

A CONTENT ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE GUARDIAN AND VANGUARD NEWSPAPERS ON COVERAGE AND FRAMING OF HATE SPEECHES PRE- AND POST-2023 NIGERIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

Hate speech has become a predominant feature in the Nigerian political space. Hate speech is majorly used as a tool for campaign by political parties' flagbearers, loyalists and cultural groups. Our multi-ethnicity and religious differences have not helped matters with respect to fuelling hate speeches. Such speeches are targeted at people of opposing political ideologies, tribes and religious beliefs. When extreme, the speeches lead to violence which result in loss of lives and properties. This study set out to analyse newspaper coverage of hate speech before and after the 2023 Nigeria presidential election. To determine the newspaper coverage of hate speech pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers were content analysed. The newspapers were purposively selected because they have a national outlook, vast circulation and wider reach. The online versions of the newspapers were used for the study due to easy access. Using a code guide, the research coded a sample size of 424 editions of the selected national dailies. It was found out that there was an inadequate volume of coverage of stories on hate speech. In the 424 editions, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* had 42 and 38 reports respectively, making a total of 80 reports on hate speech. Also, the prevalent genre was straight news. The study recommends that newspapers should give more attention to the caution/prevention frame in reporting hate speech.

Keywords: Nigeria, Hate speech, Politics, Election, Ethnicity.

Introduction

Elections represent an authoritative mechanism for the appointment of leaders within a democratic framework. In Nigeria, regrettably, the phenomenon of hate speech has emerged as a prevalent feature within the electoral process. Hate speech constitutes one of the rapidly escalating issues globally, and in Nigeria, it has instigated considerable harm to individuals as a result of communications that convey animosity in its most extreme manifestation. Hatred denotes a profound or significant animosity towards an object or individual. Consequently, hate speech may be characterized as utterances that manifest severe animus towards an object or individual, particularly in relation to bias or prejudice that incites violence, discrimination, and/or animosity.

According to the International Dialogue Centre (2019), hate speech is defined as any communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks a person or group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.

United Nations Nigeria (2023) warned that countering and addressing hate speech is vital as it was one of the issues that led to the genocides in Rwanda. Violence stemming from hate speech is mostly felt by vulnerable people. Search for Common Ground (2021) listed types of hate speech as: political-based hate speech, insecurity-based hate speech, gender-based hate speech and ethnic-based hate speech. Ohieku and Sabo (2019) considered religion and politics to provoke hate speech in Nigeria. Agbese (2018) posits that it is noteworthy that Nigeria suffers from the struggle of striking a balance between the right of free speech and speech that is hostile to national harmony, unity and peace. Nigeria's multi-ethnic society does not make it easy for the inhabitants to thrive in a hate speech-free society. According to Ohieku and Sabo (2019), hate speech is more pronounced in Nigeria's political sector as political parties and their supporters often make hate speeches against their opponents. No thanks to the multi-ethnic society of Nigeria where the flagbearers of these political parties are usually from different tribes of the country.

Waya et al (2019) noted that some Nigerian politicians used hate speech as a tactic to have advantage over their political opponents during elections and this action has increased electoral violence, political tension and instability. In the 2015 presidential elections, the major political parties (PDP and APC) fixated their campaigns more on hate speech than on issues. A vivid example was Mr. Buhari, the APC presidential flagbearer who threatened blood-flow in the country if the election was rigged against him. Hate speech and ethno-religious intolerance directly and indirectly respectively led to the surge in electoral violence in Nigeria from 2011 to 2015 (Usman and Badiru, 2015). The hate speech bill signed into law by former President Muhammadu Buhari goes to show that the incidence of hate speech is high such that a specific law had to be put in place against it. The 2023 presidential election failed to see Nigerians unite as one. Notably in Lagos, inciteful hate speeches were used against people of opposing political party ideologies, and ethnicity thereby calling for violence.

