

‘WAR AGAINST BAD LEADERSHIP’: ANALYSING APPRAISAL MARKERS IN #ENDBADGOVERNANCE CAMPAIGN DISCOURSE ON NAIRALAND

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Abstract

This paper analyses appraisal markers (attitude, engagement, graduation) in the #EndBadGovernance campaign discourse on Nairaland, a popular Nigerian online platform. It draws insights from Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal Theory to highlight Nigeria's online public perception of governance during the 2024 protest against ineffectual governance. The study uses qualitative content analysis to evaluate user-generated conversations purposively selected from posts on Nairaland with the hashtag #EndBadGovernance. An analysis of the study data revealed a prevalence of attitude (judgment, affect, and appreciation) and engagement markers. These markers were pivotal in sustaining the protest narrative as users reinforced public dissatisfaction, amplified public discontent, and delegitimised government actors' authority. This study underscores the power of evaluative language in shaping civic engagement and resistance narratives.

Keywords: #appraisalmarkers, #discourse, #endbadgovernance, #Nairaland, #socialmedia, #digitalactivism, #protestdiscourse, #socialmedia

Introduction

Social media is an excellent resource for the study of language. With its introduction came unprecedented forms of communication and social interaction through new technologies that have digitalised our lives. It has a community of its own and, in recent times, has aided in the expansion of democracy, giving more people the ability to have a public voice (Zappavigna, 2012). An expansion of democracy was exemplified in the 10-day #EndBadGovernance protest that erupted in Nigeria in August 2024. #EndBadGovernance refers to an online activism demanding better leadership in Nigeria. As Akano (2023) argues, individuals who believe there is an immediate need for change, whether gradual, rapid, or spontaneous, are more likely to exhibit resistance (p.13). As such, the #EndBadGovernance protests dominated public discourse in Nigeria as citizens expressed their frustrations regarding various challenges posed by ineffective leadership under the Bola Ahmed Tinubu-led government, demanding change. Social media platforms and discussion boards, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Nairaland (a popular Nigerian online forum), were utilised to organise and mobilise protesters against poor governance and economic hardship.

Nairaland is broadly categorised as a forum-based social media platform. Launched in 2005 by Oluwaseun Osewa, it is primarily a text-based discussion board where users engage in varying topical issues in politics, entertainment, technology, business, and education. According to Akano (2024), heterogeneous virtual spaces like Nairaland present opportunities for narratives on national integration and ethnic autonomy to develop. With the rise of digital activism in Nigeria, a novel approach has emerged to how citizens can express dissent, critique leadership, and mobilise protests. Various scholarly works have examined the political impact, media representation, and organisation dynamics of such activism, particularly within the #EndBadGovernance protests. However, there is a significant gap in the interrogation of the linguistic strategies that permeate protest discourse in Nigeria. There is limited research on how appraisal markers shaped online discussions during the #EndBadGovernance movement, which is the gap this study hopes to fill.

Furthermore, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) have predominantly featured in existing research, making Nairaland a distinctive discursive space to explore in this study. Consequently, this paper examines appraisal markers conceptualised by Martin & White (2005) in discussions related to the #EndBadGovernance protest campaign discourse on Nairaland, analysing how they shaped the discourse and mobilised public sentiments against ineffective governance. The objective is to investigate the appraisal markers employed in discussions on Nairaland during the #EndBadGovernance protest campaign and how they influenced discourse and reinforced collective grievances. The guiding research question is: How do appraisal markers (attitude, judgment, and graduation) used in discussions on Nairaland during the #EndBadGovernance protest campaign impact discourse and reinforce collective grievances? By bridging linguistics and political discourse, this paper provides a fresh perspective on how language influences civic engagement during protest campaigns. It will also highlight the need for further research on evaluative language across other social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Literature Review

The #EndBadGovernance protests have garnered considerable scholarly attention across various disciplines. This section reviews pertinent literature on the subject to acknowledge the groundwork laid by previous research and emphasise the necessity of the current study. Bassey (2024) employed Public Sphere Theory to analyse social media platforms (Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and Instagram) as practical tools for organising online protest campaigns. In a related study, Bassey et al. (2024) investigated social media algorithm strategies used to amplify protest narratives through the lens of Connective Action Theory. Drawing insights from Habermas' Public Sphere Theory and Castells' Network Society Theory, Odunlami et al. (2024) concentrated their study on social media to underscore the effectiveness of clicktivism (online activism) in driving political change in Nigeria. Shifting the focus from digital activism, Onwubuoya & Nwaoboli (2024) subjected their data to Henri Jajfel and John

