

Analysis of Selected Newspapers' Adherence to the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage Guidelines on Hate Speech in the 2019 Presidential Election

¹Moses Adagba, Tine Vanugwa ApaaNyihar, Tyotom Kechku

1. Department of Mass Communication, Benue State University, Makurdi

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the extent of Nigerian newspapers' adherence to section four of The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage in the 2019 presidential election. The aim is to ascertain the extent to which hate speech manifested in the content of the selected newspapers, the dominant placement of hate speech and the journalistic genre in which hate speech appeared in the 2019 presidential election campaigns. The study was anchored on Framing Theory and adopted Social Responsibility Theory as a supporting theory. Quantitative content analysis was used as the preferred research design. The instrument of data collection was the coding sheet. The content of three national dailies, *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation*, were analysed to assess how they adhered to guidelines on hate speech coverage during the period of the 2019 presidential election campaigns. The results obtained indicated that the extent to which newspapers refrained from publishing hate speech was low. The study also found that hate speech was located more in the inside pages of the newspapers than the front and back pages and that the journalistic genre in which hate speech appeared most was political news. The study concluded that the selected newspapers, *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation*, demonstrated low level of adherence to section 4 of The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage. It recommended among other things that alternative strategies of combating hate speech should be adopted and that media regulatory bodies should sanction newspapers that publish hate rhetoric in subsequent election.

KEY WORDS:

Media ethics, newspapers, adherence, hate speech, election coverage

Introduction

The aspiration not to promote or incite discrimination is one of the cardinal principles of ethical journalism. The directive to minimize harm is a hallmark of media ethics codes and recurs in philosophical enumerations of journalistic duty (Johnson, Thomas, & Kelling, 2020). The concept of harm refers to instances “when somebody's legitimate interests are 'set back' in a concrete and significant way” (Thomas, 2018, p. 217). The declaration of principles of the International Federation of Journalists was revised in 1986 to declare that the journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions (International Federation of Journalists, 1986). The Nigerian

Media Code of Election Coverage is also very clear on the need to prevent hate speech and other forms of incitements which could lead to violence and threaten democratic governance. It states that “hate speech and other forms of incitement could lead to violence and threaten the democratic fabric of a society. The social obligations of the media during elections therefore include the prevention of hate speech.” (The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage, 2018)

The continued and unrestrained expression of intolerant rhetoric, disseminated through the media and in political discourse could lead to incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence. It is believed that ethical codes will not solve all the problems of intolerance in media, but they can help journalists focus on their responsibility to reduce harm (Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim, and Oba, 2017). This is because apart from undermining the ethics of journalism profession, it is contributing in bringing disaffection among tribes, political class and religion or even among friends in the society. Alakali, Faga and Mbursa, (2017) observed that Nigerian public is inundated with negative media usage, such as character assassination and negative political campaigns at the expense of dissemination of issues that help them make informed choices. This perhaps explains the position of Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim, and Oba, (2017) that in Nigeria, particularly, the effects of political activities, which show hate speech have become more vivid in the successive democratic dispensation than the previous years. According to them, the parade of hate speeches in several newspapers analyzed showed that media was used by politicians to stoke up hatred and stimulate violence among ethnic and political groups during the electioneering periods as well as in the daily life. The deeds of politicians have only amplified the situation negatively and keeping the citizens more divided now than ever signals a great source of anxiety to Nigerians at home and in the diaspora.

However, The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage (2018) expects newspapers to have an anti-hate policy, reject the publication of materials that contain hate speech and monitor the content of its social media platforms to stop the spread of hate speech. Nigeria is a multicultural country of diverse people and different identities. It has projected population of about 201, 135,262 people, 400 or more ethnic groups, 2 major religions, aside from other traditional religious groups, dozens of political parties (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The Nigerian multicultural setting is characterized by diversity, heterogeneity and pluralism in the cultures, orientations and attitudes of the people. It is in this context that the study examined how newspapers refrained from publishing hate speech in the 2019 presidential election using section 4 of The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage as a guide. This section is reproduced below.

Hate Speech and Incitement

Hate speech and other forms of Incitement could lead to violence and threaten the democratic fabric of a society. The social obligations of the media during elections therefore include the prevention of hate speech.

