

Media Outlook of Hate Speech in the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

Hate speech is among the most significant communication issues that preoccupy the agenda of relevant governmental agencies and media analysts in contemporary Nigeria. It is an unfortunate phenomenon that manifests in the public sphere and is fast threatening the fragile democracy which the country is struggling to consolidate. Within this context, the study analysed the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections in the *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* newspapers. The variables of frequency, prominence, direction, journalistic genre as well as the implications for the use of hate speech were used to examine the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select editors for in-depth interview while stratified random sampling by days of the week to select the editions in the newspapers. Castells' Theory of Network Society was used as the theoretical framework. Based on the findings, the study discovers that the manifestation of hate speech was more frequent in the 2015 than 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers. The findings of the study reveal that hateful speeches were dominant in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The findings reveal that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers in 2015 and 2019 general elections was significantly high in the inside pages than front and back pages. The study also found that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers was in negative direction in 2015, and neutral direction in the 2019. The study concludes that there are implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice as it undermines the ethics of journalism profession.

Keywords

Direction · Frequency · Hate speech · Implications · Journalistic genre · Prominence

Introduction

The importance of the mass media in a modern democracy has been a subject of discussion among the participants in the political space of every democratic society, especially Nigeria as a growing democracy. The complex and diverse nature of the 21st century global society further accentuates audience reliance on the mass media for information about the all-important political sector of every democratic society, which dictates the pace in other sectors of the society. The importance of the media could be understood in their pervasiveness, which makes people learn almost everything about the world through the media. The ability of the media to disseminate information and engender citizens' political involvement in modern democracy and to influence the populace on different ideologies are fundamental in journalistic engagement (Aondover, 2022).

Within this context, the ongoing campaign against hate speech in Nigeria is worthy of concerted attention for the interest of political stability and growth of democracy in the country. Having wallowed unnecessarily long in dictatorship, the country needs to put in place measures to protect the hard-earned democracy, which is arguably fledging at this period of her history. Politics in Nigeria has become an intense struggle for political power among politicians and their political groups or parties (Aondover, 2018). More worrisome is the ethnocentric, sectional religious colourations that characterise the struggle for political supremacy, among the nationalities and religious groups that comprise the Nigerian state. At intra and inter-party levels, the spread of hate speech could portend great dangers for the democratic system (Aondover, 2021). At the individual, inter-ethnic and religious levels, publication of expressions of discrimination and hatred could diminish our democratic values. Either way, the potentials of the media in spreading hate speech through news reporting are of great concern.

Hate speech is inimical to individual and group rights as well as political stability (Kurfi *et al.*, 2021). The argument for freedom of the media as an extension of freedom of speech, on the basis of which reporters may find a dilemma, does not guarantee legal immunity against hate speech restriction. It is within this context that the attention to hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections have gained prominence.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections in the *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian* and *The Nation* newspapers. The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To examine the frequency of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.
2. To find out the prominence of stories with hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.
3. To identify the direction of stories on hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.
4. To explore the journalistic genre in which hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections appeared in the selected newspapers.
5. To examine the implications of the use of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice in the 2015 and 2019 general elections.

Literature Review

Ibraheem and Garba (2019) found that the challenge that the fabrication of information poses to democracy and society couldn't be overemphasized. They established that in various jurisdictions including Nigeria, preference, especially by governments, is given to legislative framework to counter hate speech and fake news. The study concludes that the anti-fake news and hate speech campaign will be better appreciated if it is resituated into the broad innards of the struggle of re-constructing Nigerian, may African community lives around the organising ethos of society, of access, accountability, political cultural, and economic inclusion but above all of democracy. The findings of the study are significant to this study since it examined the framework to counter hate speech and fake news.

Nwokoro (2019) used a survey design to examine hate speech in Benue and Delta states. The study used purposive and stratified techniques using the Taro Yamene formula to arrive at a sample size of 400 respondents in each state and questionnaires were administered from 18 years above. The study was based on counteracting hate speech and violence in violence-prone states through the radio with

particular emphasis on a futuristic perspective of Benue and Delta States. The findings indicate that the extent to which hate speech can accumulate before violence is developed and exhibited depend on the individual's temperament. More of the respondents are of the view that such can take a long time while the remaining number of respondents said violent behaviour is developed and exhibited within a short period. Therefore, the potentials of mainstream news media in spreading hate speech through news reporting are of great concern to the previous study and thus it is relevant to the current study.

