



**ASSOCIATION OF  
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS  
& PROFESSIONALS OF NIGERIA  
BOOK SERIES**



CANADA UNIVERSITY PRESS

# **OPINION LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON HATE SPEECH, AND FAKE NEWS REPORTING AND NIGERIA'S POLITICAL STABILITY**

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***To cite this article:***

Ogbuoshi L. I., Oyeleke A. S. & Folorunsho O. M. (2019). Opinion Leaders' Perspectives on Hate Speech, and Fake News Reporting and Nigeria's Political Stability in Fake News and Hate Speech; *Narratives of Political Instability*, ACSPN Book Series 2, pp. 26 — 40  
Retrieved from <http://www.acspn.com.ng>

(Institutional or Subscribed access may be required)

Please note that this is an electronic, pre-print version of this article published by the Canada University Press, Concord Ontario, Canada for Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN).

The ACSPN Book Series is exclusive to the Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria.

ISBN: 978-1-989271-05-6

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Layout/Design: Ashroph De Grafico

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### CHAPTER THREE

## OPINION LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON HATE SPEECH, AND FAKE NEWS REPORTING AND NIGERIA'S POLITICAL STABILITY

*Linus I OGBUOSHI, Adeola Sidikat OYELEKE  
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### Introduction

The phenomenal emergence of social media in the last few decades has made it the centre of social interactions, surpassing contributions of any other innovations in the history of mass media. Generally drawn from the fact that information is necessary for effective modern social, economic, and political development, social media has made people, being the sources, the processors as well as the end users of all information. As already known, social media has its powerful networks; its transmission is so fast and strongly effective on many people, Neisser (1994). Information is power, information is the engine room for meaningful and sustainable development, and information is also the catalyst for effective social interaction. There is no doubt in the minds of communication scholars that one of the biggest benefits accruable from the use of social media is the inherent freedom of expression. Social media has democratized and personalized accusation, purveyance and distribution of information aided by the powerful networks of internet communication. However, the menace of hate speech, being an integral aspect of hate communication has suddenly become a catch phrase in Nigeria's political lexicon, so much that concerned citizens and eminent personalities have called for legislative measures on it. Concerned stakeholders at a national roundtable summit on hate speech opines that social media has contributed to the spread of hate speech and writings, through the spread of gory pictures of either false or imagined wars. Alongside the issue of hate speech is also the constant spread of fake news; another serious issue that has characterized the social media era. These two issues (Hate Speech and Fake News) if not put in check; are capable of promoting diversity rather than the needed bond and cohesion that is necessary for the country's political development and stability.

Notably, the Nigerian political history has been very unstable, beginning from the military era till date. Political and electoral violence in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era, through the First, Second, and Third Republics to the Fourth Republic in 1999. In fact, violence, be it electoral, political or economic-related has become a regular feature of politics and electoral processes in the country. Accordingly, the democratic process, values and institutions are

prevented from developing because people who gain political power somewhat attain such through violence. Like the proliferation of small arms; peddling of hate speeches sustains the culture of intolerance and electoral violence in Nigeria. Political violence in Nigeria manifests in forms of killings; looting, destruction and damage of property; assault and death threats; bombings; forceful dispersion of political rallies; destruction of campaign billboards; fighting among political parties; violent street protests and hooliganism; arbitrary detentions and arrests without warrant and abduction. These manifestations and hindrances may not only threaten Nigeria's democratic process, but also the political stability, peace and unity of the country.

### **Problem of the Study**

Today, the Nigerian polity is so heated up that from all political divides, there has been resort to hate campaigns and speeches. There are no arguments as to how politicians have resorted to divisive comments, insinuations and innuendoes. Not only has these hate speeches pitched the North against the South, but individual hatred has attained an all-time height in Nigeria. With the uncommon level of hate speeches and campaigns in Nigeria witnessed both before and after the 2019 general elections, there is justification for venturing into an academic examination of all issues connected thereto, particularly when one views communication (Hate Speeches and Campaigns) as having the capacities and infrastructures of threatening the country's collective existence.

