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CHAPTER FIVE

MAINSTREAM MEDIA REPORTING OF HATE SPEECH AND PRESS FREEDOM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

Oluwakemi M. ORIOLA

Introduction

The importance of the mass media in a modern democracy has been a subject of discussion among participants in the political space of every democratic society, especially Nigeria as a growing democracy. The complex and diverse nature of the 21st century global society further accentuates audience reliance on the mass media for information about the all-important political sector of every democratic society, which dictates the pace in other sectors of the society. The importance of the media could be understood firstly in their pervasiveness, which makes people learn almost everything about the world through the media, especially events and issues beyond their immediate contacts; their (media) ability to disseminate information and engender citizens' political involvement in modern democracy; and their ability to influence the populace on (political) ideologies (Vivian, 2006).

A vital area of manifestation of media importance based on dependence on them by actors or participants in politics is the performance of the surveillance role. This role refers to the journalistic functions of the mass media which involves timely monitoring and reporting of political events in the society. The fact that the society ascribes this role to the mass media has earned the institution the title of "the fourth estate or unofficial fourth branch of government, designed to observe and report the executive, legislative and judicial branches" (Rodman, 2006 p.25). Based on the principles of freedom and participation, which underscore democracy, this status suggests that the mass media are important not only as vital information sources but also for interpretation, linkage, entrenchment of values, affiliation and expression (Dominick, 2011) in the political space. News reporting (otherwise termed surveillance) is the basic media function for society in a democracy due to the importance of information in political opinions, attitudes and behaviour. Other functions of the media derive from the surveillance function. According to Dominick (2011), the importance of this role lies in the facts that news travels fast in the mass media and that we live in a media-saturated world such that much of what people consider as

reality are learnt through the media. Thus, news is a basic media product in political communication, the importance of which cannot be over-emphasised.

Burton (2010) describes political communication as a field involved in the study of the dynamic interaction among political actors, the media and the audience. Its major focus is the relationship between the media and political actors on one hand and, media and society on the other. Activities of political actors are described by Dominick (2011, p. 25) as “horserace” and these usually come under the constant monitor of the media for reporting. A basic component of political events and activities, which forms an important source of political news, is speech. Citing Ayodele and Adeniyi (1999), Adedina (2010) describe speech as “the expression of ideas and thoughts by means of articulate vocal sound” (p. 351). It should be noted that speech is an innate expressive human communication skill. It is a primary human language skill, learnt and practiced before writing the other expressive skill. The innate nature of speech and its features such as spontaneity, credible contribution to issues, avenue for detailed clarification and the capability of generating appropriate feedback (Adedina, 2010) perhaps underscore media attention on it, in political news reporting. Reporters often want to hear politicians speak about issues and events in the society and such political expressions attract reportage and generate reactions. Thus, reporters give considerable attention to political speech - “ideas and facts that back up the ideas about the meaning and correct course of government” (Rodman, 2006 p. 499). The attention that political speech generates in media reportage of issues has attracted attention to it to the extent of censorship. A growing area of concern relating to regulation of political expression in Nigeria, which is generating debates on censorship, is hate speech.

There has been no generally accepted definition of hate speech. However, scholars have described it using certain legal ingredients that account for such an expression. It refers to verbal expression of hatred directed to an individual or a group, resulting in certain consequences based on social interaction (Foxman & Wolf, 2013). Such expression of hatred could be harmful to individuals' or groups' sexual orientation, gender, disability, religious belief, race or ethnicity, health status, age limitations, language and political affiliation (Hernandez, 2011). Hate speech is a sociological and legal construct that is gaining attention in Nigerian politics. It is sociological because of its effect on individual interactions and group dynamics in the society. It is legal because its ingredients are embedded in law and its prohibition hinged on human rights.

This paper is a theoretical discourse of the potentials of mainstream Nigerian news media to propagate hate speech through news reportage of political issues and events. It identifies the possible dilemma of the reportage of hate speech within the context of constitutional guarantee of press freedom. It attempts to discuss the dilemma emerging in the debate against hate speech and freedom of reporters to carry out media surveillance function. Its focus is to chart a course for the Nigerian media to be active participants in the restriction of hate speech through socially responsible journalistic practice, towards political stability in the country. This is justified because of the growing debate on hate speech in politics as witnessed in the last two general elections in Nigeria. The mainstream media arguably have crucial roles to play in the crusade against hate speech for the stability of Nigeria's political terrain.