Turner's Social Identity Theory to examine traditional media framing of the protests, highlighting the polarisation in news reporting between government-aligned and independent media. Udousoro et al. (2024) based their study on Auguste Comte's sociological theory of Social Evolution to analyse the dynamics of youth engagement in the #EndBadGovernance protest, arguing that the demonstrations signified a political shift in the awareness of Nigerian youth, as well as a transition in societal structures. In contrast, Izege (2024) examined the socio-political implications of the Igbos' indifference during the 2024 #EndBadGovernance national protest, aiming to highlight the complex nature of Nigerian politics, the challenges of national unity, and the nuances of ethnic relations in the country.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, Tomere & Ajakaye (2024) utilised aspects of Visual Grammar Theory to conduct a multimodal textual analysis of protests and counter-protests in Nigeria, labelled #EndBadGovernance and #SayNoToProtest, to ascertain their ideological and contextual significance. They revealed that these protests were polarised along the lines of solidarity, the projection of negative and/or positive governmental acts, and appeals for peace and change. Ishiguzo's (2024) study framed the #EndBadGovernance protests within the context of the amended 1999 constitution to emphasise the political language employed by the government, which used national security as a pretext to curtail civil liberties. In a subsequent study, Ugbudu (2025) performed a contextual analysis of government speeches and media reports within the framework of Marxist Political Economy Theory to explore the political language employed by the government to sustain hegemonic control during the protests. The preceding review supports our earlier assertion that, despite the extensive body of scholarly work on the #EndBadGovernance protests, there exists a notable gap in the examination of the linguistic strategies that pervade protest discourse in Nigeria, particularly regarding how appraisal markers influenced online discussions during the #EndBadGovernance movement.

Theoretical Framework

Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory is a comprehensive framework for analysing emotional content and evaluation in texts. Developed as an extension of Halliday's Systemic-Functional Theory, it emphasises the "systematic analysis of evaluation and stance as they operate in entire texts" (White, 2011, p. 14). The theory comprises three primary appraisal components: attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude refers to how emotions, judgments, and evaluations are articulated, which can be positive or negative, explicit or implicit. It encompasses three subcategories: affect—addressing emotional responses and categorised into happiness/unhappiness (feelings of joy or sadness), security/insecurity (sense of peace or unease), and satisfaction/dissatisfaction (feelings of accomplishment or frustration); judgment—assessing human behaviour based on social norms and ethics; and appreciation, which evaluates objects and phenomena concerning aesthetics, composition, and value. Engagement pertains to how speakers and writers modify the arguability of their statements and manage various perspectives

within discourse (White, 2001, p. 1). This component investigates how individuals negotiate alignment or misalignment with differing viewpoints, how voices interact in discourse and how speakers position themselves to other perspectives. Conversely, graduation addresses "grading phenomena whereby feelings are intensified and categories blurred" (Martin and White, 2005, p. 35).

Methodology

A qualitative content analysis has been adopted as the research design for this study. This design has been selected because it allows for subjective interpretation of the content within the text data. The data for the study comprise comments generated from discursive threads of four purposively selected #EndBadGovernance-related posts on Nairaland. The first post is titled "Protests: IGP Orders Officers to Deal Decisively with Arsonists and Troublemakers." This post was published on Nairaland on 1 August 2024 and received 29 responses from participants. The second post focused on the speech "EndBadGovernance Protests," delivered by the IGP, and appeared on the forum on 2 August 2024, garnering 28 responses. The third post is titled "#EndBad Government: Sultan, CAN President Demand Immediate End of Protest," which was posted on the platform on 2 August 2024 and received 29 responses. Finally, the fourth post, "Bauchi Governor Imposes Curfew as Protesters Set Vehicles and Secretariats on Fire," garnered 28 responses. From four distinct posts that garnered one hundred and fourteen responses, twenty (five responses) were purposively sampled and selected for analysis. The choice of Nairaland stems from its high level of user engagement, boasting over 3.2 million members and guests, predominantly Nigerians, and it has generated over 8.1 million posts on various topical issues affecting Nigeria and its citizens. Each of the selected posts has at least 10,000 views. The posts from the online platform are crude and unrefined, with some presented in non-standard English spelling, abbreviations, tenses, and grammatical constructions. The data for the study were examined through the lens of Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory to reveal the appraisal markers used by online activists during the #EndBadGovernance protest campaigns on Nairaland to mobilise and sustain the protest narratives.

