Hate Speech and its Threat to Credible Election in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The fact that Political Communication entails a system of dynamic interaction among three actors - politicians, media, and audience or readers - where each of whom is involved in producing, receiving, and interpreting political messages informed the decision of this paper to study hate speech, as put out by the media, from the perspective of credible elections. Therefore, this paper examines the menace of hate speech in Nigeria's politics to establish the level of involvement of the media in the upsurge of hate speech, particularly during electioneering. The paper adopts the Social Responsibility Theory as its framework. This is to ascertain whether the media, especially, is adhering to its constitutional status of being free but mindful of the peaceful coexistence and Nigeria's unity while discharging its major duty of disseminating information. Content Analysis Research Method was employed to generate the data for the study. By the use of purposive sampling, the editions of Daily Trust and Punch newspapers for six months - four months before the 2019 general elections and two months after the elections - were content analysed. The front-page stories, editorials, and political and opinion pages of the newspapers were analysed as units of analysis, while hate speech with religious, ethnic, regional, and political colourations were the content categories. The analysis was done to determine the level of involvement of the media in hate speech. By this, the research has found that conventional media like Daily Trust and Punch newspapers are also involved in the dissemination of hate speech. It was therefore recommended, among others, that media through which hate speech is disseminated should strictly adhere to its social responsibility roles as postulated by the Social Responsibility theory for incidences of hate speech to be curtailed, as it cannot only truncate Nigeria's young and nascent democracy, but it poses as a gory monster that can lead to the disintegration of the country. Therefore, everything must be done to tackle the menace of hate speech in Nigeria for democracy to thrive.

Keywords: Election, hate speech, media, peace, political communication

Introduction

The scourge of hate speech in Nigeria is not only threatening the peaceful conduct of elections but the unity and peaceful coexistence of the country. The venom being spewed by various ethnic, regional, and religious gladiators across Nigeria is more than enough to raise concern among Nigerians over the fate of Nigeria's democracy and corporate existence. Any serious government must put strategies in place that will decisively and holistically handle any menace threatening the corporate existence of the state it governs.

Social scientists, especially Pate, Nwabueze and Idiong (2013), Ezeibe (2020), Terfa (2017) and Lilleker (2006), posited that hate speech has the capacity and tendency to create political tension and uncertainty particularly when its constructive framing and priming target ethnic, regional or religious chauvinism. The foregoing postulation on the influence of hate speech in opinion and behaviour formation, perhaps, brought about the sharp division of Nigerians along ethnic, regional, and religious lines. According to Mohammed (2012) and Alex and John (2012) the activities of the media have over the years created suspicion, distrust, and acrimony among Nigerians. It created a situation where most Nigerians see themselves as enemies. The spirit of brotherhood is steadily fading and interaction among Nigerians is now characterised by ethnic, religious, and regional trepidation.

Many scholars, including Mohammed (2012), Ezeibe (2020) and Adibe (2015), have asserted that if hate speech continues to gain ground as a tool of campaign and propaganda in Nigeria, it will grow out of proportion and its accompanying devastating effects on the continuous corporate existence of the country can be better imagined. The future of states where hate speech flourishes, according to these scholars, is always bleak. Ordinarily, the diversity of Nigeria ought to have been its major strength. However, the tag of unity in diversity is gradually becoming a mirage in Nigeria.

Since the media is the channel through which hate speech is disseminated, as postulated by the foregoing scholars, it is therefore imperative to make the terminology and phraseology of the press evaluative. It is on this light, as well as the importance of the media to the development of every society, that the framers of the Nigerian 1999 constitution clearly identified the role of the media in Nigeria. Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution states thus; "the Press; radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold responsibility and accountability of the government to the people." In essence, the framers of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria had established a framework for media to operate freely as watchdog of the society, but with utmost conscience for the promotion of peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

Therefore, the advent of the modern media, from 1859 (Iwe Irohin), in Nigeria and later the social media networks ought to have strengthened the position of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution on the freedom of speech. However, both the conventional and social media are now guilty of disseminating and promoting the scourge of hate speech in Nigeria. Some of the Nigerian conventional media now use hate speech to achieve their profit-making goals, while others use the menace to settle political, ethnic, regional, or religious scores, Ezeibe (2020) and Adibe (2015), among others, posited.

Social media networks offer people the privilege to disseminate information from the comfort of their homes. Hence, under the guise of freedom of expression, some Nigerians use these networks to attack and malign their fellow countrymen. These trends made social scientists like Sellars (2016), Adedokun (2019), Greene and Simpson (2017), Alkali, Faga and Mbursa (2016), Onyekwere and Mercy (2019) et cetera to engage in serious debate as to whether the emergence of the social media can be regarded as a blessing or curse on Nigeria largely because of the proliferation of hate speech. It is not surprising, therefore, that some countries, including developed ones, regulate and restrict the use of social media to check its bad influence on the peace and corporate existence of their countries.

In the same vein, there is no gainsaying the fact that a peaceful environment is a major ingredient in the conduct of a credible election. It is therefore stating the obvious that hate speech has played a major role in igniting violence before, during, and after the 2011, 2015, and 2019 general elections. Ezeibe's (2020) strives to find the nexus of hate speech with election violence in Nigeria and brings to the fore how entrenched the culture of hate speech led to the violence that characterised the 2011, 2015, and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Therefore, hate speech is an oft-neglected major driver of election violence in Nigeria, hence scholars like Ezeibe (2020), Mohammed (2017) and Sellars (2016) advocated for the implementation of anti-hate speech laws to protect the rights of minority groups, promote political inclusion and ultimately to prevent election violence for Nigeria's democracy to thrive.

