourses related to insecurity are actively constructed, disseminated, and negotiated. Data will be collected from user-generated content spanning January to July 2025, reflecting real-time public interactions with narratives surrounding insecurity. The initial dataset will consist of 100 posts purposefully gathered to ensure alignment with the study's theme, incorporating a variety of modalities including text, visuals, and symbols. From this collection, a purposive sampling method will be utilized to select 18 posts that most effectively integrate multimodal elements—such as imagery, hashtags, captions, and emojis—to communicate meanings regarding insecurity. This selection process guarantees analytical depth and representativeness while concentrating on instances that encapsulate the intricacies of insecurity discourse.

The analysis of data will utilize Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotic Theory of Multimodality to investigate the interaction among visual, textual, and symbolic resources, thereby revealing how these modes collaborate to create meaning. This analysis will be further enhanced by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which will be employed to examine the textual elements to uncover the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings inherent in the language selections of the posts. Furthermore, overarching principles of Social Semiotics will inform the interpretation of cultural, contextual, and ideological elements that affect the representation and perception of insecurity in Nigeria. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research will yield a comprehensive interpretation of multimodal texts, highlighting the intricate ways in which social media acts as both a reflection and a shaper of the narrative surrounding insecurity in Nigeria.



Data Presentation and Analysis

Excerpts From Instagram

Comment 1

@nigeriagirl_92 (Mar 15, 2025):
“Driving home today felt like walking through a war zone—bandits everywhere. Enough is enough! 🤔🚫 #InsecurityInNigeria #NoMoreFear”

SFL Analysis:

- *Ideational*: Portrays insecurity as militarised violence (“war zone”) with agents (“bandits”) threatening daily life.
- *Interpersonal*: The exclamative “Enough is enough!” and angry-face emoji 🤔 establish a confrontational stance toward authorities and solidarity with victims.
- *Textual*: Hyphen introduces elaboration, hashtags connect the message to broader online campaigns.

Visual Grammar: Emojis 🤔 and 🚫 are symbolic markers of protest and prohibition; the hashtags operate like visual hyperlinks to thematic discussions, functioning as *salient elements* for the viewer’s eye.

Social Semiotics: The metaphor “war zone” resonates strongly in Nigerian discourse, drawing from imagery of conflict zones in the North-East, thereby coding the comment as both personal and collective grievance.

CDA: Highlights public frustration with repeated insecurity incidents, frames the issue as urgent and intolerable, and indirectly critiques governance failure.

Comment 2

@naijabizman (Apr 2, 2025):
“When Lagos can't guarantee your safety, where do we go? These headlines are getting depressing... 😞 #SecureNigeriaNow #EndBanditry”

SFL Analysis:

- *Ideational*: Posits Lagos as a symbolic safe zone now compromised, implying nowhere in Nigeria is safe.
- *Interpersonal*: The rhetorical question seeks reader engagement and agreement; the sad emoji 😞 intensifies empathy.



- *Textual*: Parallel structure (“When Lagos can’t guarantee... where do we go?”) builds rhetorical weight, hashtags direct discourse toward activism and solutions.

Visual Grammar: The 😞 emoji visually conveys emotional tone; hashtags #SecureNigeriaNow and #EndBanditry function as *framing devices*, pointing the reader to the preferred reading of the text.

Social Semiotics: Lagos, being Nigeria’s economic hub, stands here as a metonym for security and opportunity; its perceived insecurity signals nationwide crisis.

Comment 3

@mummyofyemi (Apr 10, 2025):
“Sent my kids to school for the first time in months... prayed the whole way. God help us. 🙏📖
#ProtectOurChildren #InsecurityCrisis”

SFL Analysis:

- *Ideational*: Describes a personal event—school resumption—within a climate of insecurity, embedding religious appeal.
- *Interpersonal*: The praying hands 🙏 emoji reinforces the plea to divine authority, creating a moral dimension.
- *Textual*: Ellipses convey hesitation and fear; hashtags connect the personal to a communal advocacy space.