Newspapers as sources of information carry an embodiment of believability, authenticity, truth and trust which results in reliance on newspapers for truth. During electioneering, newspapers educate the citizens on their electoral rights, the electoral process, and provide even campaign opportunities to the candidates and their parties. However, constant publications of inciteful frames on hate-embellished statements by rival political party flagbearers cause tension and incite the audience. Adisa et al (2017) notes that the use of hate speeches in several newspapers shows that the media are used by politicians to stir up hatred and incite violence among ethnic and political groups during the electioneering periods as well as in their daily lives.

Hate speech has become a continuously growing threat in the world of politics, especially in the Nigeria political space. It has eaten deep into the political sector and electioneering process of the country. It was a dangerous political weapon used by politicians, and their loyalists against those with differing viewpoints during the last presidential election in Nigeria. Hence, analyzing how newspapers covered hate speech in the 2023 presidential election becomes paramount for evaluating the approaches used by presidential candidates, parties and supporters in influencing public opinion and gaining support pre- and post-election. Thus, it becomes essential to examine newspaper reports on hate speech before and after the 2023 presidential election. The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To find out the volume of coverage of hate speeches pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election in the selected newspapers.
2. To know the news genres used in reporting stories on hate speeches pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election in the selected newspapers
3. To identify the frames adopted by the selected newspapers in the coverage of hate speeches pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election.

Empirical Review

Ogbonna and Okafo (2020) in their study "An analysis of newspapers' coverage of hate speech in Nigeria" found out that *The Punch* newspaper (online and offline editions) was ahead of *The Guardian* newspaper of both editions in its coverage of hate speech in Nigeria. The study also found out that both Nigerian newspapers gave inadequate coverage to the issue of hate speech (only 23 issues from 360 editions). The study further revealed that most of the stories on hate speech by *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers (online and offline editions) were in news form with a frequency of 7 (or 58.3%) and 8 (or 54.5%), respectively; opinion and feature stories on hate speech followed with a reportage frequency of 2 (or 18.2%) and 2 (or 16.7%) for *The Guardian* and *The Punch* (online and offline editions) respectively. Umukoro (2022) in the study "Newspaper framing of hate speeches in Nigeria: An analysis of selected newspapers" corroborates the study of Ogbonna and Okafo (2020) where it was also found out that the newspapers studied did not give detailed information on hate speeches in Nigeria. Also, hate speeches were not given prominence by the selected newspapers since most of the stories did not appear on the front pages of these national dailies.

Dissimilar to the above studies, Eric Msughter (2023) revealed that the manifestation of hate speech was frequent in 2015 general election, and such speeches appeared more in *The Guardian* followed by *Daily Trust*, and *The Nation* newspaper. The study discovered that hate speeches were significantly high on the inside pages than front and back pages of the selected newspapers in the 2015 general election.

Oriola, Omotayo and Ajayi (2022) in the study, "National newspapers' framing of Nigeria's 2019 presidential election campaigns: Perception and voting patterns by

TASUED community members" revealed that people's voting decisions appeared to be influenced by media coverage and the characteristics of the candidates. The study also found a significant link between the direction of perception of newspaper framing of the campaigns and voting pattern among members of TASUED community. The study further revealed that the respondents agreed with the assertions that the selected newspapers' framing of the 2019 Presidential election campaigns was more focused on the personalities of political candidates than on issues and programmes ($\bar{x} = 3.52$, $SD = 1.07$), and that there were name-calling and mudslinging in the 2019 presidential election campaigns as framed in Nigerian newspapers ($\bar{x} = 3.53$, $SD = 1.16$).

Ajibulu, O. and Nwaoboli, E. (2023) in their study "A content-analytical study of the Vanguard newspaper online coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election" revealed that majority of the campaign news were toned to attack political candidates and political parties, and this category accounts for 33% of the analysed reports. Attack tone was majorly used to report the campaign news and this reveals that Nigeria politics is a game of word banter. This also showed that a lot of antagonism took place between presidential candidates.