The explosion of hate speech has caused the disintegration of many states in different parts of the world, particularly in Africa, with many plunged into gruesome and horrific civil wars leaving behind devastating and disgusting consequences. Nigeria is not immune from tasting the kind of bitter experiences of states that allowed hate speech to flourish, hence hate speech can truncate Nigeria's young and nascent democracy or even cause the disintegration of the country. Based on the foregoing, this paper examines the menace of hate speech and its threat to a peaceful election in Nigeria to establish the participation and culpability, or otherwise, of each of the three major actors in political communication – the media, politicians, and audience/readers. The study is with special reference to the 2019 general elections.

Hate Speech and Political Communication

Hate speech has been described as any speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display, which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action (Ezeibe, 2020). It is on this basis that the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013:4) identified the following as characteristics of hate speech:

According to Terfa (2017), all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means; which may include incitement to hatred, contempt, or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. Terfa (2017) further asserts that hate speech involves threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. It also includes expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin as well as participation in organisations and activities, which promote and incite racial discrimination.

Again, Neisser (1994:337) notes that hate speech refers to all communications (whether verbal, written, or symbolic) that insults a racial, ethnic, or political group, whether by suggesting that they are inferior in some respect or by indicating that they are despised or not welcome for any other reasons. Similarly, Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002) describe hate speech as war waged on others employing words. Again, Enahoro (2017) defines hate speech as polluted statements, especially by Nigerians, attacking each other based on ethnicity or religion.

Furthermore, Nadim and Fledmoe (2016) note that hate speech connotes any persecuting, degrading, or discriminating speech on the grounds of the recipient's minority group identity. However, according to them, a speech can only be qualified to be described as hate speech unless it is conveyed publicly or in the presence of others and is directed at a certain group or an individual's assumed group identity.

Sellars (2016) see**s** hate speech as expressions that target a group, or an individual as a member of a group where the content of that expression causes hatred, and harm, incites bad actions beyond the speech itself, and has no redeeming purpose, which is expressed in the public with the likelihood of causing violent response. Sellars (2016) stressed the definition offered did not provide exhaustive traits of hate speech, but only provided means of identifying and classifying a certain expression as hate.

Greene and Simpson (2017), explain the ambiguity created by different definitions of hate speech where it is sometimes ascribed as an aspect of freedom of speech. They said any expression that is worthy of being categorised as hate speech is one whose content portrays traits of hatred with the capacity to cause violent reaction. According to them, therefore, while some people's speech rights must be respected, other people's right to be free from verbal abuse must also be protected, hence the logic therein clearly distinguished hate speech from freedom of speech.

The foregoing, clearly demonstrates that hate speech tends to ignite genocide. It can lead to war and the disintegration of any society whose members engage in it. It can lead to discrimination and bring about phobia in the targeted group. Hate groups can incite hatred, hence the need for caution in a state like Nigeria. By and large, hate speech brings about a lack of tolerance, political clashes, and enmity, and elections of whatever type and form cannot be conducted in a state of anarchy.

Hate Speech and Nigeria's Crises

Promoters of hate speech usually embark on the mission with clear-cut objectives. In the political sphere, hate speech in Nigeria is usually targeted at discrediting a sitting government, destabilising the polity and even making the country to become ungovernable. When any attempt succeeded in discrediting a sitting government, it would obviously lose the support of the citizens who have the supreme will in determining who becomes what in a democracy. This allows the opposition to cash in and take over power, which is the ultimate goal of every political party.

Similarly, on an individual level, hate speech can be targeted at tarnishing of individual's dignity to humiliate him/her and cause him/her psychological and emotional pain. Again, hate speech can be targeted at causing fear, embarrassment, and isolation in an individual. With this objective, if the targeted individual happens to be a leader, he/she may be distracted from performing his responsibility effectively and that can lead to failure (Ezeibe, 2020).

By and large, the ultimate objective of hate speech is to cause disaffection and raise the emotions of sentiment to achieve a desired goal. This goal can be political, religious, or ethnic. However, the danger is that if the victims of hate speech decided to react aggressively can lead to devastating consequences.

According to Mohammed (2017), hate speech in Nigeria is a multi-million-naira project and the people behind the string of hate speech, disinformation, and fake news are not about to stop anytime soon. He ascribed the resurgent push for separatism as well as rising cases of ethnic and religious disharmony to promoters of hate speech. He said these vices are all traceable in Nigeria to the growing phenomenon of hate speech, disinformation, and fake news campaigns. The foregoing brings to the fore the influence of profit drive as another motivation for hate speech dissemination in Nigeria's political communication domain. Dissemination of hate speech makes many newspapers and other media houses thrive. Economic factors are very essential to the sustenance and survival of any media, not only in Nigeria but in other parts of the globe. Therefore, a certain media organisation survives and achieves its objectives when it creates and sustains a reliable source of income to finance its operations, and dissemination of hate of speech is one of the ways that media organisations in Nigeria create a constituency for themselves where they get the highest patronage.

For example, Jonathan (2014) observed that without sources of income generation, most media organisations would find it difficult to continue with their operations. Similarly, according to Mosco's (2009) commodification theory, the commodity that media takes to the market is its news items. Failure of many media organisations to sell their print editions and decline in the number of those that subscribe to their online editions can cause them to close down; hence dissemination of hate speech by the popular sentiment of a media's audience or readership is a means of survival and generation of profit.

