

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Study of Selected Twitter Messages on Kidnapping in Nigeria

Isaiah Aluya

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Bingham University Karu,
Nasarawa State, Nigeria
Isaiah.aluya@binghamuni.edu.ng

Jilam Hephzibah Jashina

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Bingham University Karu,
Nasarawa State, Nigeria
hephzj@gmail.com

Abstract

Amid the rising incidents of kidnappings in Nigeria, X (formerly known as Twitter) has emerged as a crucial platform for meaning-making, emotional engagement, and public accountability. This study investigates X users' discursive and multimodal interactions in Nigeria concerning the growing kidnapping problem. It analyses abductions to identify patterns in public discourse, emotional responses, and acts of resistance. Utilising twelve purposively selected tweets—equally divided between textual and multimodal formats—the study employs methodologies from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to explore how meaning is created, contested, and disseminated in online environments. The results indicate a range of discursive techniques, such as nomination, predication, perspectivization, and justification, which are used to allocate blame, show solidarity, or validate institutional responses. Additionally, multimodal components like images, memes, hashtags, and government visuals influence public framing and emotional reactions. While some visual elements reinforce prevailing discourses about the state's power, others challenge these perspectives by highlighting victimisation, systemic flaws, or acts of defiance. The identified linguistic and symbolic patterns show that users actively construct meaning, using ideology and emotion to influence discourse and public opinion. This study contributes to the existing body of research on digital activism and social media discourse in conflict areas by shifting the focus from insurgency and protest to the less-examined issue of kidnapping. It also highlights how sites like X can be used for mobilisation and grieving and how they can frame national insecurity through ideological, symbolic, and emotional perspectives. The study urges scholars and decision-makers to closely examine the discursive and affective dimensions of digital reactions to insecurity.

Keywords: Discursive Strategies, Social Media Narratives, Kidnapping Narratives, Public Perception, Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

The surge in kidnappings across Nigeria has emerged as a significant national security concern that remains at the forefront of public debate and news coverage. Recent years have seen a rise in public outrage due to high-profile cases such as the 2014 abduction of the Chibok girls, the Greenfield University incident in 2021, and the mass kidnappings in Zamfara and Niger states during this timeframe. These incidents have prompted both domestic and international reactions. Conversations about the state's vulnerability to kidnappings have taken centre stage in both online and traditional spaces, highlighting growing government ineffectiveness. X (formerly Twitter) has become a crucial political discourse, resistance-building, and civic engagement platform. Users can actively shape the conversation with short comments, memes, images, and hashtags on X, as traditional gatekeeping is absent (Papacharissi, 2015). Following Elon Musk's takeover in 2023, the platform has continued to evolve, influencing content management practices that affect the rise of activism and public dialogue (Newton, 2023). Despite extensive studies on X's influence in insurgency, protests, and political communication (as noted by Jungherr et al. (2019) and Hansson et al. (2022)), few academic investigations focus on how Nigerians discuss kidnapping through discourse and visuals. Users on Nigerian Twitter express emotional responses through viral representations of these crises, blending linguistic and symbolic content. Discussions surrounding kidnapping acquire significant political and ideological meaning when authors employ emotional language, visual symbols, intertextual references, and satirical elements tweets. Although the public tools used by citizens to discuss their experiences regarding kidnappings are often overlooked in analyses that employ discourse and visual methods, they play a crucial role in fostering public awareness and stimulating policy debates on insecurity in Nigeria. Examining digital media communication tools enhances our understanding of their impact on kidnapping incidents and other security issues. This study explores the discursive strategies present in X's discussions about kidnapping. It aims to reveal how public narratives are created and contested and how X functions as a platform for digital activism and ideological debate. The study's objectives include:

1. To identify and analyse the discursive strategies used by Nigerian Twitter users in reaction to kidnapping incidents.
2. To investigate how memes, hashtags, and images influence public perception and emotional responses.
3. To examine how multimodal elements (memes, images, videos, emojis, and hashtags) reinforce or contest dominant narratives about kidnappings.

The following questions will guide the study:

1. What discursive strategies do Nigerian X users employ when discussing kidnappings?
2. How do memes, hashtags, and images affect public perception and emotional responses?

3. In what ways do multimodal elements (including images, memes, emojis, hashtags, and videos) support or challenge the prevailing narratives concerning kidnappings in Nigeria?