Accordingly:

The responsibility of journalists

4.1. A journalist shall make use of temperate language in reporting electoral

processes;

4.2. A presenter of a live programme shall refrain from airing pejorative comments;

The responsibility of media organisations

4.3. A media organization shall reject any material intended for publication or airing by parties, candidates and other interests that contains hateful or inciting words and messages;

4.4. A media organization shall refrain from publishing or airing abusive editorial comments or opinions that denigrate individuals or groups on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief;

4.5. A media organization shall meticulously monitor the content of its social media platforms to stop the spread of hate and inciting messages;

4.6. A broadcast medium shall, prior to a recorded or a live political debate, request participants to endorse a NO---HATE---SPEECH MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING committing them NOT to use words or gestures that disparage others on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief.

This study therefore analyzed the content of three Nigerian newspapers namely, *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *Daily Sun* newspapers.

Statement of the Problem

Newspapers, just like other mass media are expected to comply with acceptable ethical codes that govern the conduct of elections. The role of newspapers in elections is to ensure that voters get the right information and education to help them make informed choices. As clearly spelt out in the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage (2018), the media must report election issues in a fair, accurate and balanced manner. In addition to the above, the media is expected to avoid hate speech and be conflict sensitive knowing that violent conflicts are obstacles to a free and fair election (Frere, 2014, Budarick, 2004).

Aondover(2021) pointed out that various scholars have noted the role of the newspapers in helping to curtail hate speech and its many effects. It is also clear in the literature that newspapers can provide a platform for citizens to discuss issues at the local, national and international levels. This portends a lot for democracy, a system of government that thrives on the principles of popular participation and freedom of expression. It is expected that newspapers should use their strength to act effectively in the interest of accountability that would help to entrench democratic ethos but rather, evidence has shown over the years in the manifestation of media promotion of hate speech, especially in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria (Oshaba, 2021 and Aonderver, 2021).

Newspaper organizations, have responsibility and need to understand that they have a moral, legal and social obligation to protect the lives of Nigerians, through their publications. How well has Nigerian newspapers refrained from publishing materials that contain hate speech is a subject of serious research and worth investigating. Hence, the current study seeks to investigate the manifestation of hate speech in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria using the

content of three national dailies namely, *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *Daily Sun*.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this research is to assess how newspapers refrained from publishing hate speech in the coverage of the 2019 presidential election campaigns while the specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the extent to which hate speech manifested in the content of the selected newspapers during the 2019 presidential election campaigns.
2. Ascertain the dominant placement of stories with hate speech in the selected newspapers during the 2019 presidential election campaigns
3. Identify the journalistic genre in which hate speech in the 2019 presidential election appeared in the selected newspapers.

Research Questions

1. What was the extent to which hate speech manifested in the content of the selected newspapers during the 2019 presidential election campaigns?
2. What the dominant placement of stories with hate speech in the 2019 presidential elections?
3. What were the journalistic genre in which hate speech in the 2019 presidential election appeared in the selected newspapers?

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to Nigerian newspapers' adherence to The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage during the 2019 presidential election. It covered the period of campaigns to the actual voting, (from November 18th, 2018 to February 23rd, 2019). Three newspapers were studied namely *The Nation*, *Daily Sun*, and *Daily Trust*. These newspapers were chosen because they are among the top ten newspapers in Nigeria, have correspondents in all the states and Federal Capital Territory. Two political parties, the All Progressive Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party and their presidential candidates were chosen for the study because they were the leading political parties that contested in the election.

Hate Speech and Nigerian Democracy

The prevalence of hate rhetoric has negatively affected the Nigerian democratic experience. It has caused division and polarization in the country (Oshoba, 2021). Hate speech is often used to stoke ethnic, religious and regional tensions leading to division and polarization among different groups in Nigeria. Aondover (2021) opines that this has hindered national unity and cohesion, making it difficult for the country to progress democratically. Hate speech has also caused erosion of trust in institutions in Nigeria. The spread of hate speech undermines trust in democratic institutions and processes. When political leaders engage in rhetoric that target certain groups, it can make people lose faith in the

ability of the government to protect all citizens equally.

According to Oshaba (2021), hate speech has frequently been a precursor to violence and conflict in Nigeria. When inflammatory language is used to demonise and dehumanise certain groups, it can escalate tensions leading to communal clashes and even deadly conflicts. It has significantly fueled the embers of resentment, ethnic bigotry or tribal sentiment, religious intolerance, killings e.g Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, Shiite unrest in Southern Kaduna, amongst other forms of ethnic or politically motivated killings in Nigeria

Nigerian leaders sometimes hide under the guise of hate speech to suppress dissent and silence minority voices. In some cases, hate speech has been used as a tool to suppress opposition and silence critics. By labelling opposition voices as enemies of the state or traitors, the government can justify crackdown on dissent and curtailing freedom of speech. Sometimes hate speech laws are used unjustly to restrict freedom of expression. This can have a chilling effect on public discourse and impede the functionality of a healthy democratic society. The anti-regulation group argues that, hate speech regulations are harmful to democratic ideals as they undermine and erode multifarious liberal and democratic values, including respect for self-realization and autonomy, exposure of government incompetence and malfeasance (Weinstein, 2017).