Data Analysis

This section presents a detailed textual analysis of the data gathered from Nairaland posts to uncover appraisal markers of attitude and engagement. Comments (1-5) are extracted from the initial post.

Comment 1:

"I knew this man was up to no good. See, as he continues to insinuate that the protestors are criminals? Where are the rights Lawyers abeg? Make them make sure police have evidence for every arrest made ooo! Na so dem go carry people go kill again like they did during the EndSars. These trigger-happy policemen need to be checked abeg! Some of them are probably serial killers walking around in uniform looking for an excuse to kill another Nigerian."

Comment 2:

“If na Nigeria, IGP go just dey talk plenty without any real action. This one wey dem call "decisive" na just empty words to calm the masses. When the protests start, na dem go come bring out their full arsenal, but when it's time to address the real issues, dem dey hide like rats.”

Comment 3:

“Yes, very correct. But the government should not bring thugs to disrupt the protest.”

Comment 4:

“Empty threats, Cowards in black uniforms.”

Comment 5:

“The original plan of the government is coming out. Promise protesters Security, sponsor their touts to infiltrate the protesters, issue a warning and then go after the original protesters.”

Ahead of the commencement of the #EndBadGovernance protests on 1 August 2024, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kayode Egbetokun issued a statement directing his officers nationwide to “deal decisively” with arsonists and troublemakers as youths staged protests against hunger and economic hardship throughout the Federation. He stated that intelligence suggested the demonstrations aimed to unleash chaos upon the government and innocent citizens; therefore, the police would not sit idly by and watch the situation deteriorate into a state of lawlessness. In comment one, the speaker's tone is critical, urgent, and accusatory. He evaluates the moral character of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) with the adverse judgment label “up to no good,” implying that he is untrustworthy. To further support this idea, the word “insinuate” is employed to portray his character as misleading or manipulative. The speaker also utilises a strongly negative judgment, “trigger-happy,” to suggest that the police are reckless and excessively violent, thereby depicting the force as dangerous, mainly as reference is made to #EndSARS (a significant Nigerian protest against police brutality) as a notable example. Emotion-inducing terms like “abeg” (a Nigerian Pidgin term for “please” or “I beg you”) and an elongation like “ooo” are used by the speaker to convey concern about human rights violations and to emphasise the intensity of the emotions expressed. The expression, “These trigger-happy policemen need to be checked abeg!” assesses the policing situation in the country during the protest, suggesting that it is dangerous and uncontrolled. The statement “Some of them are probably serial killers ... looking for an excuse to kill another Nigerian”

challenges the legitimacy of police behaviour, asserting that some officers may be murderers in disguise.

Comment two is a critical and sceptical evaluation of government actions in Nigeria, particularly concerning police brutality and government failures. The speaker expresses judgment toward law enforcement officers, as illustrated by the phrase "... talk plenty without any real action." This suggests that the IGP is an ineffective officer who does not follow through on his statements. The speaker also uses appreciation to emphasise systemic failure. This is evident in the critique of the IGP's statement, which is "empty words" intended only to pacify the public into believing that the police will protect citizens. Yet, they will instead "hide like rats" when it's time to confront real issues. The engagement markers here highlight the dismissal of official narratives and pushback against government framing. "This one wey dem call 'decisive' na just empty words to calm the masses" distances the speaker from the government's claims and questions their legitimacy. In comment three, the speaker supports the youth's protest against poor governance. His backing for the protest is evident in the appraisal resources used to evaluate the moral character of the government. Given past instances of disruptions during peaceful demonstrations in the country by either the government or its agents, the speaker is concerned about the protest's outcome and advises the government not to disrupt it by hiring hooligans to mingle with the youths and create chaos, as seen during the #EndSARS protests nationwide. The speaker's concern is conveyed by the lexical items "thugs," "bring," and "disrupt." Additionally, the word "government" indicates the speaker's referent. The expression, "Yes, very correct," reflects the speaker's response to a previous comment from another participant who also supports the protest against bad governance in the country. One can observe the speaker's expression of both positive and negative sentiments. The positive sentiment is apparent in his satisfaction derived from Nigerian youths standing up for their rights. Conversely, the negative sentiment is directed at the government, captured in the speaker's sense of unease about the protest, as he fears the government may disrupt it.