Theoretical Foundations of Discursive Strategies in Social Media

Discursive strategies are organised linguistic methods that enable individuals and groups to create meaning while shaping social dynamics and achieving their communication objectives. These strategies are crucial because they serve as direct methods of persuasion that engage power relations and facilitate identity negotiation (van Dijk, 1997). This study utilises Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's (1995) framework, which views discourse as a social practice that interacts with social structures. CDA's analytical approach clarifies how textual content reinforces power structures and challenges existing norms. In uncertain times, CDA uncovers how language can either safeguard or hold accountable state institutions. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model (2006) extends this framework by identifying the mental frameworks that influence text creation and interpretation, offering insights into the construction of sociological and cultural identity. The Discourse Historical Approach developed by Reisigl and Wodak in 2001 enhances this analysis by incorporating historical contexts, naming processes, and framing techniques to examine responsibility, trauma, and social action issues.

Given X's role as an interactive visual platform, this paper adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar theory. This approach analyses visual features such as gaze, composition, and colour as discursive elements that convey urgency, vulnerability, and authority (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The #BringBackOurGirls campaign in Nigeria, which prompted numerous studies by Orji (2015) and Egbunike and Olorunnisola (2015), illustrated how social media's visual aspects can unify global public empathy toward political objectives. This research explores the fusion of visual elements and linguistic features in kidnapping events, addressing the gap in this study area. In alignment with the models posited by Fairclough and van Dijk, this paper examines how discourse reflects and influences power dynamics, especially in online political discourse. However, it diverges from past studies that often focus on political elites or institutional figures by emphasising the voices of ordinary users and their varied expressions of trauma, critique, and resistance in the context of kidnapping. Moreover, it distinguishes itself by integrating visual grammar as a specific analytical framework for social media content, a dimension that has received limited attention in discourse analysis.

Social Media and Crisis Discourse

The rise of digital platforms, notably X (formerly Twitter), has significantly altered crisis communication. In areas like Nigeria, where mainstream media often reflect government views, X is a crucial alternative for questioning official narratives and elevating marginalised voices. Gerbaudo (2012) explores how platforms like Twitter are essential in voicing political issues, coordinating protests, and nurturing collective identity. Likewise, Chilwa (2012) applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine Nigerian digital platforms' ideological frameworks, resistance, and power dynamics, highlighting how language and discourse either challenge or

reinforce state power. Hemphill and Heston (2013) emphasise Twitter's role in shaping the public agenda during crises, while Chilwa and Adetunji (2013) show how pragmatic speech acts on the platform respond to terrorism through a blend of condemnation, ideological messaging, and calls for reform. Glozer et al. (2018) reveal how organisations strategically employ X to protect their reputations during crises, emphasising its importance in crisis communication.

Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) demonstrate that participatory journalism on X can provoke fear and resistance, highlighting its ability to mobilise public sentiment. Hansson et al. (2022) expand upon this by studying how X encourages grassroots political dialogue, especially in response to government shortcomings and during protests. Domínguez de la Rosa and Millán-Franco (2023) explore how users leverage logical, moral, and reputational arguments to challenge harmful content, while Shea et al. (2024) continue this examination by investigating the discursive tactics users employ in online conflicts. In Nigeria, Okonkwo, Yusuf, and Banjo (2024) recognise X as a crucial platform for contesting dominant narratives, particularly when traditional media fall short. Likewise, Olajimbati and Osisanwo (2024) analyse the discussions surrounding trafficking on X, showing how hashtags and multimedia features enhance engagement and enrich debates.

These studies highlight X's crucial role in digital resistance, building collective identity, and facilitating ideological discussions during crises. They demonstrate how X supports real-time communication, challenges dominant narratives, and shapes public perceptions, particularly concerning security issues. While previous research has focused on insurgency or general insecurity, this study introduces a new angle by investigating the discourse surrounding kidnapping, emphasising its emotional and ideological framing through multimodal expressions. It adds an important dimension to our understanding of how abduction narratives are formed, disputed, and disseminated within the digital realm.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) investigates how meaning is communicated through various semiotic modes, including text, images, emojis, videos, and layout (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In the dynamic realm of Nigerian Twitter, features such as hashtags, protest visuals, and emojis (like ❤️) along with videos showcasing victims or protests amplify the emotional and persuasive effects of tweets (Hansson et al., 2022). Olajimbati and Osisanwo (2024) emphasise the role of visual rhetoric in raising awareness about child trafficking, while Chilwa and Ajiboye (2022) note the skillful application of imagery in crisis discussions. Satirical memes and poignant images serve as powerful means for critique and empathy, respectively (Uduak, 2023). Hashtags including #SecureNorth, #EndSAR, and #BringBackOurGirls effectively combine text and visuals to garner support and expose government shortcomings (Awopetu & Chilwa, 2023; Ofori-Parku & Moscato, 2018; Akpojivi, 2019). Visual grammar significantly influences design choices; colour, font, and layout can profoundly affect our emotional responses and narrative framing (van Dijk, 2008).

