



Analysis of Machine Sensing of Hate Speech on Twitter in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The Advent Of Social Media Has No Doubt Liberated The Communication Space, Deepened Participatory Democracy And Granted Citizens Platform To Ventilate Their Anger On National And Important Discourse. Twitter Have Gained Prominence In Recent Years Because Of Nature And Quality Of Information Available On Them. Policy Statements That Are Sourced On The Conventional Media Are Replete On Twitter. However, The Platform Has Also Become Breeding Ground For Obfuscation Of Many Absurdities. Therefore, This Study Investigates The Prevalence Of Hate Speech On Twitter In Nigeria From 2015 To 2019. Using Twitter Api As Data Mining Method, The Study Content Analyzed The Mined Tweets By Categorizing The Tweets Under Political, Religious, Ethnic, Region, Gender And Disability Categories. Findings Of The Study Show That Hate Speech On Twitter Is More Frequent During The Electioneering Years. Also, Unverified Handles On Twitter Tend To Tweet More Hate Speech Than The Verified Handles. Findings Show That Twitter Users Tend To 'Like' Hate Tweets Than 'Retweet' Them. Similarly, Political Hate Speeches Are Dominant On Twitter. The Study Therefore Recommend For Regulatory Legislation On Hate Speech Within The Confinement Of Freedom Of Speech In Order Not To Infringe On The Fundamental Human Right Of The People.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Scourge Of Hate Speech On Social Media Globally And The Efforts Of Governments Around The World To Curb The Malice Have Prompted Rethink Among The Tech Giants Like Twitter And Facebook To Design Strategies To Reduce The Rise Of Hate Speech On Their Platforms. Twitter And Facebook In Recent Times Have Suspended The Handles Of The Former Us President, Donald Trump For Reasons Bordering On Incitement (Garcia-Hodges, 2021; Culliford, 2021).

In Nigeria, The 2015 Presidential Election Campaign Signal A New Dimension In Our Political System. The Campaign Between The Opposition Apc And The Then Incumbent Pdp Was Based Not Majorly On Issues But Attacks On Personality And Obnoxious Obfuscation



(Ugbechie, 2017; Rasaan, Udende, Ibrahim & Oba, 2017; Virginia & Olanrewaju, 2017; Citad, 2016). The Fall Out The Campaign Of Hate Both Offline And Online Permeated The Hate Speech Experienced In Nigeria In Recent Times. The Rise In Hate Speech In Nigeria Prompted The President Of The Federal Republic Of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari On 21st Of August 2017, Upon His Return From Medical Treatment In London, In A National Broadcast To Bemuse The Frequency Of Hate And Dangerous Speeches In The Nation. The President Noted That There Are Some Comments On Social Media That Have –Crossed Our National Red Lines By Daring To Question Our Collective Existence As A Nation. This Is A Step Too Far! (Premiumtimes, 2017). Few Hours After The Speech, #Nationalredline Became Trending Topic On Social Media, Especially Twitter Nigeria. Surprisingly, A Twisted Version Of The President’s Speech Was Circulated On Social Media, Which Is A Form Of Attack On A Particular Tribe In The Country. This Prompted The Nigerian Army To Announce Plan To Begin Monitoring Of Online Activities Of Nigerians For Hate Speeches And Contents That Are –Anti-Corporate Existence Of This Country! (Vanguard, 2017). Eight Months Later, Precisely On March 1st 2018, The Nigerian Senate Proposed A Bill To Combat Hate And Dangerous Speeches In The Country (The Guardian, 2018). The Bill Proposed Death By Hanging To Perpetrator Of Hate Speech Upon Conviction And The Establishment Of An ‘Independent National Commission For Hate Speeches’ (The Guardian, 2018).

Hate And Dangerous Speeches Are Becoming Norms In Discourse On The Public Sphere Courtesy Of The New Media (Nemes, 2002). Since Its Emergence, The New Media And Communication Technologies Have Modified The Process Of Communication And Enshrined Active Participation Of Citizens In Communication Process. The Hitherto Top- Down Approach In Communication Is Substituted By Horizontal, Level Playing Form Of Communication. Citizens Not Only Serve As Passive Recipient But Active Producers And Distributors Of Contents. The Proliferation Of New Media Saw The Amplification Of All Sorts Of Obnoxious Contents And Hateful And Dangerous Speeches In The Public Sphere. This Is Aided By The Increase In The Mobile Phone And Internet Penetration In The Country. The National Bureau Of Statistics Puts The Figure Of Mobile Phone Users And Internet Penetration At 92,975,282 And 93,263,436 Respectively (Nbs, 2018).

The Internet Penetration, Among Other Reasons, Paved The Way For Rise In The Usage Of Social Media Platforms Such As Twitter In Nigeria. It Is Pertinent To Note That The Increasing Utilization Of Twitter By Different People Around The World And The Capacity Of Twitter To Serve As User Generated Content Platform That Can Provide Prompt And Timely, But Concise, Information On Issues Of Social, Political, Economic, Personal, National And International Interest, Among Others, Prompted Interest On The Evaluation Of The ‘Dark Side’ Of Twitter (Miró-Llinares & Rodriguez-Sala, 2016; Sevasti, 2014; Tufekci, 2017).

Sevasti (2014, P. 6) Observes That –Hate Speech Discourses During Critical Events Can Lead To The Demystification Of Socio-Political Actors, As Well As To An Overall Confusion Among Citizens Which Might Finally Result In Their Political Disengagement. This Was Evident In The 2015 General Elections In Nigeria. Rather Than Focusing On Issue Based Campaign, The Top Political Parties Were Enmeshed In Hate Campaign. Ugbechie (2017) Notes That During The 2015 Elections, Hate Speech Was Thick In The Air.



The Phenomenon Of Hate Speech Experienced During The 2015 General Elections In Nigeria Was Not Surprising Because Studies Have Shown That Political Campaigns In Nigeria Have Been Shrouded By Hate, Bile And Dangerous Speeches Leading To Post- Election Violence (Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim & Oba, 2017; Virginia & Olanrewaju, 2017; Citad, 2016, Ezeibe, 2013; Seng & Hunt, 1986). However, During 2011 And 2015 General Elections, The Phenomenon Of Hate Speech Was Armed With More Liberal, Citizens Centered, User Generated Content And Distribution Platform - The Social Media.

