When Tragedy Trends: A Framing Analysis of X Users' Reactions to the Yelwata Attack

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Abstract

In the wake of the deadly attack on Yelwata Community in Benue State, north-central Nigeria, social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), became digital battlegrounds for framing the tragedy, questioning state response, and amplifying cries for justice. The scenario is tantamount to saying when bullets fall silent, the hashtags begin to speak. Hence, this study investigates how X users framed and responded to the Yelwata carnage in Benue State, Nigeria, where over 200 lives were reportedly lost in the

violent attack. Adopting Framing Theory, the research employs qualitative content analysis of 216 tweets to uncover the dominant frames, sentiments, and discursive strategies used by users in constructing the tragedy. Findings revealed four key frames: victimhood and mourning, government failure and inaction, ethno-religious conflict, and justice advocacy. Emotional tones were largely marked by grief, anger, disbelief, and calls for resilience, while discursive strategies drew on metaphor, biblical allusions, and political critique to reinforce collective grievances and mobilise public consciousness. These results align with existing scholarship on digital activism and conflict reportage, demonstrating that social media functions as both a site of mourning and resistance, amplifying narratives of state accountability and insecurity in Nigeria. The study concludes that X serves not merely as a platform for information exchange but as a participatory public sphere where ordinary citizens contest official silence, preserve memory, and push for justice. Its implications underscore the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping conflict discourse, with relevance for policymakers, civil society actors, and scholars of media and security studies.

Keywords: Yelwata Carnage, Framing Theory, X-Users, Digital Activism, Nigeria

Introduction

In an era where digital technologies have revolutionized the ways individuals experience, interpret, and respond to crises, social media platforms have become powerful arenas for public discourse (Bassey, 2024). The social media, particularly X (formerly Twitter), has transformed from a mere channel of interpersonal communication to a pivotal arena for activism, political mobilisation, narrative construction, and meaning-making in the wake of violent conflicts and state failures (Ekoh & George, 2021; Bassey, 2024; Cammaerts, 2015). In the Nigerian context, platforms like X have increasingly functioned as both real-time news outlets and civic spaces where citizens articulate outrage, memorialise victims, and hold state actors accountable in times of national tragedy (Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017; Bello, Alhassan & Inuwa-Dutse, 2023). One recent incident that evoked significant public reactions across digital platforms was the gruesome attack on Yelwata, a community in Benue State, Nigeria on June 13, 2025. Benue state is a region in Nigeria which has long been plagued by communal violence (Bello, Alhassan & Inuwa-Dutse, 2023).

With insecurity becoming a persistent feature of the Nigerian socio-political landscape, the framing of such violent events within the digital public sphere has acquired heightened relevance. As argued by Osisanwo (2025), the media's linguistic constructions of insecurity often influence not only public perception but also the national mood and political response. Through metaphors, emotive language, and selective emphasis, users on social media adopt frames that either amplify the severity of events, question the legitimacy of governmental action, or mobilise collective identity and outrage (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008; Igwebuike, 2020). Although framing has

been studied extensively in mainstream journalism (Sabiu & Aondover, 2023; Jinmi-Ahisu & Osah, 2021) and social media's role in political resistance is well documented (Ajibola, 2021; Augustine, 2023), few studies have bridged the intersection between citizen framing of security-related violence and emotional, linguistic, and narrative devices deployed in digital spaces like X. Previous works have mainly concentrated on nationwide protest movements such as the #EndSARS demonstrations (Ekoh & George, 2021; Ugochukwu & Nwolu, 2021), or broad analyses of hate speech and propaganda (Tonneau et al., 2024; Ugwu & Nnamani, 2023), leaving a significant gap in understanding how non-protest tragedies, particularly those affecting rural or marginalised communities like Yelwata, are framed by everyday users online. Moreover, the digital framing of the Yelwata attack demands scholarly attention not only because of the content shared, but due to the recency of the occurrence as well as the speed, and intensity with which interpretations were constructed and circulated.