Statement of the Problem

The problem the discourse in this paper seeks to address encompasses the potential of Nigerian mainstream news media to spread hate speech through reportage of issues and events in politics.

Media reportage of hate speech could result in propagation of hate speech if facts are not checked because it could amount to the publication of the discriminatory thoughts or ideas of certain individuals or groups against others. Generally, the propagation of expressions of hatred could denigrate individuals and groups targeted in such expressions. Such denigration could have negative consequences on the victims on the ground of socio-political relations and affiliations. According to Hernandez (2011), “when hate speech is permitted to be propagated, it encourages a social climate in which particular groups are denigrated and their discriminatory treatment is accepted as normal” (p. 808). Nielsen (2017) observes various negative consequences of hate speech on victims such as cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Specifically, the propagation of political hate speech through news reportage could result into infringement on certain rights of the victims such as the right to be voted for, which determines political attainment. Also, it has the potential to infringe on racial, gender and religious equality among political actors. Once an individual or group has been portrayed in a manner that promotes discrimination, such a victim may be avoided by members of the public and this could lower the victim's chances to political patronage. Considering that politics is a game of numbers, lowering a person's or group's patronage through media reportage of discriminatory expressions could have negative consequences on electoral victory. Hate speech promotes unhealthy competition among political actors, which makes them not to play the game according to the ethical rules. Nigeria has witnessed series of assassinations of politicians, public unrest, hooliganism, ethnic bigotry, to mention a few, which are possibly linkable to campaign of hatred among political actors. Such campaign of calumny propagated through media reportage further promotes diversity in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria. In the long run, hate speech causes disunity in the political community. In a society where hate speech is not properly restricted and its propagation through the media not adequately regulated, the horserace nature of politics is taken beyond the struggles for power for the purpose of public service. By promoting discrimination, inequality and creating a culture of discord among political actors in the society, “hate speech attacks the very basis of democratic systems” (Hernandez, 2011 p. 811).

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to carry out a theoretical discourse of the potentials of mainstream news media to spread or propagate hate speech through political news reportage. To this end, this paper aims to conceptualise hate speech, explain its characteristics and typology. It also aims to situate hate speech legislation in Nigeria within the context of constitutional guarantee of press freedom. It aims to prescribe and argue for social responsibility theory as the normative guide to resolve the dilemma of free press and the debate against hate speech.

The Meaning and Characteristics of Hate Speech

The facts that there are differences in socio-cultural contexts of various societies of the world and that hate speech is both a legal and sociological construct perhaps account for no generally accepted definition of the construct. However, attempts have been made to conceptualise hate speech, though most of the scholarly definitions focus on racial and religious hate. A good starting point to understanding the construct is to first explain what hate or hatred means. Foxman and Wolf (2013) describes hatred in the context of human interaction as extreme dislike of persons or groups, on the ground of their racial, ethnic, religious or gender orientation or affiliation. Such extreme dislike may be overt or covert. When it is expressed in speech form or

any other non-verbal mode of message display, it becomes covert to the extent of using communication to express such kind of dislike. It is the expression of such extreme dislike which has discriminatory or denigrating consequences that constitutes hate speech.

From the legal perspective, The US Legal (2016) describes hate speech as a communication that carries no other meaning than the expression of hatred or incitement to hatred against some group of persons defined in terms of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion or sexual orientation especially in circumstances in which the communication provokes violence. This description rightly points generally to communication of information, which is characterized by not only articulate vocal sound speech but also to other communicative activities. Impliedly, it considers all forms of expressive communication written, oral and display that are intended to carry meaning to members of the public about certain groups. It also considers the potential provocation of violence as the result of such communication. However, the definition does not consider expression of hatred to individuals and it limits the potential consequences of hate speech to violence. It should be noted that hate speech affects individuals as it affects groups in the society, especially in the competitive field of politics that is characterised by struggle for supremacy and power. An individual political candidate could be targeted in an expression of hate just as a political group or party. Also, violence may not be the only consequence of hate as there are other effects such as denigration, promotion of inequality, discrimination and avoidance in socio-political interaction or affiliation.

A bill on 'Prevention of Hate Crime and Hate Speech' in South Africa, the summary of which was published in Government Gazette No. 41543 of 29 March 2018, describes an offence of hate speech. Section 1(a) of the Bill describes an offence of hate speech as an intentional communication, publication, propagation or advocacy of any message to:

one or more persons in a manner that could reasonably be construed to demonstrate a clear intention to (i) be harmful or to incite harm; or (ii) promote or propagate hatred, based on one or more of the following grounds: age, albinism, birth, colour, culture, disability, ethnic or social origin, gender or gender identity, HIV status, language, nationality, migrant or refugee status, race, religion, sex, which includes intersex, or sexual orientation (Republic of South Africa, 2018, p. 4-5).

