Hate Speech and Fake News: A Study of Meanings and Perceptions in Nigerian Political Culture

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Abstract:

Political engagement in Nigeria since the advent of its fourth republic is faced with the menace of pervasive hate speech, disinformation and fake news. The trend which now becomes a common service in media outlets as accepted by Nigerians and the government is alarming. The observed trend of hate speech during electioneering process of 2015 presidential election were phenomenon and of dire concern. This was not only a tool of influencing electorate's voting decision during the election but essential schemes to dislodge and capture future votes. Quantitative Research Method was adopted as required in this study for the analysis of factors constituting hate speech and fake news as perceived by Nigerians. The study revealed that the meaning of hate speech and fake news is well defined among Nigerians, as they perceived them to be offensive in Nigeria's volatile sociopolitical environment. It was, however, recommended that appropriate laws should be consciously promulgated and enforced against hate speech and fake news because of its volatile nature of aggravating ethno-religious crisis in the quest for nation building in Nigeria's social environment.

Keywords: Hate Speech; Social Environment; Fake News; Nigeria.

Introduction

It is believed that hate speech and fake new are pervasive in Nigeria today. Over the last few decades, the issue of hate speech has been widely debated by scholars in multiple fields of knowledge. The subject of hate speech was developed through the collective efforts of experts in the field of social science and humanities as well as media experts and computer scientists. Hate speech as Bagdikian opined, refers to communication that employs intolerant appellations to insult and denounce others vis-à-vis race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or other forms of group membership (Bagdikian, 1997). This is believed could consequently lead to rhetoric strategies that have the capacity to generate hostility and confrontation in a society as against the norms that enable democratic government to function (Chaiken and Eagly, 1978).

History will always have its fruit in a social relevance and meaning. The significant and implication of hate speech as incited into genocide in Rwanda with a record of about a million citizen massacred in 1994 gave credence to the potency of the evil duo. Rwanda genocide 1994 became world famous human massacre history ever recorded as a result of untamed perception of anti-tribe articles and cartoons in newspaper, as well as hate speech and violence incitement on audio/visual media outlet among the Tutsi and Hutu extremists. Over two decades, Rwanda, a tiny African state is yet to fully recover from the impact of a triggered hate speech and its incited violence.

The virus of hate speech and fake news has become prominent in contemporary human societies where citizens become content providers and the spread of journalists grow not just to become supporters of particular political affiliation but play a fundamental part in setting national agendas in the governance.

In Nigeria where the tenets of freedom of speech and association are enshrined in her constitution, the steady growth from her infant democracy since 1999 has witnessed series of political ideologies and actors. The quest for power and control, and the desire of politicians to win elections at all cost is overwhelmingly stronger than the will for the common good. This has largely been supported by the use of media and social media networks in shaping the societal belief system. The concern on how Nigerians perceive hate speech and fake news as presented by the media and its effects on journalism profession and the society at large formed essence of this study.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Meaning and Dimensions of Hate Speech

Hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity and could cause environmental unrest just like the Boko haram menace in the country. According to United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013:4), hate speech includes:

> *(a) all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means; (b) incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin; (c) threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above; (d) expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; (e) participation in organizations and activities which promote and incite racial discrimination.*

In his submission, Neisser (1994:337) opines that hate speech refers to "all communications (whether verbal, written, symbolic) that insult a racial, ethnic and 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". Neisser argues that apart from causing danger of physical assault, hate speech risks violent reaction. In a simple agreement to Neisser's notion, Kayambazinthu & Moyo (2002) conceive hate speeches as wars waged on others by means of word.

In same vein, fake news is false information deliberately circulated by those who have scant regard for the truth but hope to advance particular political motive. Fake news is a global phenomenon and the effect has generated so much social deviance in the modern world. This is often done electronically to gain fame or make money out of online traffic in the contemporary technological-driven world. In an open letter, Berners-Lee (world-wide-web inventor) noted that "It's too easy for misinformation to spread on the web… That people choose what to show us based on algorithms which learn from our personal data that they are constantly harvesting". Apparently, these websites show content they assumed web users would access. Thus, most misinformation and fake news appeared surprising, shocking, and designed to appeal to human biases with capacity to spread like wildfire (BBC, 2017).

