

Content Analysis of Lekki Shootings During The 2020 EndSARS Protest in Nigeria

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Abstract

There have been several reports, claims and counter claims of news of military personnel shooting at unarmed EndSARS protesters, at Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos state on the evening of Tuesday 20 October, 2020 which have made it difficult for both government and individuals to know the actual incident that occurred. The thrust of this study is to carry out a content analysis of four Nigeria national newspapers on the subject matter to ascertain the actual event. The study utilized the secondary method of data collection and used documents and descriptive statistics as its tools of evaluation. The study found that articles featuring unarmed protesters gathered at Lekki Toll Gate had a total occurrence of 22 and military personnel shooting at unarmed protesters at Lekki Toll gate had a total of 55 occurrences. The study concludes that endSARS protesters were gathered and were shot at by military personnel at the Lekki Toll Gate on the 20th October 2020. It thus recommended that Nigerian government look into the reasons why citizens go into protests and Nigerian Security operatives adopt modern ways of managing protests like the use of dialogue and technology and shun the use of live ammunitions to disperse protesters.

Keywords: EndSARS, Lekki Shootings, Lekki Toll Gate, Newspapers, Social Protest.

Introduction

Social protest has been more chaotic, less predictable and increasing globally in recent years. Social protest is a form of political expression aimed at bringing about social or political change by persuading the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of the general public or the policies of a government, organization or institution. There have been several protests or social movement activity ranging from the student movement, the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, pensioners protests, human right protest, to protest against electoral malpractices etc. Protest had been considered to be an undemocratic intrusion into politics. In the wake of the movements of the 1960s, protest is now seen as an important adjunct to democratic politics and a significant factor in the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes.

Nigeria has had its own share of social protest. The most recent national protest being the EndSARS protest, which was carried out in most states of the country in October, 2020. This particular protest has elicited a lot of debates, blame games and perceptions.

Nigerians woke up on Wednesday 21, October, 2020 to the news of military personnel shooting at unarmed EndSARS protesters, at Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos state on the evening of Tuesday 20 October, 2020. There have been several reports of the incident, claims and counter claims, which have made it difficult for both government and individuals to know the actual incident that occurred. It is based on the above statements that this study carried out a content analysis of some Nigeria national newspapers on the subject matter.

The main objective of this study is to carry out a content analysis of some Nigerian national daily newspapers in order to determine the actual incident that occurred on 20 October, 2020 at Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos State. To achieve the above objective, the following questions were formulated and answered: were there unarmed EndSARS protesters gathered at Lekki toll gate on 20 October, 2020? And did military personnel shoot at unarmed ENDSARS protesters at Lekki toll gate on 20 October, 2020?

The methodology adopted in this study followed the qualitative approach of desk research, entailing a review of literatures relating to the concepts of social protest and #endsars. The secondary data (internet, published articles, books and newspapers) was relied on as the technique for extracting information relevant to the thematic aspects of this study. Descriptive analysis and documentation were utilized to analyse the data collected based on which conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

Conceptual Clarification

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a widely used research method in the social sciences and humanities, or anywhere textual analysis is required. Krippendorff (2004) defined content analysis as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context’. Neuendorf (2002) extended this definition further by describing content analysis as ‘the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics.’ Content analysis is therefore an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the actual and symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication including not only text but also visual and aural data (Hall & Valentin 2005). Nevertheless, over time the scope of content analysis has grown from being used for making inferences based on quantified analysis of recurring, easily identifiable aspects of text content or manifest content, to become a cluster of techniques and approaches for analysing syntactic, syntagmatic, and pragmatic aspects of text grouped under the broad heading of textual analysis.

Content analysis is described as a scientific study of content of communication. The word content refers to what is contained in a message, whilst, analysis goes to explain what is contained in that message (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2019). Content analysis as a methodological tool, is a method of observation which is useful for analysing socio-political issues. Content analysis is situated between the interface of observation and document analysis. As a method of observation, instead of seeking or asking people to respond to questions, content analysis takes the communication that people have produced and asks questions of communications, it is considered as an un-obstructive or non-reactive method of social science research. It can be said to be a set of methods for analysing

the symbolic content of any communication in a manner that meanings are deduced from a set of categories that are observable representation of certain characteristics of issues of research interest.