The Bill also provides that intentional distribution or display of materials capable of being communicated or electronic communication of messages known to constitute hate speech, as provided in the paragraph above through electronic communication system to which members of the public have access and which is directed at a specific individuals who can be victims of such messages, is guilty of an offence of hate speech. However, the Bill provides exceptions to the ingredients that constitute hate speech offence. These include:

- (a) any bona fide artistic creativity, performance or other form of expression, to the extent that such creativity, performance or expression does not advocate hatred that constitutes incitement to cause harm, based on one or more of the grounds referred to in subsection (1)(a);
- (b) any academic or scientific inquiry;
- (c) fair and accurate reporting or commentary in the public interest or in the publication of any information, commentary, advertisement or notice, in accordance with section 16(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; or

(d) the bona fide interpretation and proselytising or espousing of any religious tenets, belief, teaching, doctrine or writings, to the extent that such interpretation and proselytisation does not advocate hatred that constitutes incitement to cause harm, based on one or more of the grounds referred to in subsection (1)(a) (p. 5).

The European Court of Human Rights (2018) reports in its facts sheet that tolerance and respect for equal dignity of all human beings constitute the foundations of a democratic, pluralistic society. Based on this, as a matter of principle, it may be considered necessary in certain democratic societies to sanction or even prevent all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance. The court identifies the forms of hate speech to include ethnic hate, racial hate, religious hate, threat to democratic order, verbal violence and incitement to hostility, expressions condoning terrorism, expressions condoning war crimes, expressions denigrating national identity, display of a flag with controversial historical connotations, incitement to ethnic/racial/national hatred, incitement to religious intolerance and insult of state officials.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides and protects the right to freedom of expression and this is given a legal force through Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). However, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee (HR Committee) observes that freedom of expression is not absolute and sets limits to expressions, which may be considered offensive and discriminatory. Therefore, under Article 19(3) of the ICCPR, a state may limit the right to free speech provided that the limitation is provided by law, in pursuance of a legitimate aim and necessary in a democratic society. Hate speech is one of such limitations which satisfy the three-test condition for restricting free speech. Article 20(2) of the ICCPR describes hate speech as any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence and provides for the prohibition of such expressions.

In Article 19 (2018), a report of “Media Against Hate” which is a Europe-wide campaign initiated by the European Federation of Journalists and a coalition of civil society organisation, certain characteristics of hate speech are explained to guide states in the implementation of Article 20(2) of the ICCPR. They include discriminatory expressions that constitute incitement to hostility, discrimination, or violence; and a six-part threshold test to determine whether a speaker intends to publicise or propagate hatred through speech. This test should consider the prevalent social, political or economic context; the identity of the person making the expression; the intent of the person making the expression; the content of the expression; the extent and magnitude of the expression; and the likelihood or imminence of occurrence of harm.

From the sociological viewpoint, Waltman and Ashely (2017), citing Foxman and Wolf (2013), Waltman and Haas (2011) and Waltman (2015) simply define hate speech as a kind of intentional discourse, the aim of which is to call public attention to social differences in groups and manipulate such differences to the benefit of certain groups but to the detriment of others. They explain that the discursive manifestation of hate speech is capable of socially constructing in-group and out-group, with the former portrayed in extremely positive but the latter in extremely negative lights which could be dehumanising. They also explain that expression of hate could construct the out-group as posing threats and difficulties to the in-group's cherished values and traditions. This is true especially in the competitive game of politics characterised by internal and

external groupings. In the Nigerian context, internal grouping is represented by factions within the same political parties while external grouping manifest in inter-party grouping. According to Adhlakun (2017), hate speech is any speech used to demean persons on the basis of features that identify them such as race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and predisposes them to acts of violence.

Effects of Hate Speech

Meanwhile, public discourse about hate speech has been gathering momentum in recent times, especially as the present President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration is calling attention to it and launching campaigns to discourage it. Based on the attention the construct is gathering in Nigeria, media practitioners have lent their voices to its conceptualisation. For instance, Adhlakun (2017) observes that the period of the 2015 electioneering campaign in Nigeria marks the resurgence of hate speech due to the widespread use of vitriolic political propaganda among political actors. The broadcast of a documentary considered hateful to the presidential candidate of the All People's Congress (APC), Muhammadu Buhari on the Africa Independent Television (AIT) drew the attention of his party, resulting in a petition to the National Broadcasting Commission. The petition labeled the aired content 'hate broadcast' for which AIT was to be sanctioned. With the victory of the APC candidate leading to his assumption of office as the president, campaign against hate speech has been under the focus of the administration.