Again, while studies such as Akinyetun (2021) and Mengistu (2017) acknowledge the role of youth and digital participation in governance discourse, fewer have traced how such participation manifests in moments of community tragedy, particularly through linguistic framing and affective responses. This study, therefore, fills a crucial research gap by content-analysing X users' reactions to the Yelwata attack, with particular emphasis on the framing devices, emotional valence, and socio-political subtexts embedded in their tweets. Essentially, the study interrogates how users construct meanings around communal violence, and how such meaning-making reflects wider concerns about governance, security, and ethno-religious fault lines in Nigeria. As noted by Apuke and Omar (2021), framing in conflict reporting is not neutral but is often shaped by ideology, emotion, and intention. This is especially pertinent in decentralised spaces like X, where narratives are democratised, and any user can frame an event in ways that challenge, reinforce, or distort public understanding.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate how X users framed and interpreted the Yelwata attack in Benue State, Nigeria, as expressed through their social media discourse.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine The Dominant Frames Through Which X Users Constructed And Represented The Yelwata Attack.
2. Analyse The Emotional Tones And Sentiments Embedded In X Users' Reactions To The Yelwata Carnage.
3. Interrogate The Linguistic And Discursive Strategies Employed By Users To Frame The Attack.

Literature Review

Social Media, Conflict, and Political Resistance in Nigeria

Cammaerts (2015) observes that social media plays a dual role as a medium of communication and a site of resistance, allowing actors, especially those historically marginalised, to bypass traditional institutions and participate in public discourse. In Nigeria, where political expression is often mediated by state-influenced channels, social media has emerged as an indispensable space for political expression and counter-hegemonic narratives (Bassey, 2024). The #EndSARS protest stands as a pivotal moment in Nigeria's digital resistance history. Ekoh and George (2021) note that during the EndSARS demonstrations, social media served as a tool for both mobilisation and witnessing, with users sharing personal testimonies, graphic images, and real-time updates that challenged the credibility of official statements. These digital interactions not only documented state violence but also fostered a sense of solidarity among young Nigerians, who were united in their demand for police reform. Similarly, Bassey (2024) underscores how the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protest capitalised on digital platforms to amplify civic grievances and consolidate mass engagement, driven by viral content and participatory narratives.

Furthermore, the architecture of digital platforms enables the decentralisation of political communication. Bello, Alhassan and Inuwa-Dutse (2023) demonstrate how Twitter/X provided a participatory discursive environment during the EndSARS protest, where content creation, information sharing, and narrative framing were user-driven. The hashtag mechanism allowed users to curate discourse, establish thematic focus, and generate momentum across geographic boundaries. The communicative power of hashtags such as #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance lies in their capacity to unify

disparate voices around a common cause, while simultaneously inviting global attention to local realities. Ugochukwu and Nwolu (2021) also highlight the influence of social media framing on audience perception during the EndSARS protests, revealing that emotive and moralistic frames shaped user interpretations and intensified public outrage.

Essentially, social media has also been identified as a space where political consciousness is cultivated and amplified. Ajibola (2021) describes digital platforms as enablers of a new civic imagination, wherein social actors craft symbols of resistance and redefine power relations through content creation. The decentralised and non-hierarchical nature of digital engagement, according to Ufuophu-Biri and Ojoboh (2017), empowers citizens to participate in political discourse beyond the confines of formal institutions. Moreover, Augustine (2023) observes that social media's algorithmic structure enhances the visibility of emotionally resonant content, contributing to virality and sustained attention in moments of civil unrest.

Emotion, Sentiment, and Public Outrage in Digital Spaces

Emotion and sentiment are integral to how individuals and communities engage with traumatic or politically charged events online. Social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter) which is of interest to this study, have redefined the expression of affect in public discourse, transforming digital spaces into affective arenas where grief, anger, solidarity, and fear are transmitted, amplified, and politicised. Jost et al. (2018) argue that social media not only facilitates the dissemination of information but also enables emotional mobilisation by allowing users to publicly perform their sentiments and connect with others through shared affective registers. This dynamic is especially visible in contexts of injustice or tragedy, where user-generated content often includes emotionally charged narratives, hashtags, and imagery that elicit strong communal responses. In the Nigerian digital landscape, emotional responses to socio-political events are central to civic engagement. Ekoh and George (2021) highlight that during the #EndSARS protests, expressions of grief, outrage, and helplessness were instrumental in building collective momentum. These emotional tones were not incidental but served to validate experiences, intensify the sense of urgency, and foster a digital community bound by shared indignation. Similarly, Ugochukwu and Nwolu (2021) reveal how the moral framing of the protests on social media was deeply intertwined with emotional

cues, particularly narratives of victimhood and injustice. Through the sharing of personal losses, video evidence of brutality, and emotional appeals for reform, users constructed a compelling moral discourse that transcended geographic and class divisions.