Fasakin *et al.*, (2017) evaluate the extent to which hate speeches were used during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The study was anchored on the social responsibility theory, which explains how media should ideally operate in a given society of social values and standards. The study found that during the political campaign in the 2015 general elections, many political enthusiasts and politicians were seen on different television programmes attacking their political opponents with derogatory speeches during political rallies and even interviews. Politicians to attack and condemn their political opponents used television documentaries, political jingles. Notable ones were the documentary aired on African Independent Television (AIT) on March 1st 2015 to condemn the persons of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC Chieftain) and the APC presidential candidate, General Muhammad Buhari. This documentary made the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission indict and sanction the two television stations alongside 21 other broadcast stations for violation of its code (*Nigerianeye*, October 28, 2016).

From the findings of the study, it is clear that the mass media have many social responsibilities to perform in society. The media are to be used as a tool for nation-building and shun any news, information, or report that will elicit violence or any bad behaviour in the society. Many television stations in Nigeria failed to live up to their social responsibility in the country as they were used as propaganda tools during the campaign for the 2015 general elections. The study concluded that many hate speeches were used across all the mass media during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, but none of these people who uttered the hate speeches were punished. The findings of the research add value to this study, especially how

hate speeches were used during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

Ekharefo and Akoseogasimhe (2017) textualised some political campaign advertisements for the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria with a view to analysed the development issues raised, religious and personal attacks inherent in the published advertisements. Data for the study comprised eight purposively selected adverts published in two Nigerian newspapers from January to March 2015, which was the peak period of electioneering campaigns for the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. The advertisements generally focused on the two leading parties in the country (People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). The data obtained were analysed using textual analysis.

The findings show that political adverts producers employed creatively constructed verbal and visual strategies to project political aspirants for acceptance by the Nigerian electorates. The appeal to history for the education of the electorate about the previous deeds of certain political contestants, making the campaigns evidence-based. The foregrounding of credibility matters and the emphasis on change serve as useful rhetorical appeals in the discourse upon which the analysis was anchored and which allows for their effective interpretation. The study further reveals that other noticeable discursive themes in the discourse are attacks and counter-attacks, hate, and brand association.

Aghadiogwu (2015) establishes in his study that since the advent of the new media, several individuals across the globe have joined the bandwagon; thus, employing new media technologies in their daily activities. Some Nigerians are now using social media platforms to not only stay in touch with their friends, loved ones, and colleagues but to publish or air their views on major developments in society. Employing the survey methodology, the study explored the rise of hate and peace journalism in the Nigerian democratization process as it relates to the new media. The area of study is Enugu South local government area of Enugu State. A sample size of 300 was studied. The findings of this study indicated that Nigerians have not only embraced the new media as a political platform for information consumption but for disseminating information by themselves (citizen journalism). The findings also proved that

the new media were used more for disseminating hate speeches than advocating for peace in the 2015 general elections.

Alakali (2018) examines the phenomenon of hate speech and foul language on social media platforms in Nigeria and assessed their moral and legal consequences in society and to journalism practice. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methodology to investigate the phenomenon. In the first place, the study employed the survey research methodology to sample 384 respondents using questionnaires and focus group discussions as instruments for data collection. Findings from the research indicate that promoting hate speech and foul language on social media have moral and legal consequences in society and journalism practice. Findings also show that although the respondents understand that hate speech and foul language attract legal consequences, they do not know what obligations are created by law against perpetrators of hate speech and foul language in Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study anchored on the theoretical postulations of Castells' Theory of Network Society. The Castells' Theory of Network Society examines the concept of the network to a high level of abstraction, utilizing it as a concept that depicts macro-level tendencies associated with the social organization in informational capitalism. He expressed the role of networks in social theory as follows dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the hate speech morphology in societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. Understanding the societal context of such networks entails returning to the political economy of the social transformation of capitalist society. An analytical concept network is abstract and thus unable to frame the interpretation of real-life networks, whereas theoretical concept network is an excellent crystallization of the social morphology of informational capitalism (Msughter, 2024).

As an upshot of the latter, the concept of network society has a certain intellectual appeal, even if it looks almost as if the formal description of the con-

cept of the network was needed only to legitimate its use as a metaphor. Concerning the hardcore of the metaphor, the study comes to the true message of Castellsian political economy (where politicians metaphorically used negative words to refer to other opposition), and the network in its paradigmatic form is about the nodes and connections of powerful financial and economic institutions, which allow the flows of values in pursuit of the newspapers' accumulation of capital (Aondover, 2023). This implies that 'network' in Castells' social theory is not an analytical concept but rather a powerful metaphor that served to capture the new social morphology of the capitalist system. In this context, the morphological manifestation of hate speech in the discourse of information society gains its momentum; it went out of intellectual fashion as well as political agenda and gave its place to the visions of the creative and or smart society (Ahmed & Aondover, 2022). For instance, in Nigeria, the phrase 'change begins with me' is often used metaphorically and polemical.