The campaign is now beyond the mainstream media coverage of issues and has extended to social media messages. As Adhlakun (2017) observes, there is a need for legal and administrative conceptualisation of hate speech for the purpose of boundary setting, so that mere social media commentaries as well as mainstream media messages that constitute insults, slander, libel, satire, comedy, propaganda, criticisms and legitimate protests against government policies are not misconstrued as hate speech. The impetus for the campaign could be derived from the fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and culturally sensitive society where language has contextual meaning. An expression that is permissible in one culture may be considered offensive in another and as such the social and political uses of expressions needs to be considered. Furthermore, Waltman and Haas (2011) observe that hate speech could serve social and political functions in a democratic society with implications on intimidation of members of an out-group on the basis of their racial, ethnic, religious or sexual orientations. This implies that intimidation is a necessary ingredient of hate speech. The authors also observed that promotion of violence against members of the out-group is one of the intentions of the users of hate expressions. In tandem with US Legal (2016), this brings into consideration, violence as a possible consequence of hate speech. The third ingredient of hate speech considered by the authors is that it is used to mentally and psychologically construct a collective form of memory through belief teaching and orientation among members of the in-group. Fourthly, hate speech serves recruitment purposes for group members. Derived from these ingredients, this paper hereby conceptualises hate speech thus: an expression of extreme dislike in verbal or non-verbal communication forms, publicized or displayed, which is targeted at individuals or groups with the intention to intimidate, promote denigration, discrimination and violence against the out-group, mobilise recruitment and construct a collective form of memory for the in-group. Such expression of hatred is based on, and harmful to the individual's or group's sexual orientation, gender bias, disability, religious orientation racial or ethnic connection, health status, age limitation, language or political affiliation. The publication of the expression of hatred in the Nigerian political horserace, through news reporting and the consequences of such publication

are within the purview of this paper.

On the effects of hate speech, Brown (2017) points attention to its implications on “harm, dignity, security, healthy cultural dialogue, democracy and legitimacy” (p. 420). It is harmful to individual and group victims alike. Corroborating Brown on the harmful effect of hate speech, Hernandez (2011) states that “hate speech expresses, advocates, encourages, promotes or incites hatred of a group of individuals distinguished by a particular feature or set of features...creates discord in the community, harms the target group, and infringes upon equality” (p. 807-809). Citing examples of Britain, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, India, and post-apartheid South Africa, he observes further that political discourse and competition are healthier in climes that enact and enforce hate speech legislation. This opinion points to incitement, disunity and inequality as harmful effects of expression of hate, the consequence of which denigrates the victim, based on their identifiable features and disrupts the political process. Lending their voices to the debate, Mihajlova, Bacovska and Shekerdjiev, (2013) observe that hate speech causes emotional and psychological discomfort to the victims; diminishes social and entrepreneurial mobility by promoting inequality; leads to humiliation which could make victims engage in anti-social behaviour such as drug abuse and alcoholism; diminish self-confidence and promotes acceptance of social failure; and potentially leads to hate crime, which has serious consequences for societal peace, order and security. More relevant is the authors' opinion that hate speech impedes on the principle of free marketplace of idea in a democracy as it promotes social and political exclusion against certain individuals and groups termed as out-group in Waltman and Ashely's (2017) classification. Then, the question may arise: What is the place of free speech in the discourse of hate speech regulation?

Free Speech and Press Freedom in the Debate for Hate Speech Legislation in Nigeria

Freedom of expression is a natural right individuals enjoy, which is enshrined in local legislation and international human rights law. The historical development of the philosophy of free speech dates back to the ancient Greek when the debate about whether persons other than male landowners should be allowed to speak in public (Rodman, 2006). The advent of mass communication through the invention of printing also attracted repression of expression through licensing laws. However, the popularity of democracy the world over has paved way for international debates leading to legislations and conventions that promote free speech from which press freedom derives. These have resulted in many international legal documents that define and promote free speech. Notable of these documents (to which Nigeria is a signatory) and their relevant sections are Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); Article 19, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and Article 9, African Charter on People's and Human Rights (ACPHR). These legal documents are unequivocal on the fundamentality of the right of every person to seek, receive and share any kind of information in any form without any let or hindrance. Mihajlova et al (2013) identify the classes of information as political, artistic and commercial and the forms of communication as oral, written, artistic and any other media including new technologies. Derived from these international legal documents, section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended provides that “every person shall be entitled to freedom to hold opinions and receive and impart ideas and information without interference”.