Contemporarily, the phenomenon of hate speech and fake news seemed to have permeated polities in an extensive dimension across African states as a result of its poor regulations. It has become an important aspect of electioneering campaign today that numerous election related conflict in Africa are credited to hate speech (Robert, 2012). Observably, hate speech has unequivocally become a norm of political electioneering in Nigeria and this has continued unabated. The intensity of hatred between ethnic groups in the country's configuration leverages on the use of unregulated hate speech. This is especially among the major dominant ethnic groups. The Igbos and Yorubas see the Hausas as "abokis" which though means friend but derogatorily means a moron. Similarly, the Hausas and the Yorubas see the Igbos as lovers of money while the Hausas and Igbos see the Yorubas as cowards and saboteurs (Robert, 2012 and Joel, 2013).

In a recent report, Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD, 2015) shows that 70 percent of the people disseminating hate speech in the Nigerian social media space used their identity and can be reached for a follow up actions. Although, the English language formed the major language used for dissemination of hate speeches, indigenous dialects with a visible content were rampaged in Nigerian social media space. As captured, over 65 percent of hate speech users are male in which greater percentage of the online contents used coded language that had been previously known to have generated violence/harm (CITAD, 2015).

1.1.1 The Social Environment

Hate speech or fake news does not spread in the atmosphere, it is an intentional communication that is carried out in form of transaction and they occur among people located in a specified environment. Though language differs, human social environment comprises the immediate physical surrounds, social relationships, and cultural settings within which defined groups of people function and interact. When hate speech and fake news are not controlled by appropriate authorities via stiff government regulations, elements of the social environment which include built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labour markets; social and economic processes; wealth; social, human, and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices; the arts; religious institutions and practices; as it relates to Nigerian environment with varied beliefs about place and community could be jeopardized via ethnical clashes that may arise. The social environment subsumes many aspects of the physical environment, given that contemporary landscapes, water resources, and other natural resources have been at least partially configured by human social processes that are embellished by language and human interactions (National Institutes of Health 2000).

1.2. Legal Frameworks for Counteracting Hate Speeches

Hylton (1996) associated hate speech with free speech doctrine of J.S. Mill which is enshrined in the constitutions of nations. He, however, noted that hate speech is not free speech. Hylton conceived hate speech as negative while free speech is a landmark achievement of democracy. Thence, most developed democracies added a clause on freedom of speech against the use of hate speech. For example, Article 10 (2) of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that "the exercise of freedom of expression … may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by Law … the interest of national security … for the protection of the reputation or right of others". Notably, most doctrines that recognized freedom of speech and expression in Nigeria added a clause to guard against hate speech, promote human dignity, societal cohesion and peace. According to section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution as amended in 2011 provides that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression…" More so, section 45 provides that nothing in section 39 shall invalidate any Law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society in the interest of public order, public morality and for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other persons.

Correspondingly, sections 95 and 96 of the 2010 Electoral Act proscribed the use of any language in sales promotion or politically motivated campaigns that will miffed tribal, religious and/or sectional sensitivity. Other legal frameworks that abhor the use of derogatory language in Nigeria are the Political Party Code of Conduct (2013) and the Abuja Accord (2015). Notwithstanding prescribed legal frameworks as highlighted above, there has been immense growth in hate speech before, during and after the 2011 and 2015 elections in Nigeria (Oshewolo,2017). In fact, instances of hate speech have been published in print and electronic media, social or digital media, and preached in podiums of churches and mosques.

Below are selected hate speeches that have been circulated widely in Nigeria between 2010 and 2015.

S/N	Year	Position of speakers/ Who Do they speak for?	Hate speech/ Who do they address?	Affiliation/ Publication
1	2010	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu	It must be a Northerner or no Nigeria… If Goodluck Jonathan wins the PDP"s endorsement to contest the 2011	Interview with Guardian r, 2nd November, 2010/ Neutral
2	2011	Presidential Candidate of Congress for Progressive Change, General Muhammadu Buhari	God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happens in 2011 should again	Reported by Lika Binniyat in Vanguard May 15, 2012 /PDP
3	2012	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern	Unless efforts are made to ensure that the 2015 general election are free and fair, it may	Leadership March 29, 2012 /APC
4	2013	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu	There will be bloodshed. Those who feel short- changed may take the war path and the country may not be the same again	Reported by Kemy Oguns in Osun Defender, 2nd December, 2013
5	2013	Abu King Shuluwa	Nigeria will disintegrate if Jonathan contests in 2015	Daily Independent Friday, March 8th , 2013 /PDP
6	2013	Former Chairman of PDP, Colonel Ahmadu Ali (rtd)	The Yorubas are ungrateful kind of people, who do not appreciate what others have done	Daily Sun , March 16, 2013? PDP
7	2014	Publicity Secretary of All Progressive Congress, Alhaji	If the 2015 elections are rigged, the party will not recognize the outcome and will go	Leadership 21st November, 2014; /APC