A study of comment four reveals that it is directed at the IGP, who threatened to deal decisively with the protesters. The tone of this comment is accusatory, expressing anger and displeasure towards the IGP, the head of the police force. This displeasure is evident in the phrase, "empty threats, cowards in black uniforms." The speaker uses this to make a disparaging remark about the IGP and the entire Nigerian police force. From this expression, one can sense the speaker's frustration and dissatisfaction with the IGP and the Nigerian police, often perceived as instruments the government uses to prevent youths from protesting against its excesses. Similarly, comment five employs a critical statement with negative connotations when evaluating the government. It indicates the speaker's dissatisfaction with the government, which justifies his criticism of the government's act of deception. He begins his response by stating, "The original plan of the government is coming to light." This statement suggests that what the government had concealed from the masses is now

exposed, showcasing their deception. The subsequent part of the comment also illustrates the speaker's disdain for the government, as he refers to the government's promise to provide security for protesters during the demonstrations while secretly sponsoring hooligans to infiltrate them and incite chaos, leading to their arrest by the law enforcement agents who work for the same government. Comments (6 – 10) are extracted from the second post and presented below.

Comment 6:

“Lies. The drug master has thought [sic] you how to lie. The worst IGP in the history of Nigeria, and you have succeeded in turning the force into a wing of the evil party called [sic] APC. Pains await all of you that are suffering poor Nigerians.”

Comment 7:

“Who gives a fvck what he said? People are hungry and a stooge is busy making stupid speech. Na full speech people go chop?”

Comment 8:

“Emilokan IGP 🤔. Your men are understaffed to curtail riots. Second term for Your master is not possible. Y'all started on a bad note. Nigeria no be Lagos, founder of Lagos is a total faker sold on lies and propaganda. The nation was quiet when he was declared winner, everybody was mourning. From one disaster to another under one year. Where is Remi with her one vegetable garden, she sensed danger but it was too late”.

Comment 9:

“Another certified idiot in police uniform. So, if protesters stay in one location, you will carry every police to that venue. See the type of clowns heading our security. You clowns have been opening mouth waaa talking about gathering intelligence that some hoodlums plan to hijack protest, why didn't you gather at the location where the hoodlums planned to meet? Stop blackmailing peaceful protesters. It is the duty of the police to provide security. If you only have the manpower to secure only one location, then resign. Enough of the babablu”.

Comment 10:

“The safety of Nigerians is very important now, and our leaders should also hear our cry and give us food”.

In response to reports of violent attacks that resulted in casualties, widespread looting, and the destruction of both private and government properties in certain states, the IGP addressed the nation, urging protesters to heed police warnings, remain calm, and cooperate with security agencies to uphold peace and stability. Much like the statements from the first discussion topic, this address was poorly received, as indicated in comments 6-10 above. For example, the speaker of comment six negatively evaluates the IGP's honesty and competence. The term "lies," a disparaging assessment of his character, is a direct accusation that portrays him as dishonest. The moral condemnation reinforces this accusation: "... you have succeeded in turning the force into a wing of the evil party called APC," suggesting a calculated manipulation of the force for partisan politics or political gain. The speaker's tone is also infused with anger, resentment, and a desire for retribution, as evidenced by the statement, "Pain awaits all of you that are suffering poor Nigerians." The hyperbolic phrase, "The worst IGP in the history of Nigeria..." carries both judgment and engagement appraisal markers, negatively evaluating the IGP as the most incompetent and ineffective officer to have held the position. This expression takes an absolute stance on the issue, discouraging any debate regarding the IGP's competence as if the statement were an undisputed fact.