Press freedom and free speech could be considered to be two sides of the same coin as they are both derivatives of the fundamental right to seek, receive and disseminate information without interference. Freedom of the mass media to source for, gather, disseminate information and

protect their sources is enshrined in the international human rights law as well as in the Nigerian constitution. All the international human rights documents cited above, which gives credence to the right to free speech, provide foundations for freedom of the press. This is because according to Mihajlova et al (2013), the right to free speech “includes all stages of identification and dissemination of information, as well as of ideas as processed information, regardless of the format or the media on which they appear” (p. 9). This suffices then to affirm that press freedom solidly builds on the right to free speech as enshrined in the international laws and conventions. As an extension of the right to free speech, the Nigerian 1999 Constitution expressly provides for freedom of the press in section 39(2) thus: “Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium of, for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions”. However, it further provides conditions for ownership of television of wireless broadcasting station. Therefore, within the (Nigerian) national and international levels, legislations about free speech and press freedom are clearly enshrined in legal documents.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that there is no absolute freedom anywhere in the world. Given the fact that a society is characterised by a web of social interactions, in the course of the exercise of a right by an individual or a group, an infringement on the rights of others may occur. This consideration and that of national security are often adduced for limitations to human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and of the press. McQuail (2010) observes that such regulations and control lead to censorship restraints or limits on publication. One of such limits which have attracted concerted focus in the international community and now gaining concerns in Nigeria is restrictions on hate speech. The need to promote equality and discourage discrimination is provided in Articles 1, 2, and 7 of the UDHR and Articles 2(1), Article 20(2) and 26 of the ICCPR. For instance, Article 20(2) of the ICCPR places the obligation on States to legally prohibit “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence”. This is an express international human rights requirement for the prohibition of hate speech. The Nigerian constitution does not expressly provide restrictions on hate speech but in section 42, it provides for the right to freedom of discrimination to which a person may be subjected expressly or by application of law or any executive or administrative action of government on the basis of the person's place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion. However, the fact that the provision for non-discrimination in the Nigerian constitution focuses on the application of law and government actions but not on the expressive activities of individuals, groups and the mass media makes this provision inadequate to address the issue of hate speech.

It should be noted that many countries of the world have built on international human rights law to conceptualise and expressly restrict expression of hatred in any form in their legal documents. According to Hernandez (2011), Britain, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, India and South Africa have enacted and enforced hate speech legislation. In Poland for instance, there are prohibitions of hate speech in criminal law and civil law as well as administrative law (Article 19, 2018). Articles 119(1), 256(1) and 257 of the Polish Penal Code are provisions in the country's criminal law that restrict hate speech. The Polish Construction Law and the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language are relevant administrative measures against hate speech. Article 23 and 24 of the Polish Civil Code prohibits hate speech and provides persons to demand for civil actions to seek redress. As regards media regulation on hate speech, Poland's Broadcasting Act of 1992 specifically prohibits the broadcast of content of hate and

discrimination against persons and groups on the basis of their identifiable features (Article 19, 2018). In South Africa, the debate about restriction of hate speech has attracted legislative processes with the introduction of 'Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill' in the National Assembly on March 29, 2018, the explanatory summary of which was published in Government Gazette (No. 41543 of 29 March 2018) (Republic of South Africa, 2018).

Nigeria needs to take the debate on hate speech beyond mere campaign and advance steps towards its legislation. This becomes necessary due to the growing importance of the discourse, to our growing democracy as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual society. The potential damaging effect of hate speech on the victims and the consequences it is capable of wielding on the democratic system of the Nigerian state suffice that adequate legal and administrative attention be paid to the issue. The need to set boundaries to the legal guarantee of free speech and press freedom necessitate express legislation on the issue on one hand. On the other hand, the need for legal and administrative conceptualisation of hate speech for the purpose of its distinction from insults, slander, libel, satire, comedy, propaganda, criticisms and legitimate protests against government policies is of necessity for the present government not to be guilty of political witch-hunting as the campaign intensifies.

