A Multimodal Discourse Study of Visual Images in Select Online News Discourse on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

This multimodal discourse study examines visual images in selected online news discourse on the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria to identify the various meanings which the images have been used to communicate. Two online newspapers, namely, *Vanguard* and *Business Day* served as the sources of data. Drawing insights from Kress & Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory, ten images (five from each newspaper) were purposively sampled and subjected to critical analysis using four key components (participants, representation, interaction and composition) of the theory. The results showed that the analyzed visual images are representative of the major presidential candidates' political, religious, and cultural affiliations; voters' religious and cultural orientation; voters' patience and tenacity in exercising their right to vote; the inadequate electoral system; the serenity and tranquility observed in certain polling locations; the presence of military personnel; and the millions of naira lost during election. Furthermore, the visual depictions explicitly summarized what was stated in writing and speaking. The findings corroborate the visual grammar theory and underline the importance of visual images as semiotic resources in transmitting various meanings.

Keywords: Elections, Multimodality, News Discourse, Visual Images, Visual Grammar

Introduction

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (henceforth, MDA) is a linguistic approach that employs many modes of communication to generate meaning. It is a method of discourse analysis that examines how people interact to create semiotic meaning through nonverbal cues in addition to spoken language. Many communication modes are used to campaign, educate electorates, and conduct elections. Mefsin (2008) postulates that elections are an important and noticeable way for all citizens to democratically choose or remove their leaders. Speaking further, he adds that elections are the fundamental building blocks of any democratic political system. Ojo (2017: 5) opines that elections are a voting process used to select candidates for specific positions. He distinguishes between two main categories of elections: direct elections, which are straightforward processes in which voters choose

their representatives by casting ballots for the candidates they support, and indirect elections, in which voters choose an intermediary body rather than their representative directly. The 2023 general election in Nigeria is a reflection of the direct election process identified above.

Kiani and Sarpiti (2016) note that the functions of election include: legitimizing the authority of individuals who vote, creating political stability, regulating and ensuring a seamless transition of power, selecting leaders and/or representatives, and limiting and controlling political power. To corroborate this view, Kuhne (2010) states that for an election to be successful, an electoral system must be established and implemented in the country and there must be a procedure of voter registration in which eligible citizens of the country are registered and given the right to vote. Also, administrative and communication infrastructure must be in place to ensure a smooth running of the whole election process. This should be complemented with a secure environment for the conduct of the election and a good justice and police system to address cases of fraud, abuses and other legal issues that may arise during the election process.

The most recent election conducted in Nigeria was the 2023 general elections which has left many issues for discourse at various levels. One of the issues that emanated from the conduct of the elections was the delay in the commencement of the voting process where indices shared by experts and observers such as YIAGA Africa indicated that merely 41% of the polling units in the country actually commenced the voting process before 9:30am on the 25th of February when the election was held (Nwokike, Ezeneme, & Ndidiamaka, 2023). Another major issue observed by these scholars from the electoral process was that of electoral violence. They identified several incidences of violence during the 2023 general elections in states like Imo, Kano, Bayelsa, Kogi, Edo, Ondo, Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Ebonyi, etc. These incidences of violence did not stop on the election days but even extended after the election as they observed cases of thugs disrupting the result collation process in Plateau, Lagos, and Ebonyi, etc.

In an attempt to report events before, during and after any election, photojournalists capture images that are instrumental to the masses' understanding of the entire process. This study, therefore, from a multimodal modal discourse perspective, examines selected Nigeria online news discourses for the visual images used during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Drawing insights from Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory, the study seeks to identify the various meanings which the selected visual images have been used to communicate. This is intending to establish the relevance of visual images in online news discourses.