Digital emotion is also shaped and sustained through algorithmic visibility. As Augustine (2023) notes, emotionally resonant content, particularly that which conveys pain, empathy, or outrage, is more likely to be liked, shared, and retweeted, thereby extending its reach and influence. This algorithmic amplification reinforces the prominence of emotional narratives in digital discourse. The use of emotionally loaded hashtags such as #EndSARS or #EndBadGovernance further exemplifies how users strategically deploy sentiment as a rhetorical device. Bassey (2024) underscores that these digital expressions are not merely performative but carry political weight, as they articulate collective frustration and demand accountability. The performative dimension of emotion in digital communication also intersects with language. As Cammaerts (2015) asserts, the linguistic framing of political discourse on social media often leans heavily on affect, employing metaphors, exclamations, and imagery that evoke strong emotional reactions. In Nigeria, users frequently resort to moral appeals, religious references, and cultural idioms to articulate grief or demand justice. Ufuophu-Biri and Ojoboh (2017) observe that such emotionally framed messages serve as catalysts for broader political mobilisation, especially when they reflect a shared cultural or social experience.

Linguistic and Discursive Strategies in Social Media Framing

Language is a powerful tool through which social reality is constructed, negotiated, and contested, especially in digital spaces where discursive agency is decentralised. Osisanwo (2025), through a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of Nigerian newspaper reports, demonstrates how linguistic structures such as modality, transitivity, and evaluative expressions are strategically deployed to frame insecurity as a persistent and existential threat. These findings are relevant not only to institutional media but also to user-generated discourse, where language functions as both a representational and a performative act. In the social media environment, users often deploy metaphors, slogans, hashtags, rhetorical questions, and narrative structures to create compelling discourses around violence and conflict. Igwebuike (2020), for instance, identifies the metaphorical construction of herders in news reports, showing how such language frames them as

"invaders" or "predators," thereby fuelling fear and othering. These discursive patterns also surface in digital narratives, where users draw on culturally embedded frames to articulate their perspectives. The linguistic framing of violence often involves a moral binary, such as "us versus them" or "victims versus aggressors", which simplifies complex socio-political phenomena for emotional and rhetorical effect (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008).

Digital discourse also enables real-time linguistic creativity. The brevity of tweets, combined with the immediacy of unfolding events, encourages users to employ emotionally intense, symbolic, and culturally resonant language. Ugochukwu and Nwolu (2021) observe that the framing of the #EndSARS protest was heavily mediated by affective and moralistic language, often expressed through short, potent phrases such as "Justice for the fallen," "End police brutality," and "We will not forget." These utterances, while concise, encapsulate deep socio-political grievances and act as rallying cries. Similarly, Tonneau et al. (2024) demonstrate how hate speech and polarising rhetoric flourish on Nigerian Twitter, revealing the darker dimensions of discursive agency. The study finds that users deploy inflammatory terms, ethnically loaded descriptors, and dehumanising language to assert dominance, express frustration, or provoke conflict, often reflecting deeper societal tensions. Hashtags themselves serve as linguistic and discursive instruments. As noted by Bello, Alhassan and Inuwa-Dutse (2023), hashtags do more than categorise discourse as they construct meaning, signal alignment, and invite participation. In times of conflict or tragedy, hashtags such as #EndSARS, #BenueUnderAttack, or #YelwataMassacre operate as discursive nodes around which narratives are organised and amplified. These compact linguistic units carry emotional, political, and social weight, encoding complex frames of victimhood, urgency, blame, and resistance. Cammaerts (2015) argues that such discursive strategies enable the emergence of counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge dominant institutional framings and give voice to alternative perspectives.