Social Responsibility as a Media Regulatory Approach against Hate Speech Reporting

Social responsibility theory is a variant of libertarianism free press normative philosophy of media operations. The key word in the theory that dictates the normative operations of the media in a democratic milieu is responsibility. Ravi (2012) describes responsibility as the practice of accepting obligation for conduct or behaviour within frameworks of assigned roles and morals. Applied to media operations, Gupta (2015) observes that responsibility refers to acknowledgement of media obligation for taking proper custody, care and safe-guarding of their audiences. In a broader sense, social responsibility means the acknowledgement of the roles of the media and their practitioners to protect the interest and needs of the society while freely performing their functions, in a democratic society. Such needs include continuity, order, integration, motivation, guidance and adaptation (McQuail, 2010). From the foregoing, it can be deduced that social responsibility theory is hinged on the principles of freedom, duty and obligation.

As a derivative of the free press philosophy, the theory arose from the thinking that press freedom should be accompanied by duty and obligations to the society. Folarin (2002) explains that under the social responsibility normative arrangement, the media should be socially responsible in their operations by serving economic and political systems; constructively discussing issues of public affairs; keeping public peace and maintaining social structure; protecting individual rights by serving as watchdogs to government. McQuail (2010) states the principles of social responsibility to include media acceptance of obligations to the society; ownership as public trust; truth, accuracy, fairness and objectivity; professional ethical compliance and self-regulation. By implication, media personnel and organisations are to be self-censored in their services to the society. The argument for self-censorship becomes relevant to the discourse of media regulation of hate speech. Given that censorship applies to restriction of expressions, the social responsibility approach becomes a reference point in the discourse of hate speech regulation. News as an important media text from which many others derive represents publication of communicative activities of political actors in a democracy. It should also be noted

that political speech or expression is one of the three classes of expressions that attracts legal and administrative scrutiny in modern democratic societies - others are artistic and commercial expressions (Rodman, 2006). Therefore, in the discharge of political surveillance duties by media practitioners and organisations in Nigeria, there is a need for an adoption of the social responsibility principles as the guiding norms being part of measures to regulate hate speech. The demand for media obligations to the society, directs attention to public service model of media operations in which hate speech is not propagated, even if political speakers express it. Ownership as public trust demands that media proprietors should be cautious in the spread of propaganda and discriminatory expressions. The pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and objectivity is of cardinal necessity in media reportage of political events based on issues and not personalities, based on their identifiable features. Strict compliance with professional ethics of journalism is a non-negotiable condition for stemming the trend of hate speech in Nigeria. Self-regulation is an approach to preventing government's undue interference in media operations, especially censorship.

Conclusion

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

The pervasive roles of mainstream news media and the reliance on them by the audience, for news and information about politics, makes them an important political institution that should contribute to stemming the tide of hate speech in Nigerian politics. Hate speech is inimical to individual and group rights as well as political stability. The argument for freedom of the press as an extension of freedom of speech, on the basis of which reporters may find a dilemma, does not guarantee legal immunity against hate speech restriction. In view of the fact that the debate against hate speech is gathering momentum, especially in the Nigerian political sphere, a socially responsible journalistic practice is required in the mainstream news media as a self-regulatory approach against the spread of hate speech.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the social responsibility theory as an approach by which the media could contribute to measures against hate speech. A socially responsible journalistic practice that places conscious professional mandate on fact checking, and obligation on protecting the social, cultural and political fabrics of the Nigerian society should be embraced in political news reporting. The adoption of, and strict compliance with the principles of this theory at individual practitioner and organisational levels would contribute to a healthy competition among political actors. It would also prevent government's undue interference in media operations in terms of

ensorship of (hate speech) publications, which may extend to other areas of crucial importance to the performance of media surveillance. It will make media practice in Nigeria compatible with, and sensitive to the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual nature of the Nigerian society. The Nigerian government needs to take the campaign against hate speech to the next level: more public hearings, conferences and seminars needs to be organised to engender stakeholders' participation; the process of legislation against hate speech needs to commence; and administrative measures needs to be put in place at different levels of government to combat the spread of hatred and discrimination, not only through political speech but also through all communicative activities in the field of politics. There is a need for media literacy as a measure to stem the tide of hate speech in Nigerian politics. Educating the public on the illegality of hate speech, in a culturally and politically sensitive Nigerian society is required, for stakeholders in politics to be cautious of the use of expressive activities in their quest for political power. Above all, journalists should check and cross-check news information available at their disposal for factuality, quality, decency and other ethical requirements, before disseminating them to the public in form of news.

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