There is a consensus in the literature that supports this study, especially regarding the persuasive and emotional strength of multimodal components such as memes, emojis, images, and hashtags.

This study recognises that these digital instruments can serve advocacy and resistance, aligning with the findings of Olajimbiti and Osisanwo (2024) and Chiluwa and Ajiboye (2022). However, it approaches the matter differently by merging linguistic and visual analysis within a unified framework related explicitly to the discourse of kidnapping. By examining elements like colour symbolism, typography, and emotional resonance, this study offers an enhanced semiotic interpretation often overlooked in prior analyses.

Public Discourse on Kidnapping in Nigeria

The dialogue regarding kidnapping in Nigeria, as portrayed in the media, showcases an intricate network of blame, victimhood, and public perception of the state. Nwaoboli, Asemah, and Ehigiator (2023) analyse how Nigerian newspapers cover cases of kidnapping, focusing on elements like frequency, visibility, and the framing of these narratives. Salisu (2023) notes that many leading news organisations often rely on official accounts and sensational headlines, which may hinder a deeper investigation into the crisis. Paul (2024) explores how media representations of victims can affect their psychological well-being and shape public sentiment. While sensational reporting may heighten awareness, it can also lead to increased fear or trivialise the severity of trauma.

These studies emphasise that media narratives are not merely informative; they significantly influence societal perceptions of issues, sway policy debates, and shape individual experiences. Understanding these narratives is essential for deciphering how public discourse surrounding kidnapping is created, disseminated, and discussed, particularly on interactive platforms like X. These analyses underscore the media's influence in crafting narratives, impacting public attitudes, and occasionally intensifying trauma or distributing blame. However, these investigations primarily target traditional media, such as newspapers and television. In contrast, this study redirects focus to social media, where narrative power is distributed among individuals, activists, and organisations. This marked shift unveils a democratised space for discussion, empowering users to actively generate, contest, and redefine meanings through their everyday online engagements.

Methodology

This paper utilises a qualitative discourse-analytic framework, incorporating methodologies from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). The combination of CDA and MDA establishes a robust methodological foundation for exploring how security-related narratives are constructed on social media. CDA aids in understanding textual and rhetorical strategies that reveal power dynamics and ideological perspectives, while MDA enhances the analysis by emphasising the diverse signs and symbols present in online content. Together, these methods yield a nuanced analysis that authentically captures the complexities of Twitter discussions regarding kidnappings in Nigeria. Twelve tweets were carefully chosen based on three criteria: their relevance to kidnapping incidents in Nigeria (using hashtags like #SecureNigeria, #EndKidnapping, and #NigeriaBleeds to gather pertinent content), the presence of textual or visual elements (or both), and the representation of varied viewpoints (including

government, activists, media, and institutions). This strategy allowed for a thorough exploration of discursive diversity and ideological framing. The selection of twelve tweets offers a balanced and sufficient dataset for an in-depth, nuanced examination of multimodal and linguistic strategies. This sample size manages to strike a balance between depth and breadth, ensuring analytical rigour. Additionally, all data used in this research comprised publicly available tweets. Usernames were partially anonymised when necessary to protect individual identities. The images presented were screenshots of publicly shared content, and no tweets were altered or taken out of context. Data analysis occurred in two phases, employing a qualitative framework. Initially, six textual tweets were analysed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on various discursive techniques such as nomination, predication, intensification, perspectivization, and legitimization. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model was applied to examine each tweet, emphasising its textual properties, discursive practices (including retweets and quotes), and social practices (like the attribution of blame or indication of solidarity). Furthermore, van Dijk's ideological square uncovered the underlying power relations, identity positioning, and distinctions between “Us” and “Them.” In the second phase, six multimodal tweets—incorporating images, posters, or memes—were analyzed via Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). The visual elements were evaluated for their symbolic value, emotional resonance, and framing effects. Key aspects considered included colour, composition, body language, text overlay, and visual metaphors. Hashtags were analysed for their intertextual connections and their role in narrative coherence. Both phases were guided by thematic interpretation, linking discursive and visual elements to the broader social backdrop of insecurity and digital activism in Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis consists of three distinct phases. The initial phase presents the data in text form and examines it through a discursive lens. The second phase examines the data from a multimodal discourse viewpoint. Finally, the third phase reviews the findings to address the research questions. The data presentation and analysis commence in the first phase, as outlined below.