In suggesting various alternative approaches to curbing hate speech in Nigeria, Ilori (2023) proposed four strategies which include, *strategic training, education, public awareness, and a multi stakeholder approach*. Various stakeholders should be prioritized for training, especially in the public sector, to advance an incisive public-facing understanding of hate speech in Nigeria. Since hate speech seeds violence, these proximate stakeholders who are most likely to make decisions on the public's behalf should have their training manuals updated occasionally, and ensure mandatory, continuous education including understanding the various dynamics of hate speech and its interventions in Nigeria.

Ilori (2023) also suggests that states should mainstream academic modules, such as literary studies, civic education and history into academic curricula, making them stand-alone, compulsory subjects at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. This measure would afford a fuller understanding of the various contexts that might influence hate speech in society through more objective formal education. It should focus on how the humanities preserve the society through social methods and correct hate speech through carefully planned educational systems.

To curb hate speech through alternative methods, stakeholders such as the government, social media platforms, academia, and civil society in Nigeria should consider raising more awareness about the dangers of hate speech and the various contexts in which it might occur. Such awareness should be informed by comparative and contextual examples of hate speech. Clarifying the legal and social impacts of hate speech is vital, especially with respect to international law

Lastly, a democratic, inclusive, and participatory system is central to balancing harmful speech and free expression in Nigeria. Such a system should accommodate as many stakeholders as possible to update policies on hate speech in Nigeria. Government officials, government institutions, the private sector (including telecommunication companies and social media platforms), civil society, academia, linguists, journalists, and traditional rulers at various levels should together determine the course of a nationwide policy on hate speech (Ilori, 2023).

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Nwozor, Olanrewaju Okidu, Olanrewaju, and Oladiran, (2022) assessed the use of Facebook by political supporters and electorates to canvass for support for their preferred presidential candidates in the 2019 general elections and the underlying hate speech that emanated therefrom. The results of this paper indicated widespread dissemination of hate comments by political supporters and electorates in the furtherance of their support for their preferred presidential candidates. The paper advocated responsible use of Facebook in electioneering and the imperative of regulation to guard against the circulation of hate electoral comments that could heat up the political arena and trigger electoral violence. Although the study focused on social media hate speech by politicians, it has far reaching consequences on the current study

Aondover (2021), examined the manifestation of hate speech in the 2019 general elections in the Daily Trust, The Nation and The Guardian newspapers. Stratified random sampling by days of the week was used to select the editions in the three newspapers. The study used Critical Race Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis as theoretical framework. The findings revealed that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers in 2019 general elections was significantly high in the inside pages than front and back pages. The paper also found that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers was in neutral direction in the 2019 general elections. The study concluded that the level of hate speech in Nigeria witnessed before, during and after the 2019 general elections is worrisome, particularly when one views communication (hate speech) as having the capacity of threatening the country's collective existence.

Oshaba (2021) examined the nature and character of hate speech and its implications for contemporary Nigerian body-politic. It adopts qualitative research method. The study concluded that hate speech is indeed a bane militating against the practice of democratic governance in contemporary Nigerian state. It recommended that the National Assembly and other law-making bodies in Nigeria should enact laws that will checkmate the rising spate of hate speech in Nigeria.

Similarly, Lucas and Targema (2018) investigated the nature of readers' comments on online news sites in the country, their place within the context of hate speech rhetoric and their implication on democratic consolidation in the country. The study used Social Responsibility Theory and quantitative and qualitative content analytical methods. Findings revealed that positive comments

dominated the study population. However, qualitatively, the trend of discussion was disturbing, as commentators employ the use of hate language, verbal assault, name calling, insults and derogatory words to describe subjects.

Theoretical Underpinning

The study is anchored on Framing Theory and Social Responsibility Media Theory.