Framing of Insecurity and Conflict in Traditional and Social Media

The framing of insecurity and violent conflict in both traditional and social media remains a powerful force in shaping public consciousness, political discourse, and societal responses. In contexts such as Nigeria, where violence, especially communal,

ethno-religious, and politically motivated attacks, has become a frequent occurrence, the role of media in interpreting and relaying such events is critical. Framing does not merely reflect reality; it constructs it, guiding how citizens understand the causes of violence, identify perpetrators, and form moral or political judgements. As Aondover, Sabiu and Aisha (2023) note, media framing in Nigeria often reflects deeper political, ethnic, and ideological fault lines, which in turn inform the polarisation of public opinion and exacerbate conflict narratives.

Several studies have critically examined how insecurity is represented in Nigerian media. Apuke and Omar (2021), in their content analysis of media coverage on the farmer-herder conflict, reveal that mainstream outlets often relied on episodic rather than thematic frames by reporting incidents as isolated events rather than as symptoms of deeper systemic issues. This approach, they argue, results in superficial understanding and policy responses that fail to address root causes. Similarly, Felix, Jigem and Ngantem (2025), in their study of newspaper framing of the Southern Taraba crisis, observe that news reports largely foregrounded the destruction and casualty figures while downplaying underlying socio-political grievances. The emphasis on bloodshed and spectacle over context and reconciliation demonstrates how media narratives can reinforce fear, blame, and retribution, rather than promote understanding or resolution.

In parallel, social media provides a contrasting discursive space where insecurity is framed not only through institutional narratives but also through lived experiences and grassroots voices. The digital public sphere allows for the rapid spread of information, but also for emotive, personalised, and often polarising representations of conflict. Essien, Muoghalu and Sulaimon (2022) illustrate how the Nigerian Twitter community framed the federal government's Twitter ban not merely as a policy issue but as a symbol of broader repression and democratic backsliding. Similarly, Ugwu and Nnnamani (2023) analyse how group polarisation and hate speech flourished in digital debates, particularly in response to ethnicised violence. These studies demonstrate that while social media democratises access to public discourse, it also amplifies divisive frames, especially in the absence of editorial gatekeeping.

The interconnection between language, framing, and insecurity becomes even more salient when viewed through the lens of discourse studies. Osisanwo (2025), in his

corpus-assisted critical discourse study, identifies how Nigerian newspapers consistently employ discursive markers that suggest helplessness, escalation, and uncertainty in their reporting on insecurity. Similarly, Oluwadoro (2017) advocates for a language-based intervention to address the psychological and communicative dimensions of Boko Haram-related violence, highlighting how media discourses often reinforce narratives of chaos and terror. These findings suggest that both traditional and digital media environments serve as discursive battlegrounds where insecurity is not merely reported, but actively constructed and negotiated.

Collectively, the scholarship affirms that the framing of conflict and insecurity in Nigerian media, whether institutional or digital, is a function of political context, linguistic strategy, and emotional resonance. Both spaces play a role in shaping national dialogues around violence and justice, yet they do so using different tools, norms, and power dynamics.

Theoretical Lens: Framing Theory

Framing Theory, originally developed by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974, provides a foundational lens for understanding how individuals interpret and construct meaning from reality through socially shared schemas or "frames". In his seminal work *Frame Analysis*, Goffman argued that people organise experiences and make sense of events through "primary frameworks" that help to structure perception and communication. These frameworks, though often taken for granted, shape not only how issues are understood but also how they are emotionally and behaviourally responded to. At its core, Framing Theory posits that the way an issue is presented, what is included, excluded, emphasised or downplayed, affects how it is interpreted by audiences. The theory was later expanded into the field of media and political communication by scholars such as Robert Entman and Chong and Druckman.

Entman (1993), for instance, defines framing as the process of "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient" to promote particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, or treatment recommendations. Chong and Druckman. (2007) further distinguish between *frame building* (how frames are constructed) and *frame setting* (how they influence audiences). Frame building refers

to the ways in which frames are constructed by communicators, including journalists, politicians, and increasingly, social media users, while frame setting involves the effects those frames have on audience understanding and interpretation (Chong & Druckman, 2007). This is particularly pertinent to user-generated content on social media platforms, where individuals act as both producers and consumers of information.