Conceptual Framework

MDA is a fairly recent and rapidly expanding field of research that started in the

early 1990s. It is an approach that examines how texts use images, sounds, photographs, and videos in addition to words to convey meaning. Bi (2019) views MDA as the analysis of different symbolic modes within a text. MDA is widely employed in a variety of fields of study, including literature, art, and classroom instruction. Sunday (2022) notes that the rapid advancement of technology has altered the manner in which information and communication are disseminated. The interactions between and among the various modes (including text, colour, and images) are rapidly redefining language in today's society. This is due to the fact that, as noted by Edubirdie (2022), humans communicate by a variety of means, including speaking, writing, drawing, sign languages, facial expressions, and more, in order to convey information, thoughts, feelings, and more ideas. An advertisement on MDA, for example, will take into account the design of the advertisement as well as how semiotic devices like color, framing, focus, and element placement help to create meaning in the advertisement. It takes into account multiple modes of communication and how they interact with one another. *Kress' view reflects the ability of pictures to effectively summarize a lengthy essay into a short but all-encompassing mode. The objects, colours and texts play diverse roles that sum up to a beautiful message which can only be expressed through a multimodal analysis.* Kyriakidis & Koikas (2022) affirm this view when they note that language semantics can best be taught through MDA. This is because text, images, gestures and colours play distinct but complimentary roles that make communication extremely effective, if properly used. As an emergent paradigm in discourse studies, MDA, according to O'Halloran (2011), expands the study of language to include the study of language in conjunction with additional resources such visuals, gesture, action, music, and sound. It can be applied to different modes such as visual images, signs and news discourse amongst others.

News discourse is an approach to the study of news contents. The term was formed by Teun van Dijk who consistently explored the construction of news text and the processing strategies (van Dijk, 1985). As an approach, news discourse views news stories as an intricate conversational activity and studies such stories from the social context. Also, it examines the properties of texts such as the thematic structure, actors, the ideas expressed in them as well as the participants, the production, reception processes and the probable effects. Bednarek & Caple (2012) view news discourse as the kind of discourse we encounter when we turn on the television, switch on the radio, open the newspaper or go online in order to obtain information about the happenings in the society. Rubing & Sandaran (2023) avers that it is an effective way to disseminate the ideologies of the journalists who wrote the news discourse by using various language strategies. van Dijk (1985: 70) notes that news discourse is an outcome of the social and professional practices that journalist abide by in conventional settings and an essential requisite for the efficient mental processing of news texts by both journalists and readers. To this end, its objective is to examine text and context. Xie (2018) opines that news discourse is a significant aspect

of linguistic study that employ formal and objective language. He adds that it consists of ideological contents which are concealed behind the language used which is why such contents are often misconstrued by the public. It is important to state that new discourse shapes perceptions, creates identities and influences attitudes. As a form of public discourse, news reports and conditions readers to develop specific social, political, cultural and economic frameworks that help them interpret societal events. As Lai (2019) states, language use as meaning-making suggests that news discourse needs to be considered as multi-layered. From the forgoing, news is an important aspect of discourse. It expresses happenings in the society, presents ideologies and feelings of the developers of such discourses and, in some cases, may be bias. News discourse does not just consider what is written by a journalist, but also considers contexts and how this is expressed through many modes such as texts, and visual images amongst others.

The term "visual image" refers to the graphics seen in photographs, pictures, films, or videos, whether developed or undeveloped. It includes any digital or computer image created or communicated by any means, including streaming media, even if not permanently stored. These images, according to Elmiana (2019), are particularly effective in teaching since they are frequently used as learning and teaching aids, such as in presentations and training guides. Sprague (2022) states that visual images can convey a thousand words, but complementary text can improve the substance and strengthen the coherence of designs. Visuals assist in memory retention. This elucidates why every company has a little graphic, called a logo, to represent their brand. Visual images possess the capacity to instantly identify a brand, the feelings that go along with it, and occasionally even its ideals. They aid in the visualization of a narrative and improve consumers' comprehension of the product as a whole. As we have already established, visual images are excellent. However, an excessive number of images with little textual support can occasionally obscure and even change the intended message. Types of visual images include digital and printed images, photography, graphic design, videos, animation, and more. Visual contents are regularly displayed on billboards, posters, televisions, computers, in textbooks and newspapers and a variety of other mediums. It is important to stress that visual images are important in advertising, art, communication, education, business, and engineering. The current study focuses on visual images in electronic newspapers.