Content analysis' development as a scientific tool could be traced to the period of the World War II when the U.S. government undertook a project using content analysis to evaluate enemy propaganda under the directorship of Harold Lasswell, whose approach was to discover who said what to whom and with what effect, by statistically analysing content (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2019). It became useful in the explanation of patterns of speech of various political actors and also in the analysis of thematic issues in public addresses and political statement. The usage and development of content analysis as a scientific tool can be associated to the growth of newspapers at the turn of the sixteenth century which led to a number of investigations as to their role and content which was extended later to all other mass media when they became evident – radio, movies and television (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2017). Interest in political symbols also added features to the analysis of public messages using the content analysis. Researchers use content analysis as either a qualitative or quantitative method in their studies.

In all, content analysis can be said to be a technique for systematically describing written, spoken or visual content of documents (where document refers to any physical form of communication from books to films to musical recordings and recorded conversation). Thus content analysis can be undertaken of the following: letters, diaries, books, short stories, printed publications, newspaper content, magazine articles, catalogues, advertisements (printed and filmed), posters, graffiti, photographs, drawings, radio broadcasts, television programmes, news reports, weather reports, videos, films, plays, Web pages, recorded oral testimonies, transcripts of conversations or depositions, speeches, interviews, folk songs, popular songs, products in shops.

Social Protest

Protest is simply a formal and sincere declaration of objection. Social protests often take the form of open public shows, demonstrations, and civil disturbance, it may also include secret activities such as lobbying, boycotts, petitions, and numerous online activities (Loya & McLeod, 2020). Protests' activities are driven by specific rewards (personal gratifications and benefits) and collective rewards (by a large number of individuals excluding other individual protesters). Government institutions, political leaders, and their policies are the target of protests.

Social protests have many political goals; their aspirational goals often seek to effect broad political changes that shift the distribution of power in society. More immediately, they may seek to generate favourable public opinion, or spread models of action through mechanisms of diffusion. Often, however, in order to improve conditions much of their energy is directed to influencing policy. An important motivation for political participation by citizens is the desire to affect public policies and social protests are a normal form of political participation in democracies alongside voting for representatives, voting in plebiscites and referenda, supporting interest organizations that lobby on their behalf, and expressing interests through public opinion polls.

Many social protests/movements seek to either impede threatening policies, demand change in existing inequitable policies, or propose policies that advance their goals for social, economic and political inclusion.

EndSARS

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was a division of the Nigeria Police Force controlled by the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (SCIID), which was established in 1992 (Paquette, 2020). The squad was created as a facemask wearing police unit that performs undercover operations against societal ills associated with kidnapping, ritual killings, terrorism, car snatching, armed robbery, cattle rustling, and crimes associated with firearms.

The squad had been accused of various inhuman activities, failure to socially distance, illegal human, cars, houses "stop and searches", unlawful apprehensions and confinements, unauthorized/extrajudicial killings, sexual and physical harassment of women and dehumanizing many young Nigerians. Many of these inhuman mishandlings were snapped and/or recorded and later uploaded in social media which went viral (Ujene, Orji-Egwu, & Obiangeri, 2018).

In 2017, Nigerian activists, youth and celebrities across the nation took to the streets in a peaceful protest to spread awareness of SARS' brutality and extortions. The protests also moved to social media using the hashtag #EndSARS (Ogundipe, 2017). In 2017, a petition signed by 10,195 people was submitted to Nigeria's National Assembly calling for a total disbandment of SARS (Ibrahim, 2017). The campaigners moved from social media using the #EndSARS hashtag to organised, peaceful protests in Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Osun, Benin, Ughelli, Warri, Ilorin, Ogbomosho, Owerri, Jos, Kaduna and other Nigerian cities and states, promising to continue if the government refused to disband SARS (Thisday, 2020). Nationwide protests against police brutality began on October 8, 2020, after a video emerged in early October showing police officers thought to be from the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) allegedly shooting and killing a young man in Nigeria's Southern Delta State. Although Nigerian authorities denied the reports, protests erupted across the country calling on the government to disband SARS. More videos of police brutality and injustice were shared across social media platforms. Celebrities and activists rallied for support on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook and, in a few days, protesters were on the streets of Lagos and Abuja calling for an end to SARS. Worried by the dust that the protests had generated, the Nigerian government quickly proclaimed the disbandment of SARS. This proclamation was not enough to pacify the protesters due to government antecedents, as such the protesters added compensation of victims of SARS brutality, retraining of police officers and trials of indicted SARS officials to their list of demands (Uwazuruike, 2021). The protests were mostly driven by young people.