Again, Oso (2013) noted that newspapers anywhere in the world survive by engaging in commercial activities. It is these commercial activities that enable a certain media organisation to sustain itself and ultimately make a profit, and this leads to the expansion of capital and market.

From the foregoing, it is evident that most conventional media organisations in Nigeria engage in the dissemination of hate speech largely for survival purposes. They usually promote the sentiments of their readers or audience and this usually leads to higher sales and ultimately generation of profit.

Scholars like Salihu (2017), Okwori (2020), Ezeibe (2020) as well as Mohammed (2017) have subscribed to the fact that, as well as classified hate speech as a menace in Nigeria that is capable of causing the disintegration of the country. Mohammed (2017), for example, said hate is being spewed on radio stations across the country in an alarming proportion.

> *If you tune into many radio stations, you will be shocked by the things being said, the careless incitement to violence and the level of insensitivity to the multi-religious, multi-ethnic nature of our country. Unfortunately, even the hosts of such radio programmes do little or nothing to stop. Oftentimes, they are willing collaborators of hate speech campaigners. This must not be allowed to continue because it is detrimental to the unity and well-being of our country. (Vanguard Newspaper, July 23, 2017).*

In the same vein, Alkali, et al (2016) examined the implication of hate speech on the peaceful coexistence of Nigeria. They posited that the dissemination of hate speech through various media platforms has risen to an alarming proportion. Therefore, according to them, the problem created by hate speech and foul language, especially on social media platforms, in Nigeria has both moral

and legal implications for society and journalism practice. On this basis, Alkali et al (2016) sought the intervention of relevant authorities to curtail the trending menace of hate speech through the reactivation of a monitoring mechanism, which should remove hate speech content from various media platforms.

According to Lilleker (2006), political communication is reduced to "winning over" or persuading others and is solely concerned with the acquisition of power: whether governmental power or power over the media agenda. Lilleker further said that a key function of political communication is to make the public think about an issue in a way that is favourable to the sender of the message. This means that, he said, every organisation that desires to influence the public politically must attempt to control what ideas become dominant in the public sphere. This is why promoters of hate speech employ all means to make hate speech prominent in what the media disseminate in Nigeria.

Busy and Holbert (2011) postulated what they called mediatisation of politics, which entails media influence in all aspects of politics. The more mediatised politics has become, the more important news organisations become for opinion formation, the more news content is governed by media logic, and the more political institutions and actors take media into continuous consideration and adapt to, or adopt, media logic. Most promoters of hate speech are politicians and therefore mediatise their goods of trade, which is hate speech.

It is from the foregoing one can adduce that political communication becomes most relevant when political actors strive to capture political power, this is where media organisations are used for politicians to earn the favour of the general populace since they cannot meet all the population of a given state individually. Hate speech is one of the tools employed by Nigerian politicians to win citizens' support. Media becomes important in the politics of every state as most members of the population of every state listen, read, or watch one media organisation or the other (Salihu, 2017). It is through the news, including dissemination of hate speech, and other items associated with news that most populace form opinion, hence the effective utilisation of the media by promoters of hate speech.

Hate Speech and Credible Election

One of the major prerequisites of credible elections in Nigeria and elsewhere is a peaceful environment. Violence affects the credibility of any election and hate speech usually serves as a precursor to violence. For an election to be accepted as free, fair, and credible, it has to be, largely, violence-free. Violence can lead to the emergence of leaders who do not enjoy the popular support of citizens. Nigeria has witnessed much violence before, during, and after many rounds of elections that took place in the country, which were caused by the dissemination of hate speech.

Dissemination of hate speech by the Nigerian media was said to be one of the remote and immediate causes of the events that led to the truncating of the first democratically elected government in Nigeria, which led to Nigeria's civil war of 1966. According to Aminu (2017), the civil war brought devastating effects on Nigeria as many lives and properties were lost. It also entrenched distrust among Nigerians, especially between Eastern and Northern Nigeria, and the country is still battling to overcome the enmity that the civil war caused among Nigerians.

Since the inception of the current democratic dispensation in 1999, none of the seven rounds of general elections was violence-free, and much of the violence was caused by the dissemination of hate speech by political gladiators or even the citizens. This has affected the credibility of the elections where results were contested in courts or even through outright street protests and riots.

According to Kunle (2022), hate speech was among the factors that caused violence in the 1964/1965 general election in Nigeria where about 200 citizens lost their lives, and this has affected the credibility of that election. The same hate speech also played a prominent role in the violence that characterised the general elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 where 80 lives, 100 lives, 300 lives, 800 lives, 100 lives, and 150 lives were lost, respectively. This affected the credibility of these elections.

Therefore, the dangers that hate speech exposes a diverse state like Nigeria to are highly daring. The ill feelings caused by Nigeria's civil war, which is a child of hate speech, are still being healed, even 57 years down the line, through the Federal Government initiative of the mandatory one-year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the inclusion of Federal Character principles in the country's constitution among many other measures.

Aside from Nigeria, hate speech has led to wars and scuttling of democratic governance in many parts of Africa. For instance, hate speech and incitement to violence, according to Mohammed (2017), were said to have played a significant role in the 1994 genocide that left at least 800,000 people dead in Rwanda. Anti-Tutsi articles and cartoons in the *Kangura* newspaper, as well as hate speech and incitement to violence on the radio station, called Radio-Television Libres des Mille Collines (RTLMC), Thousand Hills Free Radio and Television, helped to set the stage for the genocide in Rwanda.