A wide body of scholarship supports the applicability and robustness of Framing Theory, especially in the analysis of media and digital discourse. For instance, Commaerts (2025) asserts that social media platforms like X are dynamic spaces for framing struggle, where power, identity, and resistance are constantly negotiated. Likewise, Ugochukwu and Nwolu (2021) in their study on the #EndSARS protest, highlight how users deployed moralistic and affective frames to shape the public understanding of police brutality and to mobilise collective outrage. Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008) argue that emotional language, metaphors, and narrative frames which are commonplace in social media discourse can significantly reshape audience perceptions, particularly in conflict-related communication. These views underscore the potency of framing not only in traditional media but also in user-generated content.

Despite its widespread utility, Framing Theory has not been without criticism. One major critique is its lack of conceptual clarity and definitional precision, as noted by Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018), who argue that scholars often operationalise frames inconsistently, making comparative research difficult. Baran and Davis (2012) also highlight the challenge of distinguishing framing from closely related concepts such as priming and agenda-setting. Furthermore, the theory has been criticised for being overly media-centric, sometimes overlooking audience agency in interpreting or resisting frames. Critics such as McQuail (2010) caution against assuming a one-way influence of frames on passive audiences, especially in the digital era where media consumers are also producers. Nevertheless, the adaptability of Framing Theory to contemporary digital communication environments is widely acknowledged. The theory's core propositions are especially relevant to the participatory and affective nature of social media, where discourse is shaped through hashtags, visuals, linguistic strategies, and emotional tone. Bello, Alhassan, and Inuwa-Dutse (2023) demonstrate how framing on Nigerian Twitter contributed to collective consciousness and mobilisation during the #EndSARS protest,

while Osisanwo (2025) applies framing within a critical discourse analysis framework to reveal how insecurity is linguistically constructed in Nigerian media.

In the case of the Yelwata attack, this theoretical framework guides the examination of the dominant frames deployed by X users, the affective tones embedded in their expressions, and the discursive strategies employed to interpret, contest, or amplify the carnage. With the application of framing theory, this study seeks to understand how digital publics not only react to tragedy but also co-create its meaning within Nigeria's broader socio-political and media landscape.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis to explore how X users framed and emotionally responded to the Yelwata attack in Benue State, Nigeria. The choice of this approach is informed by the interpretive nature of the research, which seeks to understand not merely what was said online, but how it was said, the underlying meanings encoded in users' expressions, and the social realities those meanings reflect. In line with Framing Theory and discourse-based media studies (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008), this methodology allows for the detailed examination of language, sentiment, and discursive patterns embedded in social media content. The unit of analysis comprises user-generated tweets on X that reference the Yelwata attack during a defined period of heightened engagement (between June 13, 2025 and June 27, 2025). This time frame spans the first two weeks following the incident, when discourse is often most intense and sentiments rawest. Tweets were selected based on hashtags such as #Yelwata, #BenueUnderAttack, #YelwataMassacre, and related terms that trended in the aftermath of the incident.

To access the relevant dataset, the study employed Twitter's advanced search functions, capturing a sample of publicly available tweets. In line with qualitative content analysis principles, purposive sampling was used to select tweets that were information-rich, diverse in perspective, and representative of the dominant frames and sentiments circulating during the discourse. Efforts were made to include tweets from verified accounts, influential users, and ordinary citizens to ensure a cross-section of voices. Non-English tweets, spam, or those lacking contextual relevance were excluded to

maintain analytical coherence. For data analysis, initial codes were informed by existing literature on media framing and social media discourse during conflict (e.g., Ugochukwu & Nwolu, 2021; Osisanwo, 2025; Cammaerts, 2015), while emerging themes were identified during iterative reading and annotation of tweets. Manual thematic analysis techniques were employed to manage, categorise, and interpret the data. For ethical consideration, although tweets are publicly accessible, the study refrained from disclosing usernames or other identifying details.