Population

The population of the study is Nigerian Daily Newspapers between 21 and 23 October, 2020

Number of Referential/Sample: 11:

Three Nigerian national daily newspapers namely:

The Guardian of 21 and 22 October, 2020 - 2 copies

Vanguard of 21, 22 and 23 October, 2020 – 3 copies

The Punch of 21, 22 and 23 October, 2020 – 3 copies

Nigerian Tribune of 21, 22 and 23 October, 2020 – 3 copies

The contents being analysed are reports/articles from Nigeria newspapers on Lekki protesters' shootings of 20th October, 2020.

Reasons for Analysing Newspapers' reports and articles

Nigerian newspapers are backed by law and their activities are regulated by the National Broadcasting Commission, Nigeria Press Council and Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria. The editorial boards of Nigerian national newspapers are legal, there are legal instruments for registration of newspapers in Nigeria, as such the editors and publishers of newspapers know the implication of misinformation (Unini, 2017). Nigerian newspapers have become an acceptable public document in Nigeria for accurate dissemination of information. The analysis of reports or articles in national newspapers which are regarded as authentic and reliable documents makes for a more objective generalisation. In addition, the four daily newspapers analysed in the study have very wide coverage and acceptance in Nigeria.

Result of the Findings

Research Question one: Were unarmed endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki toll Gate on 20 October, 2020?

Question one above was answered by the number of times 'endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki toll gate' appeared in Nigerian daily newspapers and number of newspaper articles featuring 'unarmed endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki Toll Gate', these are analysed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: No of times unarmed endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki toll gate appeared on newspapers

Newspaper	No of appearance	Percentage
Guardian	7	19.4
Vanguard	9	25
Punch	8	22.2
Nigerian Tribune	12	33.3
Total	36	100

Source: Researchers' computation from the four newspapers collected, 2021.

From Table 1 above, the number of times unarmed endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki toll gate that appeared on newspapers between 21 – 23 October, 2020, had a total occurrence of 36, with a frequency occurrence of 7, accounting for 19.4% in the Guardian; 9 frequency occurrence accounting for 5% in the Vanguard, 8 frequency occurrence accounting for 22.2% in the Punch and 12 frequency occurrence accounting for 33.3% in the Nigerian Tribune.

Table 2: Number of articles featuring unarmed protesters gathered at Lekki Toll Gate

Newspapers	No of Articles	Percentage
Guardian	2	9.1
Vanguard	3	13.6
Punch	8	36.4
The Nigerian Tribune	9	40.9
Total	22	100

Source: Researchers' computation from the four newspapers collected, 2021.

From Table 2 above, the number of newspaper articles between 21-23 October, 2020 featuring unarmed endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki Toll Gate had a total occurrence of 22 with a

frequency occurrence of 2, accounting for 9.1% in the Guardian; 3 frequency occurrence accounting for 13.6% in the Vanguard and 8 frequency occurrence accounting for 36.4% in the Punch and frequency occurrence of 9 accounting for 40.9% in the Nigerian Tribune.

Research Question Two: Did military personnel shot at unarmed ENDSARS protesters at Lekki toll gate on 20, October, 2020?

Question two above was answered by the appearance of Lekki protesters shootings on cover pages of Nigerian daily newspapers and the number of times ‘military personnel shooting at unarmed protesters at Lekki Toll gate’ appeared in Nigeria daily newspapers. These were analysed as follows:

Punch Newspaper

According to The Punch Newspaper of Wednesday October, 21, 2020. Vol. 44 No. 22,311, the story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared as the major heading “Black Tuesday: 49 killed as protests turn bloody” with the following riders:

- i. Soldiers shoot seven dead in Lekki, 20 die in Lagos areas, banks burnt
- ii. Stop killing young protesters, Hilary Clinton, PDP tells Buhari, Army.