Despite the strength of the theory, critics viewed the theory of the information society as ideological creations designed to influence political decisions rather than tools for comprehending social reality (Usman *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, Castells believes that McLuhan's dictum "the medium is the message" could be adequately applied in the way hate speeches flourish in newspapers' content. In this perspective, there is a network (politicians and newspaper organisations), which often creates a powerful metaphor that aptly portrayed hate speech as a social morphology of information capitalism (Doda, 2015).

Research Methodology

In this study, the method is formed from the pragmatic approach, which believes in the combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality. This applies to mixed research methods in that inquirers draw liberally from both quantitative and qualitative assumptions.

The study employed content analysis as the primary method of data generation. It is an approach used in social science to examine the manifest content of media messages. This study also employed qualitative research methods using interviews. According to Nigerian Press Council (2020) 310 newspapers

exist in the country. Therefore, the population of the study constitutes the 310 newspapers in Nigeria.

The sampling technique in selecting the editions is stratified sampling. Consequently, since the sampling technique is stratified sampling by days of the week, it means that the three newspapers under investigation formed the sample size of the study. The newspapers are *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* newspapers. These papers were selected because of the geographical location and their wide scope of national issues and reach in terms of circulations. Below are the sample editions that were studied from the three newspapers:

- January Editions: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26,) = 9 days
- February Editions: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26,) = 9 days
- March Editions: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26,) = 9 days
- April Editions: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26,) = 9 days
- May Editions: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26,) = 9 days
- June Editions: (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26,) = 9 days

The sampling interval starts from second edition of each month, as January has 31 days, February 28, March 31, April 29, May 31 and June 30. Therefore, the scale for rating the sampling is as follow: $(2)+3=(5)+3=(8)+3=(11)+3=(14)+3=(17)+3=(20)+3=(23)+3=(26)$ in all the months. This means two months were selected before the 2015 and 2019 general elections, two months were considered during the 2015 and 2019 general elections and two months after the 2015 and 2019 general elections to determine the manifestation of hate speech by the three newspapers.

For the in-depth interview, purposive sampling was used to select the three newspapers and the editors for the interview. The papers were selected because they are among the 12 national papers, which means they share certain characteristics. Three editors each were chosen from the selected newspapers making a total of nine participants. The editors were sampled because they are gatekeepers of the content and they are directly involved in the processing and selection

of stories. Additionally, for an editor to be part of the study, he must have six to ten cognate work experiences in Nigerian print media organisations.

The study considered the following units of analysis: political news, editorial, cartoons, and advertorial.

1. *Political news*: these are stories on politics that contains hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.
2. *Editorial*: this is a newspaper's column that has some elements of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the three newspapers.
3. *Cartoons*: are illustrations, which consist of image or photograph that portrayed hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.
4. *Advertorial*: these are paid contents that have elements of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.

The content categorisation is based on the indicators that are used to identify what constitutes hate speech like offensive, hateful, incisive, pungent, and sarcasm as developed by (Auwal, 2018) and moderated by the current study. These forms of hate speech were read, and carefully placed to the following categories:

- a. *Offensive*: comments that attack personalities in the 2015 and 2019 general elections as published by the selected newspapers.
- b. *Hateful*: comments that are insulting of ethnic, religious or regional groups in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the sampled newspapers.
- c. *Incitive statement*: comments that call for violent attacks against individuals, members of a particular ethnic group or region in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the three papers.
- d. *Pungent*: comments that are targeted to a person, which are in form of criticism or humour in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.
- e. *Sarcasm*: these are utterances that are calculated to mock a person or group in the 2015 and 2019 general elections as published by the three papers.

The data gathering instrument in this study is coding sheet. Coding is a visible surface in a text, for example, the researcher counted a number of time or phrase that appeared in a written text. Content validity of the instrument was established by presenting the developed instrument to experts in the field of communication who ascertained that the coding sheet and in-depth interview questions are comprehensive and adequate enough. Two coders were trained and trusted to code the selected editions. Data generated through quantitative method was presented using ogive graph, frequency polygon, and SPSS version 25. In terms of qualitative data, thematic analysis was used to analyse the in-depth interview with the participants of the study.

Findings and Discussion

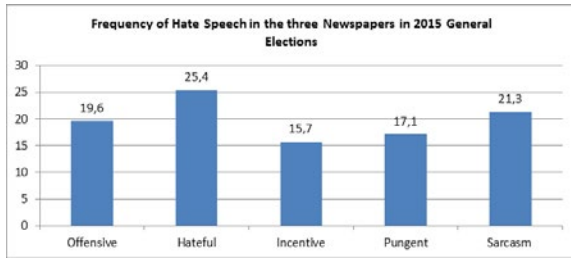


Table 1. Frequency of Hate Speech in the 2015 General Elections. Source: (author’s computation, 2021).