8	2014	Governor Shema Ibrahim of Katsina State	You should not be bordered (sic) with cockroaches of politics. Cockroaches are only found in the toilet even at homes, If you see	Reported by Premium Times on 19th November 2014 /
9	2014	Northern Elders Forum	Those who vote for Jonathan and the PDP in 2015 will be considered an enemy of the north	Vanguard, 15 October 2014/ PDP
10	2013	The leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Force (NDPSF), Alhaji Mujahid	There will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta, but everywhere if Goodluck Jonathan is not president by 2015, except	Vanguard Newspapers, May 5, 2013/ PDP
11	2013	Chief Arthur Eze PDP Chieftain	That short man called Ngige, we gave him power and he joined the Awolowo	Premium Times, November 13, 2013/ APC
12	2014	Asiwaju Bola Tinubu	It is going to be rig and roast. We are prepared	Tell, 7 July 2014./ Neutral
13	2014	Former Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Godswill	Those who want to take power through the back door will die. They will die	Punch , 17th July, 201/ Neutral
14	2014	South East Self Determination Coalition (SESDC?)	We assure those cold blooded murderers that this time, their blood thirsty campaign will not go un-replied	Reported by Clifford Ndujihe in Vanguard
15	2014	Rivers State Governor, Rotimi Amaechi	The challenge of the Nigerian military is not funding but corruption.	This day and The Nation , Tuesday,/ PDP
16	2015	Patience Jonathan	Please don't vote for prison. A vote for Buhari is a vote to send people to Prison.	Vanguard news March 25, 2015

Source: Adisa et al (2017).

1.3. The Spread of Hate Speech and Fake News in Nigeria: Media Responsibility

Journalism as a profession is concerned with news coverage and reporting, it has often been seen as a tool for advocating and ensuring peace in the societies. This is one of the many roles journalists play in a society known as the social responsibility, and as the media usually regarded as the conscience of the society. Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, the digression of media practice tends to be callous concerning its core role as peacemaker, rather, most practitioners serve as machinery for disunity, igniting crises and triggering hatred in the society (Ali 2013:1). The recent trend in journalism malpractice in the country is credited to the spread of hate speech, fake news with its inherent uncivil characters. Indeed, the press became vulnerable of reporting hate speech and fake news either by quoting directly from interviews, press statements, advertorials and sometimes from unproven online sources.

During the process of 2015 general elections, popular media outlets such as AIT, Channels, Thisday, Vanguard and The Nation *inter alia* flourished with political campaigns of several party candidates with gross abuse of "right to free speech", intensified hate speech and other forms of offensive character (Olowojolu 2016:8 and Fasakin et.al, 2017). This was regarded as social aberration as the media outlets operated without the ethics of the profession. Despite the prevailing journalism codes of ethic such as the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage, the use of hate speech and uncivil language filled the media landscape. It is worthy of note that hate speech and profane speech in Nigeria are mostly prone to religion and politics (Jideofor 2012 and Fasakin et.al, 2017) the most delicate part of Nigerian identity that is prone to environmental violent.

In general, description of hate speech tends to be wide, and can symbolize insolent words to those in authority or minority groups and individuals. Also, critical circumstances such as election period, hate speech is viable in promoting manipulation, contestations of hate speech among political actors tend to provoke violence while it can attract to those in power dissent and criticism. Nonetheless, while still countering hate speeches in the traditional media, the emergence of social media broadened the battlefield in combating the hate speech and fake news virus. The social media offers an ideal platform to adapt and spread hate speech and fake news easily because of its decentralized, anonymous and interactive structure. The prevalence of hate speech and fake news on political, national issues, and social interactions in Nigeria, especially on social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn is alarming. This is because apart from undermining the ethics of journalism profession, it is contributing to disaffection among tribes, political actors, and religious affiliations within the Nigerian social environment. The thriving of negative media usage such as character assassination and negative political campaigns is prevailing at the expense of right dissemination of matters that will help Nigerian make informed choices that are absolutely limited.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Given the essentiality of Metamorphosis theory as pronounced by its exponents in the emergence of new order of media, its thrust and content gave a feat to this study. Fildler (1997) among other scholars believes that media do not arise spontaneously and independently, rather it emerges gradually from older media in a metamorphosis process. This emergence usually results from the perceived deficiencies of the older media particularly in the denials of opportunities to citizens in the need for participation in the communication process. Thus, the new media emerges as a solace for citizens' need to be adequately involved in the information and communication sphere of a society. The constrain that limited the participation in the social and accepted public communication to a set of group, usually the journalists, around traditional media gave way in the broader sphere of communication in Nigeria. The alleged shortcomings to participate in the communication process have given rise to the emergence of social media in Nigeria in which Nigerians disseminate and bring social effects to social fora nationally and globally. The anonymous or pseudonymous character on social media that allows participants a fictitious personalities and names gave rise to free and unhindered communication. These include the use of hate speech and derogative appellations without any formidable social, political and legal penalties.