Olowojolu (2016) posited that the profession of journalism is concerned with news coverage and reporting and it is therefore seen as a tool for advocating and ensuring peace in societies. Therefore, the promotion of peace and harmonious coexistence is one of the major duties of media organisations all over the world and Nigeria is not an exception. Any media organisation that engages in incitement to violence through the dissemination of hate speech is engaged in journalism malpractice. It is because of the importance of the media to peace and stability that social science scholars formulated the Social Responsibility Theory, which largely emphasised the need for journalists and media practitioners generally to understand the duties their profession vested on them, which is the need to keep nations and states peacefully.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Social Responsibility Theory as its theoretical framework. The social responsibility role of the media presupposes that the media is free to effectively discharge its responsibilities, and therefore should responsibly carry out its expected watchdog role in society. The theory also holds that the media has the right to criticise government and institutions, but also has certain basic responsibilities to maintain the stability of society (Des, 2012). Therefore, this theory is assumed to best explain the problem of finding a solution to the menace of hate speech in Nigeria, which is largely disseminated by the media.

According to McQuail (1983:116), social responsibility theory, which gave the media the social responsibility role, owes its origin to an American initiative – the Commission on Freedom of the Press of 1978. Bitner (1989) says while the theory gives the media absolute freedom, it at the same time restricts the freedom by recommending that the media must act by the ethics of journalism.

McQuail (1983:117-118) has elaborated the main theses of the theory as follows:

> *"The media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society. These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance. In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions."*

McQuail (1983:117-118) further asserted that the media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or give offence to minority groups. The media as a whole should be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society, provide access to various points of view, and to rights of reply. Society and the public, following the first-named principle, have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure a public good. Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to their employers and the market.

The social responsibility theory has provided adequate ways, in which the press could satisfactorily serve society. However, in a democratic state like that of Nigeria, social responsibility falls victim to the dictates of government or profit-seeking motives of the commercial media and thereby short of serving the people and this is why promoters of hate speech get ample space in Nigeria's media.

Methodology

By the use of content analysis, this paper adopted a systematic method of investigation to discover facts on the involvement of conventional media in the dissemination of hate speech. Therefore, to address this problem, content analysis was used in collecting data for the study. Front-page stories, editorials, and political and opinion pages of the editions of Daily Trust and Punch newspapers for six months - from November 2018 to April 2019 – were content analysed. This was based on the purposive selection of the period that political activities for the 2019 elections were at their peak. About four months before the 2019 elections, November to February, was the period that campaigns were intensified with politicians adopting various strategies, including hate speech, to outsmart their opponents. Similarly, two months after the elections, March and April, politicians continued their contestation to justify their position on the fairness, or otherwise, of the elections.

Both Daily Trust and Punch newspapers were selected to determine the involvement, or otherwise, of conventional print media based in Northern and Southern Nigeria in the dissemination of hate speech. Mediafacts (2012-2017) established Daily Trust as the newspaper with the highest circulation or readership in Northern Nigeria while the Punch newspaper was rated among the top three newspapers with the highest circulation in Southern Nigeria. Hence, this study employed a purposive sampling technique in selecting the two newspapers under study and the facts established by Mediafacts (2012-2017) also informed the decision to select these two newspapers. Again, this paper determined the involvement of the two selected newspapers in the dissemination of hate speech in two folds – one, the direct involvement of the newspapers

through their editorials and front-page stories, and two, how Daily Trust and Punch newspapers provided space for politicians and their readers for dissemination of hate speech.

Voltmer (2006) posited that front-page stories and editorials of newspapers determine their identity. This gives credence to the current study to analyse the front-page stories and editorials of Daily Trust and Punch newspapers within the period under study to determine their direct involvement in the dissemination of hate speech. Again, the content analysis of the opinion and political pages of the newspapers assists in determining the role of politicians and readers in the dissemination of hate speech through the platforms of Daily Trust and Punch newspapers.

Within the period under study, Daily Trust and Punch newspapers, being daily titles, produced three hundred and sixty (360) editions, one hundred and eighty (180) for each newspaper; this is an average of thirty days (30) per month taken into consideration. Therefore, in selecting the editions of Daily Trust and Punch newspapers for content analysis, purposive sampling was also deployed. Babbie (2010:192) justified the use of any of the non-probability sampling techniques where the use of probability sampling "wouldn't be appropriate even if it were possible".

Through the use of the purposive sampling technique, this paper reviewed thirty-four (34) editions that were found to have featured news items with hate speech content in the case of the Daily Trust newspaper. This represents 19% of the total population of the study. However, 43 news items were found to have contained messages of hate speech in the 34 editions of the Daily Trust newspaper that were found relevant for this study. On the other hand, twenty-one (21) editions of the Punch newspaper were reviewed by the paper, which were found to be relevant to the study. This represents 11.67% of the population.