Newspaper images are the visuals found in newspapers. They accompany news stories to capture what might have been skipped by words in the story. The images on newspaper pages increases public interest greatly and draw readers' attention to contemporary events. The images are employed primarily for advertising and to supplement news stories. Without these images on newspapers pages, the material would be boring and unappealing (Oparaugo, 2021). This stresses the relevance of images to newspapers and consequently to human existence in general. As images in themselves

contain adequate meanings, they entice people and motivate them to read in a bit to satisfy their curiosity. Adeboye (2021) is of the view that photography is the modern visual culture of a universal language, which is believed to be capable of sometimes standing on its own without necessarily depending on texts of any kind. He states further that photojournalism now stands at the frontier of using the power of photography to bring the unknown to the limelight. This article focuses on the communicative functions of visual images. It argues that images are not restricted by language barriers. Being a universal language, images are read by people of diverse backgrounds and interpreted without any linguistic restrictions.

Review of Literature

Studies on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria have been conducted from different perspectives. First, Olabanjo, Wusu, Afisi, Asokere, Padonu, Olabanjo, & Mazzara (2023) investigated tweets connected to the three main presidential contenders in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election to determine the power of social media and how it has been utilized to influence elections and electoral institutions in Nigeria. The study used a variety of theoretical models to categorize tweets as positive, neutral, or negative. The results of the exploratory data analysis indicated that Alhaji Atiku Abubarkar of the PDP focused more on local networks and conferences. Mr. Peter Obi of the LP recently identified Twitter as a possible medium of manifesto and tapped into it. Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the APC operated an active Twitter network, which contributed to the spread of his campaign strategies. The study also found that, while Twitter is an excellent platform for political debate and discussion, it is controlled by a very small percentage of the population. The study suggests that opinion from Twitter can be used as a broad basis for developing insights and simulating elections.

Abubakar and Olatunji-Ohwovoriole (2023) explored the media engagement methods utilized by the three major presidential candidates during the 2023 general election media debate. The study employed insights from Appraisal theory in examining the language used by the candidates in negotiating their interpersonal stance and convincing the listeners. The data was obtained from the interviews conducted by the Nigerian Economy Summit Group on January 13th and 16th, 2023. The study used a descriptive survey method to identify the candidates' engagement tactics for evaluating Nigeria's economic status and other topics. The findings indicated that the candidates used a variety of engagement tactics, including proclaiming, denying, and describing appraisal items. The study emphasized the significance of politicians utilizing suitable language and communication tactics to effectively engage the public during media conversation.

Ijeh and Abimbola (2023) examined the Nigerian 2023 general elections to assess the constraints of voter education and how the mass media could be used to educate voters on the elections. The study employed the Agenda Setting Theory as theoretical framework.

The findings showed that voter education by the mass media was hampered by an elitist attitude of the media, apathy toward political matters, and distrust of politicians. Furthermore, it demonstrated how the media successfully focused public attention to relevant election-related problems in order to increase participation in the 2023 general elections through voter education content. The study argued that the media must collaborate with INEC and government public education institutions to spark public debate on election issues and aid members of the public in obtaining up-to-date information by giving required facts, analyses, examples, and demonstrations.

Salahu (2023) investigated how Nigeria's two main religions, Islam and Christianity, influenced the results of the 2023 presidential election. The study used quantitative and qualitative methods in addition to critical analysis to analyze data obtained from the Independent National Commission. The purpose of this was to ascertain the outcome of the presidential election in relation to the three candidates' strongholds within the country's two major faiths. The results showed that the two main religions had a significant influence on the outcome of the 2023 presidential election. Therefore, the study submitted that, among other problems plaguing the nation as a whole, religion plays a major role in influencing the results of elections in Nigeria. Additionally, the study argued that, in order for the country to prosper, democracy must be elevated above religion.