Findings

The analysis draws on the 216 tweets sampled and each subsection addresses one of the research objectives, providing a detailed insight into the way users on X (formerly Twitter) framed, emoted, and discursively responded to the Yelwata carnage.

RO1: Dominant Frames in the Representation of the Yelwata Attack

A central thrust of this study was to examine the dominant frames through which X users constructed and represented the Yelwata massacre. From the analysis, four primary frames emerged: victimhood and loss, government failure, ethno-religious tension, and calls for justice and accountability.

Victimhood and Loss Frame

The victimhood frame was prevalent across multiple tweets, evoking a strong sense of empathy and human loss. Such tweets constructed narratives that focused on the emotional devastation experienced by survivors. Some of the tweets read:

> This lady lost all her 5 children and she also lost her mother at the recent Yelwata Massacre in Benue State. The pain is deep and piercing.

> How do you console someone like this? This is devastating

> The lady in the first photo lost her mum and 4
> sisters in the Yelwata massacre in Benue state...
> Dare to imagine having your entire family wiped
> off in one day.

Essentially, these narratives framed the victims not as abstract casualties, but as people with names, histories, and families, thereby challenging the reduction of victims to mere statistics.

Government Failure

The frame of government failure was also dominant. Users expressed outrage at perceived state neglect and complicity and criticized them for failing to do their responsibilities as at when due. Some of the tweets read:

> Nigeria is a failed state, like every single African
> nation

> Assume Nigeria is a country, Tinubu would have
> been removed over these incessant killings. Still,
> we don't know our rights

> The massacre in Yelwata is yet another tragic proof
> that this government has completely failed in its
> primary duty to protect lives and property

The tweets above captured the growing disillusionment with the state apparatus and several tweets also accused the political elite of performative sympathy, noting that:

> Top politicians visited the hospitals where
> survivors... are treated... for a camera show

This accusation of performative sympathy often intersected with accusations of hypocrisy, as a user said:

> She (refereeing to one of the victims) chose to
> nurse her grief by herself rather than being used for
> a hypocritical show by shameless politicians

Ethno-religious Frame

Ethno-religious frame emerged in narratives linking the attackers to Fulani herders and implying religious motives. For instance, some tweets claimed:

> Fulani Militias are real cancer to the communities they enter, all are Demon possessed

> Those people doing this are just around the same area... motorbikes they use to come and carry out the attacks are used in the city centres of Mkd and Lafia

Another stated:

> The Fulani terrorist are being aided by the Nigerian soldiers, police and all the security forces... to fulfill the jihad agenda.

> Nigerians are oblivious of the Fulani agenda or they are pretending

These tweets frame the attacks not merely as acts of violence but as manifestations of an enduring ethno-religious conflict.

Justice and Retribution Frame

The justice and retribution frame also surfaced prominently. Tweets called for both national and communal responses in term of self-defence. Such tweets include:

> Benue people should arm themselves and fight back. The rule of nature is SURVIVE OR DIE!

> These criminals must pay... they must be wiped out or kept in d cooler for yrs...

> Mobilize and strike them back unexpectedly as they did to your village no time

The tweets here reflect a rising vigilante logic where users believe justice cannot be attained through formal institutions. These demonstrate an emerging militancy in digital discourse, reflecting a perceived failure of state protection

RO2: Emotional Tones and Sentiments Embedded in the Tweets

The second objective sought to analyse the emotional tones embedded in user reactions to the Yelwata massacre. The tweets analysed revealed a complex interplay of grief, anger, helplessness, and sarcastic bitterness**.**

Grief

Grief was deeply encoded in many of the tweets. Expressions such as *"I can't erase the images from my head I'm so traumatised right now"* (Tweet 2), and *"Oh my God! The Loss is unimaginable... I can't help it. Am crying already"* (Tweet 27) showed the grief in most of the users. These emotionally charged responses serve not only as cathartic expressions but also as public rituals of mourning in the digital sphere.