Way, Ugwuanyi and Ogbonna (2019) remarked that in Nigeria, the narratives of ethnicity formed bases for hate speech while in the USA, the focal point of hate discourse was on racism rather than ethnicity. The study also revealed that hate speeches in Nigeria featured more violence than the ones in the United States of America, and the party leaders or associates of both opposing groups recorded more hate speeches than the candidates. The study also found out that the pattern of hate speeches in Nigeria is more on health, ethnic background, personality/trust and party affiliations.

Data and Methods

The content analysis was adopted for this study. All national newspapers published in Nigeria make up the population of study. There are a total of 62 national dailies published in Nigeria from which *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers were selected. The period under study runs from 1st November 2022 to 31st May 2023. The newspapers were purposively selected because they have a national outlook, vast circulation and wider reach. The online versions of the newspapers were used for the study due to easy access. The duration of study was also purposively selected because that was the heat period of hate speeches just before and after the election.

A sample size of 424 editions of the two selected newspapers were examined. These newspapers were studied for a period of seven (7) months. The purpose sampling method was also used to select the months which are November (30 days), December (31 days), January (31 days), February (28 days), March (31 days), April (30 days) and May (31 days) because they adequately represent the category from which the researchers need to draw data. Seven (7) months when calculated gives 212 editions (days) and when multiplied by 2 (*Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers)

gives 424. The unit of analysis for this study entails the straight news stories, feature stories, editorials, opinion articles, letters-to-the-editor, cartoons, and columns. The code sheet was used in collating data from the contents of the selected newspapers. The details are as follows:

Category A: Media: 1 – Vanguard, 2 – The Guardian.

Category B: Study Period: November 2022 - May 2023

Category C: Genre: 1 – Straight News, 2 – Editorials, 3 – Features, 4 – Columns, 5 – Opinion articles, 6 – Letters-to-the-editor, 7 – Cartoons, 8 – Picture stories.

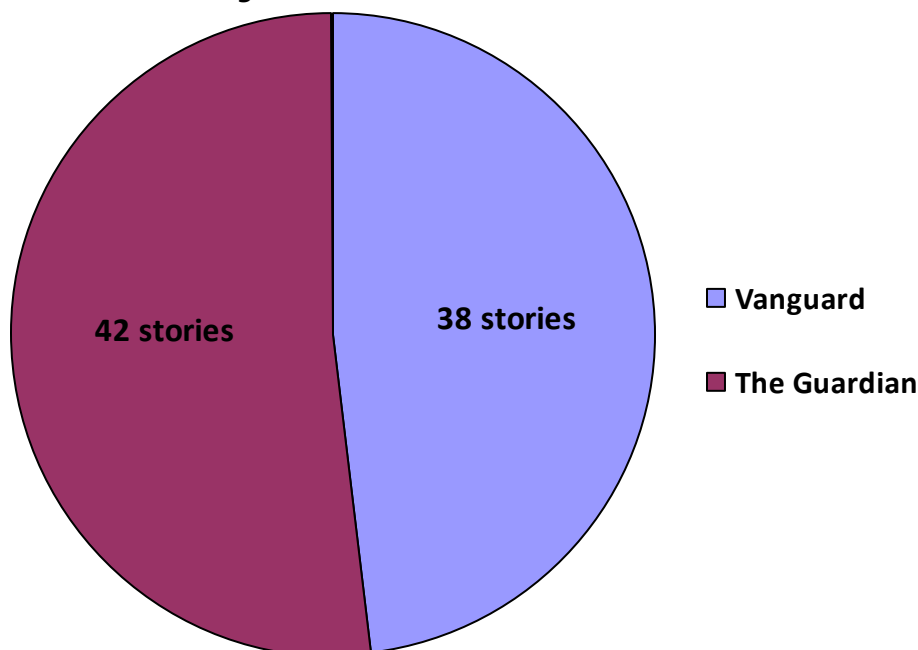
Category D: Dominant News Frame: 1 – Hate speech offences, 2 – Violence frame, 3 – Economic frame, 4 – Law / policy frame, 5 – Caution / prevention frame, 6 – Education / training frame, 7 – Human rights frame.