Since there are little or no sufficient empirical studies that addresses the issues at stake, such academic gap will find a closure in this current work.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad goal of this paper is to examine opinion leaders' perspectives on the implications of hate speech and fake news reporting for Nigeria's political stability. However, the study is geared towards the following specifics:

1. To find out the reasons why people engage in the conception and dissemination of hate speeches and fake news.
2. To identify the major targets of hate speeches and fake news.
3. To check the period during which hate speeches and fake news become rampant.
4. To estimate the possible consequences of promoting hate speeches and fake news, on the political stability of Nigeria.
5. Suggest ways of managing the psychosocial maladies of hate speeches and fake news.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been raised to give focus and direction:

1. Why do people engage in the conception and dissemination of hate speeches and fake news?
2. Who are the major targets of hate speeches and fake news?
3. At what point does hate speeches and fake news become rampant?
4. What are the possible consequences of promoting hate speeches and fake news, on the political stability of Nigeria?
5. What are the practical ways of managing the psychosocial maladies of hate speeches and fake news?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Hate Speech: An Overview**

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. United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013:4) noted that 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.

According to Neisser (1994:337) cited in Ezeibe (2015), hate speech refers to “all communications (whether verbal, written, symbolic) that insults 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 argued that apart from causing danger of physical assault, hate speech risks violent reaction. Put simply, Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002) conceived hate speeches as wars waged on others by means of word. Indeed, the phenomenon of hate speech has taken an extensive dimension in Africa due to poor regulations. Hate speech, according to Nigeria's Minister of Information, Lai Mohamed, has permeated every nooks and cranny of Nigeria through social media activism, it has eaten deep into the bone marrows of Nigerians and continues unabated. The same way social media has contributed immensely to hate speech so as it has done to fake news.

Scholars have continued to debate whether the latitude provided by the democratization or democratized information by social media is enough to guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Freedom of expression is an inalienable right of an individual guaranteed by the United Nations Charter of Human Rights and Section 39 of the Nigerian 1999 constitution. Freedom of the press on the other hand represents the institutional liberty granted journalists in carrying out their professional activities (Oloyede 1996).

### **Hate Speech and the Challenges of Nation Building**

Hate speech is so pervasive in Nigeria that a number of citizens are susceptible to it. The irony is that people who usually complain of being insulted by other ethnic groups often use even more hateful words in describing the groups they feel have insulted them. Net effect: the widening of the social distance among the different ethnicities that make up the country and an exacerbation of the crisis in the country's nation-building. Several observations could be made about the interplay between ethnicity, hate speech and the crisis in the country's nation-building project. One, hate speech employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership. It is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Recent researches conducted indicates that there are individuals and groups in Nigeria who openly relish the freedom to rain insults and profile others by appropriating to themselves the role of ethnic and religious champions. The end result (implication) is that hate speech is often the gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence as well as a precursor to serious harmful criminal acts. It is doubtful if there will be hate-motivated violent attacks on any group

without hate speech and the hatred it purveys. Two, there is nothing wrong in people celebrating pride in their ethnic and cultural identities as it is not always a manifestation of ethnicity when someone proclaims, '*I am a proud Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba or Efik*,' (Adibe, 2018).

Most ethnic groups across the world feel that their way of life, food,, dress, habits, beliefs, values, and so forth, are superior to those of other groups. There is nothing wrong with this. The boundary between this love for one's ethnic identity (ethnocentrism) and ethnicity (which is conflictual in character) could however be thin. When our love for our ethnic identity results in seeing other groups as competitors or the reasons why we are not getting what we believe we deserve to get, then there is often recourse to hate speech to vent our frustrations on the out-group. At that point, the love for one's ethnic identity has become conflictual in form and thus; crossed the boundary to ethnicity. It is important to underline that although ethnicity is rooted in the struggle for the scarce societal values political positions, jobs, contracts, scholarships etc by the various ethnic factions of the Nigerian elite, it has over time acquired an objective character such that it now exists independent of the original causative factors. Not surprisingly therefore, we have a group of 'ethnic watchers' whose only vocation appears to be working the arithmetic of which ethnic group gets what, when and how in the proverbial sharing of the 'national cake' (Adibe, 2018). Conclusively, all the aforementioned may deter government's efforts in ensuring a stable and well-developed socio-political system and a viable economy. The process of nation-building requires conscious efforts from all and sundry, irrespective of political, social or ethnic affinity.