Anger and rage

Anger and rage were particularly directed at state actors. For instance, *"The rain that caused the flood which prevented Tinubu from going to Yelwata is the same rain children were forced to stand under just to wave at his convoy of shame"* (Tweet 39) blends sarcasm with political rage. The feeling of betrayal is reflected in *"After you write this, that's where it ends? When will you opposition leaders actually rise up to shut down complacent ruling party?"* (Tweet 85). Another tweet says: *"Empty speeches and hollow promises can't bring back the dead. Nigerians deserve security, not condolences."*

Helplessness

A tone of helplessness and resignation pervaded several tweets: *"It's heartbreaking to see such suffering"* (Tweet 20), and *"Everyone left should just pack out and leave that state empty because those devils may come back"* (Tweet 23). These sentiments reflect a psychological fatigue often associated with protracted crises as continually been witnessed in Benue State.

Sarcastic Bitterness

Sarcasm and dark humour also emerged as affective strategies in the tweets: *"So much for cows! Your Excellency... use your resources and ranch them. Open grazing is government sponsored irresponsibility!"* (Tweet 82). Another tweet mocked state inaction by asking, *"What is the purpose of the Air force Base in Makurdi if these terrorists could execute this genocide in the state?" (Twwet 201).* This emotional register signifies a coping mechanism that blends frustration with wit in the face of despair.

RO 3: Linguistic and Discursive Strategies

The third objective focused on interrogating the linguistic and discursive strategies X users deployed to construct meaning around the Yelwata carnage. The findings reveal heavy use of metaphors, religious allusions, intertextuality, repetition, code switching and hashtags as framing tools.

Users employed metaphors and imagery to heighten emotional impact. For example, *"They live on human blood. Their evil must come to an end"* (Tweet 68), *"Yelwata, the village that was attacked by Fulani Herdsmen and over 200 people massacred."* likens the attackers to vampiric figures, emphasising perceived brutality. The expressions evoke visceral imagery that stirs emotional engagement.

Religious symbolism abounded: *"In the Bible, the 3 wise men were from the East. Sodom & Gomorrah were in the West and God destroyed them. Let the people of Benue wise up"* (Tweet 50), embedding the violence within a divine morality tale. Discursive strategies also included anaphora and repetition, such as in *"Fight and die or still die"* (Tweet 41), and *"Stop crying... defend your land and lives... defend yourselves"* (Tweet 88), which rhetorically intensify calls to action. Intertextual references also occurred in tweets like *"MNK warned you guys five years ago about Fulani agenda but majority of Nigerians called him terrorist. Who's now the terrorist?"* (Tweet 74). This situates current events within a longer historical or ideological continuum.

Code-switching also occurred in the tweets as users switch between formal English and local idioms or Pidgin also featured, enhancing cultural resonance. An example is: *"una dey craze, this useless country full of corrupt politicians",* This tweets alongside its code swtiching conveys deep frustration through street parlance.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a layered and emotionally charged digital response to the Yelwata massacre, affirming the capacity of social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), to serve as dynamic public spheres where collective grief, outrage, and political discourse converge. Consistent with the premises of framing theory (Chong & Druckman, 2007), users did not merely report on the event; rather, they actively participated in constructing narratives, assigning blame, and mobilising sentiments through discursive practices. The implications of these observations are manifold, touching on issues of media framing, affective politics, digital activism, and the crisis of state legitimacy in Nigeria.

Firstly, the prominence of victimhood and government inaction as dominant frames aligns with previous studies on digital responses to national tragedies. Ekoh and George (2021) noted a similar trend in their examination of digital expressions during the #EndSARS protests, where the platform became a theatre for challenging state complicity and inefficiency. This study confirms that such framing is not isolated but part of a broader communicative strategy among Nigerian netizens to signal dissatisfaction with state performance. The recurrence of terms like "failed state", "shameless politicians", and "hypocrisy" reveals a potent symbolic indictment of state actors, suggesting a widening credibility gap between government narratives and public perception. As Apuke and Omar (2021) argue, media framing in conflict contexts often reflects broader systemic frustrations and contested truths.

Moreover, the emotional undertones uncovered, ranging from grief and trauma to rage and defiance, demonstrate how social media discourse transcends mere reportage to become an affective space of resistance. This corroborates Cammaerts' (2015) assertion that digital platforms amplify not only messages but emotions, making them central to

the formation of political subjectivities. The tweet lamenting, *"This kind of loss you can't even cry anymore. God!!"* exemplifies the affective overload experienced by many users. These emotional expressions serve a dual purpose: they validate collective mourning while also fuelling a counter-narrative that challenges state-sanctioned silence and minimisation.