Framing Theory

The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 104). The origins of framing as it is used in political communication research today can be traced back to both sociological and psychological literature. In the sociological tradition, Lecheler and de Vreese (2019), inform that the work by Erving Goffman is crucial. Goffman takes the starting point that frames are useful devices for human beings to make sense of the world in all kinds of everyday situations. For him, frames are culturally bound and serve to reduce the complexity of our everyday world. His argument is that interpretative designs constitute central elements of cultural belief systems. Goffman (1974) called these interpretative designs frames that we use in our day-to-day experience to make sense of the world.

Frames help to reduce the complexity of information, but serve as a two-way process; to interpret and reconstruct reality. The framing notion was picked up by Entman (1993), who transferred framing to the study of the mass and news media, in particular. At the core of the news framing research stands the quest to understand and explain why “(often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes larger) changes of opinion” or other outcome variables (Chong & Druckman, 2007b, p. 104).

Framing does not have a single definition that is agreed upon and used by most scholars (Lecheler and de Vreese, 2019). This lack of consensus has led some scholars to refer to framing as a “fractured paradigm” (Entman, 1993). Goffman (1974) defines a frame as “the principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them”. This “schemata of interpretation” helps people to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” everyday events (Goffman 1974 p21). Journalists use “frames (to) organize strips of the everyday world, a strip being an arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity” (Goffman 1974 p10-11). Robert Entman (1993) says to frame a communicative text or message is to promote certain facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or a treatment recommendation. As stated by Entman (2007 p 4) in his oft-cited definition, framing is “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights the connections among them to promote a particular interpretation”.

The journalistic news frame stresses some aspects of the case and pushes others to the background, and the frame highlights the active role of journalists in constructing news stories (Lecheler and de Vreese, 2019).

The theory of framing is important for this study because it offers critical ways to examine campaign messages, observe patterns and analyze the underlying meanings of the frames used in the messages (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Applied to this study, the theory provides an explanation as to how news can be framed by the selected newspapers in the coverage of the 2019 Presidential Election to adhere to the Media Code guidelines on hate speech.

Social Responsibility Media Theory

The theory was propounded in 1956 by F. S. Siebert, T. B. Paterson and W. Schramm (Folarin, 1998). The major premise of Social Responsibility theory is that freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication. It encourages total freedom of the press and no censorship, but it should be regulated according to social responsibilities and external controls. Content is also filtered through public obligation and interference.

The basic assumptions and components of the social responsibility media theory includes the fact that: media have obligation to society, media ownership is a public trust, news media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant, media should be free but self-regulated, media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. The theory replaced libertarian theory with the view that libertarianism was outdated. After the emergence of this theory, professionalism in the media started to be taken seriously. The Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press was set up to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the Libertarian or Free Press Theory. This was because the so-called free market of ideas had failed to guarantee press freedom and to yield the expected benefits to the society. Instead, the commercial development of the press and the unforeseen developments in media technology had tended to limit access to the media for individuals and groups. Thus, media power was concentrated in the hands of a few businessmen (advertisers) and media professionals who had the means to set up media empires.

Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma, (2016) observe that social responsibility theory rests on the notion of free press acting responsibly. If the media fail to be responsible, then government agencies and professional bodies like NUJ and NPC should ensure they act responsibly.

This theory is relevant to the present study because it argues that the conduct of the media has to take into account public interest. The public interest that the media have to consider in reporting elections include diversity in information, diversity in culture and opinion, support for the democratic political system, support for public order and security of the country (Asemah, et al 2016). Social responsibility theory is a media theory that encourages professionalism and compliance with ethical codes. When covering elections, newspapers are

expected to put the interest of the nation first and above any other person or commercial interest and should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional standards. Ethics emphasize responsibility of the media in packaging their contents.

Methodology

The study adopted the content analysis research method in finding answers to the research questions. The use of content analysis here is predicated on the research's aim of assessing the content of print media vis-à-vis their compliance with the Nigeria Media Code of Election Coverage during the 2019 presidential election. According to Parveen and Showkat (2017, p.1) an "interpretation of what is contained (content) in a message is called content analysis. Content analysis is the study of recorded human communications such as dairy entries, books, newspapers, videos, text messages, tweets, Facebook updates etc."

The population for this study was Nigerian newspapers. Three newspapers were purposively selected based on geographical spread. They are *Daily Trust*, *Daily Sun* and *The Nation*. The period of study was from November 18th, 2018 to 23rd February, 2019. This period was chosen because it covers the time that election campaigns officially commenced on the 18th November 2018 and ended on the 21st February 2019 while the presidential and national assembly election took place on the 23th February 2019.