### **Fake News**

With the advent of the new media, the scourge of fake news is becoming more prevalent that its negative impact on popular online newspapers is very evident. As Allcot and Gentzkow (2017, p.7) said, "The declining trust in mainstream media could be both a cause and a consequence of fake news gaining more attraction". If fake news can affect traditional newspapers, then its impact on major online newspapers can only be imagined. Fake news means "false information deliberately circulated by those who have scant regard for the truth but hope to advance particular (often extreme) political causes and make money out of online traffic. Or it could be false information circulated by journalists who do not realise it's false" (BBC, 2017, March 12). The literacy level in the country has not entirely made the difference between social media and popular online newspaper a common knowledge to all. It is still believed in some quarters that there is no difference between a major online news site and Facebook. To this extent, it is feared that whatever negative impression people have of one is extended to the other. Online newspapers are important to society as a whole, and allowing social media to post whatever they like is a way of undermining its very usefulness. With the hardcopy newspaper believed to be giving way to the online edition, well-known online newspapers should increasingly be playing the role and gaining the acceptance hitherto reserved for the hardcopy newspaper. According to Asemah (2009, p.37), "The media, whether electronic or print often sets agenda for the public to follow; they monitor trends and events in our society and raise their agenda based on what they have monitored ... Whatever issue the media raises becomes an issue of public concern".

Bearing this in mind the need to sustain that pride of place earlier occupied by the print newspaper in setting the agenda as well as among other roles holding government accountable to the people, the society stands to lose out greatly if popular online newspapers, in the face of disappearing hardcopy editions, lose the widely recognised and documented influence of the media on account of fake news broadcast on social media channels which are lifted for publishing by some online news sites. Given that fake news is more likely to be wholly believed

in view of their salacious and sensational nature coupled with their feeding into the sentiment of the public, government and news managers are distracted from making the true position prevail over fake news that have been passed off as real. However, the existence of two variant versions of a news item may confuse the reading public and even make them lose credibility in the news medium readily accessible to them. When this happens; the very essential information role which makes the media a fourth estate of the realm are undermined. Sanusi, Adelabu and Esiri (2015, p.11) wrote that fourth estate of the realm appellation of the media requires it to monitor and report the conduct of the government, adding that as watchdogs, people rely on the media for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those elected into power. The media was also said to shape and reaffirm attitude and behaviour of people in the society by showing what happens to people who act in a way that violates societal expectations. In view of the fact that “The most popular newspaper or newsmagazine is the one that has integrity: that rare element of credibility” Ekwueme (2008), those in power would not lose sleep over the watchdog activities of an online newspaper without a reader base that can take what they read from such online news sites to the bank.

In Nigeria, there have been instances of fake news targeted against the political process. Examples include the 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial election result which was then circulated on social media before official announcement by INEC and Iyabo Obasanjo's purported Open Letter to her father which she later claimed was a fake news report. The problem of fake news has become so pronounced that the inventor of the World Wide Web, WWW, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, declared on the 28th anniversary of his invention that the impact of fake news is increasingly a matter of concern, adding that social media sites and search engines must be encouraged to continue efforts to tackle the menace. In an open letter published on March 12, 2017, to mark the WWWs 28th birthday, Berners-Lee noted that,

*It's too easy for misinformation to spread on the web”. He added that people “choose what to show us based on algorithms which learn from our personal data that they are constantly harvesting. The net result is that these websites show us content they think we'll click on meaning that misinformation, or 'fake news', which is surprising, shocking, or designed to appeal to our biases can spread like wildfire.*

To an extent, the biggest casualty of this misinformation that spreads on the web is the online newspaper. Fake news is a global phenomenon. In July 2016, the now-defunct website wtoe5news.com, which described itself as “a fantasy news website” and that most of its articles are “satire or pure fantasy”, reported that Pope Francis had endorsed Donald Trump's presidential candidacy. The story was shared more than a million times on Facebook. There was also the fabricated story from the now-defunct website Denvergurdian.com captioned: “FBI agent suspected in Hillary email leaks found dead in apparent murder-suicide”.

### **Fake News and Hate Speech: Ethical and Legal Positions**

Hylton (1996) compared 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. Hence, 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” Impressively, most doctrines that established freedom of speech and expression in Nigeria added a clause to guard against hate speech, promote human dignity, societal cohesion and peace. For instance, 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. Similarly, sections 95 and 96 of the 2010 Electoral Act prohibited the use of any language in campaigns that will hurt tribal, religious and/or sectional feelings. Law of libel and slanders also protect the citizens against hateful utterances. 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). Despite these legal frameworks however, there has been notable growth in hate speech before, during and after the three general elections held in 2011, 2015 and 2019. There are, however, existing laws that cater for abuse of freedom or harassment of individuals and groups, as pointed out by civil society and mass media groups. The law setting up the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Advertising Practitioners Council (APCON), Nigerian Press Council (NPC), and the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) filtered out offensive materials and pornography among others.