Nwaoboli and Ajibulu (2023) studied the frames and tones that the *Vanguard* online newspaper utilized in reporting the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The study analyzed 136 news reports using content analysis. Results showed that the *Vanguard* online newspaper reported the campaign issues to the public mostly by using the attack tone and frame technique.

Iseolorunkanmi, Olanrewaju, Oduola, Nweke-Love, Kodi & Akinojo (2023) made a concerted effort to explore the influence of social media in changing public opinion, voter mobilization, and candidate campaigns in Omu Aran, a town in Kwara State, during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The purpose was to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of social media in political communication in Omu Aran during the elections. The study employed the agenda setting theory in analysing the data gathered from both primary and secondary sources. This was supplemented by the distribution of questionnaires to targeted participants. The findings demonstrated that voter education programs supported by the media contributed to enhanced election literacy, increased voter turnout, and reduced invalid ballots.

A critical evaluation of the above-mentioned studies indicates that the 2023 general elections in Nigeria has been studied from different perspectives using different theoretical approaches. This study differs from the abovementioned studies in that, from a multimodal discourse perspective, it investigates select visual images on the 2023 general elections from two prominent Nigeria online newspapers, drawing insights from Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory.

Theoretical Framework

Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory describes a social-semiotic resource of a specific group, along with the group's explicit and implicit knowledge about it and how it is used in its practices. It does this while keeping in mind the rules that govern this type of culturally specific visual communication. The visual components are referred to as participants. Therefore, visual texts frequently include interactive participants sourced from picture-makers and image-viewers as well as participants drawn from all individuals, events, objects, and other items seen in the image. The image is created by the image-maker, and viewed by the image-viewer (Moerdisuroso, 2014).

The visual grammar model has its foundation on Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which shows that visuals, like other semiotic modes, can realize ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions through representation, interaction, and composition, respectively. Kress and Leeuwen's visual grammar demonstrate that the three Hallidayan meta-functions of language can be applied to visual designs. In order to give meaning to visual features, ideational (representation patterns), interpersonal (patterns of interaction), and textual (representation and communication acts) components work in tandem. According to Royce (2013), these elements are visual features with semantic properties. The visual designers can utilize a range of visual strategies to achieve these semantic attributes or meanings.

The components of the theory that are pertinent to this investigation are participants, representation, interaction, and composition. Participants are the visible elements in an image discourse. According to Moerdisuroso (2014), participants include all persons, events, objects, and other forms that occur in the image. Representation refers to how a picture is formed as a result of experiences. This concept of representation is related to Halliday's ideational meta-function, which deals with language as a representation and mirror of human experience (Ode, 2018: p.6). According to Banks (2002), the ideational meta-function is the part of meaning that deals with how external reality is represented in the text. The term "interaction" relates to the description of the relationship between an image marker, an image representation, and a reader. Contact, attitude, distance, and modality are the aspects included in the interactive meaning. The composition is inspired by Halliday's textual metafunction. The textual metafunction, according to Matthiessen and Halliday (1997), generates resources for expressing interpersonal and ideational meanings as information arranged into text that can be continuously exchanged between speaker and listener.

Data and Methods

Images from two national dailies, namely, *Vanguard* and *Business Day*, served as the source of data for this study. Ten (10) images, five from each daily, were

purposively selected from the two dailies which reported the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The choice of both dailies for this study is hinged on the study's objective which is to establish the communicative imports of the visual images in relation to the election. The visual images used for the study were selected from different editions of *Vanguard* and *Business Day* online news discourse. A qualitative research design complemented by Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory was used for the investigation. The selected images were subjected to critical examination using the visual grammar theory components of participants, representations, interactions, and composition. The participants, objects, and colors in the images were used to interpret the images. Each image is presented and discussed independently based on what it represents. The image compositions, as well as the texts that accompany them, are seen as key meaning-making agents in the study. For the sake of clarity, each image is numbered sequentially from Figure 1 to Figure 10.