Given The Rising Popularity Of Twitter And The Claims That Hate Speech Can Be Harmful To Individuals, Groups And To Society As A Whole (Nemes, 2002); Also, The Fact That Twitter's Conversations Are Organized Around Trending Topics May Facilitate The Quick And Wide Spreading Of Hateful Messages (Unesco, 2015). Yardi And Boyd (2010) Underlined The Need -To Examine Hate Speech, Along With Polarization And Extremism, In Contemporary Online Platforms Like Twitter (P.316).

Against This Background, This Study Investigates How Twitter Serves As A Platform That Enables Expression Of Hate Speech And Intolerance In Nigeria From 2015 To 2019.

Aim and Objectives

1. To Find Out Frequency Of Hate Speech On Twitter In Nigeria
2. To Examine Impression Generated By Hate Tweets On Twitter In Nigeria
3. To Investigate The Status Of The Twitter Handles Tweeting Hate Speech In Nigeria
4. To Study The Prevalence Of Hate Speech On Twitter From 2015 To 2019

Conceptualization of Hate Speech

According To Gagliardone, Gal, Alves And Martinez (2015), Hate Speech Is Intertwined With Freedom Of Speech, Individual, Group And Minority Rights, As Well As Concepts Of Dignity, Liberty And Equality. Therefore, Its Definition Is Often Contested. They However, Defined Hate Speech Base On National And International Legislation, As The -Expressions That Advocate Incitement To Harm (Particularly, Discrimination, Hostility Or Violence) Based Upon The Target's Being Identified With A Certain Social Or Demographic Group. It May Include, But Is Not Limited To, Speech That Advocates, Threatens, Or Encourages Violent Acts (P. 10). It Can Also Be Regarded As Any Expressions That Foster A Climate Of Prejudice And Intolerance On The Assumption That This May Fuel Targeted Discrimination, Hostility And Violent Attacks.

According To Unesco Report, Hate Speech Is Regarded As:

Expressions That Advocate Incitement To Harm (Particularly, Discrimination, Hostility Or Violence) Based Upon The Target's Being Identified With A Certain Social Or Demographic Group. It May Include, But Is Not Limited To, Speech That Advocates, Threatens, Or Encourages Violent Acts. For Some, However, The Concept Extends Also To Expressions That Foster A Climate Of Prejudice And Intolerance On The Assumption That This May Fuel Targeted Discrimination, Hostility And Violent Attacks (Unesco, 2015, P.).

Neisser (1994, P. 337) Opines That Hate Speech Is -All Communications (Whether Verbal, Written, Symbolic) That Insults A Racial, Ethnic And Political Group, Whether By Suggesting



That They Are Inferior In Some Respect Or By Indicating That They Are Despised Or Not Welcome For Any Other Reasons. Neisser Argued That Apart From Causing Danger Of Physical Assault, Hate Speech Risks Violent Reaction. Capture Vividly, Kayambazinthu And Moyo (2002) Conceived Hate Speeches As Wars Waged On Others By Means Of Word.

Hate Speech Can Also Be Seen As A Communication That Employs Intolerant Appellations To Insult And Denounce Others Either On The Bases Of Their Race, Religion, Ethnicity, Gender, Or Other Forms Of Group Membership (Bagdikian, 1997). Consequently, Hate Speech Exemplifies Rhetorical Strategies Which Drive Some People To A Level Of Hostility In Which They Openly Wish Physical Harm On Others Or Political Leaders, Contravening Vital Norms That Enable Democratic Government To Function (Chaiken & Eagly, 1978).

Social Media, Hate Speech and Democracy in Nigeria

2011 And 2015 General Elections In Nigeria Witnessed An Unprecedented Era Of Campaigns Where Citizens Engaged In The Promotion Of Their Cherished Candidates And To Some Extent Demonizing Or Vilifying Candidates That They Do Not Support (Kperogi, 2016). The Methods Have Surpassed The Utilization Of Conventional Media Platforms Such As Radio, Television, Newspaper, Magazines, Billboard, Posters Etc. It Has Now Incorporated Social Media To Political Activities, Governance And Democratic Discourse. However, Many Of The Social Media Users Do So Without Regards To The Issues Of Decency, Decorum, Ethics Or Playing Politics According To Its Rules (Friend And Singer, 2007).

Advocates Of The Democratizing Power Of Social Media (Jeong-Su, 2003; Papacharissi, 2002, 2004; Woo-Young, 2005), Profess The Social Media's Capacity To Empower Ordinary People To Beat -Big Media In The Agenda Setting Scene. Such Enthusiasts Argue That New Media In General And Social Media In Particular Will Increase Political Participation And Pave The Way For A New Democratic Utopia.

Though, Periodic Elections, Free Speech, Freedom Of Expression And Transparency Are Some Of The Tenets Of Democratic Governance. However, Pate, Ibrahim, Pereira, Ya'u, Agbanyin And Bagu (2017) Observe That During The 2015 General Elections, Obnoxious Verbal And Non-Verbal Communication Mechanism Were Deployed To Promote Political Candidates And Denigrate Opponents. Political Gladiators And Their Followers Used Distasteful Contents To Campaign For Votes On Social Media.