Category E: Dominant Issue Frame: 1 – Gender, 2 – Ethnicity/tribe, 3 – Religion, 4 – Politics, 5 – Ideology, 6 – Party, 7 – Journalism, 8 – Candidate.

The researcher adopted the quantitative method in presenting, analyzing and interpreting the data that were collected from the sample newspapers. In analyzing the data, the coded data was presented in figures on tables and charts with their frequencies and their percentages.

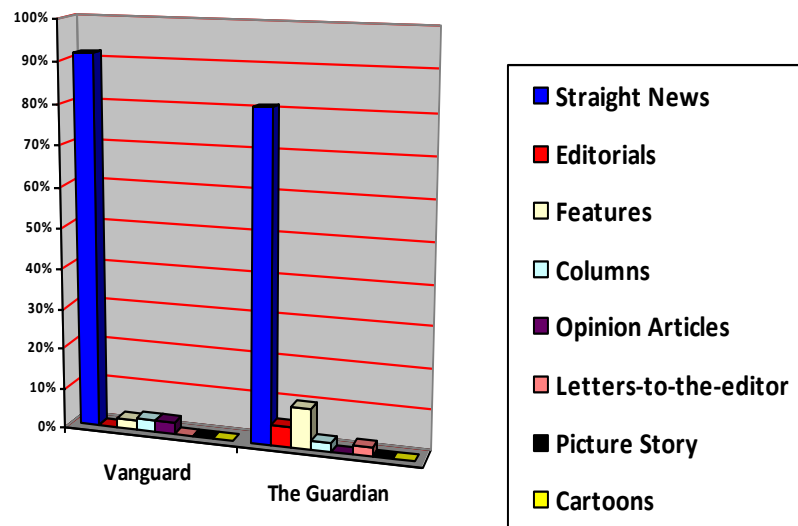
Results

a. Volume of coverage



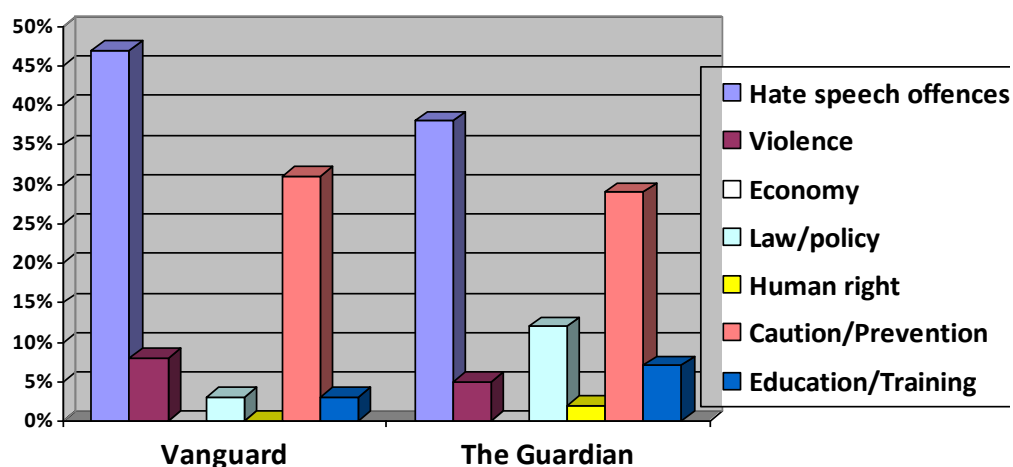
There were 80 stories on hate speech in the 424 editions of the selected newspapers. The number of stories (80) was significantly lesser than the number of editions (424) studied which shows that there was an inadequate amount of hate speech coverage.

b. Distribution of stories according to genres.