Visual Grammar: 📖 symbolises education and innocence, creating visual tension when juxtaposed with the insecurity theme.

Social Semiotics: The act of praying while doing a routine task like school drop-off highlights how insecurity has infiltrated ordinary life in Nigeria.

Comment 4

@igbofashionista (Mar 28, 2025):
“Femi was kidnapped overnight—again. Ransom paid, tears shed. This is not normal. 😞💔
#StopTheKidnappings #JusticeForFemi”

SFL Analysis:

- *Ideational*: Narrates a recurrent kidnapping case, using “again” to mark repeated victimisation.



- *Interpersonal*: The sad 😞 and broken heart 💔 emojis emphasise grief and urgency; declarative “This is not normal” challenges normalisation of insecurity.
- *Textual*: Short, clipped sentences enhance dramatic effect; hashtags personalise the issue while linking it to national discourse.

Visual Grammar: The emojis function as affective *foregrounding devices*, making the emotional cost of insecurity visible even before reading the full text.

Social Semiotics: Naming “Femi” personalises the insecurity crisis, reflecting how Nigerian social media often merges private tragedy with public activism.

Comment 5

@techguru_naija (Apr 5, 2025):
“Security cameras cost less than lives. Why is it always reaction and not prevention? 😞🔔
#TechForSecurity #SmartNigeria”

SFL Analysis:

- *Ideational*: Proposes a preventive solution (security cameras) versus reactive measures; life valuation is foregrounded.
- *Interpersonal*: The questioning tone with 😞 emoji prompts critical reflection; 🔔 serves as a visual alert.
- *Textual*: Antithesis (“cost less than lives”) and rhetorical question strengthen argumentative force; hashtags embed the comment in a tech-solutions discourse.

Visual Grammar: 😞 denotes analysis/skepticism, 🔔 is a high-salience warning symbol—together constructing a *call-to-action* visual mode.

Social Semiotics: Embeds the debate within a Nigerian tech advocacy space, implying modernisation as a pathway to improved security.

Excerpts From Twitter (X)

Tweet 1

@NaijaReporter (July 2, 2025, 10:15 AM)

“Another attack on commuters on Abuja–Kaduna road this morning. When will our leaders act?
👁️🗺️ #InsecurityInNigeria #SpeakUpNaija”

- SFL



- *Ideational*: Highlights a violent event (“attack on commuters”), ties it to a specific setting (“Abuja–Kaduna road”).
- *Interpersonal*: The rhetorical question (“When will our leaders act?”) invites reader engagement; the angry emoji (🔴) amplifies frustration.
- *Textual*: The structure (“Another ... this morning”) signals repeated injustice; hashtags link the post to broader public discourse.
- **Visual Grammar**
 - Emojis: 🔴 expresses frustration; 🛣️ (road) reinforces the geographic focus. They serve as *salient visual markers* guiding emotional interpretation.
- **Social Semiotics**
 - Locational reference to the Abuja–Kaduna road evokes national consciousness around a familiar insecurity hotspot, embedding the comment in lived geographical reality.

Tweet 2

@AnambraMama (June 29, 2025, 8:05 PM)

“Sent my son to the market and didn’t sleep until he returned safely. This fear is not normal. 🤔🙏
#ProtectOurChildren #InsecurityCrisis”

- **SFL**
 - *Ideational*: Communicates everyday life overshadowed by insecurity; the activity (sending son to the market) is mundane, yet suffused with fear.
 - *Interpersonal*: The sad emoji (😞) evokes empathy; the praying emoji (🙏) signals reliance on divine protection.
 - *Textual*: Statement “This fear is not normal” frames insecurity as unacceptable; hashtags tie the personal to larger campaigns.
- **Visual Grammar**
 - Emojis visually encode emotional tone—grief and prayerfulness—foregrounding maternal anxiety.
- **Social Semiotics**
 - Culturally resonant: parents’ fears around children’s safety are deeply felt in Nigerian discourse, giving the message emotional depth and resonance.