From comment seven, it is evident that the speaker is dismissive and critical. The strong judgment marker, "Who gives a fuck what he said?" dismisses the IGP as a person and renders his speech meaningless. It also exhibits indifference and rejection toward the speech. The vulgar word "fuck" amplifies the speaker's anger and frustration while reinforcing disdain for the IGP. A genuine and urgent problem is highlighted in "People are hungry," positioning hunger as a national crisis in light of the speaker's assessment of the nation's state (affect marker). A judgment marker is present in the negative label "stooge." The rhetorical question "Na full speech people go chop" pre-emptively invalidates any defence of the speech, positioning (engagement marker) it as useless in addressing real problems. The speaker in comment eight mocks the IGP, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Remi Tinubu, and Prof Mahmood Yakubu. He begins by addressing the IGP as "Emilokan IGP". "Emilokan" is a Yoruba expression meaning "it is my turn". This nickname was given to President Tinubu during his 2023 presidential campaign when he asserted that it was his turn to be President. Since then, Nigerians have referred to him as "Emilokan" mockingly. The speaker ridicules the Inspector General of Police (IGP) due to the police's inadequate manpower and their failure to manage the riots that erupted during the protests. This is illustrated with terms such as "understaffed", "curtail", and "riots". After disparaging the IGP, he addresses President Bola Tinubu, advising him against pursuing a second term, as his bid is deemed dead in the water. He criticised the 2023 presidential election and blamed the INEC chairman for declaring an incorrect candidate as the winner. Lexical items such as "understaffed", "bad note", "lies", "propaganda", "mourning", "disaster", and "vegetable garden" serve as appraisal markers used to evaluate the current administration's performance. The choice of these words suggests that the speaker is dissatisfied with the

prevailing hardships in Nigeria, empathises with suffering Nigerians, and expresses discontent towards the APC government for leading Nigerians into starvation. Phrases such as “your men are understaffed to curtail riots”, “Y’all started on a bad note”, and “Nigeria no be Lagos” convey negative evaluations aimed at the IGP and President Bola Tinubu. Conversely, “Second term for your master is impossible” reveals a negative judgement directed at the IGP. The speaker employs the expression, “The nation was quiet when he was declared the winner; everybody was mourning”, to voice solidarity with Nigerians who feel robbed of their democratic rights. This explains why he hurls insults at the IGP and his men for their attempts to suppress the protests, the President and his first lady for failing to rescue the country from its current crisis, and the INEC chairman for denying Nigerians their mandate. The lexical choices in the comment reflect the speaker’s perspective on the matter. While he supports the protests against bad governance, he opposes the IGP and the President for their attempts to disrupt the demonstrations.

An analysis of comment nine reveals the speaker’s stance and evaluation of the subject. His position is evident in his choice of appraisal markers, indicating that he is against poor governance and consequently supports the youth’s protest against maladministration in the country. However, he expresses dissatisfaction with the Nigerian Police Force for allowing hoodlums to hijack the protest and blackmail peaceful demonstrators, thereby disrupting it. For this reason, he negatively evaluates the IGP and his officers, criticising them for opposing the protesters instead of providing them with security. Phrases such as “another certified idiot in police uniform”, “clowns heading our security”, “you clowns have been opening your mouths...” and “enough of the babablu” are disparaging remarks aimed at the IGP and his officers. They serve to portray the IGP and his staff in a negative light. In comment 10, the speaker expresses concern for the safety of Nigerians during the demonstrations, implying that the protest has spiralled out of control. By voicing this concern, he demonstrates solidarity with all Nigerians, particularly the youth protesting against poor governance in the country. He urges the Nigerian government to listen to the pleas of the suffering masses. The phrase “Our leaders should also hear our cry and provide us with food” is evaluative. These are appraisal resources employed to highlight the insensitivity of the current administration to the struggles of the populace and the high levels of poverty and starvation in the country, thus casting the APC government in a negative light. Comments (11-15) are extracted from the third post. These comments are presented below:

Comment 11:

“CAN is a disgrace to Christianity.”

Comment 12:

“Which religion is not even a disgrace to Nigeria? Many churches, many mosques, and many shrines yet evil continues.”

Comment 13:

“Who are they and who do they think they are? What have they done to help the suffering masses? Make dem go die.”

Comment 14:

“Senseless leaders! Not when the damage done has not been addressed but kept on getting worst.”

Comment 15:

“End protest on empty stomach? Dey play.