According to The Punch Newspaper of Thursday October, 22, 2020. Vol. 44, No. 22,312, the story on Lekki protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “#EndSARS killings. Buhari under fire” with the following riders:

- i. UN, UK, EU, Obasanjo, Soyinka, Atiku, others condemn FG for deaths
- ii. NBA plans local, international suits against govt, demands killers’ arrest.

According to The Punch Newspaper of Friday October, 23, 2020. Vol. 44, No. 22,313, the story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “President’s Broadcast. Nigerians attack Buhari for snubbing Lekki shootings, looting, killings continue”, with the following riders:

- i. President’s broadcast empty, devoid of leadership qualities, says African Bar Association
- ii. Speech lacks empathy, emotion, short of expectations, contains gaps - #EndSARS protesters, SANS.

Vanguard Newspaper

There was no story on Lekki protesters shootings on the cover page of Vanguard Newspaper of Wednesday, October, 21, 2020. Vol. 27: No. 64,188.

According to Vanguard Newspaper of Thursday, October, 22, 2020. Vol. 27: No. 64,188, the story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “EndSARS: Total Paralysis as Fires of fury Ground Lagos”.

According to Vanguard Newspaper of Friday, October, 23, 2020. Vol. 27: No. 64,188, the story on Lekki protesters shootings appeared on the cover page as “Violence continues as Buhari sues for peace”, with the following riders:

- i. Your voice has been heard, stop the protests, Buhari tells youths.
- ii. To world leaders: get your facts right before taking position
- iii. DHQ asks Nigerians to wait for findings of investigation panel on Lekki killings
- iv. Video of Lekki shooting going to judicial panel says Sanwo Olu

The Guardian Newspaper

According to the Guardian Newspaper of Wednesday 21, October 2020, vol. 37, No. 15,273. The story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “Sanwo-Olu blames forces beyond ‘direct control’ for Lekki killings”.

According to the Guardian Newspaper of Thursday 22, October 2020, vol. 37, No. 15,274. The story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “Outrage over Lekki attacks”, with the following riders:

- i. Soyinka, Obasanjo, NBA tackle president
- ii. Group declares seven-days mourning
- iii. SERAP drags Buhari, Army to ICC
- iv. FG sues for calm, commits to police reforms

The Nigerian Tribune Newspaper

According to the Nigerian Tribune Newspaper of Wednesday 21, October 2020, No. 17, 653. The story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “Outrage over shootings as Lekki tollgate turns bloody”, with the following riders:

- i. Security operatives fire live bullets as EndSARS protesters run.
- ii. Many killed in Ibadan, Lagos, Jos
- iii. Police stations, vehicles burnt
- iv. Lagos, Ekiti, Plateau, Osun, Ondo declare curfew
- v. EndSARS: I won’t sign-off 2021 budget without compensation for victims - Gbajabiamila

According to the Nigerian Tribune Newspaper of Thursday 22, October 2020, No. 17,654. The story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “EndSARS: Shooting at protesters will close window to peace - Obasanjo”, with the following riders:

- i. Soyinka wants apology from soldiers, says govs should take over security of their states.
- ii. Too much blood already spilled, let there be no more – Gbajabiamila
- iii. Southern, Middle Belt leaders call for UN probe.
- iv. Speak out now, Afe tells Buhari
- v. NBA calls for dismissal, prosecution of perpetrators
- vi. Presidency appeal for calm

According to the Nigerian Tribune Newspaper of Friday 23, October 2020, No. 17,655. The story on Lekki Protesters Shootings appeared on the cover page as “We didn’t order Lekki shooting – Sanwo-Olu”.

From the four newspapers analysed, it was discovered that the story on endSARS protesters shootings at Lekki Toll Gate appeared on the cover pages of all the newspapers on the 3 days (21-23 October, 2020), except for Vanguard Newspaper of Wednesday, October, 21, 2020. Vol. 27: No. 64,188.

Table 3: Newspapers' Cover pages on Lekki protesters shootings

Newspapers	Number of Cover pages	Percentage
Guardian	2	20
Vanguard	2	20
Punch	3	30
Nigerian tribune	3	30
Total	10	100

Source: Researchers' computation from the four newspapers collected, 2021.