Textual Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The images sourced from *Vanguard* and *Business Day* are analyzed using visual grammar theory in this section. The objective is to establish the multiple meanings which the visual images have been used to communicate. To this end, the analysis will determine the participants, composition, interaction, and picture representation. The first image to be examined is sourced from *Vanguard* online newspaper published on the 27th of February 2023.

Figure 1: Major candidates of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria

The image above contains seven participants which jointly convey multiple meanings. This correlates with the conception of MDA that images summarize what would have been expressed longer by words. The seven participants are divided into humans and objects. Four of the participants are humans while the other three are objects. The human

participants are Mr. Peter Obi, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and Alhaji Rabiu Kwankwaso. The representation of these participants from the background enables one to infer that the image is a political discourse. Without any written text, representation suggests that the participants are from diverse backgrounds with each containing a different background colour emphasizing their diversity and regions. Mr. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, hails from the eastern part of Nigeria. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the Peoples' Democratic Party, hails from the northern part of Nigeria. Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu is from the western part of Nigeria and the presidential candidate of the All Progressive Congress. Alhaji Rabiu Kwankwanso, the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria People's Party, is from the northern part of Nigeria. The distance between these candidates denotes the two major divisions in the country namely, the south and north. Observe that the distance between Mr. Peter Obi and Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu is proximal. Such proximity is suggestive of the southern region which both candidates emanate from. However, the proximity between Alhaji Atiku Abubarkar and Alhaji Rabiu Kwankwanso is indicative that both candidates emanate from the northern part of the country. The second group of participants (that is, the objects) are three in number. The first object is the ballot box; the second is the ballot paper and the third is the colour. Visual grammar's representation helps us to understand that the image denotes an election. The colours on the ballot box which are green and white which suggest the place and country where the election is taking place (Nigeria). On composition, the colours in the background are indicative of the political affiliations of the human participants who are from different political affiliations. The position of the ballot box and paper is also important. They signify the vote casting process of sliding ballot papers into ballot boxes, which is why the paper is captured half into the box. The central position of the ballot box suggests how politicians of diverse cultures and political backgrounds tussle for the highest political office in the nation. On interaction, the photojournalist interacts with the image viewer in the image above. While the photographer explains all that is contained, the viewer of the image which in the case of discourse becomes an addressee is engaged actively in reflecting the image based on facts from the interaction visible in the image. Overall, the photojournalist employs the picture to capture the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, the race for who becomes the nation's next president and the major contenders in the election.

The second image that follows is sourced from *Vanguard* online newspaper published on February 25th 2023. It captures the multiple meanings which the images have been used to communicate:

Voting has started at unit EC 30c on 22 Road,
Festac town, Lagos at 9.26am

Figure 2: Voting in progress during the 2023 presidential election

The image above comprises many participants all collectively leading to meaning generation in the text. As postulated by visual grammar, the participants include humans, objects and a text. The human participants are grouped into three categories: first is the security operative, second is the electorates and the third category is that of the electoral officials. The representation is interpreted as the electoral process in Nigeria. While some electorates are witnessed casting their votes (e.g., the woman in blue and red and the man in black trousers and ash shirt), others are seen patiently waiting to exercise their franchise. The practice of voters waiting for a long period of time to exercise their franchise suggests the slow and tedious nature of the voting process in Nigeria which most times extend into the night. The presence of security agents seated on a wooden bench represents the security of the electorates as well as that of the votes cast. The sitting of the officers also suggests that they are not on ground to intimidate voters but rather to ensure their safety. On composition, the image reveals that the Nigeria's electoral process is still evolving. This is exemplified by the facilities used in the election and some of the electorates who had to stand in the hot sun for a long period before casting their votes. The security personnel, the electorates and the officials, all signify the essential elements of an election. In interaction, the photographer explains to the image viewer the state of activities at the polling unit on election day. The objects seen in the image include a tree, ballot boxes, a building, a bench and voting stand among others. The presence of these objects represents the electoral process or situation. The objects are employed according to visual grammar to depict the election. Elections are conducted under trees and the welfare of the electorates, officials and operatives are neglected. The third category of participants (the text) as presented summarizes the activities of the other participants in the image. The photojournalist employs this picture to portray an atmosphere of peace, calm and orderliness in the location where this election is holding. This goes to indicate that things appear to be going smoothly as the security operatives who were assigned to maintain peace and order have no work to

do and are sitting and relaxing.