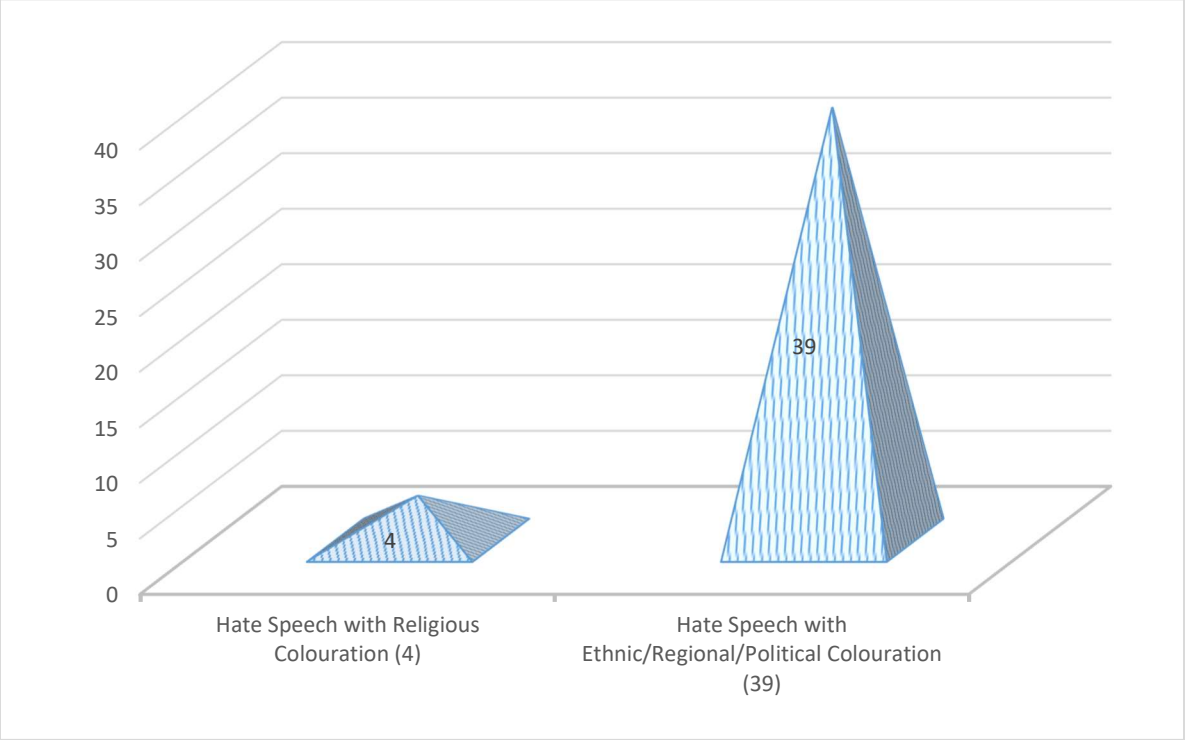
The content categories for this paper are Hate Speech with Religious Colouration and Hate Speech with Ethnic, Regional, and Political Colourations. Similarly, the units of analysis are front-page stories, editorials, and political and opinion pages of the Daily Trust and Punch newspapers. The units of analysis and content categories were coded as 1 for Hate Speech with Religious colouration, 2 Hate Speech with other colourations, 3 front-page stories, 4 editorials, 5 political pages, and 6 opinion pages. The coding has greatly assisted in the efficiency and ease of data collection.

Result

The following figures present data on the news items that connote hate speech as disseminated by the *Daily Trust* and the *Punch* newspapers from November 2018 to April 2019. The data therein establish the colouration of hate speech disseminated by both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers. Similarly, the data establish the direct involvement, or otherwise, of the newspapers in the dissemination of hate speech as well as the space they provided for the dissemination of hate speech by different actors in Nigeria's political communication. Therefore, the data generated from the two newspapers' editorials, front, political, and opinion pages within the period under study are presented in the figures below to address the problematique of the research:

Figure 1

Types of hate speech news items disseminated by *Daily Trust* newspaper from November 2018 to April 2019



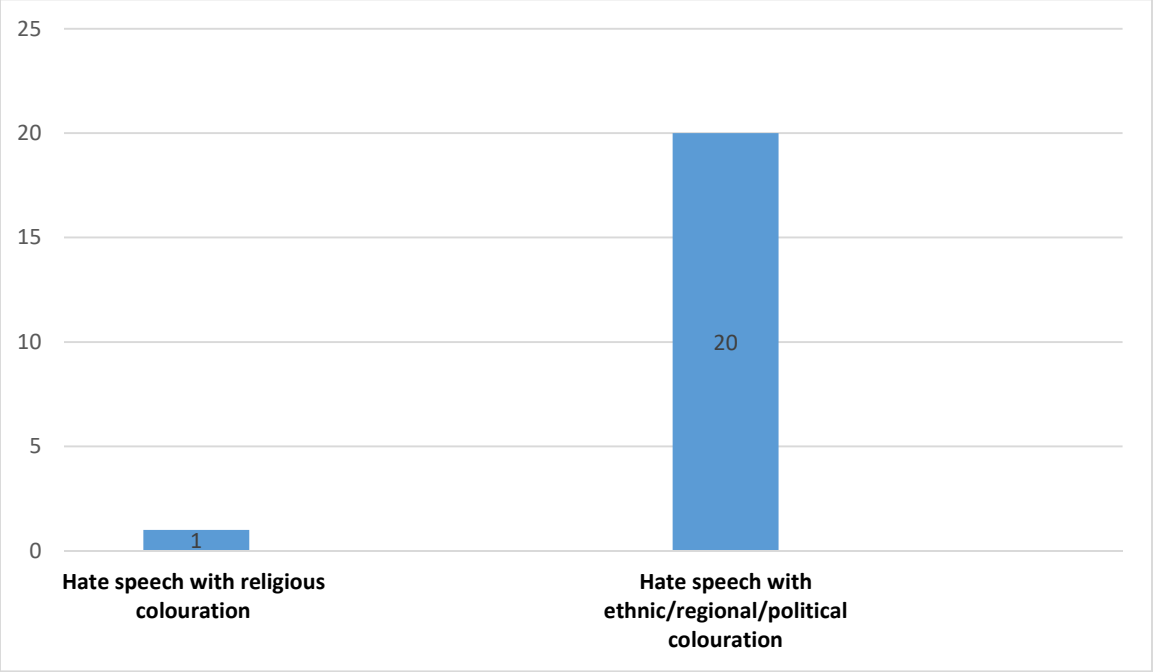
Source: Field Work (2022)