From Table 3 above, the story of Lekki protesters shootings on cover pages of newspapers between 21 – 23 October, 2020 had a total occurrence of 10, with a frequency occurrence of 2, accounting for 20% in the Guardian; 2 frequency occurrence accounting for 20% in the Vanguard, 3 frequency occurrence accounting for 30% in the Punch and 3 frequency occurrence accounting for 30% in the Nigerian Tribune.

Table 4: Number of times military personnel shooting at unarmed protesters at Lekki Toll gate appeared

Newspaper	No of times shooting by military personnel appeared	Percentage
Guardian	11	20
Vanguard	11	20
Punch	14	25.5
Nigerian Tribune	19	34.5
Total	55	100

Source: Researchers' computation from the four newspapers collected, 2021.

From Table 4 above, the number of times military personnel shooting at unarmed protesters at Lekki Toll gate appeared in newspapers between 21-23 October, 2020 had a total of 55 occurrences with a frequency occurrence of 11, accounting for 20% in the Guardian; 11 frequency occurrence accounting for 20% in the Vanguard, 8 frequency occurrence accounting for 25.5% in the Punch and 19 frequency occurrence accounting for 34.5% in the Nigerian Tribune.

Discussion

From the content analysis of four Nigerian national daily newspapers on the issue of Lekki shootings during the 2020 endSARS protest in Nigeria, the study found that the number of times 'unarmed endSARS protesters gathered at Lekki toll gate' appeared on newspapers between 21 – 23 October, 2020, had a total occurrence of 36. The number of articles featuring 'unarmed protesters gathered at Lekki Toll Gate' had a total occurrence of 22.

The study also found that the story on 'endSARS protesters shootings at Lekki Toll Gate' appeared on the cover pages and headlines of all the newspapers on the 3 days (21-23 October, 2020), except for Vanguard of Wednesday, October, 21, 2020. Vol. 27: No. 64,188. The story of 'Lekki protesters shootings' on cover pages of newspapers between 21 – 23 October, 2020 had a total occurrence of 10. The number of times 'military personnel shooting at unarmed protesters at Lekki Toll gate' appeared in newspapers between 21-23 October, 2020 had a total of 55 occurrences.

It is observed from the findings of the study that 'endSARS protesters gathering and being shot at by military personnel' have high appearances in the four newspapers analysed. This is an indication that the military action violated the citizens' right to life and freedom of peaceful assembly. This supports the assertion of Abati (2020), that the Nigerian state repression and clampdown on EndSARS protesters induced gross violation of human rights. The observation also

reiterated the events of the past years in the extrajudicial killings in Odi, Bayelsa State and Zaki Biam in Benue State in 1999 and 2001 (Amnesty International, 2018). This observation may be attributed to the failure of the Nigerian police force to effectively carry out their duty of civil protection of lives and property and the shortage of Nigerian police personnel. This buttressed the assertion of Sallek (2019) that the deployment of the military to quell civil unrest in Nigeria is due to the weaknesses and inadequacies of the Nigerian police in terms of inadequate training, shortage of manpower and equipment. It also shows the human rights violations by government agencies that are supposed to protect the citizens. The observation could also be traced to lack of effective military-civilian relationship and military personnel not being vast in the latest techniques of civil unrest management. All these have expanded citizens' mistrust of the Nigeria security personnel and might lead to more social protest and civil unrest, if not properly checked.

Conclusion

The study carried out a content analysis of four Nigerian national daily newspapers between 21 and 23 October, 2020 to ascertain the actual event that occurred at Lekki Toll Gate on 20th October, 2020. From the findings of the study, all the national daily newspapers featured the gathering of 'unarmed endSARS protesters at Lekki Toll Gate' on 20 October, 2020 and all the national daily newspapers featured the story of unarmed endSARS protesters being shot by military personnel. The study thus concludes that endSARS protesters were gathered at Lekki Toll Gate on 20 October, 2020 and that unarmed endSARS protesters were shot at by military personnel at the Lekki Toll Gate on the 20th October, 2020.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Nigerian government should know that protest is not an attack on government but a form of feedback from citizens, and look into the reasons why citizens go into protest.
- ii. Security operatives in Nigeria should adopt modern ways of managing protesters like the use of dialogue and technology, and shun the use of live ammunitions to disperse protesters. The Nigeria security apparatuses need urgent reforms and overhauling to improve on their relationships with the citizens.

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