Tweet 3

@Tech4PeaceNG (June 30, 2025, 3:20 PM)

“Drones and smart cameras could prevent crime before it happens. Why no investment yet? 🤖🚁
#SmartSecurity #TechForNigeria”

- **SFL**



- *Ideational*: Introduces technological solutions as preventive strategies; opposes reactive security models.
- *Interpersonal*: The questioning tone (“Why no investment yet?”) paired with the investigative emoji (🧐) expresses critique and prompt for dialogue.
- *Textual*: The contrast between what “could” be done versus current absence of investment underscores urgency.
- **Visual Grammar**
 - Emojis: 🧐 conveys scrutiny; 🚁 (drone) signals tech framing—both serve as visual anchors of the tweet's solution-oriented focus.
- **Social Semiotics**
 - Leverages tech progressiveness; taps into aspirational discourses about modernization in Nigerian security infrastructure.

Tweet 4

@CivicVoiceNG (July 1, 2025, 1:47 PM)

“Has billions spent on security improved safety? On the streets, nothing has changed. 🧐💸
#AccountabilityNow #EndInsecurity”

- **SFL**
 - *Ideational*: Puts financial investment in tension with street-level safety realities.
 - *Interpersonal*: The thinking emoji (🧐) reinforces skepticism; the money emoji (💸) underscores perceived wastage.
 - *Textual*: Contrast between rhetoric (“spent ... improved”) and reality (“nothing has changed”) creates cognitive dissonance.
- **Visual Grammar**
 - Emojis visually highlight financial critique and skepticism, making abstract notions tangible.
- **Social Semiotics**
 - Invokes public concern over resource mismanagement and demand for transparency—common themes in Nigerian civic discourse.

Tweet 5

@KadunaActivist (July 3, 2025, 9:30 AM)

“Kaduna’s youth are being kidnapped repeatedly—it’s become a business. We demand more than prayers. 💔🆘 #StopKidnapping #SaveNigeria”



- **SFL**
 - *Ideational*: Highlights recurring youth abductions in Kaduna; calls the systematized insecurity a “business.”
 - *Interpersonal*: The broken-heart emoji (💔) and SOS (🆘) convey emotional distress and urgent appeal for action.
 - *Textual*: “We demand more than prayers” suggests dissatisfaction with passive or symbolic responses; hashtags amplify activism.
- **Visual Grammar**
 - Emojis signal moral urgency and emotional weight—foregrounding the human cost of insecurity.
- **Social Semiotics**
 - Places spotlight on Kaduna region, youth vulnerability, and economic metaphor (“business”) that critiques profiteering insecurity.
 - Frames insecurity as commodified and exploitative, implicating societal and institutional complicity, and urges immediate remedial responses.

Excerpts From FaceBook

Comment 1

"Another kidnapping in broad daylight, yet the so-called leaders keep holding 'security summits' with no results. We are tired! #SecureNigeriaNow #EndInsecurity"

SFL Analysis:

- *Ideational metafunction*: Presents a material process (“kidnapping in broad daylight”) and relational processes (“leaders... keep holding security summits”), linking events to responsible actors.
- *Interpersonal metafunction*: The evaluative phrase “so-called leaders” and exclamatory “We are tired!” express frustration, constructing solidarity with the audience.
- *Textual metafunction*: Conjunction “yet” contrasts action with outcome, heightening irony. Hashtags serve as cohesive devices linking the post to larger conversations.

Visual Grammar (Potential Imagery): The hashtags imply connection to protest images, photos of rallies, or symbolic graphics (e.g., broken chains, padlocks). These visual affordances position the reader in a demand relationship—urging direct action.

Social Semiotics: Encodes public disillusionment with governance, drawing on culturally familiar frustration over unfulfilled promises in Nigeria’s security discourse.