### **Social Media Proliferation and Spread of Fake News**

There is no doubt that the increasing negative sides of social media seems to be outweighing its benefits. Recent developments around the world have proved that social media has assumed a destructive dimension and threatening the very humanity it came to improve (Adavize 2018). The unending controversies surrounding the U.S election that ushered in Donald Trump as President have actually unraveled the ugliest side (disinformation) of social media. The alleged Russia meddling in the U.S election through the social media platforms is an eye-opener for the rapidly growing virtual community. The revelation of *Facebook* data scandal with a research firm, Cambridge Analytical, gives more insight into the increasing adverse role of social media which was thought to be a tool that would help to strengthen democracy, enlighten the populace, impart knowledge and unite the world. Social media is now just doing the opposite.

Allcoz (2018) opines that the evolution of fake news, false news, post-truth, or distorted information did not just start. It has been in existence since time immemorial, but technology exacerbated it. As more people are gaining access to the internet they become purveyors of information and disinformation, with the supersonic power of social media. Although, the term 'fake news' has not been adequately given scholarly definitions, it is generally described as completely false information, photos or videos purposefully created and transmitted to confuse, misinform the general public in order to influence their judgments. The current momentum in the debates of the destructive power of social media is as a result of its practical devastating experiences of countries and communities around the world. Social media which was seen not long ago as a nemesis for rogue, unpopular and authoritarian regimes and corrupt officials is now turning out to serve their very interests. Rogues and fantastically corrupt individuals, some of them who had been displaced and disgraced are currently being pushed to the frontline on the strength of fake news spiraling on social media. One of the thousands of fake news reported to have boosted the electoral fortunes of Donald Trump was the fake adoption of his candidacy by Pope Francis. This story reached a vast majority of Americans and beyond, and no doubt influenced their electoral judgments before its falsehood was discovered.

Also, in Nigeria, the proliferation of fake news on social media has reached an unprecedented level, putting the country in a precarious situation. This trend gained prominence during the build-up to the 2015 elections. The reported demise of the then-presidential candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari in London, became a hitting point for the then ruling party, PDP. The phenomenon assumed a frightening dimension immediately after the inauguration of APC government in May 2015, even as the recently proscribed Biafra agitators quickly seized the opportunity to advance their secession agenda. Ever since then, the country continues to bloom in the vicious circles of ubiquitous disinformation. In September last year, a well-crafted fake UN speech of President Muhammadu Buhari was circulated on social media even before the President arrived in New York for the 72nd session of United Nations General Assembly meeting. Even Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook CEO, who had earlier denied that his platform is abetting fake news or hoaxes, is now adjusting to the reality as more mountains of practical evidence continues to emerge from around the world.

### **Hate Speech on Nigeria's Political Stability: Implications**

Political violence, especially during electioneering is the greatest consequence of hate speech. Fischer (2002) cited in Ezeibe (2015: 22) identified different manifestations of election violence as follows:

1. Pre-election day violence (it occurs during registration period and can lead to massive disenfranchisement of voters due to psychological fear);
2. Campaign violence (it is during this period that major political meetings and rallies are held. This period is a prominent stage with high tendency for electoral violence);
3. Election day violence (it manifests in the forms of burning of election offices and materials including ballot boxes and papers, intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes, rigging and diversion of election materials);
4. Post-election day violence (violence can also occur hours and days after elections. This can emanate from dispute over election results and the inability of the judiciary to handle election disputes fairly. The manner in which election results are announced might also lead to electoral violence.