The research adopted the composite week sampling technique, where one day is drawn every week of every month throughout the sampling period. It is a tried and tested method. The work of Riffe, Aust & Lacy (1993) demonstrates that the composite week sampling technique is as good as any other sampling technique when dealing with newspaper content. In the current study, only week days (Monday-Friday) were sampled because the weekend editions have different titles. The sampling started with the edition of Monday 19th 2018. Tuesday was chosen for the second week, Wednesday for the third week, Thursday for the fourth and Friday for the fifth week. The same pattern was used for the rest of the weeks. In all, 14 editions were selected from each of the three selected newspapers that formed the population of this study and analyzed. Thus a total of 42 issues of the three newspapers were analyzed.

Coding in this research work was done manually. The data gathering instrument in this study is coding sheet which contained relevant coding categories such as frequency, placement and genre. The study considered the following units of analysis under each category.

Frequency

- a. *Offensive*: comments that attack personalities in the 2019 presidential elections as published by the selected newspapers.
- b. *Hateful*: comments that insult ethnic, religious or regional groups in the 2019 presidential elections by the sampled newspapers.
- c. *Incisive statement*: comments that call for violent attacks against individuals,

members of a particular ethnic group or region in the 2019 presidential elections by the three papers.

d. *Sarcastic*: these are utterances that are calculated to mock a person or group in the 2019 presidential elections as published by the three papers

Placement

- a. Front page
- b. inside page
- c. Back page

Genre

a. *Political news*: these political news stories that contain hate speech in the 2019 presidential elections by the selected newspapers.

b. *Features*: in this study, feature are newspaper columns that are opinion based and have some elements of hate speech during the 2019 presidential elections by the three newspapers.

c. *Cartoons*: are illustrations, which consist of image or photograph that portrayed hate speech in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers.

Presentation of Data

Data is presented using tables and simple percentages.

Table 1: Frequency of hate speech in the newspapers during the 2019 presidential election

Variable	<i>Daily Sun</i>		<i>Daily Trust</i>		<i>The Nation</i>		Total	%
Offensive	21	30.9	13	18.1	22	23.9	56	24.1
Hateful	20	29.4	25	34.7	28	30.4	73	31.5
Inciting	14	20.6	20	27.8	20	21.7	54	23.3
Sarcastic	13	19.1	14	19.4	22	23.9	49	21.1
Total	68	100	72	100	92	100	232	100

The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage advises journalists to use temperate language and avoid expressions that dehumanise parties, aspirants, candidates and other groups. Newspapers are also to avoid using pictures or images that contain elements of hateful representations of parties or candidates. Table 1 indicates the spread of hate speech within the five selected newspapers. Based on the data, the manifestation of hate speech in the *Daily Sun* indicate 30.9% offensive, 29.4% hateful, 20.6% incisive and 13% sarcastic. *Daily Trust* on the other hand has 18.1% offensive, 34.7% hateful, 27.8% incisive and 19.4% sarcasm. Lastly, *The Nation* records 23.9% offensive, 30.4% hateful, 21.7%

inciting and 23.9% sarcasm respectively. The overall hate speeches in the 2019 presidential election points 24.1% offensive, 31.5% hateful, 23.3% inciting and 21.1% were sarcastic. This means that in the 2019 general elections, hate speech stories were more in the *The Nation*, followed by *Daily Trust* and *Daily Sun*. Based on the indicators that were used to identify what constitute hate speech in the study, hateful speeches were dominant in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers

Table 2: Dominant Location for the Placement of Stories with Hate Speech in the 2019 General Elections

Location	Daily Sun		Daily Trust		The Nation		Total	
Front Page	08	11.7	15	20.8	23	25	46	19.8
Inside page	56	82.4	54	75	60	65.2	170	73.3
Back page	04	5.9	03	4.2	09	9.8	16	6.9
Total	68	100	72	100	92	100	232	100

Table 2 ascertained the dominant location for the placement of stories with hate speech in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers. The rating scale of front page, inside page, and back pages was used to determine the manifestation of hate speech in the 2019 general elections. The data shows that in 2019 presidential election, *Daily Sun* has 11.7% hate speeches on the front page, 82.4% in the inside page, and 5.9% at the back page. *Daily Trust* has 20.8% on the front page, 75% in the inside page, and 4.2% at the back page. Additionally, *The Nation* has 25% on the front page, 65.2% in the inside page, and 9.8% at the back page. In all, the three newspapers have 19.8% stories with hate speech on the front page, 73.3% in the inside page, and 6.9% at the back page. This means that the manifestation of hate speech is significantly high in the inside page compare to front and back pages in the 2019 general elections. Based on the rating scale, the manifestation of hate speech stories was dominant in the inside pages by the selected newspapers.