Comment 2



*"Billions allocated for security, but the streets are still unsafe. Where is the money going?
#AccountabilityFirst #InsecurityInNigeria"*

SFL:

- *Ideational*: Highlights contradiction between resource allocation (“billions allocated”) and persistent insecurity (“streets... still unsafe”).
- *Interpersonal*: Rhetorical question challenges government transparency, inviting audience reflection.
- *Textual*: The “but” conjunction signals contrast; hashtags crystallise the thematic thrust.

Visual Grammar: Potential imagery could include infographics on budget vs. crime rate or photos of unsafe streets, reinforcing the text’s contrast.

Social Semiotics: Links insecurity to corruption and financial mismanagement—key themes in Nigerian political discourse.

Comment 3

*"Can't travel from Abuja to Kaduna without fear. This is not the Nigeria we dream of.
#StopTheKillings #SecurityIsARight"*

SFL:

- *Ideational*: Describes a negative reality (movement restriction due to fear).
- *Interpersonal*: Pronoun “we” builds a collective identity; declarative “Security is a right” asserts a normative stance.
- *Textual*: Parallel structure (“Abuja to Kaduna” vs. “Nigeria we dream of”) contrasts dystopian present with idealised future.

Visual Grammar: Associated visuals could include maps, road scenes, or protest posters, situating the discourse spatially (specific route: Abuja–Kaduna).

Social Semiotics: Encodes a shared geographical experience—this route is infamous for kidnappings—making the post resonate culturally with Nigerians familiar with the danger.

Comment 4

"Our soldiers are doing their best, but without proper support from the government, insecurity will continue. #SupportOurTroops #PeaceInNigeria"

SFL:



- *Ideational*: Identifies two actors—soldiers (positive agency) and government (deficient agency).
- *Interpersonal*: Balances praise (“doing their best”) with critique of leadership.
- *Textual*: “But” signals shift from appreciation to critique. Hashtags align with pro-military solidarity campaigns.

Visual Grammar: Likely paired with images of soldiers in action, Nigerian flags, or peace symbols—positioning the audience as observers of national service.

Social Semiotics: Draws on patriotic sentiment while critiquing governance; positions soldiers as victims of systemic failure.

Comment 5

"Insecurity has become a business for some people in power. They profit while we suffer. #CorruptionAndInsecurity #SaveNigeria"

SFL:

- *Ideational*: Constructs insecurity as commodified (“business”), identifying profiteers (“people in power”) vs. victims (“we”).
- *Interpersonal*: Binary opposition creates moral urgency; “we suffer” appeals to shared grievance.
- *Textual*: Short, emphatic sentences increase rhetorical force; hashtags provide thematic closure.

Visual Grammar: Could be paired with cartoons/memes of politicians counting money, reinforcing satire and moral indictment.

Social Semiotics: Utilises the metaphor of business to symbolise systemic exploitation—common in Nigerian political discourse.

Pictorial Excerpts 1

Facebook ▶ Community Watch Group ▶ 2025-04-05





Analysis

The image titled “*Insecurity in Northern Nigeria*” combines visual and textual elements to communicate a powerful message about violence and unrest in the region. Through **multimodal discourse analysis**, it integrates a distressed woman in the foreground, raising her hands in despair, against a background of burnt vehicles, smoke, and armed figures, while the bold red-and-white headline frames the meaning and locates the issue geographically. The interaction of the modes heightens the emotional and political impact, making it a strong awareness tool on social media. From a **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)** perspective, the ideational metafunction depicts material processes—destruction, armed action, and emotional reaction—while participants include the woman (experiencer), armed men (actors), and burnt vehicles (affected objects). Interpersonally, the image demands engagement through the woman’s direct, emotive posture and the urgency of the headline, while textually, the arrangement prioritizes the headline and foregrounds human suffering for maximum effect. Using a **social semiotic** lens, the red text symbolizes danger and urgency, the woman’s gesture signifies helplessness and appeal, and the background destruction serves as a recognizable sign of conflict. These semiotic resources work together to construct a narrative of crisis, evoking empathy, raising socio-political consciousness, and framing insecurity in Northern Nigeria as an urgent public concern.