Figure one shows the types of hate speech news items disseminated by *Daily Trust* newspaper within the period under study. News items with religious hate speech content were four (4), representing 9.3% of the total forty-three (43) hate speech news items featured by *Daily Trust* within the period of study. However, the newspaper featured thirty-nine (39) hate speech news items with ethnic and other colourations within the period, representing 90.7% of the total hate speech news items disseminated by *Daily Trust* within the period.

Therefore, the data in the figure show that *Daily Trust* newspaper has disseminated news items containing hate speech before and after the 2019 general elections. It is therefore guilty of promoting hate speech. However, hate speech with ethnic, regional, and political colouration was more prominent than those with religious colouration within the period of the study.

Figure 2

Types of hate speech news items disseminated by *Punch* newspaper from November 2018 to April 2019



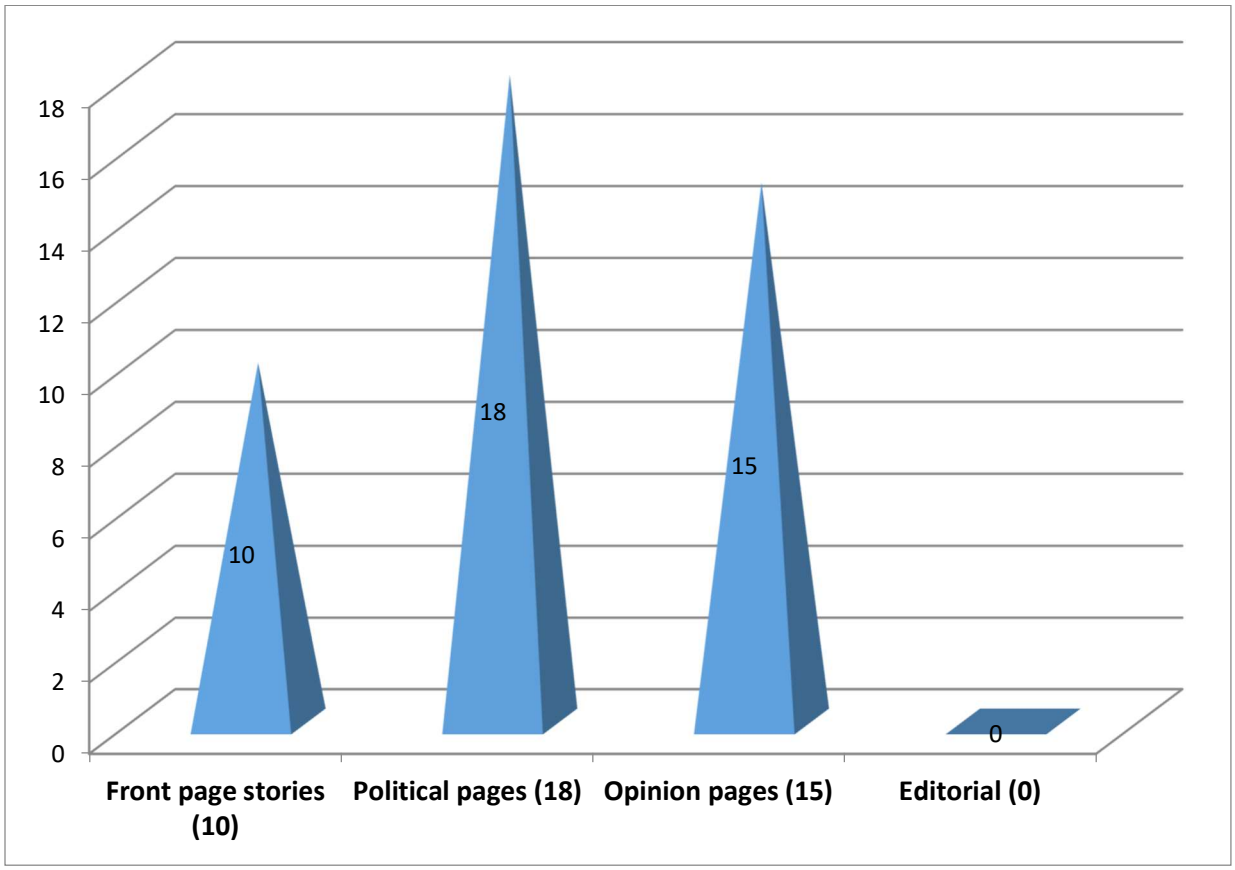
Source: Field Work (2022)

Data in figure two show the types of hate speech news items disseminated by the Punch newspaper within the period under study. News item with religious hate speech content was one (1), representing 4.76% of the total twenty-one (21) hate speech news items featured by Punch within the period of the study. On the other hand, hate speech news items with ethnic and other colourations disseminated by the newspaper within the period of the study were twenty (20), representing 95.24% of the total hate speech news items disseminated by the Punch newspaper within the period.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Punch newspaper has disseminated news items containing hate speech before and after the 2019 general elections. It is therefore also guilty of promoting hate speech. However, hate speech with ethnic, regional, and political colouration were more prominent than those with religious colouration within the period of the study.