### **Societal Effect of Social Media and Fake News Reports**

However, everyone who has read news on social media would probably fall victim to fake news. Even the mainstream media are not spared. In an attempt to remain relevant in the face of the obvious threat posed by social media to their very survival, they fall victim to fake news. For example, some years ago, a national daily flashed a fake picture lifted from social media on their front-page that contained foreign mercenaries which the paper described as U.S marines fighting *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. Also, recently the Nigerian media including the self-acclaimed reputable ones were awash with bogus interview granted by the North Central Zonal Chairman of Miyetti Allah, where he was quoted to describe an attack by suspected herdsmen in Jos, Plateau State, as retaliatory; for the killings of large number of their cattle in the state. It was just the latest hoax that exposes the vulnerability of even the traditional media and raises ethical questions about their operations in the age of internet/social media. The frightening aspect of fake news on social media is that, it travels faster than the truth while the vast majority of people take them as prophetic revelations especially when it serves their very interests without questioning the validity. Far from the truth, fake news is a poison that divides society, blinds the mind, reinforces sentiments and plunges society into unending conflicts that hinder development and create unstable global community.

### **Critics/Criticism of Hate Speech in Nigeria**



The Hate Speech Bill which was proposed by the Nigerian Senate prescribed death by hanging for any person found guilty of any form of hate speech that results in the death of another person. The 'Hate Speech Bill' was sponsored by Senator Aliyu Sabi Abdullahi of Niger State and has death by hanging, inserted as capital punishment for offenders. The Bill, seeks to “eliminate” hate speech and discourage harassment on the grounds of ethnicity, religion or race among others. It prescribes stiff penalties for offences such as “ethnic hatred.” “Any person who uses, publishes, presents, produces, plays, provides, distributes and/or directs the performance of any material, written and/or visual, which is threatening, abusive or insulting or involves the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words, commits an offence,” it states.

However, barrage of criticisms have trailed the introduction of the bill, with many of the view that it was aimed at hunting critics of the government. The bill stated clearly a penalty for those who are found guilty of any form of hate speech that results in the death of another person after judicial processes in a Federal High Court. **Critical sections of the society like the mass media, civil society, pressure groups, the academia, writers and creative/performing artistes who expectedly will bear the main brunt of the obnoxious law have been curiously and dangerously indifferent, as only a few voices have raised the alarm.** The critics of this penalty were of the opinion that death penalty should have been provided as the punishment when someone or a group is responsible for the deaths of other people. After all, the present law says 'if you do anything that results in the death of another person and it is proven beyond reasonable doubt that you caused the death of that person, the penalty is death by hanging'. In a very damning editorial on March 19, 2018, The Punch criticised the bill in the following words:

*Purveying or inciting hatred is bad, but viewed from all perspectives, this is a bad law being proposed by persons so unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the practices and nuances of fundamental rights and democracy. Not even in his first term as a military head of state did President Muhammadu Buhari propose such heavy jail terms and fines against the exercise of free speech and media freedom. The infamous anti-media Decree 4 that headlined the military junta he led in 1984-85 came far short of imposing millions of naira in fines or prescribing the death penalty. Neither did the British colonial masters who drafted and enforced a succession of sedition and anti-press laws contemplate silencing free speech with the death penalty.*

Like other critics, the paper noted that the Bill sits at odds with provisions on basic fundamental rights outlined in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution, especially Sections 38 and 39 that guarantee the freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and freedom of expression and the press, respectively. The basic law and enabling legislation, also sufficiently prohibit the abuse of such rights and discrimination against persons or groups on account of race, ethnicity or faith. Nigerian senator, Shehu Sani, as quoted by Sahara Reporters (2018) argued that the law against hate speech will be used against free speech, that it would be a threat to democracy and freedom of speech and Nigerians should fight and reject it. Believing that the bill would be used to intimidate and arrest critics of government, Sani stated that “Many critics and social media enthusiasts will end up in the gallows. Our condemned cells in the prisons will be filled with bloggers, critics and perceived political opponents. We must fight hate speech, hate speech is a real threat to peace, unity and order of a nation, but we must protect free speech. Free speech is the shield of the oppressed.”

## **Methodology**

The major challenge with political communication is that it is associated with the nature and quality of evidence to measure effects (McNair, 2011). Considering the nature of this paper, in-depth interview which is a qualitative research methodology was used. It afforded the opportunity to use structured interview questions in gathering data from the respondents. This method was chosen in order to elicit background and detailed information as related to the menace of hate speech and fake news reporting on the political stability of Nigeria. First, the selected respondents were asked how the people around them have responded to certain hate speeches and fake news reports, and then their responses analysed. We used the questions to assess the seriousness of the hate speeches to determine their capacity to generate political violence; likewise that of fake news was done the same way. The questions asked were carefully formulated to avoid simplification and exaggeration.