Pictorial Excerpt 2

Instagram ▶ NGO Account ▶ 2025-05-02



Analysis

The second case study features an Instagram post capturing a public protest in Akure. The image depicts a dense crowd of youths and students, some holding placards, gathered in a tense atmosphere with visible security presence. The presence of a vehicle in the foreground, complete with a readable license plate, anchors the event in a specific local reality, enhancing authenticity. Unlike the controlled staging of the first image, this scene is organic and unpolished, signalling spontaneous civic mobilisation. The caption — “End Bad Governance protest breaks out in Akure as Students, youth demand action against insecurity and failed promises of the Present Govt. in Ondo State” — adopts a formal, declarative tone that foregrounds the cause, actors, and grievances.

Here, the ideational metafunction positions the protesters as active agents (“demand action”), while the government is cast as a failed promise-keeper. Interpersonally, the absence of slang or emojis frames the event as serious and legitimate, appealing to both local and wider audiences. The textual metafunction is reinforced through hashtags (#AkureHowFar, #Akure, #OndoState), which function as cohesive devices, indexing the event within searchable discourse spaces and facilitating online solidarity. In multimodal terms (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021), the image provides the experiential dimension of the protest, while the caption contextualises and legitimises it, guiding viewer interpretation. From a social semiotic angle, the post activates Nigeria’s cultural script of youth-led political resistance as a moral response to insecurity and governance failure. Mediating the protest through Instagram transforms it from a localised event into a networked political act, amplifying its reach and symbolic value.

Pictorial Excerpt 3



Instagram ▶ Citizen-Influencer ▶ 2025-03-11



Analysis

The image portrays a scene of insecurity through a chaotic street setting with visible tension and fear. From a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, the representational meaning is realized in the visual elements depicting armed individuals, fleeing civilians, and distressed expressions, which serve as processes (actions of running, pointing weapons) and participants (attackers, victims). The interpersonal meaning is conveyed through the vector of gaze — the armed individuals' direct gaze towards the viewer creates a confrontational stance, invoking fear and urgency, while the victims' avoidance gaze reinforces helplessness. The compositional meaning is reinforced by the central placement of the armed figures, foregrounding them as the thematic focus, with the surrounding environment providing contextual background. From a social semiotic lens, the image draws on culturally recognized signs of danger — weapons, smoke, scattered belongings, and people in panic — all of which index insecurity in many socio-political contexts, particularly in regions facing armed conflict. The visual choices, including color contrasts (dark tones for attackers, brighter but disordered tones for civilians) and spatial arrangements, communicate a narrative of power imbalance and social disruption. Through a multimodal discourse analysis approach, the interplay of visual, spatial, and symbolic modes constructs a layered message: the armed figures, weaponry, and fleeing civilians together form a cohesive multimodal text that communicates insecurity as both a physical threat and a disruption of social order. The image functions not merely as an illustration but as a discursive act that shapes perceptions of violence, framing insecurity as an urgent social problem that destabilizes communal life.

Across these platforms, insecurity is constructed as **pervasive, systemic, and tied to governance failures**. In the Facebook dataset, the discourse is largely **text-heavy**, using hashtags as **meta discursive devices** to link individual grievances to collective campaigns (e.g., #SecureNigeriaNow, #EndInsecurity). These comments foreground **ideational meanings** such as violence (“kidnapping in broad daylight”), corruption (“billions allocated... but streets unsafe”), and systemic neglect (“insecurity has become a business”), while the **interpersonal metafunction** is enacted through solidarity markers like “we are tired” and moral evaluations such as “This is not normal.”