Table 1 examines the frequency of hate speech in the 2015 general elections by the selected newspapers. Based on the data, the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 by *Daily Trust* accounts for 20% (n=67) offensive, 24.2% (n=81) hateful, 17.3% (n=58) incentive, 15.5% (n=52) pungent, and 22.10% (n=77) sarcasm. *The Nation* has 20.9% (n=57) offensive, 24.3% (n=66) hateful, 14.3% (n=39) incentive, 21.3% (n=58) pungent, and 19.1% (n=52) sarcasm. *The Guardian* records 18.2% (n=65) offensive, 27.5% (n=98) hateful, 15.2% (n=54) incentive, 17.7% (n=63) pungent, and 21.3% (n=76) sarcasm. Cumulatively, the manifestation of hate speech in the *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* newspapers are as follows: 19.6% (n=189) offensive, 25.4% (n=245) hateful, 15.7% (n=151) incentive, 17.10% (n=173) pungent, and 21.3% (n=205) sarcasm. The data indicates that the manifestation of hate speech was more frequent in *The Guardian* in the 2015 general elections, follow

by *Daily Trust* newspaper. Based on the content categorisation, hateful speeches were dominant compare to other categories like offensive, incentive, pungent, and sarcasm in the 2015 general elections.

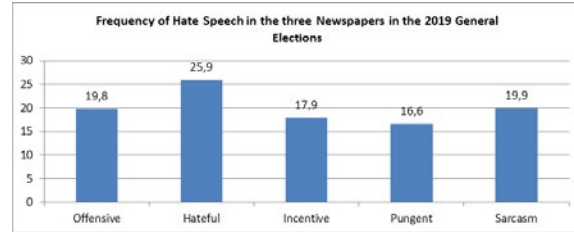


Table 2. Frequency of Hate Speech in the 2019 General Elections. Source: (author’s computation, 2021).

Similarly, the manifestation of hate speech in the 2019 general elections in the *Daily Trust* accounts for 19.2% (n=58) offensive, 23.2% (n=70) hateful, 18.9% (n=57) incentive, 16.9% (n=51) pungent, and 21.8% (n=66) sarcasm. *The Nation* records 18.2% (n=48) offensive, 26.2% (n=69) hateful, 19.0 (n=50) incentive, 17.5% (n=46) pungent, and 19.0% (n=50) sarcasm. *The Guardian* has 21.7% (n=62) offensive, 28.4% (n=81) hateful, 15.8% (n=45) incentive, 15.4% (n=44) pungent, and 18.6% (n=53) sarcasm. The overall hate speeches in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers point 19.8% (n=168) offensive, 25.9% (n=220) hateful, 17.9% (n=152) incentive, 16.6% (n=141) pungent, and 19.9% (n=169) sarcasm. This means that in the 2019 general elections, hate speech stories were more in the *Daily Trust*, followed by *The Guardian*. Based on the indicators that were used to identify what constitute hate speech in the study, hateful speeches were dominant in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.

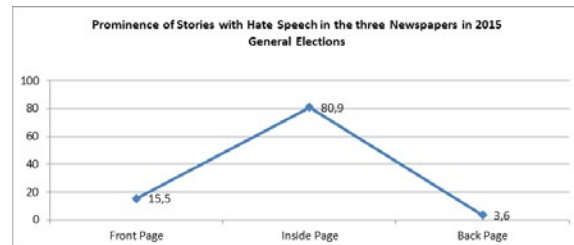


Table 3. Prominence of Stories with Hate Speech in the 2015 General Elections. Source: (author’s computation, 2021).

Table 3 ascertains the prominence of stories with hate speech in the 2015 general elections by the selected newspapers. The rating scale of front page, inside page, and back pages was used to determine the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 general elections. The data shows that in 2015 general elections, *Daily Trust* has 17.6% (n=59) stories that contained hate speech on the front page, 79.1% (n=265) in the inside page, and 3.3% (n=11) at the back page. *The Nation* accounts for 17.6% (n=48) stories with hate speech on the front page, 79.8% (n=217) in the inside page, and 2.6% (n=7) at the back page. Similarly, *The Guardian* records 11.8% (n=42) stories that contained hate speech on the front page, 83.4% (n=297) in the inside page, and 4.8% (n=17) at the back page. Cumulatively, in 2015, 15.5% (n=149) are on the front page, 80.9% (n=779) in the inside page, and 3.6% (n=35) at the back page. Based on the result, the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers in 2015 appeared more in the inside pages than front and back pages.