Also, the idea highlighted in "public sphere theory" beamed light of relevance to the subject matter of this study. The public sphere as the thrust of the theory was in response to what Jurgen Habermas considered as the massification and atomization of public domain by media. Habermas (1989) conceived public sphere as an arena where citizens have unrestricted access to matters of general interest stimulated by freedoms of assembly, association, expression and publication of opinions without undue economic and political control. In a credence to Habermas' school of thought and concept, Flichy (2010) argues that in a modern world of technology where internet abruptly interconnected human societies, the Web 2.0 invented provides amateurs with opportunity to contribute with their themes of interest, challenge opinions and find an audience for their view. Thus, amateurs acquire an influence that not so long ago, was the exclusive privilege of professionals and experts. According to experts and researchers (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994, Odugbemi, 2008 and Flichy, 2010), the conferment of social recognition on amateurs is particularly significant in the field of arts, popular culture, science and politics.

The emergence of social media platforms in Nigerian public domain operates as new public sphere with undefined boundaries vis-à-vis freedoms of assembly, association and expression. The democratization process in a trending political debate among political parties is unduly affected by bloggers and subscribers of social media platform in an unregulated public environment and not control by any social gatekeeper.

1.5. Statement of the Problem

Political engagement in Nigeria since the advent of its fourth republic is faced with the menace of pervasive hate speech, disinformation and fake news. The trend which now becomes a common service in media outlets as accepted by Nigerians and the government is alarming. It should be noted that hate speech and fake news if not put to check are tools of social disorder within the environment, giving the potency of this social evil twins, scholars (Allcott, and Gentzkow, 2017, Neisser, 1994, Adisa, et.al. 2017), were of the view that the deviance from societal values and goals driven by fake news and hate speech caused more dangers and impediment on social tranquillity. This is regarded as anti-societal values and norms. The trend of hate speeches and fake news as directed most especially at the presidential candidates of the two dominant political parties (PDP and APC) during electioneering for 2015 presidential election was of grave concern. No such a dramatic collection of hate speech has been recorded in the annals of election in Nigeria. This was not only a tool of influencing electorates' voting decision during the election but essential schemes to dislodge and capture future votes.

Unlike the social media, as Adisa, et.al noted, the traditional media practice is known to be subjected to rigours of accuracy, fact-checking and fairness, among others because of its valued texture in a social fabric. Unfortunately, its saltiness to social development and tranquillity has been insulted with gains and unlawful benefits. Distorted and unverified speeches orchestrated by politicians and allies are being helped for propaganda by traditional media, as well as social media, (Kayambazinthu and Moyo, 2002). There is no doubt that the renascent push for self-government as well as rising cases of ethnic and religious disharmony are all traceable to the growing phenomenon of hate speech, cum disinformation and fake news campaign. These had without doubt imprinted certain thoughts and perceptions among Nigerians in a society of polyglot configurations. It now becomes a concern what hate speech and fake news mean to Nigerians, and a bothersome question as who to be blamed for the spread of hate speech and fake news in Nigerian environmental landscape. The overall meaning, perception and influence of hate speech and fake news on Nigerian in the fate of freedom of speech and association, informs this research study.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What does hate speech and fake news mean to Nigerians?
2. Is the media to be blamed for the spread of hate speech and fake news?
3. To what extent can hate speech and fake news spread be curbed or minimize in the media?

1.7. Scope of the Study

Although Nigerians (eligible voters) in Kwara State are the focus for this study, considering the exigencies of time which would not permit to draw sample from all eligible voters across the state, sample population of the focus would be limited to Irepodun Local Government in Kwara State for this study.

2. Methodology

Quantitative research method was adopted in this study for the analysis of factors constituting hate speech and fake news as perceived by Nigerians.

2.1. Study Design

The study design for this purpose is descriptive design with the use of survey method. This aimed at collecting samples through the use of questionnaire from the targeted population for examination that addressed specific aims as perception on the study would be analyzed.

2.2. Population of Study

The targeted population for this study and investigation focused on eligible Nigerian voters in Irepodun Local Government, Kwara State. The sample population consisted of 100 socially informed and literate Nigerians.

2.3. Methods of Data Collection

The investigation study adopted primary and secondary methods of data collection. Questionnaires was administered for data collection while collection of academic Journals, Books, Daily Newspapers and vast Internet materials was leveraged on as secondary source of data. These wide range data consultation helped lay foundation for the study through the intense works of researcher in relation to this study.