The third image below is sourced from *Vanguard* online newspaper published on the 25th of February, 2023. Just like the previous two images examined, this image is equally employed by the photojournalist to convey a multi-layered meaning:

Accreditation and voting has commenced by 9am at Polling unit Kidang III, Marama/Kidang ward, Hawul LGA in Borno state.

Figure 3: Voters on the queues waiting to exercise their franchise

The third image as captured above has several participants related to those in figure 2. The image is however represented in a different background. The dresses of the people, male and female suggest the religious orientation of the participants. In the composition, the participants are lined in two separate queues implying the differentiation between genders emphasised probably by the religion of the voters. The electorates here are voting under the sun which affirms their endurance or their loyalty to the candidates of their choices. Though, there is no sight of any electoral material or official, the third participant, the "text" represents the situation and composition of the picture. The place, time and activity all make up the textual Metafunction or Composition represented by the image. Despite the insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria, voters still are determined to exercise their rights to vote. In interaction, the photographer who in this case is the narrator explains to the image viewer what the situation is in Marama in Borno State. The invisibility of electoral materials and officials in the above image raises many concerns coupled with the invisibility of any officers. Without the text, there is no other participant in the image that interacts with the reader and explains the event. This raises a great concern as to the credibility of the result from that unit. Could it be that the officials are in the building or at the corridor? The image, however, reveals the political zeal expressed by women and indeed all adults in the Northern part of Nigeria. The fourth image below is sourced from *Vanguard* online newspaper published on the 25th of February 2023.

Figure 4: Voters on the queue waiting to exercise their franchise

The various participants in the above image are humans, buildings and texts. The participants are represented as electorates who have queued up patiently to vote for their preferred candidates. The visual composition of these human participants speak typically of the situation that is obtainable at polling units where some persons vote and others hang around to gist or probably wait till the end to witness the voting processes at the units. The second category of participants in the image is objects. The colours of the building and the field jointly suggest that the election is taking place at a school. Closely related to figure 3, there is no evidence of voting in terms of materials and officials visibly present. The third participant (the text) represents the situation and summarizes the activities ongoing. The visual composition of the image suggests less political interest and determination by the people in the community in contrast with the composition in figure 3. Thus, strongly suggesting a stronger political participation in the North compared to the East. The image interacts with the viewer. While it captures the situation at the polling units, it explains to the viewer also that the voters here are from different backgrounds with different religious backings from figure 3. Both male and female voters are on the same queue. The dress of the female voters explains that they are not Muslims. Also important in the composition is the scanty nature of the participants in the image which suggests political apathy. This suggests why there are fewer figures from the East compared to the North.

The fifth image below is sourced from *Vanguard* online newspaper published on the 25th of February 2023. The multiple meanings conveyed through the image is discussed thus:

Journalists at Ward C 085, polling unit, Alausa, where Tinubu will be voting, awaiting arrival of INEC officials

Figure 5: Journalists on duty covering the 2023 presidential election

The many participants in the fifth image sums up to make meaning from the text. The various participants are categorized as humans, objects and text. The personalities of the human participants are represented by the objects in front of the camera which reveals that they are journalists. The composition is indicative that the participants are ready for their job. It equally suggests that the electoral process is open and accessible to everyone. The second participant in the image (the camera) represents photojournalism. The text which is the third participant presents an insight into the situation at hand which suggests that the photo journalists are actually at the location for the purpose of capturing the happenings at the polling unit. The composition helps us to understand that the journalists are likely the first to arrive the polling unit. In contrast with other figures presented so far, figure 5 is the only figure that has journalists. This explains the composition of the text on the fact that one of the top contenders for the position of the president will be voting at this polling unit. The serenity of the environment equally is a composition of the image. Without any officials or security agents, the heavy presence of journalists interacts with the viewer and explains how key political actors are celebrated. Also, the politicians vote in serene environment while other electorates are left in underdeveloped areas and have to stay under the sun.