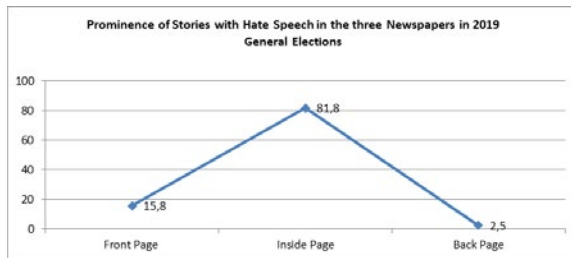


Table 4. Prominence of Stories with Hate Speech in the 2019 General Elections. Source: (author's computation, 2021).

In terms of 2019 general elections, *Daily Trust* has 13.9% (n=42) hate speeches on the front page, 84.1% (n=254) in the inside page, and 1.10% (n=6) at the back page. *The Nation* has 14.8% (n=39) on the front page, 82.9% (n=218) in the inside page, and 2.3% (n=6) at the back page. Additionally, *The Guardian* has 18.6% (n=53) on the front page, 78.2% (n=223) in the inside page, and 3.1% (n=9) at the back page. In all, the three newspapers have 15.8% (n=134) stories with hate speech on the front page, 81.8% (n=695) in the inside page, and 2.5% (n=21) at the back page. This means that the manifestation of hate speech is significantly high in the inside page compare to front and back pages in the 2019 general elections.

Based on the rating scale, the manifestation of hate speech stories was dominant in the inside pages by the selected newspapers.

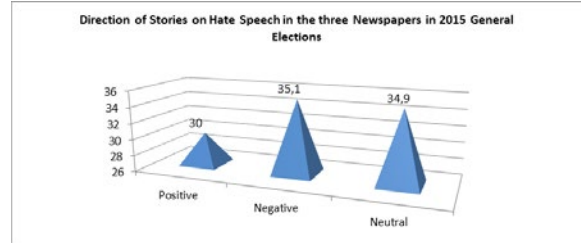


Table 5. Direction of Stories on Hate Speech in the 2015 and 2019 General Elections. Source: (author's computation, 2021).

Table 5 identified the direction of stories on hate speech in the 2015 general elections by the selected newspapers. The data points that *Daily Trust* has 30.7% (n=103) on positive direction, 34.3% (n=115) on negative direction while 34.9% (n=117) were on neutral directions. *The Nation* has 27.2% (n=74) on positive direction, 35.7% (n=97) on negative direction and 37.1% (n=101) on neutral direction. Furthermore, *The Guardian* has 31.5% (n=112) on positive direction, 35.4% (n=126) on negative direction and 33.1% (n=118) on neutral direction. Cumulatively, 30.0% (n=289) was on the positive direction, 35.1% (n=338) on negative direction and 34.9% (n=336) on neutral direction. The data shows that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers was in the negative direction with 35.1% in the 2015 general elections. Suleiman and Owolabi (2018) studies of newspaper coverage of the first republic politics also revealed that newspaper owned by leaders of different political parties published negative reports on the opponents and their ethnic groups.

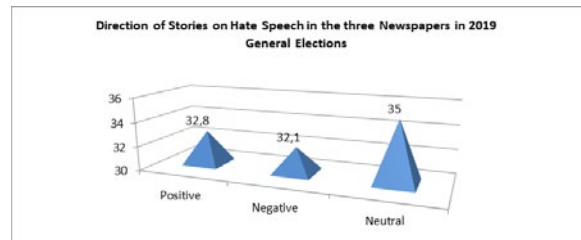


Table 6. Direction of Stories on Hate Speech in the 2019 General Elections. Source: (author's computation, 2021).

The data further indicates that in the 2019 general elections, *Daily Trust* has 32.1% (n=97) on the positive direction, 35.1% (n=106) on the negative direction, while 32.8% (n=99) on the neutral direction. *The Nation* has 32.3% (n=85) on the positive direction, 30.8% (n=81) on the negative direction and 36.9% (n=97) on the neutral direction. Also, *The Guardian* has 34.0% (n=97) on the positive direction, 30.2% (n=86) on the negative direction while 35.8% (n=102) on the neutral direction. This means that the manifestation of hate speech in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers was on the neutral direction within the period of the study.

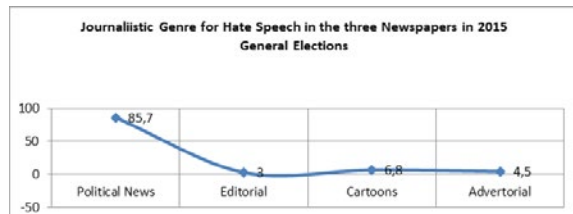


Table 7. Journalistic Genre for Hate Speech in the 2015 General Elections. Source: (author's computation, 2021).