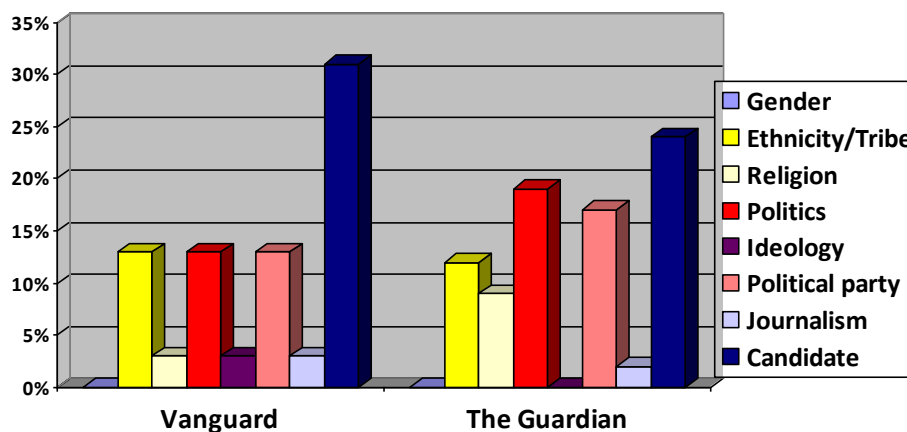
The above chart represents the forms in which the selected newspapers reported hate speech. The story type used frequently by *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* is the straight news (92% and 81% respectively) which shows the agenda-setting nature of the stories. Straight news uses the power of currency to reel out information as urgent as it is and should be taken seriously at a particular time. In giving depth, editorials, features, columns and letters-to-the-editor were barely used by the newspapers thereby making it less prominent. The readers may need to know the news behind the news, to find what is truly important about an urgent issue (hate speech), thereby going beyond straight news stories to establish framing. However, the information they need is lacking. The lack of substantial editorials raises an alarm as editorials are the perspective of newspaper houses regarding issues of importance. The absence can be interpreted to mean that the press didn't consider hate speech as a very pressing issue.

c. Distribution of stories according to news frames



The chart above reveals that hate speech offence was the highest framing used in hate speech reports. It is followed by caution/prevention stories. On an individual basis *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers reported the subject matter, hate speech offence, the most with 47% and 38% respectively.

d. Distribution of stories according to issue frames.



The above chart reveals that apart from "candidate" which is the highest, the higher hate speech issue frame was politics-based. The implication of this is that the personalities of the candidates for the presidential election were largely attacked.

Discussion of Findings

Objective One: To find out the volume of coverage of hate speeches pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election in the selected newspapers

This objective was created to find out the volume of coverage the selected newspapers gave hate speech pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election. Data generated from chart A reveal that there were 80 stories on hate speech in the 424 editions of the selected newspapers. The number of stories (80) was way lesser than the number of editions (424) studied which shows that there was an inadequate amount of hate speech coverage. This finding is supported by Ogbonna and Okafo (2020), and Umukoro (2022) who in their studies found out that Nigerian newspapers gave inadequate coverage to the issue of hate speech. In Ogbonna and Okafo (2020), only 23 issues from 360 editions of *Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers gave coverage to hate speech while in Umukoro (2022), the selected newspapers studied did not give detailed information on hate speeches in Nigeria. Also, in the same study, hate speeches were not given prominence by the selected newspapers since most of the stories did not appear on the front pages of these national dailies.

Dissimilar to the finding and studies above, Eric Msughter (2023) showed that the manifestation of hate speech was frequent in 2015 general elections, and such speeches appeared more in *The Guardian* followed by *Daily Trust*, and *The Nation* newspaper. The study discovered that hate speeches were significantly high on the inside pages than front and back pages of the selected newspapers in the 2015 general election.

Under this finding, *The Guardian* newspaper had more stories (42) than *Vanguard* newspaper (38) which is also supported by the findings from Eric Msughter (2023) which showed that hate speeches appeared more in *The Guardian* followed by *Daily Trust*.