2.4. Sampling Technique

Non-probability sampling method was purposively selected for accuracy in frequency and inclusion of all required units in this study. Thus, the selected population which constituted 100 mid-class Nigerians was drawn from Irepodun Local Government, Kwara State to suit the study purpose.

3. Data Presentation & Analysis

The presentation of the primary data done with tables is based on the data retrieved from questionnaires. The frequencies and the percentages were calculated with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics 21 Software. Before going into the presentation of findings proper, it needs to be pointed out that of all the 100 questionnaires distributed in deference to the sample size, 9 were unaccounted for. It was also discovered that 5 others were not properly filled which automatically invalidated them. Less this number (14), the researcher was left with 86 questionnaires to work with. The 86 responses are presented below in tables of frequencies and percentages to answer the Research Questions already established in this paper.

Table 1: What does hate speech and fake news mean to Nigerians?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bad Speech	16	18.6	**18.6**	18.6
	Use of Derogatory Language in Communication	14	16.3	**16.3**	34.9
	Communication Targeted at Destroying another Person's Image	38	44.2	**44.2**	79.1
	Communication that do not conform to social norms or values	18	20.9	**20.9**	100.0
	Total	**86**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

A1 – Use of Derogatory Language in Communication, A2 – Bad Speech, A3 – Communication that do not conform to social norms or values, A4 – Communication Targeted at Destroying another Person's Image
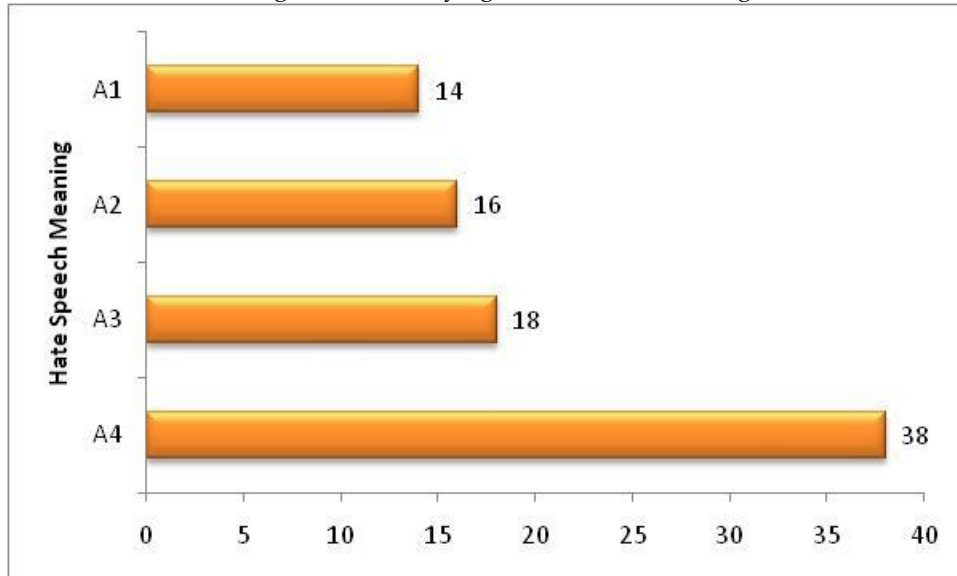

Table 2: What does fake news mean to you?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	News that lacks fact and accuracy	45	52.3	**52.3**	52.3
	News that is fake	11	12.8	**12.8**	65.1
	News that do not emanate from the media	9	10.5	**10.5**	75.6
	News spread by just anybody	14	16.3	**16.3**	91.9
	As defined by Politicians	7	8.1	**8.1**	100.0
	Total	**86**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

