



HATE SPEECH AND RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA: THE WAY

FORWARD

SIJUADE, Emmanuel Olugbenga

Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State

*Email of Corresponding Author: sijuadegbenga741@gmail.com Phone: 09121015713

ABSTRACT

The role of mass media in changing the attitudes of the public towards government and its policies has been demonstrated on countless occasions as it transfers messages that encourage societal development and integration to the public. However, drawing from the lens of critical implication of hate speech within the Nigerian socio-political milieu, this paper explores the importance of hate speech in the operations of Nigerian media and its implications on the societal values. The paper also shows that hate speech is a manipulative tool that has engendered many negative narrative, ostracism, fury, misperception and economic challenges, which many political actors have used to their advantage either to misinform, disinform. Hate speech is a constantly evolving phenomenon, with new perpetrators, targets and tactics. Socially conscious journalists are aware of how rapidly hate-filled messages seep into, and often overwhelm comment on the Internet. The paper concludes by suggesting that Impunity against hate crimes can be tackled by establishing monitoring and evaluation units in newsrooms. These units would then be tasked with monitoring hate speech trends, compiling reports and bringing these to the attention of key institutions and the civil society.

Keywords: *Civil society, Hate Speech, Journalism, Media and Societal Values*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of hate speech has created a great impact within the Nigerian polity, especially with the increasing security threats in different parts of the country. Perceived marginalization, anger, confusion and economic challenges, which many political actors have used to their advantage either to misinform, misinform, promote apathy or skew voting choices for elections has created many hate crimes (CDD, 2018; Pate, 2018). This ideological perspective might not only intensify prejudice and stereotypes, It also affects the mental health of the targeted individuals (Jakubowicz, 2017). Different studies point out that negative feelings towards minorities and stereotypes tend to increase with time and it only takes a “trigger” event to result in hate crimes. Pate & Ibrahim, (2020) reinstated this submission as he stated that hate Speech led to growing waves of concern for referendum, ethnic division and secession of both the Oduduwa and the Biafran nation.

Mohan (2018), speaking further, believes that hate speech often exacerbates existing cleavages and exploits prejudices in different contexts, which in turn affects the legislation that seeks to regulate it.

For instance, any attempt to regulate or control hate speech, directly challenges the idea of freedom of expression, a foundational requirement for democracy. Such an attempt readily offers an opportunity for intolerant and reactionary governments to silence critical oppositional voices and counter discourses on governmental performance and political mal administration. Evidently, political office holders often attempt to mislead the public by labeling any story they disagree with as hate speech. A good example of such was when the National Broadcasting Commission, (NBC) seized and imposed a N5 million fine on the broadcast license of Channels Television for alleged breach of the broadcast code in its live programme,

titled “Politics Today”. (The Guardian, April 26, 2021). On the other hand, taking to self-censorship is inimical to the public interest. Freedom must be balanced with responsibility (Oso, 2018).

Speaking from the aforementioned perspective, Popoola (2018) expresses sadness over the drastic public mistrust in the Nigerian media which has waned over time due to ethical and professional inadequacies. Related to this is the excessive commercialization and ‘commodification’ of the media content which has given opportunity for uncultured practitioners to input hateful and derogatory statements as media content. Viewership and circulation have assumed greater importance in news judgement than other social and professional values and norms. In some media organizations, the separation of the news from advertisement department has been obliterated; reporters now act as advertising officers, negotiating the fees for news coverage. Another factor is the preponderant

growth of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). ICTs are rapidly expanding the public sphere just as they are somewhat equally undermining the traditional legacy media and communication structure.

Hate Speech and Journalism:

The approach of the Nigerian media to hate speech in the polity is rooted in the peculiarity of the Nigerian politics and society which have, since the inception of the modern media, exerted a lot of influence on media practice, content, consumption and interpretation (Popoola, 2018). Unfortunately, it is apparent that the various segments of the Nigerian society have been primed to see one another as enemies. Over time, we have constructed and generated so many stereotypes and negative epithets about each ethnic group that such stereotypes and epithets can easily be mobilised and find accommodation in the cultural and social frames of a particular group. Primordial sentiments and

resentments based on cultural, ethnic and political polarities generate a lot of hatred and antagonism. Hate speech is more likely to thrive in this kind of social setting.

Because of economic pressure and what some have called back--pack journalism, editorial oversight and leadership in the newsroom have declined. In many newsrooms, the sub--desk has been eliminated; no more fact checking Popoola and Olatubosun, (2017). It is like anything can go as far as it will bring in money and probably not libelous. The news gate has become more porous than ever. This is where propagandists and merchants of hate speech clamor in. The internet-enabled social media are ready tools though the mainstream media are not spared. We have all turned citizen journalist and bloggers. There is no license or professional training. As a result, there are no sense of commitment to any social value or ethics. It is not new; but its current manifestations and the moral panic it has generated, are part of

the challenges of this period. The point is that the prevailing socio political, cultural and environmental realities at a particular period are crucial in our understanding and contextualization of what is considered as hate speech.