Social Media Platforms Such As Facebook, Twitter, Myspace And Youtube Have Been Used Successfully In Mobilizing Political Support In Developed Democracies Such As The Us By Barrack Obama In 2008 And 2012, Donald Trump In 2016, And David Cameron In The Uk In 2010. In Developing Democracy Like Some African Countries; Political Uprising Such As The Arab Spring In Egypt, Tunisia And Libya, Social Movement In Nigeria Like Bringbackourgirls (Bbog), Enoughisenough (Eie), Endsars, Ignited And Catalyzed By Social Media Among Others Which Has Re-Ignited Debates About The Power Of New Media In Political Mobilization. In Particular, Online Media Is Seen As Promoting Communicative Democracy By Recovering The Right Of Public Debate For Social Groups That Have Been Deprived Of Access To The Existing Media. These New Media Are Characterized By -Post-Capitalization, The Expansion Of Access Rights, And Interactive Communication (Yim



Jeong-Su 2003, P. 40). It Is Further Argued That The Alternative Forums Created By Such New Media Vitalize Public Opinion Creation By Bottom-Up Agenda Setting. Such Media Therefore Play A Major Role In Producing And Disseminating Debates That Challenge The Dominant Social Order And Work To Create New Space That Offers Opportunities For Political Participation. In The New Network Society Of Instant Messaging, Blogging And Social Networking, Politics Has Become Fundamentally Media Politics.

Although It Is Without Doubt That New Media Technologies Provide The Citizens With New Tools To Facilitate Participation In Social And Political Matters, It Is Important To Critically Analyse The Question Of Whether New Media Does Offer A New Public Sphere Different From That Provided By The Old Media Hence Enhancing Democracy Or Merely New Public Spaces Where Alternative Discourse Takes Place.

The Transition To Democratic Governance In Nigeria In 1999 Creates Multiplier Effect Of Total Liberalization Of Airwaves, Freedom Of Speech And In Recent Times, Proliferation Of The Citizen Journalism. Multi-Party System Was Anticipated To Bring In The Politics Of Ideology, Which Would Replace Ethnic Based Politics Just The Same Way The Proliferation Of Media Was Anticipated To Expand Democratic Space. The Media In Nigeria In Collaboration With Some Civil Society Organizations Such As Nadeco Were At The Forefront In The Fight For Multiparty Democracy In The Early 1990s. The Ethnic Coloration Of The Media Is However Visible In The Political Parties In Nigeria. There Has However Been A Consistent Pattern Of Visible Ethnic-Based Politics In Subsequent Elections In Nigeria Since The Advent Of Democracy In 1999. The Tradition Of Aligning To Cultural, Religious, Regional And Individual Identities In Behavior And Operations Is Still Visible In Nigerian Politics. Politics Campaigns And Engagements Have Been Anchored On Instrumentalizing Of Ethnic, Religious And Regional Identities (Pate, Ibrahim, Pereira, Ya'u, Agbanyin & Bagu, 2017). Multiparty Politics Seems To Have Done Nothing To Change Nigerians' Perception That Political Patronage Would Follow Ethnic, Religion, Regional Lines Among Others.

Although New Media, Especially Social Media Can Easily Be Regarded As The Alternative Media Through Which Citizens Can Dilute This Ethnicized Pattern Of Politics, An Analysis Of The Content In Social Media Shows That It Is Much More Ethnicised Than In Old Media Where We Have Some Basic Regulatory Standards (Citad, 2016). The Economist (2017) Posits That The Advent Of Social Media Is Making Politics To Get Uglier.

-Part Of The Reasons Is That, By Spreading Untruth And Outrage, Corroding Voters' Judgment And Aggravating Partisanship, Social Media Erode The Conditions For The Horse-Trading (The Economist 2017, P. 11).

The Economist (2017, P. 11) Furthers That -In A Liberal Democracy, Nobody Gets Exactly What He Wants, But Everyone Broadly Has The Freedom To Lead The Life He Chooses. However, Without Decent Information, Civility And Conciliation, Societies Resolve Their Differences By Resorting To Coercion. In As Much As Social Media Have Brought About Liberalization Of The Public Space And Strengthen Frontier Of Discourse In Public Sphere, It Has Become A Double Edge Sword In The Sense That It Has Created Platform For Ventilation Of All Sorts Of Obnoxious Obfuscations, Hate And Dangerous Speeches. -Not Long Ago Social Media Held Out The Promise Of A More Enlightened Politics, As



Accurate Information And Effortless Communication Helped Good People Drive Out Corruption, Bigotry And Lies! (The Economist, 2017, P. 11). However, The Cambridge Analytical Interference In The 2015 General Elections In Nigeria (Illegal Use Of Facebook Data To Influence Election Result), Hacking Of The Email Of The Then Apc President Candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari, And Interference Of Cambridge Analytical In Altering The Elections Of Other Countries Using Social Media Data (Washington Post, 2018) Are Giving Credence To The Claim Of The Economist (2017) That Social Media Is A Threat To Democracy.

In Nigeria, The Spat Of Hate And Dangerous Speeches On Social Media Is Posing Serious Threat To Its Nascent Democracy. The Vice President, Yomi Osinbajo Had To Equate Hate Speech To Terrorism Because Of Its Adverse Effect (Premiumtimes, 2018). This Is Because Social Media Is Becoming A Platform For Ideological Promotion Rather Than For Sharing Information. The Economist Argues That:

People Do Not Share Content Solely Because It Is Informative. They Share Information Because They Want Attention For Themselves, And For What The Things They Share Say About Them. They Want To Be Heard And Seen And Respected. They Want To Post To Be Liked, Tweets To Be Retweeted (Economist, 2017, P. 13).

The White Supremacists' Movement In America, The Nazis In Germany, Ipob And Biafra Movements In Nigeria, Boko Haram, And Some Aggrieved Political Gladiators Have Been Using The Social Media To Promote Their Agenda No Matter How Decent Or Indecent The Agenda. The Interconnected Nature Of Social Media Is Making It More Dangerous To Fathom. As Udende (2011) Observes That In A World Where Everybody Is Connected, Everybody Is At Risk.

Argument On The Effect Of New Media On Democracy Is Still Ongoing. As The Technology Evolved, So Is The Development And Growth Of Democracy In The Nigeria. No Doubt, The New Media Has Created Access, Liberalized The Hitherto Monopolistic Information Production, And Engendered Public Participation. Since Representative Democracy Triumph On Popular Participation, Citizen Engagement And Free Flow Of Information, Access To Timely, Uninterrupted And Qualitative Information Become Paramount. Democracy Survives Or Perishes On The Strength Of Public Participation. Impact Of Communication On Democracy Cannot Be Over Emphasized. But Rise Of Hate And Dangerous Speeches On These Platforms Is Posing Danger To Democracy. This Bring To Mind The Question Whether Social Media Advantages Worth The Risk.