Data Presentation One

This section presents the study's data and analyses it from a discursive perspective. The data is presented in the table below, which includes the Twitter handle source, the tweet content, its category, the discursive strategies and linguistic features utilised, and their interpretation.

| No | Twitter Handle / Source | Tweet Content | Category | Discursive Strategies Applied | Linguistic Features | Interpretation / Function |
|----|-------------------------|--|------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1 | @NGRPresident (Tinubu) | President Bola Tinubu @officialABAT has directed security agencies to rescue the | Governmental Discourse | <i>Nomination; Actor Description: Ideational Function</i> | Use of "heinous", "innocent victims", and "pursuit of | Frames the President as a protector, portrays kidnapping as ethically |

| | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | remaining female students... | | | quality education." | indefensible, and underscores education as an inherent right. |
| 2 | @NGRPresident | President Tinubu: We Must Treat Kidnappers as Terrorists. #StateHousePressRelease | Governmental Discourse | <i>Categorization; Us vs. Them Polarisation; Modality</i> | Use of the word "terrorists" – high modality and definitive stance | Associates kidnapping with terrorism; establishes a justification for stringent policy measures; reinforces governmental power. |
| 3 | @obyzezeks | Yesterday, I woke to the news of the abduction of over 300 schoolgirls... What have I not already said these 7 years? | Civil Society & Activist | <i>Intensification/ Mitigation; Presupposition; Interdiscursivity</i> | Personal voice, emotive language, rhetorical questions | Exhibit signs of advocacy fatigue; highlight the emotional impact and the need for consistent activism; calls for immediate action/urgent change. |
| 4 | @AmnestyNigeria | Amnesty International condemns the appalling abduction of 200... hold perpetrators to account. | Civil Society & Activist | <i>Predication Moral Evaluation; Ideational Function</i> | "Appalling", "hold perpetrators to account." | The framing of abduction as a human rights violation demands justice and state responsibility. |
| 5 | @SaharaReporters | DSS Tracking System Used To Shield Kidnappers... Soldiers Turn Checkpoints into Toll Booths | Critical Media | <i>Argumentation; Actor Description: Lexical Choice</i> | Accusatory tone, metaphor of "Toll Booths" | Accuses state agencies of corruption and complicity; challenges trust in national security. |
| 6 | @UN | Every student and teacher should feel safe... join UNESCO in stressing that schools should never be a target. | International Voice | <i>Nomination/ Predication; Global Framing; Intertextuality</i> | "Every student, never be a target" – universalising language | Positions education as a global right; frames kidnapping as a global issue needing solidarity. |

Table 1. Discursive Analysis

Data Presentation Two

This section captures the second phase of the data presentation. It introduces the images for study and subsequently analyses them using a Multimodal Discourse lens. The analysis, presented in tabular form, includes the image description, discursive strategies, linguistic features, multimodal elements, narrative roles, their interpretation, and the impact of public framing.



Image 1: Gunmen Kidnapped Dozens of Students

Image 1 depicts a child in chains, representing the kidnapping of numerous students in Kankara, Katsina State, during the night. The multimodal analysis is illustrated in Table 2, as presented below.

| Image Description | Discursive Strategies | Symbolic/Linguistic Features | Multimodal Element & Narrative Role | Function / Interpretation | Emotional / Public Framing Impact |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| Image of a crying, bloodied child in chains, set against a bold red background with the text “#END INSECURITY”. | Nomination (the child as a symbol of victimhood); Perspectivization (from the victim’s lens); Intensification (visual trauma); Protest framing | Chains = bondage; Blood = pain; Red = alarm/danger; Child = innocence; Text “#END INSECURITY” = protest slogan | The Image reinforces the narrative of state failure and insecurity, aligning with activist hashtags (#SecureNorth) | Highlights the emotional and physical cost of insecurity; critiques government inaction; mobilises visual resistance | Evokes horror, empathy, outrage; frames insecurity as a crisis demanding urgent attention |

Table 2: Multimodal Analysis of Image 1.