Theoretical Framework: Development Media theory and Sense Extension Theory

Given the contestability of the term, 'hate speech', various theories have been used to analyze its manifestations. For example, Carney (2014) adopted a forensic linguistic approach to interpreting hate speech discourse while Sharon (2017) used sentimental analysis approach to investigate the use of hate speech on social media. However, in this study, the researcher employs Development Media theory and Sense Extension Theory, The Concept Assumption & Proposition of Sense extension theory by Marshal McLuhan of 1965 shows how the media alter their environment as well as the very message they convey. McLuhan sees the enormous

implications of the development of language for humans when he writes: *“It is the extension of man in speech that enables the intellect to detach itself from the vastly wider reality”*. Without language human intelligence would have remained totally involved in the objects of its attention. Thus, spoken language is the key development in the evolution of human consciousness and culture and the medium from which subsequent technological extensions have evolved. But recent extensions via electronic technology elevate the process of technological extension to a new level of significance. McLuhan states: *“Our new electric technology that extends our senses and nerves in a global embrace has large implications for the future of language”*.

In essence, McLuhan’s theory shows how the mediated messages affect the immediate environment. For instance, several cases of hate speech in the Nigerian media by several politicians, opinion leaders, public speakers and government official have created many

crises in several part of the country. However looking at Development Media theory which was propounded by Denis Mcquail in 1987 organisation and content of the media should be subjected to positive developmental tasks in line with national established policy. The thrust of this theory lies in the insistence that *the media must accept and help in the execution of positive developmental tasks in line with national ideology*. This means that the Nigerian elites, journalists or media content developers must always take into cognizance, what the heterogeneous audience have access to in terms of broadcast or print media content. The government of the day also have a duty to ensure it that the journalist or media content creators presumed to have contravened any national law(s) in the course of their information processing and gathering, are duly punished. Development press behaviors are thus anchored on self-regulation, but if the media would not voluntarily behave

properly, then there are definite social structures and mechanisms like constitutional prescriptions and professional code of ethics, which must be strictly applied, so as to ensure that the media behave in compliance with recognized social standards.

How to Manage Hate Speech as a Journalist

1. Education on media ethics: Countering ethnic based hate speech begins by a realization that while freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, the emergence of social media has created multiple platforms for the production, packaging and dissemination of hate speech. Education on media ethics should focus on the rights and freedoms of journalists and their role in creating and promoting peaceful societies. Awareness must be raised on the political, social and cultural rights of individuals and groups, including freedom of speech, and the responsibilities and social implications that come with press freedom.

Journalists must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify hate speech and to counteract hate speech messages.

2. Encourage conflict sensitive reporting and multicultural awareness campaigns: Conflict sensitive reporting will help dispel the ‘us’ against ‘them’ fallacy. Journalists should be taught conflict sensitive reporting skills. Multicultural awareness campaigns should emphasize knowledge about and respect for the diversity of cultures and traditions. Journalists must exercise professional standards in this and can write articles, air programmes and even speak with people without taking sides.

3. Regulation of social media: I know many of you reading this article will ask how you regulate social media without revoking the right to press freedom. Press freedom can be enhanced through education on media laws and ethics.

4. Encourage victims and witnesses to report hate speech related crimes: Hate speech

remains largely invisible simply because many victims do not know where to report the cases or even understand that they are victims of hate speech.

5. End impunity against hate crimes: Impunity against hate crimes can be tackled by establishing monitoring and evaluation units in newsrooms. These units would then be tasked with monitoring hate speech trends, compiling reports and bringing these to the attention of key institutions and the civil society.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion underscore the fact that hate speech does not exist in a vacuum. It is socially situated, articulated and designed for some purposes. Consequently, it is suffice to submit that the structure of the Nigerian society and the commodification of media product with the medialization of politics have made the propagation of hate speech and its consumption adangerous phenomenon for a developing country like Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Adebanwi and Obadare (2013) *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* Palgrave Macmillan
- Arcan, Esra, (2013) "Interrupted Social Peace: Hate Speech in Turkish Media", in IAFOR Journal of Communication, Media and Film, Vol 1
- Boeckman, R. J. & Turpin-Petrosino, C. (2002), 'Understanding the Harm of Hate Crime,' Journal of Social Issues, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 207-225.
- Cowan, G. & Khatchadourian, D. (2003), 'Empathy, Ways of Knowing, and Interdependence as Mediators of Gender Differences, Attitudes Toward Hate Speech and Freedom of Speech,' Psychology of Women Quarterly, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 300-308.
- Folarin, B. (2004), *Theories of Mass Communication, An Introductory Text*, Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd.
- Galtung, John, (2002) "Peace Journalism: A Challenge". In Kempf, Wilhelm & Heikki Loustarinen (eds.) *Journalism and the New World Order, Vol. 2. Studying the War and the Media*. Nordicom, Gothenburg.
- Hernández, T.K. (2011), 'Hate Speech and the Language of Racism in Latin America: A Lens for Reconsidering Global Hate Speech Restrictions and Legislation Models,' University of Pennsylvania