Table 7 examines the journalistic genre in which hate speech in the 2015 general elections appeared in the selected newspapers. Thus, in the 2015 general elections, *Daily Trust* has 85.1% (n=285) on political news, 3.6% (n=12) on editorial, 6.3% (n=21) on cartoons while 5.1% (n=17) on advertorial. Similarly, *The Nation* has 84.9% (n=231) on political news, 2.9% (n=8) on editorial, 8.8% (n=24) on cartoons while 3.3% (n=9) on advertorial. Apparently, *The Guardian* has 86.8% (n=309) on political news, 2.5% (n=9) on editorial, 5.9% (n=21) on cartoons, and 4.8% (n=17) on advertorial. In the overall journalistic genre, 85.7% (n=825) was on political news, 3.0% (n=29) was on editorial, 6.8% (n=66) was on cartoons, and 4.5% (n=43) was on advertorial. The data shows that *The Guardian* accounts the highest in terms of political news with 86.8%, followed by *Daily Trust* with 85.1%, and *The Nation* with 84.9%. This implies that in the 2015 general elections, the manifestation of hate speech was on political news by the selected newspapers.

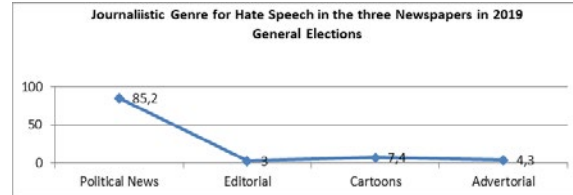


Table 8. Journalistic Genre for Hate Speech in the 2019 General Elections. Source: (author's computation, 2021).

In the 2019 general elections, *Daily Trust* accounts for 84.1% (n=254) on political news, 2.10% (n=9) on editorial, 9.6% (n=29) on cartoons while 3.3% (n=10) on advertorial. *The Nation* has 82.9% (n=218) on political news, 3.4% (n=9) on editorial, 7.6% (n=20) on cartoons while 6.1% (n=16) on advertorial. *The Guardian* has 88.4% (n=252) on political news, 2.8% (n=8) on editorial, 4.9% (n=14) on cartoons, and 3.8% (n=11) on advertorial. This means that the manifestation of hate speech in the 2019 general elections was high in *The Guardian*, followed by *Daily Trust*, and *The Nation*. The implication of the data is that most of the hate speeches manifested in the political news and some appeared in the cartoons within the period of the study. Comparatively, the manifestation of hate speech was on political news by the selected newspapers in the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. This coincided with the assumption of CRT, which indicates that media use phrases sponsored by politicians that refer to other opposition groups from descriptions that are not merely rhetorical, but pedestals on which hate speech flourishes.

Implications of the use of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice in the 2015 and 2019 general elections

The research question that guided the qualitative data generation process was designed and directed to elicit responses on the implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice because journalists are violating the code of ethics. The interviews were recorded and transcribed at thematic level where words spoken by interviewees are evident in the following themes.

Awareness and Understanding of Hate Speech

From the interviews held with editors of *Daily Trust*, P1 stated that "Hate speech is an expression

or any writing that expresses prejudice against a particular goal, especially based on race, religion, or sexual orientation. So, any abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses that prejudice against a particular group of people based on their race or religion can be considered as hate speech.” Similarly, P4 added that “I am aware of hate speech because it has become a kind of tool for political players to advance their cause and see how they can override their opponent. Generally, hate speech can be defined as abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses prejudices against a particular group, especially based on race, religion, and sexual orientation.”

P6 articulated that “hate speech is a speech one makes that lowers the esteem of another person and it is a speech that tries to bring down somebody in a way that makes him feel unwanted. Hate speech is also a speech you make that demeans somebody. It could be religious, political, or social.” P9 confirmed that “It is difficult for anyone whether a practicing or non-practicing journalist not to be aware of hate speech. This is because it has been bombarding the media by newspapers through the officials in the government and for that reason, I am aware of hate speech. Hate speech is a speech with specific content targeted to a person or group of persons to raise prejudices, to influence other people negatively about the person.” From the data generated it is evident that the editors are aware and understand what is hate speech.

Implication of Hate Speech Stories in the Newspapers

P2 agreed that “sitting from my position and a couple of us in the media, we could see clearly that there were practical cases of hate speeches citing example of Ayo Fayose’s publication saying that every leader we had from the North had to die in power, Murtala Mohammed and Musa Yar’addua that if we settle for this man giving his age are we sure that he is going to... that is hate speech in his own right.” P3 averred that “It shouldn’t just be a belief it should be based on facts. We should be able to go back and do data analysis of what transpired then and harvest what we think is hate speech.