Table 3: Genre for Hate Speech in the 2019 General Elections

Genre	Daily Sun		Daily Trust		The Nation		Total	
News	39	57.4	40	55.6	58	63	137	59.1
Cartoons	10	14.7	12	16.7	12	13	34	14.6
Features	19	27.9	20	27.7	22	24	61	26.3
Total	68	100	72	100	92	100	232	100

Table 3 examined the journalistic genre in which hate speech in the 2019 general elections appeared in the selected newspapers. In the 2019 general elections, *Daily Sun* accounts for 57.4% on political news, 14.7% on cartoons while 27.9% on features. *Daily Trust* has 55.6% on political news, 16.7% on cartoons while 27.7% on features. *The Nation* has 63% on political news, 13% on cartoons, and 24% on features. The implication of the data is that most of the hate speeches manifested in political news followed by feature stories and cartoons came at a distant third within the period of the study.

Discussion of findings

The social responsibility theory of the media believes that the media should be free but self-regulated and should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional standards. The conduct of the media has to take into account public interest. When framing elections news, journalists should consider diversity in religion, diversity in culture and opinion, support for the democratic political system, support for public order and security of the country. Therefore, the publication of hate rhetoric without restraint can provoke public disorder and may cause a degeneration of full blown violence among different groups in the country. Section four (4) of the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage forbids newspapers as well as other media from publishing materials that contain hate speech. This study analysed the content of three national dairies namely, *Daily Sun*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* to ascertain the extent they refrained from publishing hate speech.

The study shows that within the study period, newspapers published 22.7% offensive, 30% hateful, 21.3% inciting and 25% were sarcastic. This means that in the 2019 general elections, hate speech stories were prevalent in *The Nation*, *Daily Sun* and *Daily Trust*. Based on the indicators that were used to identify what constitute hate speech in the study, hateful speeches were dominant in the 2019 general elections by the selected newspapers. This result agreed with Nwozor et al (2022) who also found widespread dissemination of hate comments by political supporters and electorates in the furtherance of their support for their preferred presidential candidates. It also corroborated Aondover (2021) who found widespread publication of hate speech in newspapers during general election. Oshaba (2021) concluded that hate speech is indeed a bane

militating against the practice of democratic governance in contemporary Nigerian state. he recommended that the National Assembly and other law-making bodies in Nigeria should enact laws that will checkmate the rising spate of hate speech in Nigeria.

The manifestation of hate speech was significantly high in the inside pages compare to the front and back pages in the 2019 general elections. In all, the three newspapers have 22% stories with hate speech on the front page, 71.5% in the inside page, and 6.5% at the back page. Based on the rating scale, the manifestation of hate speech stories was dominant in the inside pages by the selected newspapers. Corroborating, Aondover (2021) also revealed that many of the news reports at the 2019 presidential campaign had dangerous and outrageous headlines in the inside pages of Nigerian newspapers

The implication of the data is that most of the hate speeches manifested in the advertisements followed by political news and cartoons came at a distant third within the period of the study. This contradicts Aondover (2021) who found that most of the hate speeches manifested in the political news and some appeared in the cartoons within the period of his study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the manifestation of hate speech was prevalent in the selected newspapers in the 2019 presidential election. The findings of the study revealed that hateful speeches were dominant in the 2019 presidential election. The findings showed that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers in 2019 presidential election was significantly high in the inside pages than front and back pages. The study also found that the manifestation of hate speech by the selected newspapers was higher in political advertisement than other journalistic genres. Arising from the findings, the study concluded that the level of hate speech in Nigeria witnessed during the 2019 presidential election campaigns was worrisome, particularly when one views communication(hate speech) as having the capacity of threatening the country's democracy. Most of the scholars whose work were reviewed agreed that the trend of discussion in Nigeria most of the times is disturbing, as commentators employ the use of hate language, verbal assault, name calling, insults and derogatory words to describe subjects(Lucas&Targema, 2018, Aondover, 2021, Ilori, 2023).

In line with Ilori's (2023) study, this paper recommends that alternative strategies including strategic training, education, public awareness, and a multistakeholder approach should be adopted to combat hate rhetoric in Nigeria. In addition, newspapers and other media that publish hate speech should be sanctioned by regulatory bodies such as Nigeria Union of Journalists and Nigerian Press Council.

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