Twitter Usage In Nigeria

In 2017, 13% Of Internet Users In Nigeria Use Twitter Compare To 41% That Use Facebook And Whatsapp Respectively, Twitter Is Considered Elitist (Statista, 2018). By 2013, 18% Of Us Online Users Claimed To Use Twitter (Duggan & Smith, 2013) By 2019 It Rose Marginally To 18.9%. In 2014, 9% Of German Online Users Identified Themselves As Twitter Users (Van Eimeren & Frees, 2014 Cited In Jungherr, 2014) It Reduced Marginally To 8.9% In 2018. Jungherr (2014) Observes That This Difference Already Shows That The Importance Of Twitter In Both Countries Should Be Evaluated Differently. Compare These Figures To



93.2million About 51% Internet Users In Nigeria (Nbs, 2018) Nigeria Internet Penetration Is Looking Encouraging. Interestingly Though, The Usage Gap, Which Clearly Exists Between The Usa, Germany And Nigeria With Regard To Twitter And Internet, Is Not Grounded In A Fundamentally Different Usage Intensity Of The Internet Itself. They Can Serve As Rough Indicators Suggesting That While The Internet Is More Broadly Used In The Usa And Germany Than In Nigeria, This Usage Gap Is Far Smaller Than The Gap Seen With Regard To Twitter Use.

Twitter, Politics and Challenges Of Hate Speech

Media Have Always Been Central To Political Activities And Democratic Governance (McNair, 2003). The Advent Of New Media Has Changed The Dimension And Dynamic Of Politics And Political Communication. This Phenomenon Gained Its Root In The 2011 General Elections In Nigeria. The Then Candidate Of Pdp During The 2011 Presidential Election Goodluck Jonathan Relied Heavily On Social Media Presence For His Campaign (Nnanyelugo & Nwafor, 2013). This Development In Nigeria Has Precedence In The United State Of America. The Election That Ushered In President Barack Obama Was Partly Due To Heavy Reliance On Social Media For Political Campaign (Nnanyelugo & Nwafor, 2013). Since Then The Number Of Politicians, Journalists And Citizens That Use Twitter For Political Communication And Participation Is Rapidly Increasing. As A Matter Of Fact, Recent Events Demonstrate The Role Of Twitter In Political Communication. Barack Obama Tweeted -This Happened Because Of You. Thank You! To Announce His Victory Of The Us Elections On 2012 (The Telegraph, 2012). The Recently Ousted U.S President, Donald Trump Took Use Of Social Media For Political Campaign And Governance To Next Level. Government Policies And Decisions Are Being Announced On The Twitter Handle Of President Trump. Likewise, The Former Prime Minister Of Greece George Papandreou Used

Twitter To Publish The Main Keystones Of The Country's Intentions For The Debt Negotiation Process During The Euro Summit In Brussels (Bbc, 2011).

Hate Speech On Social Media Have Triggered Election Violence In Many African Countries. However, Election Violence Is Not However The Only Challenges Posed By Hate Speech Online As Observed By The Un Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur On Minority Issues (Hrc, 2015). While Statistics Offering A Global Overview Of The Phenomenon Are Not Available, Both Social Networking Platforms And Organizations Created To Combat Hate Speech Have Recognized That Hateful Messages Disseminated Online Are Increasingly Common And Have Elicited Unprecedented Attention To Develop Adequate Responses. According To Hatebase, A Web-Based Application That Collects Instances Of Hate Speech Online Worldwide, The Majority Of Cases Of Hate Speech Target Individuals Based On Ethnicity And Nationality, But Incitements To Hatred Focusing On Religion And Class Have Also Been On The Rise (Hatebase, 2019).

Empirical Review

In Nigeria, Abdullah (2018) Conducted A Study On The Tweeting Habits Of Selected Two Politicians In Kaduna State Northwest Nigeria Using A Qualitative Content Analysis Method. The Analysis Of The Selected Tweets Shows That The Politicians Despite Being State Executive And A Federal Legislature Respectively, Are Engaging In Hate Speech. Nasir



Elrufai The Governor Of Kaduna State And Senator Shehu Sani Through Their Tweets Promote Hate Speech. The Study Also Reports That There Were No Steps Taken By Twitter To Either Delete Or Suspended Such Accounts.

Ahmed (2018) Studied The Facebook Comments Of Some Selected Media Platforms On Biafra Agitations And The Arewa Youths' Ultimatum To Igbo Residents In The North. Using Critical Discourse Analysis Method, The Study Found That The Comments Were Polarised Along Regional And Religious Lines. The Study Therefore Advocates For Enactment Of Regulatory Framework To Moderate To Checkmate Social Media Contents.

In A Similar Study, Ezeibe And Ikeanyibe (2017) Investigate The Import Of Hate Speech In 2015 Elections In Nigeria. Using Primary And Secondary Data, The Study Content-Analyzed Media Reports Of Hate Speeches By Tell Magazine, Sahara Reporters, The Guardian, Vanguard, Leadership, Thisday, Nations, And Premium Times Over A Period Of Five Years, From 2010 To 2015. The Findings Show That Elites Employ Hate Speech To Curry Favour Along Every Possible Line Of Diversity—Such As Ethnicity, Geopolitical Region, And Religion—To Retain Or Obtain Political Power. The Study Shows That Hate Speech Has Been Elevated To The Status Of A Political Campaign Strategy And Suggests That Serious Checks And Balances Should Be Evolved To Ensure The Sustained Reduction Of Ethnic Politics So As To Improve Democratic Consolidation.

In Another Study On Hate Speech During 2015 General Elections In Nigeria, Rasaan, Udende, Ibrahim And Oba (2017), Using A Critical Discourse Analysis Of Three Newspapers, The Study Established That Hate Speech Was The Focal Point And The Instrument Of Campaign. The Findings Show That The 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.