Image 2: Abduction of Students in Nigerian University

Image 2 features a human hand with five fingers and the inscription “end kidnapping” to illustrate Nigerians' desperate plea for the government to address the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria. The multimodal analysis is presented in Table 3 below, starting with the description of the image and its related discursive strategies. This is followed by the symbolic and linguistic features, multimodal discourse elements, their interpretation, function, and public framing.

| Image Description | Discursive Strategies | Symbolic/Linguistic Features | Multimodal Element & Narrative Role | Function / Interpretation | Emotional / Public Framing Impact |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|
| A yellow cracked wall background features a raised black hand holding a silhouette of a girl. The overlay text reads: “END KIDNAPPING #BringBackFugusGirls.” | Blame (toward FG, Defence Minister, Arewa elders); Perspectivization (victim-centred); Protest framing; Intensification (bold visuals) | Yellow = distress/urgency; Cracks = instability; Raised hand = resistance/protection; Girl silhouette = vulnerability; Bold black and red fonts = alarm and seriousness | The Image challenges state silence and reinforces public outrage, aligning with activist memory from past campaigns like #BringBackOur Girls | Calls for state accountability and community solidarity; visually demands justice and protection for kidnapped girls | Triggers sadness, urgency, collective anger; creates a protest-oriented frame rooted in digital resistance and historical memory. |

Table 3: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Image 2

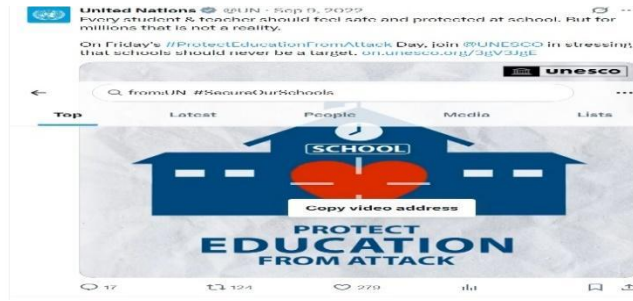


Image 3: Attack on Education in Nigeria

Image 3 showcases a school alongside the phrase “Protect Education from attack,” reflecting the United Nations' position on safeguarding all students and teachers in Nigerian schools. A multimodal analysis of this image is provided in Table 4, detailed below.

| Image Description | Discursive Strategies | Symbolic/Linguistic Features | Multimodal Element & Narrative Role (Reinforce or Challenge Kidnapping) | Function/ Interpretation | Emotional/Public Framing Impact |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| A tweet from the United Nations with no direct imagery of children or kidnappings. It features a plain background with text highlighting the UN’s concern about school kidnappings and a link to a full article. | Institutional ethos, international solidarity, and legitimisation through global authority. | Formal and empathetic tone; references to children and kidnapping as global issues; absence of emotional language creates an authoritative stance. | Absence of strong visual imagery downplays emotional immediacy, reinforcing institutional framing of the issue as systemic and policy-relevant rather than emotional. | Reinforces the role of the UN as a concerned observer and advocate; focuses attention on policy-level intervention and international cooperation. | May elicit a moderate emotional response (concern), but the lack of vivid imagery limits personal emotional connection; appeals more to rational engagement and policy advocacy. |

Table 4: Multimodal Analysis of Image 3.

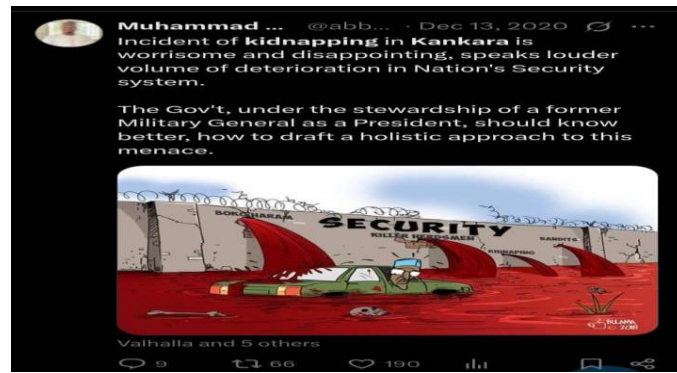


Image 4: Deterioration of the Nation's Security System

Image 4 illustrates the nation's security collapse through terms such as 'Boko Haram, security, killer herdsmen, and bandit' displayed on a fence, alongside a breakdown vehicle with a man inside who resembles former president Muhammadu Buhari. The multimodal analysis is detailed in Table 5, as shown below.