P4 said “In our newspaper, we have responsible people, we operate by code of conducts, we operate

by ethics, we are ethically conscious, and we can’t put our nation on flames because we want to disseminate news. I can vouch for our newspaper that we do not allow commercial instincts to override our social responsibilities functions. Therefore, we strove to make conscious efforts to ensure that our stories do not contain hate speech as much as possible.” Based on the position of P5 “I will not say no because even the laws of the country are not being obeyed 100%. In *The Guardian* here we the editors and even the owners do not allow things like that, we practice fine journalism by running away from those things that can give us a definition that will be different from our mission here as a newspaper.” According to P5 “I don’t agree with that assertion because part of our social responsibility as a newspaper is to ensure that we don’t carry stories that would make people panic.

Implication on Prominent of Hate Speech on the Pages of Newspapers

P1 is of the view that “As a professional journalist, as much as you want to give people the freedom of expression, you also want to guide against hate speech, because as the watchdog of society, part of our job is to be able to produce content that will sustain the society. Generally speaking, I think the media try to minimize hate speech on their pages, but we have instances where we have one or two, especially in the opinion column where you give people the freedom to express themselves. Though we try as much as possible to ensure we do not have it.

According to P4 “Not in all instances, we all know that in all the efforts by the government to tame the monster called hate speech; their focus has been social media and that led to the social media bill. Meaning that hate speech was motivated by the new media because that is where the issue has been prominent and because social media has no gatekeeper, but newspapers operate on ethics. However, in some cases, some journalists were violating the code of ethics, which necessitated the spread of hate speech on the pages of some newspapers in the 2015 and 2019 general elections.”

According to P8 “To an extent, it was prominent in the sense that during the political period a lot of media organisations let down their gourd, and politicians use certain words or phrases that tend

to inflame passion. They also tend to misinform the public or try to mislead people by their utterances or statements and press releases. So, yes in the 2015 and 2019 elections there were a couple of hate speeches that were actually on display. To this extent, I will say to a very significant extent.” P9 pointed that “Hate speeches became prominent at the running of the 2015 general election, but at a minimal level in the 2019 general election. The climax was at the 2015. One can easily see hate speech written by the former opposition of power (APC) to the then-president where he was described as a drunk and clueless person. The purpose of which was to incite the masses against him and to get power at all cost.” All the participants agreed that hate speech was prominent on the pages of newspapers.

Implication on the Dissemination of Hate Speech

According to P1 “I believe especially in the area of the opinion and the columns that were published, especially in the build-up to the 2015 elections, the nation was at a very critical stage and we saw some analyses that were biased being published. They market a particular candidate. So I believe the media allowed themselves to be used. Also in 2019, there were so many reports of anonymous sources in the newspaper, and these are weighty allegations against a particular candidate and the other persons were not reached out to.”

P5 asserted that “If there were such hate speeches really, newspapers will naturally constitute platforms through which those speeches could be dished to the public, because newspaper is a veritable means of mass communication. Because people make hate speeches, it could be on the pages of newspaper for newspaper houses who could not discern that this is a hate speech and go ahead to publish it the way they come.”

P9 maintained that “Newspapers contributed to hate speeches and vulgar languages in the 2015 and 2019 general elections from the choice of words used, the headlines; like those that contained the tagged name ‘banditry’ in their reports, and in the editorial contents of some newspapers you could also see traces of hate speeches. Hence, I will say newspapers contributed in their choice of words, they contributed in the way they stereotyped a

particular group, and in the way they give prominence to certain news items that have negative connotations.” From the data generated, it is evident that newspapers disseminate hate speech as well as vulgar language.

Implication of Editors as Gatekeepers of the Content

P3 pointed that “The average editor of Nigeria is careful because if you carry hate speech somebody could sue you. So, the fear of litigation checks what newspaper editors are allowed to do. Am saying that more of what we are talking about could be the content of commercial messages or political adverts. In that area the editor does not have much oversight what the editors know is editorial content so if there is going to be an advert, it will be blank on the domain that will be presented to you. The editor wouldn’t even know the content until the next day when you see commercial materials.”

P5 added that “Everybody who works in a newspaper house is an editor because when a reporter is sent out that person you call a reporter is an editor. By the time a reporter goes out to cover an event for you, he or she will be the one to select and file in the report. From the avalanche of things that happened there the reporter will be the first to select what to write, when a reporter files in a story we work on it and look at those things we consider unethical because hate speech should be considered unethical.”

On the contrary, P8 said “We can be accused to the point that yes, we did not sieve them out, but we did not generate these hate speeches; we were not the reporters who reported them. So, I think we cannot blame the editors, we can only blame them for not wiping them out. To an extent, editors should take responsibility, but politicians should also take a larger percentage of the blame.”