Citad (2016) In Its Monitoring Report On Hate Speech During The 2015 General Elections Reports That 70% Of The People Disseminating Hate Speech In The Nigerian Social Media Space Use Their Identity And Can Be Reached For A Follow Up Actions. The Study Sampled 21760 Posts Covering 32 Hate Speech Instances From January To May 2015.

Again, English Language Is The Major Language Used For Dissemination Of Hate Speeches With A Visible Content In Hausa Language In The Nigerian Social Media Space. More So, Over 65 Percent Of Posters Of Hate Speech Contents Are Males And A Greater Percentage Of The Contents Of The Posts Use Coded Language That Had Been Used In The Past To Generate Violence/Harm.

Miro-Llinares And Rodriguez-Sala (2016) In A Study On Cyber Hate Speech On Twitter During The Attack Against The Charlie Hebdo Weekly In Paris, In The Year 2015, Sampled More Than 255,000 Tweets With Some Selected Hashtags. A Combination Of Both Qualitative And Quantitative Content Analysis Of The Tweets Was Conducted Using Data Mining Technique To Generate The Data For Analysis. The Findings Show That Disruptive Events Are Followed By Communications That Show Spatial Temporal And Textual Patterns Clearly Identifiable. Also, The Fact That The Patterns Show That There Are Indications Of Differences Between The Variables Of The Neutral Messages That Were Generated In The Social Conversation About The Attack To Charlie Hebdo And The Messages Of Violence And



Hate, There Are No Patterns That Determine Significant Differences In These Expressions Of Hate Vis-A-Vis The Rest Of The Social Conversation. The Results Show Predictive Patterns That Can Facilitate The Task Of Classifying Messages Of Violence And Hate

In Another Study In The Uk By Prism (2016), It Was Discovered That Both Facebook And Twitter Are Used As Open-Ended Platforms Where Unchallenged Hateful, Hostile, And Disturbing Messages Against Certain Religious Or Ethnic Groups Are Spread At A Speed Of A Click, With Four Of The Five Uk Parties Monitored Encouraging Violence Against The Identified ‘Suspect Population’; Currently Muslims, And Other Recent Newcomers To The Uk.

Rogers (2013) While Conducting An Online Mapping Of Right-Wing Parties‘ Use Of Social Media Expressed That With Regard To Social Media, Facebook Is A Leading Platform For Expression Throughout The Right, Whilst Twitter Is Popular Only In Specific Countries And Instances. Social Media In General Is Frequently Used By Political Movements To Promote Their Initiatives, Their Positions And Their Role In The Public Debate, As Well As To Communicate Appointments And Demonstrations. Many Of The Groups Studied Also Take Advantage Of The Political Climate And Major Events And Use Social Media For Scapegoating And Scaremongering. Social Media Has Largely Replaced The Use Of Websites And Blogs By Racist Perpetrators, On Account Of Their Greater Capacity To Transmit Contents.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The Design Of This Study Is Quantitative Content Analysis. This Was Used At The Level Of Examining The Manifest Text Of Tweets. To Justify The Suitability Of Content Analysis For Internet Related Communication Studies, The Study Aligns With Riffe, Lacy And Fico (2014, P.22) Idea That –Current Online Content Or Archived Content Found On ...Blog Posts, Tweets And So On May Be Analyzed...|. On What Makes Up A Communication Content, Riffe, Lacy And Fico (2014, P. 23) Elaborate That It Includes –Themes In Political Speeches, Individual Blog Posts Or Entire Exchanges Among Facebook Posters... As Appropriate Communication Content|. And Visual Contents (Tweets Inclusive), Form Large Part Of Internet Communication.

Riffe, Lacy And Fico (2014) Observe That The Universe Of Online Posts Or Tweets Is –Unlimited And Unknowable And Inherently Unstable Over Time| (P. 168). Thus, It Becomes Difficult To Construct Scientific Probability Samples, Which Requires That Every Unit In The Population Has An Equal Chance Of Being Included In The Sample And That Inclusion/Exclusion Of Any Particular Unit Be Based On Random Selection And Not Any Potential Researcher Selection Bias. Purposive Sample Method Was Deployed For This Study With The Selection Of 3960 Samples In Four Year (2015-2019) From Common Hashtag Such As #Tyrantbuhari, #Ibelongtonobody, #Babagoslow, #Pmb, #Nigeriadecide2019, #Nigeria2019, #Rescuenigeria, #Herdsman, #Bokoharam, #Lifeless, #Jubrilfromsudan, #Nationalredline, #Nextlevel, #Atikuiscoming, #Makenigeriaworkagain, #Atikumakethecall, #Iamnorth, #Butiku, #Takeitback, #Nextlevelconfirmed, #Pmb4plus4. These Hashtags Were Selected Based On The



Outcome Of Pre-Testing Of The Trending Hashtags Within The Time Period. This Is In-Line With The Observation Of Lacy, Et Al. (2015) That Researchers Should Conduct A Formal Test Of A Search String's -Recall|| And

-Precision.|| Four Thousand Tweets Were Analyzed In This Study.

The Data For The Study Was Generated Through Data Mining Method Through

Twitter Application Programming Interface (Api). This Process Involves Five Steps:

1. Registration With Twitter As A Developer To Get Access
2. Creating An Api To Deploy Search Terms And Receive Tweets
3. Creating A Program To Deploy The Api, Obtain Tweets, And Parse The Twitter Stream Into A Sas Dataset
4. Performing Exploratory Data Analysis On A Few Tweets To Find The Best Search Terms For The Investigation
5. Extracting And Analyzing A Large Number Of Tweets Pulled Using The Preferred Search Terms

Only Tweets Were Considered As The Unit Of Analysis In The Study. The Category Systems Are Religion, Politics, Region, Ethnic, Gender, Disability And Others. Religious Hate Look At Tweets Which Targeted Individuals Based On Their Religion. Political Category Is Hate Based On Political Inclination. Region Category Deals With Hate Based On Geopolitical Zone. Ethnic Hate Speech Is Targeting Individuals Or Groups Based On Their Tribe. Gender Category Focus On Gender Based Hate Speech And Disability Is About Hate Speech Based On The Disability Of A Person.