| Image Description | Discursive Strategies | Symbolic/Linguistic Features | Multimodal Elements & Narrative Roles | Function / Interpretation | Emotional / Public Framing Impact |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| A cartoon of a distressed leader (resembling then-President Buhari) sitting in a broken car on a blood-red path filled with bones and skulls. Behind him, a cracked wall labelled "SECURITY" is breached by sharks named Boko Haram, Herdsmen, Bandits, and Kidnappers. | Irony, Perspectivization; Delegitimation, Satirical Blame | Blood = death/violence; Skulls = casualties; Cracked wall = failed security; Sharks = uncontrollable threats; Stranded leader = helpless governance | The Image challenges the dominant narrative of state competence and security success; it dramatizes decay and failed leadership. | Serves as a political critique; frames leadership as overwhelmed and failing in its duty; invites reflection on the illusion of control. | Elicits fear, disgust, irony, and loss of confidence; frames kidnapping not as isolated but as part of a collapsed security architecture |

Table 5: Multimodal Analysis of Image 4.



Image 5: Presidency Orders Security Agencies to End Insecurity

Image 5 uses the portraits of the Nigerian army to reflect the Nigerian government's directive to all security agencies in the country to rescue the remaining female students who were kidnapped from Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State. The multimodal analysis is presented in Table 6 as shown below.

| Image Description | Discursive Strategies | Symbolic/ Linguistic Features | Multimodal Element & Narrative Role (Reinforce or Challenge Kidnapping) | Function/Interpretation | Emotional/Public Framing Impact |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| A silhouetted image of Nigerian security personnel stands beside an official presidential seal, used in a tweet announcing directives for a rescue mission. | Institutional authority, reassurance, and urgency. | Use of formal institutional language: "President Tinubu directs..."; presence of the presidential seal implies authenticity and command; Security terminologies ("rescue", "terrorists") | Reinforces the state's active role in combating kidnapping; positions the government as responsive and committed. | Projects an image of proactive leadership and institutional credibility; addresses public demands effectively; aimed at rebuilding public trust and conveying a message of proactive governance. | It creates a sense of state control and hope, although for sceptical audiences, it may evoke doubt about governmental efficacy, given a history of unfulfilled promises. |

Table 6: Multimodal Analysis of Image 5



Image 6: Kidnapping of a 5-Year-Old Baby

Image 6 depicts two women who were apprehended by law enforcement agents for selling a 5-year-old baby for 600,000 in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The multimodal analysis is presented in Table 7 below.

| Element | Discursive Strategies | Symbolic/ Linguistic Features | Multimodal Element & Narrative Role | Function/Interpretation | Emotional/Public Framing Impact |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Two women display a handwritten sign that reveals their names and the offence: "Child Stealing." | Public shaming and criminal exposure of two women accused of child kidnapping. | Barefoot posture, plain clothing, handwritten placard reading "CHILD STEALING". | Mimics police mugshot or "name and shame" template, often used in Nigeria. | Enacts informal justice through visual accountability. | Triggers community anger and fear, emphasises the vulnerability of children in society, and public judgment. |
| Text (Tweet Content) | Naming and blaming strategy. Highlights the perpetrators' actions and monetary motive. | Direct statement: "Kidnap and sell 5-year-old boy for N600, 000." Emphasizes the commodification of human life. | Text caption paired with visual strengthens factual and emotional narrative. | Emphasizes societal decay; implies motive tied to poverty or immorality. | Evokes moral shock, horror, and calls for justice. |
| Visual Format (Placard): Mimics a visual meme associated with Nigerian police "name and shame" tactics. | Visual rhetoric of exposure; social justice symbolism. | Handwritten signs reflect localized, informal policing or community justice methods. | Becomes part of a Nigerian "visual grammar" of crime accountability. | Acts as a cultural meme signaling accountability and moral degradation. | Creates symbolic justice and triggers public condemnation or solidarity with the victim. |