## **Sample**

In this paper, non-probability sampling technique was adopted. From the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, one political elite was purposively selected from each State in the zone, making a total of 36 purposively chosen interviewees. We stratified Nigeria into the following, using the existing geo-political zones:

1. Northwest -Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara states.
2. Southwest -Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ondo and Ekiti states.
3. Southeast -Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states.
4. North central-Benue, FCT, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states.
5. Northeast-Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states.
6. South south -Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Cross-River and Rivers states.

However, from each of these geopolitical zones, prominent leaders were selected for the interview. Specifically, the people interviewed were; Religious leaders, Youth leaders, Traditional leaders, Journalists, Political leaders and leaders of civil society groups based in Nigeria. Table 1 below shows the states from where our interviewees were drawn. We selected our interviewees based on the states within the geopolitical zone that was mostly affected by political and post-election violence in 2011 and 2015.

## **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the In-depth Interview conducted with the respondents who are leaders in their various capacities in the religious, cultural and social-economic groupings across the shores of the country were analysed and interpreted using the thematic approach.

**Background, Position and Experience of Participants:** The interviewees are mostly educated and versed in their various areas of endeavour. Most of them attained their present status through hard work, personal development, activeness, personality, academic exposure and leadership skills.

**Traditional Leaders:** From the interview made, most of the respondents in this category are fairly educated, and attained their present status as a result of leadership training, divine arrangement and hereditary. All their responses are summarized and categorized as **Interview 1**.

**Youth Leaders:** In this category, the interviewees are educated and of younger age, most of them attained their present status through leadership skill, experience and personal recognition. All their responses are summarized and categorized as **Interview 2**.

**Religious Leaders:** The interviewees here got to their present status through hard work, prayer, devotion, and divine arrangement. All their responses are summarized and categorized as **Interview 3**.

**Journalists:** Respondents in this category are learned and attained their present positions through career growth, progression and process. Since it is a career vocation, they grew along with the process. All their responses are summarized and categorized as **Interview 4**.

**Political Leaders:** Through personal recognition, discipline, hard work and commitment. All their responses are summarized and categorized as **Interview 5**.

**Civil Society Leaders:** Through commitment, discipline, hard work, leadership training and exposure they attained their status as civil society group leaders. All their responses are summarized and categorized as **Interview 6**.

**Analysis of RESEARCH QUESTION 1: *Why do people engage in the conception and dissemination of hate speeches and fake news?***

Majority of the interviewees are in agreement that hate speech is now a common phenomenon in our present day society, and that it is mostly made to achieve some sinister goals. **Interview I** are of the belief that hate speech and fake news is becoming a dangerous trend that must be critically looked into. Majority contended that “...people engage in it to bring the targets down” while others are of the view that “...the freedom obtainable from the social media gateways are responsible for the level of hate speeches and fake news recorded in recent times”. The interviewees emphasized that hate speech is a personal projection which is based on the freedom of expression which the constitution guarantees. **Interview 2** are of the opinion that hate speech and fake news are very common these days, and should not be taken serious. However, they stressed on the need for the promoters of hate speech to be punished, and that individuals to rationalize before responding to fake news messages. **Interview 3**, however, stressed that hate speech should not be taken lightly, as their respective religion preaches tolerance, peace and love. They mostly believe that the advent of technology has really empowered the perpetrators of hate speech and fake news, but stringent measures should be put in place to avoid chaos among citizens.

However, **Interview 4** agreed that hate speech is a predominant issue these days, but fake news should be ignored because the promoters are only looking for cheap publicity and recognition. They also maintained that “hate speeches are promoted for selfish interests, and that it always has either religious or tribal undertone”, adding that “hate speech is being promoted by political animals who are desperate to achieve their ambitions at all cost”. For **Interview 5**, it is believed that they are used to hate speeches because they see it as a political gimmick or statement. But for **Interview 6**, they are of the opinions that “hate speech and fake news is detrimental to the cohesive bond that binds the society, and should not be taken lightly”.

Most times, hate speeches are directed towards gaining political power, relevance and recognition. Also, fake news is currently trending as a result of the liberty and luxury of technological inventions.