Analysis and Interpretations

Analysis Of The Selected Tweets Is Presented Below. The Frequency Of Hate Tweets, The Impression Generated By The Hate Tweets, Prominence Of Handles Tweeting Hate Speech And The Prevalence Of Hate Speech On Twitter In Nigeria.

Table 4.1: Frequency of Hate Tweets 2015 To 2019

Themes	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Politics	2227	56.2	56.2
Religion	465	11.7	68.0
Ethnicity	463	11.7	79.7
Region	650	16.4	96.1
Gender	56	1.4	97.5
Disability	24	.6	98.1
Others	75	1.9	100.0
Total	3960	100.0	

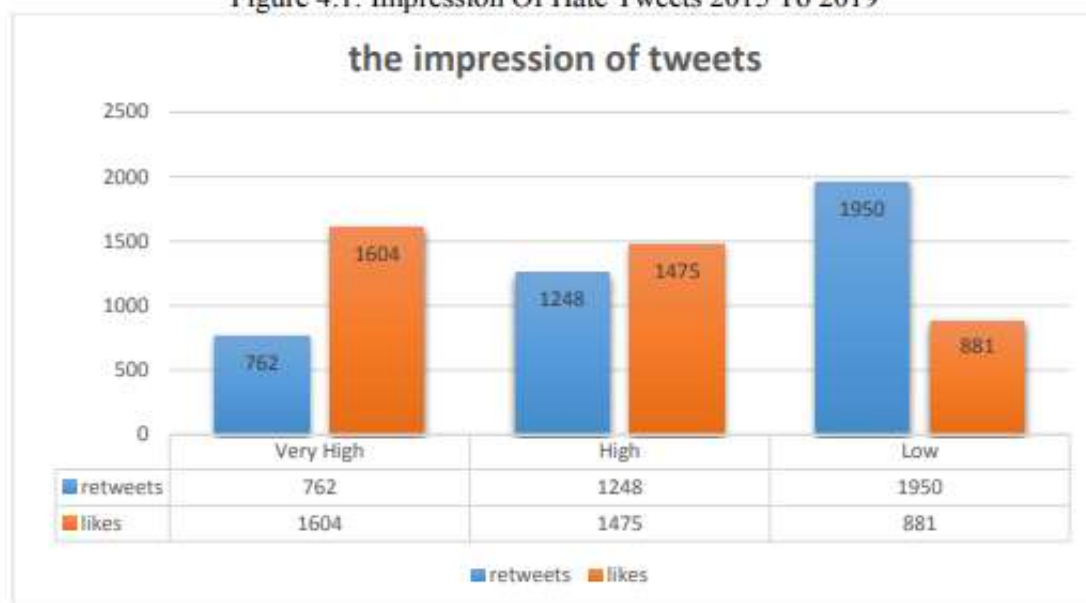
Source: Twitter Api Data Mining, 2019



From The Table Above, It Can Be Seen That Politics Has The Highest Frequency 2227 Representing 56.2%, Followed By Region With 650 Representing 16.4%, Religion And Ethnicity Are On A Tie With Both At 11.7% Each. Others Has 75 Representing 1.9% Of The Data. Gender Category Has 56 Representing 1.4% While Disability Is The Least (24) Representing 0.6% Of The Data.

From The Data, It Can Be Deduced That The Highest Case Of Hate Speech On Twitter In Nigeria Is Political. From 2015 To 2019, Political Hate Speech Pervade The Twitter Space Than Any Other Hate Speech. This Is Because Of The Nature Of Social Media Discourse That Often Takes On Political Coloration.

Figure 4.1: Impression Of Hate Tweets 2015 To 2019

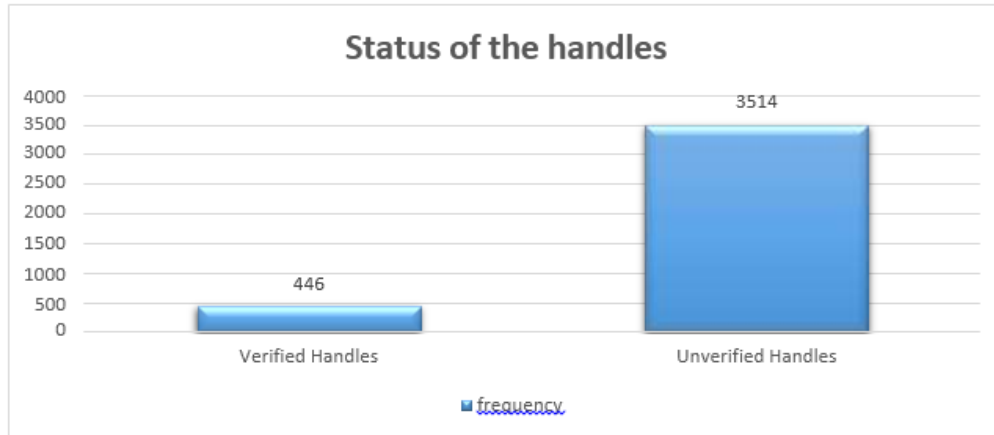


Source: Twitter Api Data Mining, 2019

From The Figure Above, In Terms Of Retweets, The Lowest (499 And Below) Comes First With 1950, This Is Followed By High Which Represents 500-999 At 1244, Lastly, Very High Representing 1000 And Above Retweets At 762. Also, The Likes Records Very High Frequency At 1604 Followed By High With 1475, Low Comes Last With 881. This Indicates That Tweepers In The Very High Category Like Hate Tweets More Than They Retweets. Likewise, The High Category Also Shows More Likes Than Retweets. However, The Low Category Differs At It Records More Retweets Than Likes. This Shows That Tweepers Are More Inclined To Like Hate Based Tweets Than Retweets Them Because Retweets Are Rebroadcasted To The Tweepers Wall But Likes Aren't.