Table 7: Multimodal Analysis of Image 6

Discussion of Findings

This section examines twelve tweets and images, focusing on how discursive strategies, multimodal resources, and linguistic elements influence narratives about kidnapping in Nigeria. The analysis follows the structure of the three research questions. The first research question was, what discursive strategies do Nigerian Twitter users employ when discussing kidnappings? This paper identifies various discursive strategies evident in kidnapping tweets. The findings reveal that the tweets vary based on the involved actors (government, civil society, media, citizens, and international organisations), yet they all highlight the politicisation, emotional weight, and ideological framing of kidnapping. The analysis relies on frameworks established by Reisigl & Wodak (2001), Fairclough (1995, 2003), and van Dijk (2006). A key discursive strategy noted is nomination, where victims are referred to with collective and empathetic expressions like “our girls” or “our children.” This choice fosters an emotional connection and reinforces a shared national identity. Furthermore, predication labels perpetrators with morally charged terms such as “criminals,” “terrorists,” or “bandits.” Likewise, government representatives are characterised as either negligent or decisive, depending on the speaker's perspective. The techniques of intensification and mitigation amplify emotional responses using words such as “barbaric,” “horrific,” and “trauma,” particularly in tweets from activists or eyewitnesses. In contrast, official communications generally employ more neutral language to moderate public response. The strategy of perspectivization is evident in the frequent use of first-person plural pronouns like “we” and “our children,” which cultivates a collective voice and moral standpoint, especially in civil society narratives. Lastly, justification and legitimization appear as government-related tweets aim to substantiate institutional actions through formal language. Meanwhile, counter-narratives from activists and concerned citizens underline perceived failures, silence, or inefficiencies in the state's reactions. Fairclough's (1995) dimensions demonstrate that tweets operate on multiple levels. The textual level reveals concise tweets that use emotionally impactful language and well-selected hashtags. The discursive practice aspect is illustrated through retweets, quotations, and the strategic use of intertextual hashtags (such as #SecureNorth and #BringBackFugusGirls). The social practice dimension shows how these discourses either uphold or challenge state legitimacy, contributing to broader narratives about national identity and political accountability. Additionally, van Dijk's (2006) ideological square showcases an ongoing “us – versus – them” narrative, placing victims, activists, and concerned citizens (“Us”) against kidnappers and, at times, the state itself (“Them”) when its responses are viewed as inadequate or complicit. These strategies highlight how digital discourse on Twitter is used to address issues of responsibility, morality, and legitimacy within the context of Nigeria's ongoing insecurity.

The second research question explored how memes, hashtags, and images influence public perception and emotional responses. Multimodal elements, including images, memes, hashtags, and visual content, significantly shape emotional narratives and enhance public sentiment. In Table 2 (Image of a Chained Boy), children are portrayed as vulnerable victims, symbolising the state's broader failure to safeguard them. This image evokes intense outrage and compassion, creating a powerful visual narrative of helplessness that goes beyond textual limitations. Building on this

emotional impact, Table 3 (Protest Poster with Hashtags) enriches collective memory by intentionally featuring hashtags like #BringBackOurGirls and #KurigaMassAbduction. By visually linking current and historical tragedies, it situates the event within a framework of ongoing national trauma, revitalising the conversation around protests and strengthening civic resistance. Moving to Table 4 (UN-Branded Image), the focus expands from a national to a global perspective, depicting kidnapping as a humanitarian crisis. The institutional imagery fosters empathy and urgency while subtly critiquing state inadequacies, demonstrating how visual discourse can cross national boundaries and universalize local suffering. Conversely, Table 5 (Security Cartoon) uses satire to critique leadership. The exaggerated visuals, lacking hashtags, resemble meme-like images highlighting insecurity and inciting public scepticism. This image generates fear and distrust, showing how irony and exaggeration amplify public sentiment.

Table 6 (Government Press Release Graphic) adopts a formal tone to instill a sense of control and order. However, frequently using such visuals could lead to emotional fatigue and increasing scepticism, which may diminish their symbolic impact over time. Meanwhile, Table 7 (Female Suspects with Placards) introduces more complexity by illustrating themes of guilt and accountability. While it provokes outrage, it also raises ethical concerns about public shaming and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, resulting in public interpretations filled with moral and emotional implications. From this, memes, hashtags, and images emerge as powerful emotional triggers that frame kidnapping incidents as systemic failures, urgent crises, or acts of justice. They humanise the crisis, foster empathy, and inspire collective action. Their spread emphasises the emotional nuances of online activism and the ongoing contest over truth and accountability.