Implication of Hate Speech on Journalistic Practice

P2 averred that “It does have implications if something is capable of inciting people negatively against other people naturally. The implication is that professional bodies like the NUJ, NBC, among others may sanction journalists or media organisations for allowing hate speeches to go out into the public domain.

For example, recently, NBC gave *Channel Television* a query for granting Samuel Ortom, the Governor of Benue State interview, where he attacks President Buhari on the issues of Anti-Open Grazing Law.”

P6 maintained that “Terrible implications are very common with online newspapers and social media. Online newspapers publish hate speech and they constitute a threat to our profession because you can publish a story and it will set the country on fire. If we recall Rwanda when they had the genocide, it started from publications and radio stations, and this set the ethnic Tutsis against the Hutus. In Nigeria also *This Day* published a story written by a lady and some people felt it was against Islam and they went to the streets in Kaduna and some states in the North.”

P7 stated that “It is a major implication to the industry. It undermines trust in the practitioner because a man who consumes news expects that he is being served what is credible, true, and factual. Now we are beginning to see things that are not news, people package lies, paramount prejudices and serve them to people as news. So, it implies our industry is an industry that thrives on credibility; you put your name there, your integrity and judgment on the line.”

Implication and Challenges Faced by Editors

P1 pointed that “Concerning hate speech in the build-up to the 2015 and 2019 general elections, the pressure was there because everybody wants you to introduce their contents, but as an editor, you must be able to see through the lines and ask yourself a few questions. Of what value will it be to the society and the generality of the people? Will it inform or misinform the people? People will always want their materials to be published, but as an editor, you must always act as a gatekeeper.”

P5 said “The challenges will always be there because when you are scrambling for a position some people believe that in war everything is fair or just, but I don’t think that everything should be just because even in a war situation, people will continue to throw all sorts of things, but because these things will pass through our medium, we have a responsibility to make sure what is being thrown is not something that is going to break the general glass.”

P8 said “One of the challenges for me is balance, how do you balance a story? How do you balance what the other party is saying? How are you sure

that you are not being unnecessarily partisan in the prominence you give to your report? So, there is an issue of balance, issue of fairness, issue of cross-checking, trying to get to the other side of the story. Politicians will make statements and when you try to reach out to the other party and say can you react to this, the other person will just say I wish to be anonymous.”

Solutions to the Identified Challenges

P3 said “The playing field should be made level for everybody; newspapers with good and rich content should be favoured. From 2015 till date, I have seen a kind of exclusion of some newspapers from the patronage of the government in power. We have a situation where the government in power has not repented from the political mindset of 2015, some people had carried the hatred of 2015 to 2021 and if possible 2023. I am appealing that the government in power should see the media as being available to everybody irrespective of party affiliation.”

P4 stated that “Journalism profession and journalists need constant skills update because new way of doing journalism is coming out every day. Especially, now that we are in the digital age, we should update our skills always and we should stick to journalism code. Although, that code was designed since 1988, but up till today, it is still the code that we are using and it is still relevant, let every journalist uphold to it, read it always and put it to practice.”

P9 maintained that “The first is capacity building through training and retraining. Secondly, the concept of hate speech should be broken down for better understanding. Thirdly, there should be a stiff penalty for defaulters and finally, media should self-censor itself; the body should rain it down at defaulters and if this is done and taken into cognizance, they will learn from the mistakes of others. This will reduce hate speeches as we go into the 2023 general elections.” All the participants agreed that some of the points highlighted are solutions to the identified challenges.

Conclusion

This study examines hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The pragmatic approach, which believes in the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, was adopted using content analysis, and in-depth interview. Three newspapers

were selected for content analysis, and nine editors for the in-depth interview, who responded to some questions raised by the paper. Based on the findings, the study discovered that the manifestation of hate speech was more frequent in the 2015 than 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers. The findings of the study revealed that hateful speeches were dominant in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The study reveals that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers in 2015 and 2019 general elections was significantly high in the inside pages than front and back pages. The study also found that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers was in negative direction in 2015, and neutral direction in the 2019.

Conclusively, there are implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice as it undermines trust in the profession. It also makes people think that information coming from such media is not credible enough. Others think that the codes of ethics are mere documents which are not effective as far as the profession is concerned. As co-runners in the development of a country or society, the professional journalistic practice should remain within the ambit of ethical codes of the profession for proper dissemination of information to the public. Therefore, the findings of the study have substantially addressed and resolved the issues in the research objectives and questions, which impliedly suggest that the study has achieved its goal of analysing the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers in Nigeria.

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