Figure 4.2: The Status of the Handles Tweeting Hate 2015 To 2019

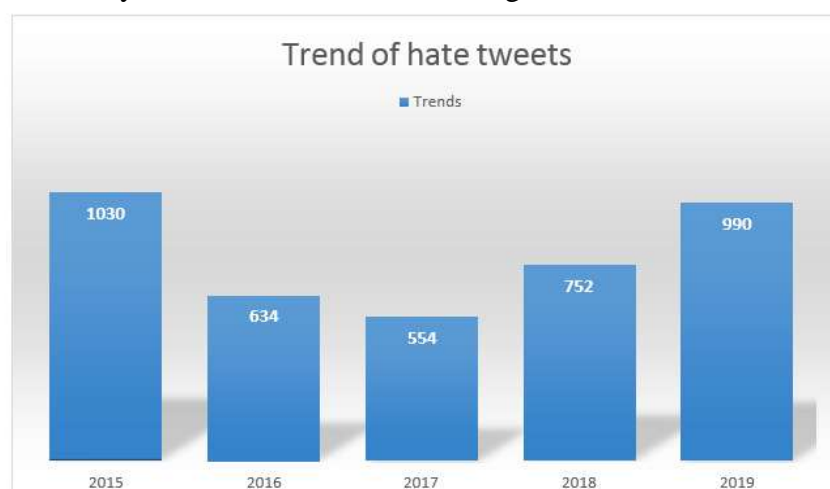


Source: Twitter Api Data Mining, 2019

Figure Above, Unverified Handles Accounted For 3514 (88.7%) Of The Tweets Analysed While Verified Handles Recorded The Frequency Of 446 At 11.2%. This Shows That Hate Tweets Are Mostly From Less Prominent Handles Than Prominent Ones.

Verified Twitter Handles Or Accounts Are The Types Of Accounts With The Blue Badge Which Allow Users To Understand That A Particular Account Is Authentic, Notable, Active, And Of Public Interest. This Types Of Accounts Are Mostly Owned By Government Or Government Officials, Entertainers, Sports Persons, Influential And Public Figures, Among Others. Unverified Handles On The Other Hand Are The Account Belonging To Ordinary Citizens Who Command Less Followership And Engagement On Twitter Compared To The Verified Handles. Because Of The Prominence Of Verified Handles, People Attach So Much Importance To What They Tweet And They Easily Influence Public Discourse.

Figure 4.3: Yearly Trend Of Hate Tweets In Nigeria 2015 To 2019





Source: Twitter Api Data Mining, 2019

Figure 4.3 Above Depicts The Yearly Trend Of Hate Tweets Within The Years Studied. The Data Show That 26% Of The Hate Tweets Were Twitted In 2015. This Is Following Closely By 2019 With 25%, 2018 Has 19% While 2016 Record 16%, The Lowest Is 2017 With 14%. The Highest Year Is 2015 Which Perhaps Reflects The Nature Of Conversation On Twittersphere As At The Time When President Buhari Assumed Office In His First Tenure. From The Data, It Can Be Seen That The Trend Of Hate Tweets Experienced Reduction Between 2016 And 2017. The Period Can Be Regarded As The Moment Of Calm. 2017 Recorded 554 (14%) Which Is The Lowest In The Four Years Studied Partly Because Issues That Generated Hate Are Mostly During Political Campaigns. In 2018, Being The Year Preceding The Election Year, The Figure Rises Again (19%) Being The Period Major Political Gladiators Engage In Series Of Political Activities In Preparation Of Party Primaries And The General Election. The Twittersphere Recorded High Number Of Political Activities During This Period. 2019 Being Another Election Year Also Recorded Huge Number Of Hate Related Tweets. Basically, The Trend Of Hate Speech Of Twitter Is Zigzag Trend As The Tweets Decreases Then Peaked Again When The Election Is Around The Corner.

This Indicates That The Trend Of Hate Tweets In Nigeria Is Directly Connected To Electioneering Period. The Situational Analysis Shows That The Periods The Hate Tweet Rises Are Before The Election, During Elections And Immediately After Elections. However, After Elections, A Semblance Of Normalcy Does Return As Evident In Low Percentage In T2 And T3 Recording 16% And 14% Respectively Compared To Other Periods.

Summary Of The Study (Findings/Suggestions/Conclusion)

The Objective Of This Section Is To Establish Connection Between The Findings Of This Study And The General Body Of Knowledge. In This Regards, The Study Aligns With The Summation Of Rasaan, Udende, Ibrahim And Oba (2017), In Their Study On Hate Speech

In Nigerian Newspapers Using A Critical Discourse Analysis Of Three Newspapers, They Established That Hate Speech Was Prevalent During The 2015 Campaign In Nigeria. They Hypothesised That The 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. This Buttresses The Findings Of This Study Which Show That Politic Was Central To Hate Discourse On Twitter In Nigeria Between The Periods Studied. Majorly, Political Hate Intensified During Electioneering Campaigns. This Is Followed By Region Based Hate Speech. Religion And Ethnic Based Hate Speech Are Very Close While Gender And Disability Recorded Few Frequency.

Confirming The Finding Of Citad (2016) That The Social Media Instead Of Being The Alternative Media Through Which Citizens Can Dilute Nigeria's Ethnicized Pattern Of Politics, Its Contents Show That It Is Much More Ethnicized Than The Old Media Where We Have Some Basic Regulatory Standards. The Study Proves That Political Based Hate Speech Dominates The Twitter Space During The Time Studied. Political Hate Speech Across The Four-Year Space Of This Study Tops The Category Of All The Tweets Analysed Each Year. This Is Partly Because Major Appointment, Policy Formulation And Decisions Of The Administration Is Subjected To Political, Ethnic, Religious And Regional Biases. This Explain



Why Regional Based Hate Tweets Come Second Among The Dominant Themes. This Finding Resonates With The Study Of Ahmed (2018) On The Facebook Comments Of Some Selected Media Platforms On Biafra Agitations And The Arewa Youths' Ultimatum To Igbo Residents In The North. The Study Found That The Comments Were Polarised Along Regional And Religious Lines.