The sixth image below is sourced from *Business Day* online newspapers published on the 1st of March 2023.

Figure 6: Armoured vehicle stationed at a strategic location

The above image captures numerous participants, some of which may be difficult to clearly identify. However, all the participants are objects. The representation of the principal participant in the image (the armoured vehicle) underscores the presence of security personnel witnessed in some parts of the country during the elections. The composition of the image which is the deserted street manned by the principal participant represents the restriction of movement and activities on the days of election in the country. According to Visual Grammar's interaction, the image has informed the viewer that on the day of election, streets are shut and manned by heavy security personnel and gadgets. During elections, movement is restricted until voting in all locations are completed. This is exemplified in the image above as no human participant is sighted on the street. The photo journalist uses the above image to depict the restriction of movement that is mostly characteristic of elections in Nigeria and other African countries where millions of naira are lost owing to the nation's shutting down of all markets/businesses on this day.

The seventh image below is sourced from *Business Day* online newspapers published on the 1st of March 2023.

Figure 7: Campaign of one of the major presidential candidates

Using the Visual Grammar approach to MDA, the participants in the text above are numerous. They can be grouped into humans and objects. The representation is indicative of the campaign organised by Mr. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party. The composition which reflects the textual Metafunction presents the masses' complete support for Peter Obi. The joy and smiles on some of the faces of the participants reveal a hope and positivism expressed by them. The object participants in the text represents the simplicity of the candidate and his love for the people. As seen in the composition (cars, pedestrian bridge and traffic lights), the rally is held on the road in an open area. This pre-election image suggests that the candidate has high prospects in the elections. In the interaction of visual grammar, the image expresses to the reader the Nigerian citizens yearnings for a change of government which is reflected in the massive support accorded to the Labour Party candidate, Mr. Peter Obi during the presidential election.

The eighth image below is sourced from *Business Day* online newspaper published on the 1st of March 2023.

Figure 8: Voters and supporters discussing the ongoing presidential election

The text above (image) consists of participants which are humans and objects (the road, signage and buildings). The participants are a representation of the determination, and unwavering support from electorates enjoyed by the politicians. This is prevalent in the attitude of the participants as expressed in the interaction. The human participants as seen in the image seem to have waited for hours but did not return to their homes. They rather engage themselves in group discussions as they wait patiently, probably for results to be counted, the arrival of a candidate or the commencement of the voting process. The other participant (the objects) is a representation of the season or period of the event in the absent of any particular activity in the image. The composition of the image is that all important aspect that helps us to understand the discourse in the absence of any written text. The roads are deserted, the signage which can be seen from the back represents the bank premises. The direction the humans are facing signals that the bank is closed. Deductively, the electorates have gathered and are waiting for the purpose of the election. The road is completely deserted of vehicles which tallies with figure 7 where all other businesses are closed and movement restricted with all attention focused on election. This results to the loss of millions of internally generated revenues. The image interacts with the viewer and presents him/her with information such as closure of businesses, restriction of movement, slow pace of the electoral process, interaction of electorates to keep themselves busy while waiting and many more.

The ninth image presented below is sourced from *Business Day* online newspaper published on the 1st of March 2023.