The linguistic creativity and strategic use of metaphors, sarcasm, religious references, and intertextuality in the tweets, such as *"the blood-soaked villages like Yelewata"* or *"Tinubu's convoy of shame"*, illustrate what Ufuophu-Biri and Ojoboh (2017) describe as the rhetorical weaponisation of language in digital resistance. This study extends their findings by showing how users frame not only perpetrators but also responders, effectively politicising both violence and the discourse surrounding it. The rhetorical question, *"How do you console someone like this? How do you tell her to 'reconcile' with those who wiped out her family?"* poignantly challenges the politics of forgiveness and national unity, echoing Ajetunmobi's (2023) critique of the dissonance between ethical journalism and state propaganda.

Furthermore, the data suggest that social media enables a decentralised form of agenda setting, where citizens, not elites, determine the focal points of discourse. In contrast to traditional media framing that often relies on official statements, users on X foregrounded marginalised voices and community testimonies. This finding resonates with Mirra and Garcia's (2017) notion of a reimagined civic participation in the multimodal public sphere. The recurring call for arming citizens and the suggestion that *"Benue people should go into the bush at night to hunt for their killers"* further illustrates the radicalisation of discourse in response to perceived state absence, a phenomenon also noted by Felix et al. (2025) in their study on Southern Taraba.

The implications of these findings are significant. Firstly, they highlight the evolving nature of digital platforms as alternative public spheres where hegemonic narratives are resisted and reshaped. Secondly, they expose the emotional labour borne by ordinary citizens in curating and sustaining public memory of violence. Thirdly, they suggest that social media is not merely reactive but also generative, producing new vocabularies, alliances, and political imaginations. However, these spaces are also vulnerable to

polarisation, misinformation, and emotional exhaustion, which could hinder sustained activism if not navigated judiciously.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the wake of the Yelwata carnage, this study has offered a critical lens through which to examine the discursive practices, emotional responses, and framing strategies employed by X (formerly Twitter) users in narrating and contesting the tragedy. Drawing upon 216 tweets, the research analysed how digital citizens responded to the attack, not merely as passive observers but as active framers of discourse, constructing meaning, assigning blame, and articulating collective trauma. The analysis, grounded in framing theory, revealed that users predominantly framed the incident within narratives of victimhood, government inaction, ethno-religious tensions, and systemic failure. These frames were suffused with powerful affective expressions ranging from anguish and sorrow to outrage and defiance, often laced with political undertones and calls for resistance.

The implications of this study are profound, especially in understanding how social media platforms have evolved into participatory arenas where the politics of representation, memory, and justice play out in real time. The study aligns with the findings of Apuke and Omar (2021), as well as Bello, Alhassan, and Inuwa-Dutse (2023), who have argued that social media serves as both a site of emotional catharsis and political mobilisation in Nigeria's turbulent socio-political climate. Furthermore, the linguistic strategies deployed by users, metaphors, rhetorical questions, moral binaries, echo findings in Osisanwo (2025) and Igwebuike (2020), underscoring the complex interplay between language, power, and identity in digital conflict narratives.

Given the insights drawn from this study, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, there is a pressing need for policymakers and security agencies to monitor and engage constructively with digital narratives. Rather than dismissing social media as merely reactive, stakeholders must recognise its capacity to illuminate public grievances, foster accountability, and provide early warning signals in conflict-prone regions. Secondly, digital literacy and conflict-sensitive communication training should be integrated into media and civic education programmes. This would empower citizens to articulate their

concerns responsibly while mitigating the risk of misinformation, polarisation, and hate speech. These are issues previously identified by Tonneau et al. (2024) and Ugwu and Nnnamani (2023). Thirdly, researchers and practitioners in peacebuilding should consider integrating social media analysis into their conflict-mapping frameworks. As this study has demonstrated, platforms like X are not only sources of information but reservoirs of collective memory and resistance, capable of shaping public perception and influencing policy discourse.

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