B1 – As defined by Politicians, B2 – News that do not emanate from the media, B3 – News that is fake, B4 - News spread by just anybody, B5 – News that lacks fact and accuracy.
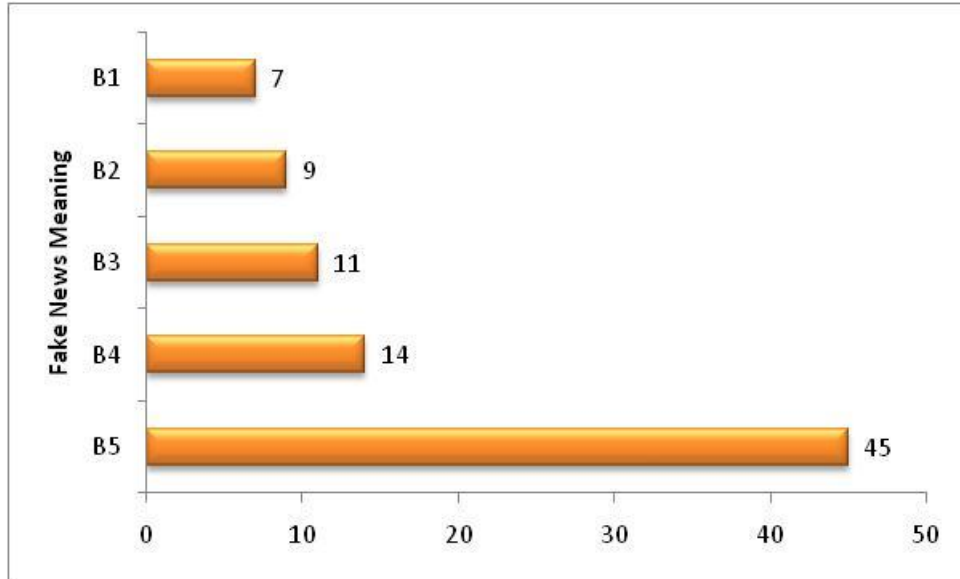
Obviously from the data collected from the population of study, some percentage have their own definition of what hate speech and fake news is but 44.2% in the valid percentage from Table 1 defined hate speech as 'Communication Targeted at Destroying another Person's Image'. While others based on response defined it as, 'Bad Speech, Use of Derogatory Language in Communication and Communication that does not conform to social norms or values', therefore the researcher will stick to "Communication Targeted at Destroying another Person's Image" which has the highest percentage. Secondly, 52.3 percent also see fake news as news that lacks fact and accuracy, based on the research objective set for this study; findings show that Nigerians, to an extent, know the meaning of hate speech and fake news. This shows that Nigerians are well informed about political reality around them.

Research Question 2: Is the Media to be blamed for the spread of hate speech and fake news?
Table 3: Who should be blamed for the spread of hate speech and fake news?

Response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Media	22	25.6	**25.6**	25.6
	Politicians	38	44.2	**44.2**	69.8
	Citizens	18	20.9	**20.9**	90.7
	All	8	9.3	**9.3**	100.0
	Total	**86**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
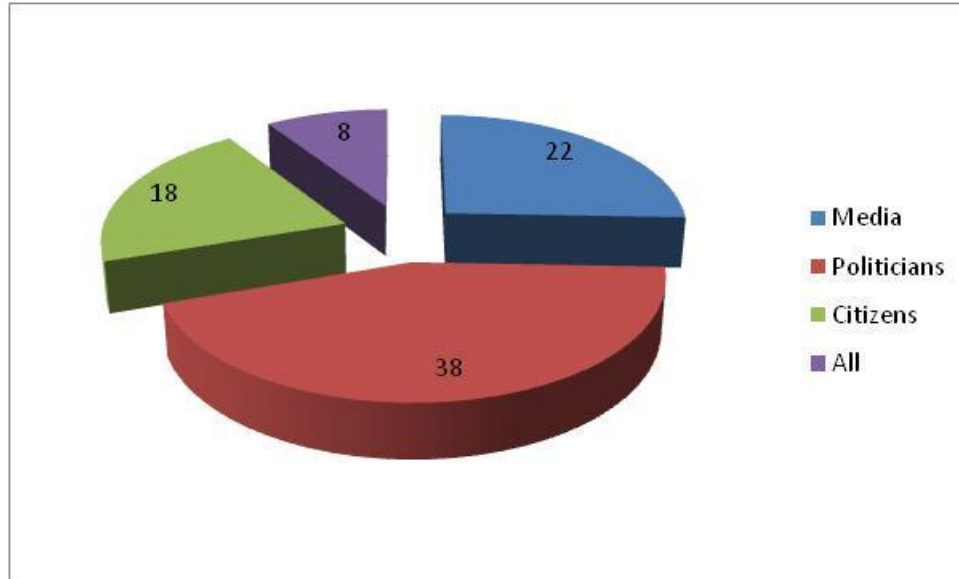
Even though one would have thought that the blame on hate speech and fake news would be placed at the door step of the media, data gathered from the field shows otherwise. From Table 3, going by the valid percentage 44.2% recorded that politicians should be blamed for the spread of hate speech and fake news in the nation. The drive and crave for power has made many politicians to be so desperate and they would stop at nothing to bring down their opponent. Above all, who owns the media? Many media organizations are owned by the Politicians, even when they are not owned by them, the desire to get advert has made many media owners to be partisan. This shows that the media still have some level of credibility among Nigerians but ownership and crave for survival are factors affecting the Media.