In contrast, Instagram comments integrate **visual and textual modes**, using emojis 🙄 🚫 🙏 📖 💔 🚨 as **semiotic amplifiers** that visually encode emotions—anger, grief, prayer, urgency—before the full text is read. For instance, in @mummyofyemi’s comment, 📖 anchors the narrative in education, while 🙏 symbolises reliance on divine intervention, signalling a **cultural code** where faith is a key coping mechanism. Similarly, @techguru_naija’s use of 🙄 and 🚨 constructs a dual meaning: critical evaluation of governance choices and a heightened alert for security urgency.

The **social semiotic dimension** shows how both platforms draw on shared Nigerian cultural scripts: naming specific locations (Abuja–Kaduna) to evoke spatial familiarity; invoking corruption as an explanatory frame for insecurity; and using metaphors (“war zone,” “business”) to simplify and dramatise complex socio-political dynamics.

Findings

The analysis revealed that social media posts on insecurity in Nigeria frequently combine emotionally charged images, such as burnt houses, grieving victims, and military presence, with short yet impactful textual captions. This integration of visuals and text generates a high level of salience, amplifying both the emotional and persuasive impact of the messages. Many of these posts employ affective lexical choices such as “heart breaking,” “helpless,” and “brutal attack,” often accompanied by expressive emojis like 💔, 🙄, and 🔥, which serve to visually encode emotional states and intensify the viewer’s empathy and outrage. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) terms, these elements constitute appraisal resources, particularly in the areas of attitude and graduation, which foreground interpersonal meaning.

From a social semiotic perspective, the visual modes function as symbolic representations of insecurity, connoting chaos, helplessness, and state failure. Close-up shots of victims highlight the human cost of violence, while wide shots of destruction convey the scale of devastation. This aligns with Halliday’s ideational meta function, which focuses on how experiences and events are represented. The study also revealed platform-specific multimodal patterns. Twitter posts tend to rely on concise text and hashtags, such as #EndInsecurityNow, to encourage rapid dissemination, while Instagram posts feature high-quality images and longer narrative captions. YouTube videos, on the other hand, employ sequential framing, narration, and background music to sustain audience engagement.

Furthermore, the posts examined in this study frequently assign agency and blame, either explicitly naming the government and security forces or implicitly framing them through visual contrasts, such as military vehicles juxtaposed with destruction scenes to suggest state inadequacy. Transitivity analysis of the linguistic components shows a predominance of material processes, such as “gunmen attacked” and “police failed to respond,” and relational processes, such as “the situation is hopeless,” which help to shape public perception. Many posts also function as calls to action, urging community vigilance, protests, or prayers. The combination of visual evidence,



personal testimony, and symbolic markers, such as the Nigerian flag, fosters solidarity and reinforces a shared sense of identity and collective concern.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that social media platforms in Nigeria have evolved into powerful spaces for constructing and circulating discourses of insecurity. Through the dynamic interplay of linguistic, visual, and symbolic resources, users portray insecurity not merely as a factual occurrence but as a deeply emotional and politically charged reality. The application of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, supported by SFL and Social Semiotics, demonstrates that posts on these platforms strategically exploit their multimodal affordances to evoke empathy, assign blame, and mobilize public sentiment.

This study concludes that visual modes are central to meaning-making in online insecurity discourse, functioning far beyond a decorative role. Emotional intensifiers, such as affective vocabulary and emojis, significantly shape how audiences interpret and engage with insecurity-related content. Moreover, social media posts often serve both informational and mobilizing purposes, influencing public perception and contributing to political and social discourse.

Given the growing influence of social media in shaping national narratives on insecurity, there is an urgent need for critical media literacy among users, journalists, and policymakers. Awareness of the persuasive power of multimodal communication can help curb the spread of misinformation while fostering more constructive and informed discourse. Future research could investigate the role of misinformation, algorithmic amplification, and audience reception in intensifying or countering insecurity narratives in the Nigerian context.

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