- Journal of International Law, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 805- 841
- Howard, R. (2004a) *Conflict Sensitive Journalism: A Handbook* Denmark: IMS and IMPACS
- Howard, R. (2004b) *Conflict Sensitive Journalism: State of the Art A Course for Journalists and Journalism Educators* Denmark: Paris: UNESCO
- Howard, R. (2009) *Conflict Sensitive Journalism: State of the Art*: Paris: UNESCO
- Joseph R. (1991) *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of The Second Republic*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Joseph R. (2013) "Prebendalism and Dysfunctionality in Nigeria" retrieved from: <https://africaplus.wordpress.com>
- Kunczik, M. (1998), *Concepts of Journalism: North and South*, Bonn: Friedrick Eberst Stiftung.
- Matsuda, M.J. (1993) Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the victim's story, in Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech and the First Amendment, eds M.J. Matsuda et al., Westview Press, Boulder, CO, pp. 17-51
- Mc Quail, D. (2007), *Mass Communication Theory* 6th ed., London: SAGE Publications
- Murdock, G. and Golding, P. (2016) "Political Economy and Media Production: A Reply to Dwyer", in *Media, Culture and Society* SAGE Journals Online ISSN: 1460-3675 retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716655094>
- Murdock, G. and Golding, P. (2000) "Culture, Communications and Political Economy" in Curran and Gurevitch (eds) *MassMedia and Society* London: Edward Arnold, pp 70-92
- Okunna, C.S. and Popoola, B.O. (2017) "Role of the Media in Building the Culture of Peace". In Pate and Oso (eds) *Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflicts in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Evans Publishers Limited.
- Olorunyomi, Dapo (2018) "Fact, Truth and Knowledge: Journalism and the Ethical Community" keynote presentation at the 5th Annual Conference of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), entitled: Media Narratives: Hate Speech, Fake News and Political Stability in Africa, held at the Best Western Hotel, Asaba, Nigeria.
- Oso, Lai (2018) Presidential address of welcome delivered at the 5th Annual Conference of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), entitled: Media Narratives: Hate Speech, Fake News and Political Stability in Africa, held at the Best Western Hotel, Asaba, Nigeria.
- Oso, Lai (2014) "Power, Sources and the News", in Oso, Olatunji and Owens-Ibie (eds) *Journalism and Media in Nigeria: Context, Issues*

- and Practice*, Ontario Canada: Canada University Press
- Parekh, B. (2006), 'Hate Speech: Is There a Case of Banning?' *Public Policy Research*, vol. 12, no.4, pp. 213-223.
- Popoola B.O. (2018) "Media, *Politics and Conflicts in Nigeria: The Fourth or the Ruinous Estate of the Realm?* 10th Ajayi Crowther University Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the Modupe and Folorunso Alakija Law Auditorium, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria, Thursday, 12th April, 2018. Oyo: Ajayi Crowther University Press.
- Popoola, B.O. and Olatubosun A (2017) "Socially-responsible or Calumnious Campaigns in the Press: Perspectives on the Coverage of the 2013 Governorship Electioneering Campaigns in Anambra State Nigeria", in *Benin MEDIACOM Journal*, No 10 pp 1-18
- Popoola, B.O. and Adegoke, R. (2016) "Political Rivalry Signification in Newspaper Reportage of the 2015 Presidential Elections" in *International Journal of Media, Security & Development (IJMSD)* Vol 2 No 1 pp 42-53
- Popoola, B.O. (2015a) *A Discourse on Politico-personal Conflicts in Nigeria's Politics: The Media and their Narratives* Ibadan: John Archers
- Popoola, B.O. (2015b) "Terrorism in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of Boko Haram Activities", in *Communicating Peace and Conflict: Genres, Practices and Challenges in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Book Builders, pp 190-199
- Popoola, B.O. (2015c) "Media and Terrorism: An Exposition of Relationship Drives" in Isola and Popoola (eds) *Journalism Practice and Terrorism in Nigeria: Issues, Trends and Techniques*, Ibadan: John Archers, pp 43-62
- Popoola, B.O. (2015d) "Conflict Sensitive Reportage of Terrorism in Nigeria: A Development Media Imperative" in Isola and Popoola (eds) *Journalism Practice and Terrorism in Nigeria: Issues, Trends and Techniques*, Ibadan: John Archers, pp 196-205
- Tsesis, A. (2002), *Destructive Messages: How Hate Speech Paves the Way for Harmful Social Movements*, New York University Press, New York.
- Vollhardt et al. (2006), 'Deconstructing Hate Speech in the DRC: A Psychological Media Sensitization Campaign,' *Journal of Hate Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 15-35.
- Wasko, J. (2014), "The Study of the Political Economy of the Media in the Twenty-first Century", in *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* Vol 10 No 3