Research Question 3: To what extent can hate speech and fake news spread be curbed or minimise in the Media?

Table 4: Hate speech and fake news should be totally discouraged by all stakeholders

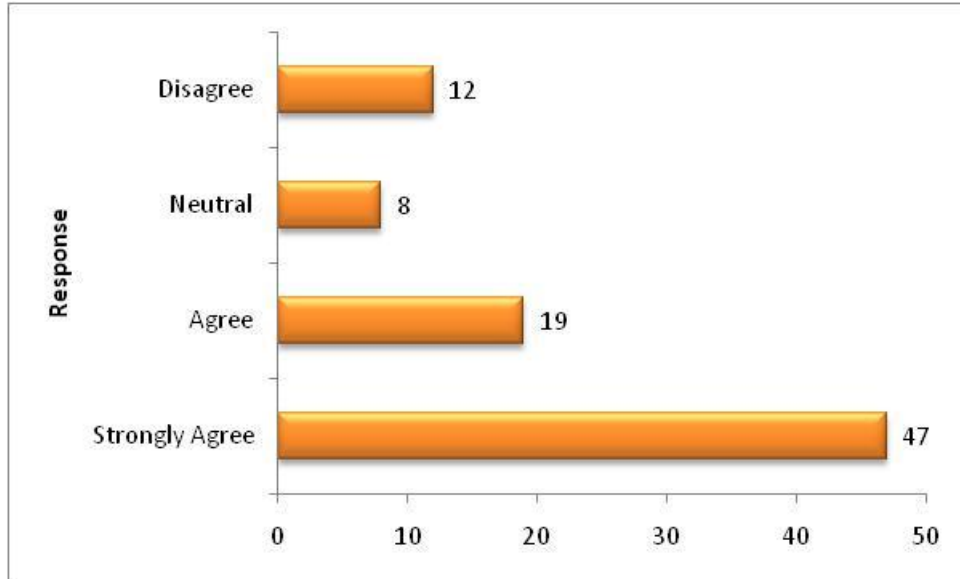| Response		Frequency	Percent	**Valid Percent**	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	47	54.7	**54.7**	54.7
	Agree	19	22.1	**22.1**	76.7
	Neutral	8	9.3	**9.3**	86.0
	Disagree	12	14.0	**14.0**	100.0
	Total	**86**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 5: The media can curb hate speech and fake news by staying objective at all times

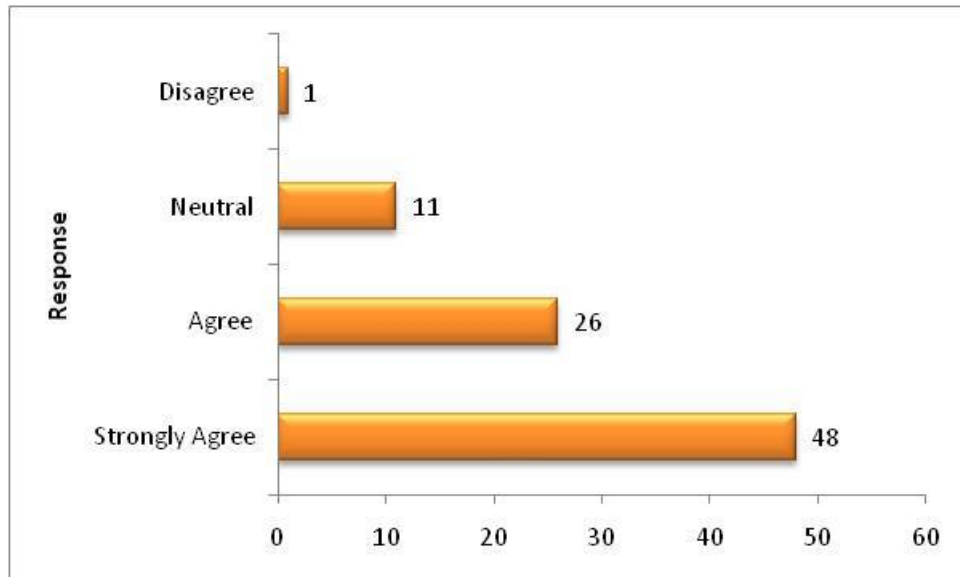|	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	48	55.8	**55.8**	55.8
	Agree	26	30.2	**30.2**	86.0
	Neutral	11	12.8	**12.8**	98.8
	Disagree	1	1.2	**1.2**	100.0
	Total	**86**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 6: Government should be more involved in regulating media contents to curb the spread of hate speech and fake news