Figure 9: Sensitization of the voters prior to the commencement of voting

The image (text) above has two major categories of participants. First is human and the other is an object which is a ballot paper. The human participants which include security operatives, officials (corps member inclusive) and the crowd are staring at a particular object. The ballot paper is the material used for voting. The activity observed in the image represents the sensitisation and voters education process prior to the commencement of proper voting. In all, the participants are a representation of the 2023 elections. The composition reveals how voters are educated on how to handle the ballot papers. In the composition of the image, the officers on duty represent the safety of the electorates, the officials and the materials. In the interaction model of visual grammar, the image interacts with the viewer and expresses several events that transpired during the electoral process. The ballot paper contains all the registered political parties which make up the composition of the ballot paper. This implies that Nigeria operated a multiparty system. The arrangement of participants in the image signals the disorganized nature of affairs at the polling unit. As opposed to figure 3 and 4 where all electorates are properly queued, the electorates here are not properly organised. This suggests that before the commencement of voting, the venue is usually lousy.

The tenth image below is extracted from *Business Day* online newspaper published on the 1st of March 2023.

Figure 10: Election venue

The discourse above is made up of many participants, representation interaction and composition. The participants are humans (officials seen with jackets, the electorates and an officer of the law), buildings and vehicle (viewed from a distance). All the participants function to entirely represent an election. As electorates wait patiently on the queue, officials are attending to some of the voters and the security officer is signaling the presence of security at the polling unit. From a distance, other participants can be seen engaging in different unknown activities. The composition of the text depicts a number of facts; the participants suggest an election, the building suggests the venue of the election which is the school compound while the vehicles suggest the means of conveying electoral materials and officials. The posture of the security officer also suggests friendliness which means that the security is not out to harass or intimidate voters. Despite the availability of school buildings, the election is conducted in an open and under the sun. This means that the government is yet to make proper provisions for infrastructure needed for conducting elections successfully.

Discussion of Findings

This study sets out to investigate some selected visuals images from *Vanguard* and *Business Day* online newspapers. The aim was to (a) determine how the selected images have been used to portray the electoral process, (b) narrate the circumstances surrounding the 2023 elections and (c) help viewers understand the process of electioneering. The findings of the study revealed that images summarize lengthy written or spoken words. As seen in the analysis, each image presents facts that can be discussed further into lengthy written or spoken texts. Images signal facts and helps the viewer with a true view of events that transpired even in their absence as though they were present. Also revealed is the fact that elections in Nigeria are primitive which reflects the first objective of determining how selected images have been used to portray the electoral process: apart from figures 1, 5 and

7, every other figure portrays the underdeveloped nature of Nigeria's electoral process. The electorates, officials and security operatives are made to suffer under the hot sun. In figures 6 and 8, it is observed that there is a total shutdown of all businesses for the purpose of voting. This puts all commercial and social activities on hold and leads to the loss of huge sums of money which reflects the circumstances of frustration of the masses through late arrival of materials and restriction of movement and closure of businesses on accounts of perceived security threats or attempts to safeguard materials. Also instrumental to the study is the fact that colours play a vital role in meaning generation. As observed in image 1, the different colours are used to suggest the location of the election as well as the background. Participants in images are very critical to understanding the content of any image.

Conclusion

Language is of key importance to our understanding of the society and everything around us. MDA helps us to study the nonverbal modes that equally sum up to meaning making in language and discourse. Focusing on Online Visual images from newspapers, MDA of Visual Images in Selected Online News Discourses on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria is done using the Visual Grammar theory. The study has led to the discovery that much needs to be done in terms of putting in place relevant infrastructure to improve the entirety of the electoral process. The electoral process is the time where leaders are celebrated. This MDA has enabled the interpretation of the various participants in the various images which facilitates the understanding of such images. It is learned that images equally communicate more effectively than spoken words. Without images, it is really difficult to prove a fact. Issues like late arrival of materials, closure of businesses for the sake of voting, political apathy mass participation in elections, gender discrimination, perseverance of the electorates and many more have been beautifully captured in the images which summarizes the entirety of the electoral process. An upgrade of the electoral process to an electronic exercise is strongly recommended to help in controlling possible rigging channels and as well save millions that are lost as a result of the shutting of businesses for the purpose of election.

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