Similar to the IGP’s demand for the protests to cease, the Sultan of Sokoto and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), under the auspices of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), expressed their concern regarding the loss of lives and properties following the protests. They urged for calm, asking the demonstrators to halt their protests and allow the government to address their grievances. Comments (11-15) reveal the appraisal strategies deployed by users in their responses to the news article. In comment eleven, the speaker employs dialogic contraction (engagement) to dismiss alternative viewpoints regarding CAN's role. Framing CAN as “a disgrace” implies that the body’s perspective on the protests is fundamentally unacceptable to the protesters. The statement's brevity renders it absolute and unyielding. Additionally, it negatively evaluates CAN’s actions, indicating a failure to uphold its Christian values as spiritual leaders. Comment 12 serves as a broad societal critique, questioning the role of religion in Nigeria and its impact on morality and governance. It incorporates appraisal markers of judgment, appreciation, and engagement to convey frustration, scepticism, and moral disillusionment. This is evident in the use of "disgrace," an adverse judgment, suggesting that all religious institutions have failed and lack the moral authority to guide society positively. A negative appreciation of the role of religion or its representatives is reflected in “yet evil continues," which expresses resignation or hopelessness. It further implies that religion in Nigeria has not alleviated societal problems despite its dominance.

Comment thirteen shows a confrontational, dismissive, and emotionally charged statement. Judgment, affect, and engagement markers evaluate the religious authority figures. For instance, the legitimacy and relevance of these authorities are questioned in the rhetorical question, “Who are they, and who do they think they are?” The speaker suggests they lack the moral grounds to demand that the protesters stop their demonstrations. Emotions are also emphasised as the speaker expresses a wish for harm by stating, “Make them go die.” This reflects deep frustration and a loss of faith in their leadership. While evaluating events, the speaker uses negative appreciation to assess the role of religious bodies before the protests. This is exemplified by the question, "What have they done to help the suffering masses?" This implies that as influential figures in the country, much is expected of these religious bodies,

yet they have done nothing to offer solutions. The speaker's stance is absolute and allows no room for alternative views. In comment fourteen, the speaker criticises the Sultan and the CAN president, calling them senseless leaders. The lexical item "senseless leaders" expresses the speaker's disappointment with Nigeria's so-called religious leaders for urging the Nigerian youths to cease the protest when the issues that prompted it remain unresolved. His word choice indicates that he is both critical and abusive, dismissing the appeal made by Nigeria's religious leaders for the youths to stop the protest. In addition to evaluative markers such as "senseless leaders," used to pass judgment, phrases like "damage done," "addressed," and "getting worse" also serve evaluative functions. In this context, the phrase "damage done" may suggest inflation, poverty, starvation, and suffering throughout the nation. Conversely, "addressed" and "getting worse" imply that the problems that prompted the protest are escalating rather than being resolved. These lexical items (senseless leaders, damage done, addressed and getting worse) function as appraisal resources that highlight the speaker's support for the continuation of the protest while chastising Nigeria's so-called religious leaders for their cowardice and insensitivity towards the plight of the masses. In support of comment fourteen, the speaker of comment fifteen criticises Nigeria's religious leaders for calling for an end to the protest, arguing that the underlying issues have not been addressed. Note that the opening statement of the comment, encapsulated in the phrase "End protest on an empty stomach?" is an interrogative statement serving as an engagement marker to invite other participants to join the discourse. In addition to functioning as an engagement marker, it also critiques the activities of the APC government, portraying them negatively. While the expression "End protest on an empty stomach" implies a prevalence of hunger in the country, "Dey play" in Nigerian Pidgin implies "You are playing". It is employed to scold Nigeria's religious leaders who are not taking Nigerians' problems seriously but wish for the Nigerian youths to halt the protest. Comments (16 – 20) are culled from the fourth post.

Comment 16:

"Tinubu has failed. If he knows what's good, he better reduce fuel prices as soon as possible. That's the only way to end this carnage if not his govt will be battling unrest in the North for the next four years. He should ask Jonathan."

Comment 17:

"The honourable thing is for the President to resign"

Comment 18:

"So Tinubu feel less concerned about all this?"

Comment 19:

"Tinubu isn't really as experienced as we rate him."

Comment 20:

“Those who make this argument should drop it. Tinubu is a colossal failure”.