The third research question was: How do multimodal elements (including images, memes, emojis, and hashtags) uphold or challenge the dominant narratives surrounding kidnappings in Nigeria? Analysis of the multimodal data presented in Tables 2 to 7 reveals that various stakeholders utilise images, hashtags, and memes to both affirm existing narratives, such as the failure of the state and the victimisation of citizens, and to contest or reinterpret dominant perspectives, particularly those related to official state responses.

Table 2 – Image of a Chained Boy (Victimhood and Vulnerability) – underscores the ongoing narrative of state neglect by depicting the abducted child as the ultimate victim of a dangerous society. The visual metaphor of captivity and despair highlights the lack of protection for citizens, particularly children, which increases distrust in state security measures. This multimodal element strengthens public sentiment that kidnapping is a systemic problem that could be averted if institutions operated effectively. Building on this emotional resonance, Table 3 – Protest Poster with Hashtags (#BringBackOurGirls, #KurigaMassAbduction) – amplifies the activist narrative of national mourning and protest. The hashtags connect current events to historical tragedies like the Chibok abductions, embedding this moment within the collective national awareness. The Image actively challenges governmental silence and positions social media as an essential platform for truth and solidarity.

Extending this narrative to a global context, Table 4 – UN- Branded Image and Caption ("Bring them home safe") – reinforces a humanitarian view, depicting kidnapped children as universally deserving of protection. While affirming their innocence, the Image implicitly criticises national leadership by emphasising the need for international oversight, recontextualising a local security issue as a shared moral responsibility. Turning to satire, Table 5 – Cartoon Image – critiques official state narratives through visual metaphor. The fractured "SECURITY" wall and the of sharks labelled "Kidnapping," "Bandits," and "Boko Haram" suggest a beleaguered state grappling with ineffective governance. The imagery, powerful even without hashtags, employs irony to amplify criticism and foster scepticism about government effectiveness.

Table 6 – Official Press Announcement Graphic – utilises high-end graphics and military imagery to bolster state authority. It may convey a sense of control and attentiveness, though its impact could weaken if frequently used in similar contexts. To sceptics, such visuals may symbolise weak governance instead of genuine intervention. Furthermore, Table 7 – Female Suspects with Placards – introduces a moral and cultural aspect, portraying suspects in a public shaming context that aligns with local justice traditions. While advocating for community safety and a stance against crime, it also raises ethical concerns about due process and gender representation. This visual could be interpreted as a mechanism for ensuring accountability for some, while it risks undermining the state's moral authority by transforming justice into a spectacle for others. Thus, multimodal elements function as arenas for discursive conflict, shaping public beliefs, emotions, and actions.

Conclusion

This paper explored how Nigerian X users utilise discursive and multimodal strategies to create meaning regarding kidnapping incidents. The findings indicate that tweets serve as venues for emotional expression, political critique, advocacy, and collective identity formation. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis with Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this study enhances our comprehension of how digital narratives influence public discourse, either reinforcing or challenging authority and galvanizing sentiments related to national security. However, limitations were observed while conducting this study. The paper is qualitative research primarily focused on tweets about kidnapping discourse. Studies could benefit from incorporating quantitative measures of audience engagement or emotional response, especially using longitudinal or cross-sectional analysis. Further research could explore and focus on conducting longitudinal and comparative studies that analyse discourses surrounding kidnapping across various social media platforms, geopolitical settings, and during different crisis periods. This approach will provide a deeper understanding of changing discursive patterns and public perceptions. Furthermore, future research could investigate audience reception and interpretation of these multimodal narratives, particularly examining how different demographic groups (such as youth, women, and rural communities) perceive and emotionally react to content related to kidnapping. Another valuable area of exploration is the relationship between digital activism and linguistic expression, analyzing how users on digital platforms express solidarity, resistance, or indifference through their language choices and the features of the platforms they use. Interdisciplinary methods that combine critical discourse analysis with media studies, psychology, and digital humanities would enhance our

understanding of the interactions between platform design, narrative agency, and emotional engagement among the public.

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