Erjavec And Kovačič (2012) Analysed Hateful Messages In The Comments On Slovenia's Most Popular News Websites Using Triangulation Method, Their Research Identified Different Categories Of Speakers, Each Motivated By Unique Factors: From The -Soldiers|| Who Belong To Political Parties And Non-Governmental Organizations And Use Online Means Systematically To Disseminate Stereotypes And Damage The Reputation Of Their Opponents; To The -Watchdogs|| Who Use Hate Speech To Draw Attention To Social Problems. This Study Shows That Prominently, Verified Account Don't Post Hate Speech Or Retweet Them As Does The Unverified Accounts. The _Soldiers' Are Predominantly In The Unverified Handles While The Verified Handles Can Be Classified As The _Watchdogs' Who Doesn't Directly Post Hate Speech Much But Doesn't Advocate Against It.

Also, The Economist (2017, P. 13) Had Argued That -People Do Not Share Content Solely Because It Is Informative. They Share Information Because They Want Attention For Themselves, And For What The Things They Share Say About Them. They Want To Be Heard And Seen And Respected. They Want To Post To Be Liked, Tweets To Be Retreated|| Against This Backdrop, This Study Established That Tweeps With Less Followers And With Unverified Handled Tweets And Retweets More Hate Speech Than The Verified Handles. This Is Because Unpopular Handles Are Prone To Follow Bandwagon To Gain Popularity And Followers. However, Verified Handles Most Times Are Conscious Of What They Tweet And Retweets.

The Study Also Show That The Trend Of Hate Tweets In Nigeria Is Directly Connected To Electioneering Period. The Situational Analysis Shows That The Periods The Hate Tweet Rises Are Before The Election, During Elections And Immediately After Elections. However, After Elections, A Semblance Of Normalcy Does Return As Evident In Figure 4.3 Compared To Other Periods. This Finding Buttressed The Finding Of Ezeibe And Ikeanyibe (2017) On The Trend Of Hate Speech In Eight Major Newspapers In Nigeria From 2010-2015. The Study Found That Hate Speech Has Been Elevated To The Status Of A Political Campaign Strategy And It Accounts For The Escalation Of Pre, During And Post-Election Violence In Nigeria. The Rise In The May 2015 Figure (Being Post-Election Period) Was The By- Product Of Hate Speech During The 2015 General Election Campaign. This Aligned With The Summation Of Pate, Ibrahim, Pereira, Ya'u, Agbanyin And Bagu (2017) That During The 2015 General Elections, Obnoxious Verbal And Non-Verbal Communication Mechanism Were Deployed To Promote Political Candidates And Denigrate Opponents. Political Gladiators And Their Followers Used Distasteful Contents To Campaign For Votes On Social Media. This Study Also Find Increment In The Occurrence Of Hate Tweets In 2019 Due To The General Elections. This Buttressed The Finding Of Umati (2013) On The Kenyan General Elections Where It Was Established That The Two Months Preceding The Election Witnessed An Increase In Online Offensive Speeches Circulated On Social Media (Mainly Facebook And Twitter).



Suggestion and Recommendation

Despite The Provision Of Freedom Of Speech In The Nigerian 1999 Constitution However, Because Of The Silver Lining In The Wording Of Free Speech, It Is Sometimes Misconstrued And Shrouded With Hate Speech. Gagliardone, Et. Al. (2015) Had Established That The Line Between Free Speech And Hate Speech Is Blur. There Is Therefore Need For The Review Of The Constitution To Clearly State What Constitute Free And Hate Speech.

The Study Also Recommended For Legal Framework For The Regulation Of Hate Speech On Social Media. Although There Was A Bill Proposed By Senator Sabi Abdullahi Which Sought For The Establishment Of Hate Speech Commission And Death Penalty For Convict Of Hate Speech (Premium Times, 2018), This Bill Has Been Shut-Down By Civil Society Organizations And The Citizens As A Ploy By Government To Fizzle Dissenting Voices And Limit Free Speech. However, Globally, Nations Are Developing Guidelines To Regulate Hate Speech. Most Importantly, Social Media Regulations Are Being Developed In Advance Democracies Especially In The Wake Of The Rise In Nationalist Movement Around The Globe. Nigeria Also Need A Form Of Regulation In The Wake Of This Increase In Hate Speech. Specifically, Conventional Media Platforms Now Post Contents They Dare Not Publish On Their Conventional Media Platforms On Social Media Out Of Fear From Regulatory Body.

Twitter Likes, Retweets And Number Of Followers Is Becoming Oxygen. So Many Tweeps Relied On It Because Twitter Impression Validates Their Influential Status. As A Result, Trending Was Elevated To Usual Phenomenon, As Such, The Urge For Contribution To Every Trending Topic Becomes Imperative No Matter How Demeaning The Trending Topic Is. This Study Therefore Recommend That Influencers Be Cautious Of The Trending Hashtags Or Topic They Help Promote.

Also, Political Parties Should Try To Be More Civil And Campaign Base On Issues And Not Attacks On Personalities As Evidence Has Shown That The Tensed Campaign Hate Rhetoric Continues Even After The Electioneering Campaign. Even Though There Are Relevant Sections In The Electoral Acts 2010 To Guide The Utterance And Conduct Of Elections And Campaigns In Nigeria, There Are Ample Evidence From The Spat Of Hate Speech To Prove That The Provision Of The Electoral Acts Is Not Being Adhered To And There Is No Much Implementation Of The Provision Of The Act. Therefore, The Study Recommends The Strict And Holistic Implementation Of The Provisions In The Electoral Act And Met Out Appropriate Sanctions Against Defaulters.

3. CONCLUSION

This Study Has No Doubt Put Into Perspective The Trend Of Hate Speech On One Of The Popular Social Media Platforms In Nigeria – Twitter. Twitter And Other Social Media Platforms Have No Doubt Brought About Easy Access In Public Communication Devoid Of The Conventional Hegemony. However, The Prevalence Of Hate Speech And Ethnic Profiling



Is Bringing To Fore The Argument For Regulation Of Social Media Space.

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