Comment sixteen reveals a direct and politically critical speaker addressing President Tinubu while expressing frustration and a warning call for action, given the violence reported in Bauchi and other states during the protests. Appraisal markers like judgment, affect, appreciation, and engagement are evident in this comment. For instance, the expression “Tinubu has failed” strongly assesses Mr President’s body language towards protests. It is an adverse judgment that is absolute at its best (engagement marker) and does not entertain opposing opinions. It also suggests that his leadership has not met the citizens’ expectations and has reached a point of failure. The speaker also implies a lack of foresight or wisdom, “If he knows what’s good ...”, but presents an opportunity for further damage to be prevented, “he better reduce fuel price as soon as possible”. Affect markers express a sense of crisis and the need to handle the situation as an emergency rather than just a policy debate. The word “carnage” indicates widespread violence during the protests. As such, the President must act fast to avoid the long-term consequence of “battling unrest in the North for the next four years.” Finally, albeit negatively, the speaker exemplifies appreciation when he references former President Goodluck Jonathan as a historical precedent of a leader facing similar crises. Security, especially in Northern Nigeria, was assumed to be the former president’s biggest albatross. The statement “He should ask Jonathan” suggests that President Tinubu should learn from past mistakes to avoid repeating them by taking decisive steps to attend to the protesters' demands.

Comment seventeen conveys the speaker's disillusionment, suggesting that the escalation of violence during the protests represents a failure in governance rather than merely a crisis that can be resolved. The statement is filled with judgment, emotion, appreciation, and engagement markers to emphasize the speaker’s call for accountability and a change in leadership. The judgment, emotion, and appreciation markers are illustrated in the phrase “The honourable thing,” where “honourable” frames resignation as the ethical and acceptable action for the President. This phrase also indicates disillusionment with the President’s behavior, implying he has lost credibility and assessing his tenure as irredeemable. Based on the speaker's firm and assertive tone, it can be inferred that any opposing view favoring the President's continuation in office would be dismissed (engagement), as the speaker offers no opportunities for reforms, second chances, or policy shifts. The stance asserts that the President has lost all the citizens' trust as if it were a fact.

In the wake of the crisis that characterised the protests against poor governance, the speaker of comment eighteen believed that President Tinubu would heed the calls of Nigerians by addressing their demands. Unfortunately, the opposite occurred in this instance, justifying the speaker’s expression of anticipation and astonishment, which resulted in his pessimistic tone in this comment. Consequently, his statement is laden with emotion and evaluative

markers intended to render judgment, as illustrated by the phrase, “So Tinubu feels less concerned.” While the words “feel less concerned” suggest Tinubu’s insensitivity to the plight of the masses despite their protests against his ineffective leadership, they also serve as an evaluative indicator that portrays his government negatively. Commentaries nineteen and twenty criticise President Tinubu. In both cases, the assessments of the president are negative. Both speakers exhibit a critical attitude and an informative tone, highlighting the seriousness of the discussed subject. While speaker nineteen views the president as someone Nigerians may have overrated, which accounts for his failure to deliver, speaker twenty concludes that he is a colossal failure. Lexical items such as “rate” in nineteen and “colossal failure” in twenty serve evaluative functions, as both speakers use them to assess the performance of the president's government.

Discussion of Findings

Appraisal Theory is a valuable framework for evaluating the emotions and stances prevalent in Nairaland discussions about the #EndBadGovernance protests. The analysed data showed a predominance of judgment, affect, appreciation, and engagement markers utilised by speakers to express their frustrations and shape collective grievances and dissatisfaction regarding perceived government failures. The study submits that the appraisal markers used by participants in the online protest discourse were mainly negative evaluations that ultimately framed the protests, delegitimised established authorities, and undermined official narratives rather than fostering dialogue and reasoning.

Conclusion

This paper emphasizes how appraisal markers shaped protest discourse on Nairaland during the #EndBadGovernance movement. It investigated the topic from a discourse-analytical perspective, highlighting how appraisal markers—attitude (judgment, affect, and appreciation) and engagement—were employed to construct legitimacy, resistance, and collective discontent that sustained the narrative among online activists, specifically on Nairaland. The study adds to existing research on #EndBadGovernance by shifting the focus beyond technological, legal, and socio-political aspects of activism to the linguistic strategies that were utilized to support the protest movements, offering a unique perspective on how the discourse influenced the broader socio-political narrative of governance and resistance. The research suggests that future studies could evaluate the protest language of movements on other social media platforms or even conduct a comparative study involving Nairaland, to explore the general characteristics of digital discourse during protests and how they facilitate and motivate collective actions.

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