Figure 3

Placement of hate speech news items by *Daily Trust* newspaper from November 2018 to April 2019



Source: Field Work (2022)

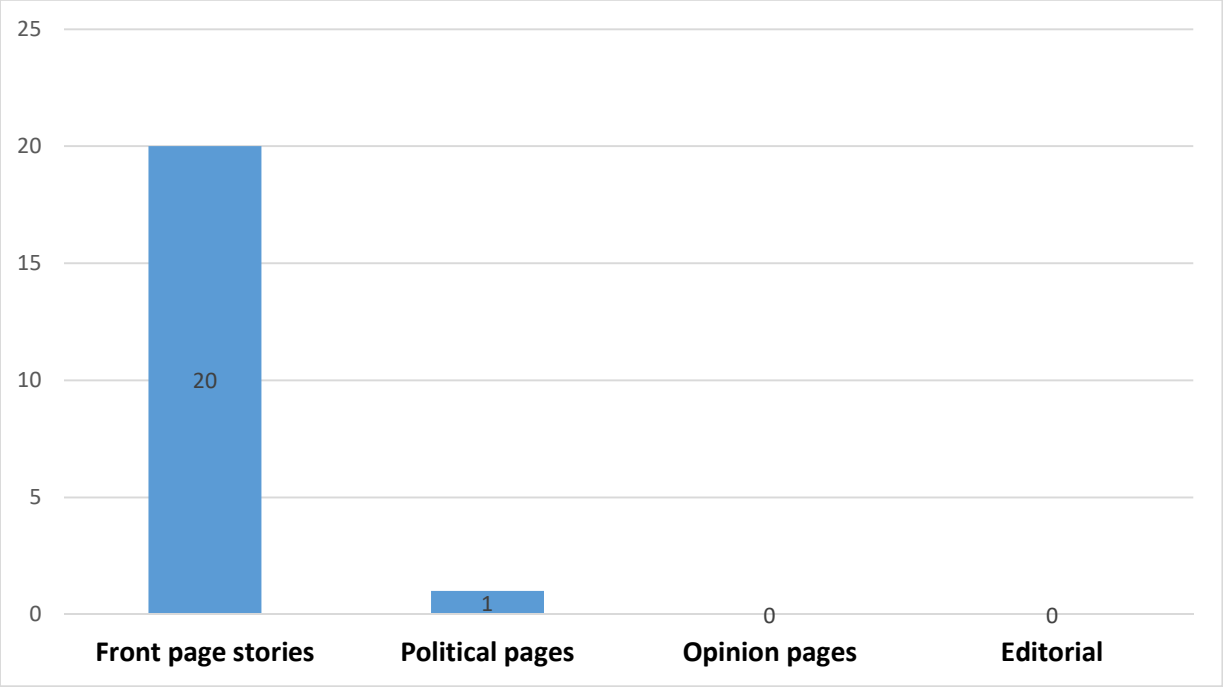
Figure three shows that *Daily Trust* newspaper has within the period under study featured ten (10) front page stories containing hate speech. This represents 23.26% of the forty-three (43) news items with hate speech content featured in the segments of the newspaper. Similarly, the newspaper featured eighteen (18) news items on its political pages containing hate speech representing 41.86% of the total hate speech news items disseminated within the period. Again, on the opinion pages, fifteen (15) readers' opinions with hate speech content were disseminated, representing 34.88% of the total placement of news items with hate speech within the period. There was no editorial found containing hate speech messages within the period under study.

The analysis above shows that politicians were the ones who were more engaged in the dissemination of hate speech before and after the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. They were followed by readers of the *Daily Trust* newspaper. The analysis also shows that the newspaper did not directly engage in promoting hate speech, as there was no editorial featured by the newspaper containing hate speech messages. Editorials

are usually the opinion of a newspaper. However, the newspaper has implicitly promoted the dissemination of hate speech messages by providing politicians and readers the platforms as well as giving hate speech prominence on its front pages.

Figure 4

Placement of hate speech news items by *Punch* newspaper from November 2018 to April 2019



Source: Field Work (2022)

Data in figure four show that *Punch* newspaper within the period under study featured twenty (20) front page stories containing hate speech, representing 95.24% of the twenty-one (21) news items with hate speech content featured in the segments of the *Punch* newspaper. Again, the newspaper featured only one (1) news item on its political page containing hate speech, representing 4.76% of the total hate speech news items disseminated within the period. However, no news item with hate content was discovered on the opinion pages of the newspaper. Again, there was no editorial found containing hate speech messages within the period under study.

The analysis shows that hate speech was disseminated by the *Punch* newspaper before and after the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The analysis shows that the *Punch* newspaper gave dissemination of hate speech prominence as most of the news items with hate speech content featured on the newspaper's front pages. The *Punch* also provided space for politicians to spew hate speech through its political pages.

However, the analysis shows that the newspaper did not directly engage in promoting hate speech, as there was no editorial featured by the newspaper containing hate speech messages. As explained, editorials are usually the opinion of a newspaper.