**Analysis of RESEARCH QUESTION 2: *Who are the major targets of hate speeches and fake news?***

There is a consensus by the interviewees on the targets of hate speeches and fake news. **Interview 1** contended that politicians and religious leaders are the major targets. They believe that that “...*those in leadership positions are most vulnerable in the era of hate campaigns and fake news. Ordinarily, you will only hate someone that is superior to you*”. Majority believed that people in government or religious leaders are mostly targeted in the hate campaign era. **Interview 2** are of the opinion that “*hate speech and fake news are usually made against anybody that belongs to the promoter's opposition*”. However, **Interview 3** believed that “*anybody can be the target of hate speech*”. For **Interview 4**, there is a difference, as some hold the opinion that “*one can only be a target when there is obvious reason for such hateful campaigns*”. For **Interview 6**, it is believed that “*everybody is a prospective target of hate speeches, so long as people are members of the society*”.

### **Analysis of RESEARCH QUESTION 3: *At what point does hate speeches and fake news become rampant?***

Again, there is a consensus among the interviewees on the timing of hate speeches becoming rampant. Mostly, hate speeches and fake news become common during electioneering periods. **Interview 4** are of the opinion that “...*because of the craze to outsmart each other, politicians mostly resort to hate speeches during campaigns and in the electioneering period mostly*”. However, **Interview 5**, believed that “...*hate speeches are expected whenever people jostle for positions or tend to get unmerited advantage over others. There is no particular time*”. For **Interview 6**, there are divided opinions in that “... *it is evident in our everyday life*”.

### **Analysis of RESEARCH QUESTION 4: *What are the possible consequences of promoting hate speeches and fake news on the political stability of Nigeria?***

The overall consequence of these two social maladies may be disastrous and catastrophic if not put into check. Nigeria's background as a nation gives credence to the fact that there was a “marriage of inconvenience” in the past which needs large and constant dose of peaceful co-existence, harmony, love and tolerance. The interviewees across Nigeria's geo-political zones are of the view that hate speech as a social menace have greatly affected the political system, development and stability of Nigeria as a sovereign nation. Various opinions reflect that hate speech is capable of creating tribal and religious conflicts, societal unrest, war and all sorts of calamities if greater punishment is not instituted on time.

**Interview 1** emphasized that social media is the home for breeding hate statements and unverified reports. They however, maintained that “*social media has been wrongly abused by the initiators of fake news*. The interviewees stressed that hate speech and fake news are both capable of retarding the growth and stability of Nigeria's political system, democratic value and unity of purpose. Their opinion varies and differs: Some were of the belief that hate speech is now a common phenomenon that is uttered in the electioneering period, while some believed it's being sponsored for selfish interest. For **Interview 2**, it is believed that “*if the menace is not urgently nipped in the bud by concerned authorities, it is capable of generating tension and unrest as well as economic stagnation*”. There is a consensus among the interviewees that “*hate speech and fake news if not curbed, can affect the country's political stability, democratic values and morals*”.

For **Interview 4**, social media has given everyone the liberty to express their unlimited freedom in a wrong way. They stressed that “*social media is just a tool in the hand of hate speech*

*perpetrators, not that it was invented for negative reasons*". They opined that *"hate speech and fake news are capable of turning things the other way round, and can further entrench hostility among various tribes and ethnicity"*. However, **Interview 5** contended that the advent of social media has not promoted hate speech and fake news; rather it has ended government's monopoly and hegemony of the media. They stressed that *"members of the public are no longer passive audience rather an active one as a result of social media, just that it has been wrongly used by people with selfish interests"*. The interviewees in this category said that if the menace of hate speech and fake news continue to thrive from various sources, the country may be heading towards anarchy. **Interview 6**, are of the opinion that *"social media has really contributed to the spread of hate statements which are capable of inciting one ethnic group against the other"*. They stressed that *"the perpetrators of hate speech will not stop in spreading it, regardless of the medium. Even if the social media is regulated, they will still use another medium to pass their hate speeches and crooked reports"*. Interviewees here also stressed that hate speech and fake news if not checkmated, may portend grave danger as it will continue to divide the people.