Response		Frequency	Percent	**Valid Percent**	Cumulative Percent
Vali d	Strongly Agree	62	72.1	**72.1**	72.1
	Agree	9	10.5	**10.5**	82.6
	Neutral	5	5.8	**5.8**	88.4
	Disagree	4	4.7	**4.7**	93.0
	Total	6	7.0	**7.0**	100.0
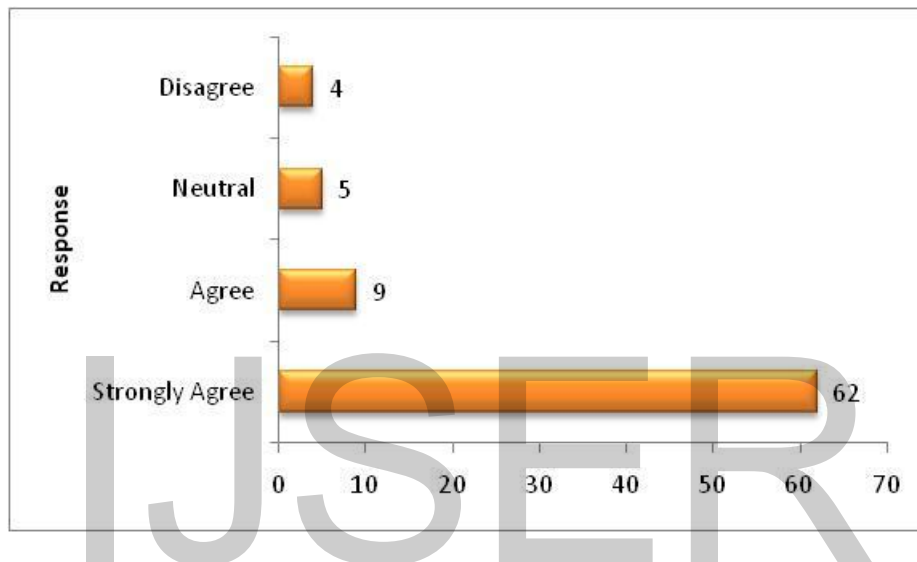
In Table 4 the distribution shows that 54.7% of the respondents strongly agree, while 22.1% agree that hate speech and fake news should be totally discouraged by all stakeholders in the country, be it government, media, politicians and citizens. On media responsibility in the spread of hate speech and fake news, frequency distribution in Table 5 shows that 55.8% of respondents strongly agree that media can curb the spread of hate speech and fake news, while 30.2% also agree to it. Table 6 finally placed the responsibility of curbing hate speech and fake news on the lap of the Government, as 72.1% strongly agree that the Government should be more involved in regulating media content to curb the spread of this menace, while 10.5% also attest to this. In line with the analysis presented above, it is first the responsibility of all to promote love and unity as it contains in the nation's National Anthem because every society deserves the media and government it gets. The society first has a responsibility to play, after at all, it is the society that provides the media the raw material for its operations. Events in recent time has shown that Nigeria has never been this divided due to the spread of hate speech and fake news, appropriate laws are in place but there is lack of responsibility on the part of the Government to enforce them and until there is serious enforcement from the relevant Government agencies, there cannot be strict compliance by the political gladiators and actors. Hence, the scourge of hate speech and fake news would keep permeating the very fabrics of the nation's socio-political environmental landscape.

Recommendations

There is an urgent need for political leaders and authority to consciously promulgate law against hate speech and fake news because of its volatile nature of aggravating ethno-religion crisis in the quest for nation building in Nigeria. As established by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966 and enforced on March 23, 1976 which encourages prohibition of advocacy with racial, ethnic or religious colouration among nations. Nigeria as a nation is expected to align with this global resolution as enforcement of such laws should be implemented irrespective who is involved. Therefore, in view of this, the following measures could be explored:

There is an urgent need to develop, in conjunction with critical organs of the nation such as media owners and practitioners, on the classification of what constitutes hate speech and fake news so that they can easily be spotted and discarded. Also, Media houses through their agencies/professional associations should incorporate these as part of good journalism practice and impose sanctions on erring members who publish or broadcast hate speech and fake news-laden materials. The National Orientation Agency in concert with the civil society groups and community leaders should discourage the use of hate speech and fake news at all levels during and after electioneering campaigns. Furthermore, airspace territory should well be protected as Internet Service providers should be coordinated and encouraged to shut down blogs and websites that publish, promote or give unfettered space for expression that can incite tension in Nigerian social environment. Above all Nigerian civil society organizations should impress upon the political leaders at all levels to curb spread of hate speech and fake news considering the fragile nature of Nigeria's political and social environment.

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