Discussion of findings

Data generated by this study, as shown above, reveal that conventional media organisations in Nigeria are also involved in the dissemination of hate speech messages based on religious, ethnic, regional, or political grounds. *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers which were used as case study for this research were found to be guilty of the promotion and dissemination of hate speech both implicitly and prominently.

It was found that *Daily Trust* newspaper has disseminated hate speech messages with religious, ethnic, regional, and political colourations. However, hate speech disseminated by *Daily Trust* newspaper was more through the platforms it provided for politicians and its readers. Politicians accounted for 41.86% of hate speech disseminated by *Daily Trust* newspaper, while readers accounted for 34.88% of hate speech disseminated by the newspaper within the period under review. At the same time, *Daily Trust* newspaper also gave prominence to the dissemination of hate as it featured front-page stories with hate speech messages that accounted for 23.26% of the total news items with hate speech content disseminated by the newspaper.

Furthermore, it was found that the *Punch* newspaper has also disseminated hate speech messages with religious, ethnic, regional, and political colourations. However, unlike the *Daily Trust* newspaper, the *Punch* newspaper gave more prominence to the dissemination of hate speech, as most news items with hate content were disseminated on the newspaper's front pages, and this accounted for 95.24% of the total news items with hate content disseminated by the *Punch* newspaper.

This paper has also established that hate speech with ethnic, regional, and political colourations is prominent in Nigeria's conventional media space. It was found that within the period under review, both *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers featured sixty-four (64) news items with hate content. However, out of this, hate speech with ethnic, regional, and political colourations accounted for 59 (fifty-nine) news items or 92.19%, while hate speech with religious colouration accounted for only 5 (five) news items or 7.81%. This shows that the two newspapers are cautious about disseminating religious hate speeches, perhaps because of their delicate nature. Again, the two newspapers, obviously, are also careful not to hurt the sensitivity of their readership which comprises members of different faiths.

Going with Ezeibe (2020), Salihu (2017), Okwori (2020), and Alkali, et al (2016) description of hate speech as any speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display that could incite people to violence or prejudicial action further justifies the findings of this research, as this description guided this paper in identifying news items from the two newspapers with hate content. Sellars (2016) and Enahoro (2017) defined hate speech as actions targeted at tarnishing of individual's or group's dignity to humiliate the targeted person or group usually with the salient desire to cause psychological and emotional pain, and this definition further fortifies the position of this paper, as the definition was also used in picking content with hate speeches.

In the same vein, available facts in the existing literature established that all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means, is hate speech, which further validates the findings of this paper. Incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination, threats to violence, and expression of insults and ridicule were all established as forms of hate speech, especially as postulated by Terfa (2017), Neisser (1994) and Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002). The variables used in describing hate speech by the foregoing scholars were used in the content analysis of the newspapers selected by this study. It was on those premises that this paper also found that hate speech can cause violence, war, disaffection and raise emotions of sentiment, and where the victims of hate speech decide to react aggressively, it can lead to devastating consequences.

The literature have therefore established that hate speech can lead to the destabilisation of states and nations. Mohammed (2017) posited that the Rwandan genocide was engineered and instigated by anti-Tutsis media organisations through the dissemination of hate speech. Similarly, media organisations played a significant role in fuelling embers of hatred that led to the Nigerian Civil War through the dissemination of hate speech, as posited by Aminu (2017).

It was also established in the literature that profit motive is one of the factors that make media organisations engage in the dissemination of hate speech. Jonathan (2014) and Oso (2013) posited that in order to please their readers or audience, media organisations in Nigeria disseminate hate speech messages, as this allows them to record more sales of their print editions, receive more adverts or get more subscribers on their online platforms, and all these toughen the findings of this study.

Conclusion

The media through which hate speech messages are disseminated tend to forget their vital role in safeguarding societies, nations, and states. Media platforms ought to be sources of genuine information. They ought to be respectful of laws and ethics that citizens can fall back to for authentic information. Traditional media are supposed to be platforms that provide citizens with alternative and reliable information that counters fake news and disinformation. They are therefore, in all comportments and manners, supposed to appear different from the social media that is largely uncensored, excessively egalitarian, and unregulated in Nigeria. Where conventional media becomes purveyors of fake news and hate speech, they pose extreme dangers to the cooperate existence of Nigeria. As supposed genuine sources of information fall prey to amateurism, conventional media tends to lose citizens' confidence, as such every information they disseminate will be received with suspense. The absence of genuine and reliable information can lead to chaos, instability, bedlam, and civil disorder. Election as the bedrock and substratum of democracy cannot take place in a chaotic and muddled environment that irresponsible journalism can usher in.

From the foregoing, it is therefore incumbent on Nigerian media to unite against hate speech by being resolute in tackling the menace. The government must embark on a relentless campaign against these evil tendencies at various levels. Similarly, Nigerians must boycott any medium that engages in the dissemination of hate speech, incitement to violence, disinformation, and the spread of fake news. This, in other words, is saying that Nigerians must desist from spreading hate speech through any means.

In the same vein, media regulators must also be alive to their responsibilities by promptly sanctioning the purveyors of hate speech, disinformation, and fake news. This will conform with the provision of section 45 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 that provides for the suspension or restriction of the right of freedom of expression in appropriate situations and in the interest or defence of public safety, public order, public morality or public health or to protect the rights and freedom of other persons.

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