**Analysis of RESEARCH QUESTION 5: *What are the practical ways of managing the psychosocial maladies of hate speeches and fake news?***

Opinion varied and differed among respondents. Some were of the belief that hate speech is now a common phenomenon that is uttered in the electioneering period, while some believed it's being sponsored for selfish interests. **Interview 2** are of the view that *"the media have not done enough in checkmating the excesses of the perpetrators and those who are quacks among them"*. Supporting the viewpoint shared by **Interview 2**, the **Interview 4** also supported the opinion that the media practitioners have tried in their campaigns against these menaces, but need to double their efforts. **Interview 3**, however, stressed that *"the media needs to share in the blame, as they also promote hate speech and fake news through publishing sensational matters, news framing and the need to beat deadline"*. For **Interview 6**, *"Journalists have done their best, just that most of the people in the society derive pleasure in patronizing junks from online media and faceless writers"*. Some of the interviewees in this category stressed that certain ethical standards do hinder them to report issues that may have adverse effect or danger on the society, but the perpetrators and promoters of hate speech are not bothered with these ethical rules. **Interview 5** maintained that the mainstream media journalists are doing their best, *"but those reporting through social media platforms are not helping matters"*. However, **Interview 1** are of the opinions that the media is one of the promoters of hate speech and fake news. They maintained that *"most of the reports coming out from the media are not well investigated, owing to the fact that some of their workers are not trained adequately"*.

**How the media can assist in curbing the menace**

The interviewees expressed divergent opinions and observations by suggesting that the media should be encouraged to carry out reports that are well investigated before disseminating same to the public. Also, the media were advised to stop either rebroadcasting or giving coverage to hate speeches made by people in the society. Another observation made by the interviewees was that *"the media should refrain from participating in political or electoral campaign; as such act is a breeding ground for hate statements, speeches, abusive songs and sensational words"*. Conclusively, the media should ensure that there are efforts in place to confirm or verify source(s) of information, and also initiate policy of zero tolerance for hate speeches and unverified reports. Such policy will restrict the menace of hate speech and fake news dissemination, to the social media alone. However, contrary opinions from some interviewees indicated that politicians and other people at the helm of affairs in the country have successfully



sown the 'seed of hatred' amidst the people, for their own political interests. The interviewees in all the categories emphasized that the goals of unity amidst the diversified structure of Nigeria as a country can still be achieved with the right attitude, policies and good governance, devoid of ethnic bigotry.

### **Government policies and intervention to checkmate the excesses**

Generally, the interviewees are of the opinion that various policies introduced by government to curb this menace are not implemented. **Interview 1** in their responses maintained that government has introduced some set of regulations that will convict offenders of hate speech and fake news, “*but some enemies of progress are frustrating government's efforts*”. Others believe that some leaders of sectional groups at times instigate their followers to make hate statements and speeches, thereby causing panic and confusion. **Interview 2** are of the opinion that “*government has not helped matters, as there are some elements within the government, who are frustrating the efforts of the National Assembly, in passing the hate speech bill which is meant to punish offenders*”. Some are critical of the hate speech bill, that it is capable of putting an end to freedom of speech. **Interview 4** blamed the government for lack of policies and directions to curtail the menace of hate speech and fake news. They stressed that those at the helm of affairs are the ones promoting hate speech the most, while fake news is common to the citizenry. **Interview 6** maintained that the National Assembly which is an arm of government should improve on the hate speech bill, and give it the needed power to arrest and convict offenders of the two evil monsters (hate speech and fake news).

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Hate speeches are directed towards gaining political power, relevance and recognition. It is mostly common during electioneering process and may subsequently lead to electoral violence. Also, fake news is currently trending as a result of the liberty and luxuries of technological inventions. The overall consequence of these two lingering problems may be disastrous and catastrophic if not put into check. Nigeria's background as a nation gives credence to the fact that there was a “marriage of inconvenience” in the past which peaceful co-existence, harmony, love and tolerance can be the solution to. This paper concludes that greater implications await the country if the menace of hate speech and fake news are not curtailed. Besides, the country which attained full independence 59 years ago ought to have got it right political-wise as other smaller and younger countries have achieved political stability long ago. Nevertheless, we are not where we used to be, but more still needs to be done in our political system and process so as to achieve development, growth and stability within the next couple of years. This paper among others recommends that speaking out loudly against hate speech is no longer enough. INEC and other civil society organisations such as the Nigerian Human Right Commission should identify and prosecute individuals and organizations that breach relevant laws governing public speech and electoral campaigns. Government and civil societies in Nigeria should also monitor the media, especially the native language radio stations who use hate speech to fan the embers of ethnic division.

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