Objective Two: To know the news genres used in reporting stories on hate speeches pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election in the selected newspapers

This objective was designed to know the news genres used in reporting stories on hate speeches pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election in the selected newspapers. Data generated from chart B reveal that the story type used frequently by *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers is the straight news (92% and 81% respectively) which shows the agenda-setting nature of the stories. In giving depth, editorials, features, columns and letters-to-the-editor were barely used by the newspapers thereby making it less prominent. This finding is in consonance with that of Ogbonna and Okafo (2020) where it was found out that most of the stories on hate speech by *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers (online and offline editions) were in news form with a frequency of 7 (or 58.3%) and 8 (or 54.5%), respectively; opinion and

feature stories on hate speech followed with a reportage frequency of 2 (or 18.2%) and 2 (or 16.7%) for *The Guardian* and *The Punch* (online and offline editions) respectively.

Objective Three: To identify the frames adopted by the selected newspapers in the coverage of hate speeches pre and post 2023 Nigeria Presidential Election

Chart C reveals that in terms of news frames, the hate speech offences dominated the newspapers followed by caution/prevention. This shows that there is a prevalence of hate speeches, and there seems to be much efforts into cautioning/preventing people to desist from hate speech. This finding agrees with the finding of Oriola, Omotayo and Ajayi (2022) in their study revealed that the respondents agreed with the assertions that the selected newspapers' framing of the 2019 Presidential election campaigns was more focused on name-calling and mudslinging in the 2019 presidential election campaigns as framed in Nigerian newspapers ($\bar{x} = 3.53$, $SD = 1.16$). Also, this finding is similar to that of Ajibulu and Nwaoboli (2023) who showed that majority of the campaign news were toned to attack political candidates and political parties, and this category accounts for 33% of the analysed reports.

A finding under this objective which showed that the "education/training" frame was less dominant has failed to go by the framing theory which states that how something is presented to the public influences the choices people make about how to process the information. Under this theory, the media are expected to influence the perception of the news by the audience (Asemah, et al. 2017). Little wonder we still have hate speeches around us which have eaten deeply into the political fabrics of our society because the press has failed to educate/train its audience on how to go about political campaigns and messages through making the "education/training" frame the most dominant in its reportage of hate speech.

Under the issue-based frames, chart D reveals that "candidate" ranks the highest. The implication of this is that the personalities of the candidates for the presidential election were largely attacked. This finding also supports the findings of Oriola, Omotayo and Ajayi (2022), and Ajibulu and Nwaoboli (2023) who found out that newspapers' framing of the 2019 Presidential election campaigns was more focused on the personalities of political candidates than on issues and that majority of the campaign news in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election were toned to attack political candidates and political parties respectively.

Also, findings under the issue-based frames show that ethnicity ranked fourth. The implication of this is that ethnicity played a role in hate speech. This is supported by Waya, Ugwuanyi and Ogbonna (2019) who remarked that in Nigeria, the narratives of ethnicity formed bases for hate speech while in the USA, the focal point of hate discourse was on racism rather than ethnicity. The study also found out that the pattern of hate speeches in Nigeria is more on health status of candidates, ethnic background, personality/trust and party affiliations.

Conclusion

Hate speech has come to stay in Nigeria as a major result of the country's multiethnicity. Hate speech pre- and post-2023 Nigeria presidential election was not covered adequately by the selected newspapers, and also the straight news story was mostly used to report hate speeches which gave urgency but lacked depth. The press still has a lot to do in curtailing hate speech by giving it more attention. Frames on "caution/prevention" should be more prevalent to reduce the level of hate speech in the society. Also, frames on "education/training" should be more dominant in order for the press to educate and train its audience on how to go about their campaigns thereby reducing the hostility that comes with hate speeches. Politicians, political parties' flagbearers, aides, supporters, party loyalists and cultural groups need to refrain from using hate speech in their campaigns and messages.

Finally, the media ought to employ editorials, features, columns, and opinion articles to provide comprehensive reports on hate speech. Members of the community should notably leverage opinion articles and letters-to-the-editor to educate the public regarding the adverse effects of hate speech.

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