

**Social media Usership in Benue State and the Proliferation of Hate Speech on the Nigerian
Social Media Space**

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Abstract

The study was an assessment of social media usership and the proliferation of hate speech on Social Media Space in Benue State. The aim was to ascertain the specific social media platforms in which hate speech is mostly used, identify the nature of the relationship between social media use and the proliferation of hate speech and to pinpoint the socio-cultural factors responsible for the proliferation of hate speech. The research was a survey with questionnaire as instrument. The population of the study was 38,778 drawn from four major LGA in the State. Aroaye's (2004) formula for determining sample size was used to arrive at a sample of 384 randomly selected for the study. The study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory and public sphere theory. Findings revealed that Facebook and Twitter are the social media platforms in which hate speech is mostly used in Benue State and that abuse of power by political leaders is the major factor for the proliferation of hate speech. Furthermore, cheap accessibility and protection of identity were discovered to be the major backbone for proliferation of hate speech while multicultural divide and marginalization were discovered to be the major socio cultural factors responsible for

proliferation of hate speech. The study therefore recommends that government should ensure equitable distribution of resources and avoid marginalization of some religious ethnic groups. Also, laws protecting against hate speech should be enacted as fast as possible to help curtail the proliferation of hate speech on the social media in Nigeria, provided such laws are not enacted in sentiment to suppress or witch-hunt certain truths, groups or individuals amongst others.

Keywords: Hate speech, Social media, New media, Proliferation, Marginalization

Background of Study

Social media platforms create an enabling environment for anyone with the resources to interact, keep in touch with loved ones, share ideas, learn and unlearn as the case may be. It helps to bridge the social gap that the conventional media have held for so long. People usually feel comfortable sharing deep truths and heartfelt concerns as well as taking advantage of the unlimited access for audience participation. Social media platforms avail to fulfill personal or collective objectives.

Social media originated to facilitate interaction among friends and families. However, it was later adopted by the merchants who wanted to take advantage of the new communication to reach out to customers. The power of the social media is the ability to connect and share information with anyone on earth or with many people simultaneously.

Nowadays, the manner in which people receive news and communicate with one another have been redefined by the internet particularly social media. The arrival of new media have moved communication away from an era of communicating ideas usually orally and only to small number of people, to an era in which individuals can use a variety of diffusion channels in order to communicate instantaneously with people who are a long distance away (Suemo, 2020).

The liberty to write and generate contents without any meticulous review or protocol simply insinuate that this new medium of virtual communication allows people to feel greater freedom in the way they express themselves unlike other conventional platforms like print and broadcast journalism.

Since the advent of social media, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram and YouTube, global peace and unity have continued to float along racial, cultural, religious and ethnic divides. This is because users social media platforms drawn across the globe, utilize new media for specific personal and sometimes unguided purposes thus,

opening the gates for unscrupulous influencers to graze freely and create contents that in some cases threaten world peace and unity in disturbing proportions. In the light of this development, a significant proportion of social media contents particularly in developing countries where the technology is relatively new, serve as channel of hate speech.

At the instance of social media, the Nigeria state in recent times, have come face to face with teething ethnic and religious divergences with social media further deepening the wounds that ultimately isolate us as a people across political, ethnic, religious and cultural lines. The reason is not farfetched from the unguarded liberties of expression that social media platforms present to its unassuming users.

In view of the above, this study seeks to identify social media platforms in which hate speech is mostly used. Furthermore, the study intends to find out the nature of the relationship between social media usership and the proliferation of hate speech and to ascertain the socio-cultural factors responsible for the spread of hate speech on the social media space in Benue State Nigeria.

Research Objective

The specific objective of the study is to:

1. Ascertain the specific social media platforms in which hate speech is mostly used in Benue State.
2. Identify the factors responsible for the spread of hate speech on social media space.
3. Pinpoint the nature of the relationship between social media usership and the proliferation of hate speech.
4. Find out the socio-cultural factors responsible for the proliferation of hate speech on the Nigerian social media space

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification on Social media

Social media comprises communication websites that facilitate relationship forming between users from diverse backgrounds, resulting in a rich social structure. The study examined various definitions and views of some scholars on social media. For instance, Agwuocha (2019)

refers to social media as various computer-based interactive/platforms that facilitate quick access to and sharing of pieces of information of various contents through virtual networks.

Spagnoletti et al (2015) and Xu & Zhang (2013) in Kapoor et al (2018) commonly refer to social media as a set of internet-based technologies/applications, which are aimed at promoting the creation, modification, update and exchange of user-generated content, whilst establishing new links between content creators themselves. Bharati et al (2014) in Kapoor *et al* (2018) refer to social media as a technology “not focused on transactions but on collaboration and communication across groups both inside and outside the firm”.

Other definitions of social media considered in this study are those of Wakefield & Wakefield (2016) , Schlagwein & Hu (2016). In addition, Tang et al (2017) in Kapoor et al (2018) also identify social media as user generated media which is a source “online information, created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, bands, services personalities and issues.

All of the aforementioned description clearly regards social media as communication tools supported by internet-based technologies for dissemination of information. Most of the definition of social media acknowledge the high concentration of user generated contents across such platforms.

A Synopsis of Hate speech

Hate speech has been in existence before the late 1980s. Just that, it has a different dimension and is in a different form. For instance, in the writing of Kloskos (2012 p.130) in Abdulkarim (2020) while explaining Aristotle’s natural slavery and subordination of women, Klosko mentioned that the Greeks believed that they were naturally superior to non-Greeks, and so enslaving them is justified. It implies that, people of non Greek origin are inferior and are referred to as others. Therefore, Aristotle’s defense of slavery and the subordination of women were not given attention. Rather the following statement regarding the defense of slavery was stated:

“In order to keep Aristotle’s defense of slavery in proper historical perspective, we should realize slavery was unquestioned aspect of the ancient world and remained in

existence through much of the world for countries”. Kloskos (2012) in Abdugarim (2020).

This shows that since the ancient of the 14th century, hate speech is being in existence, just that it has not taken a modern structure of today’s hate speech, because of the reason that then, the perception of minorities by majorities is weak compared to today’s rule of law.

Also, Bleich (2011) in Abdugarim (2020) wrote that hate speech can be traced back to 1936 when the backbench lawmakers of the British parliament proposed the banning racial or religious prejudice in light of the aggressive behavior of Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists. The reason why this has become the origin of hate speech was because of the attempt they made (backbench lawmakers) to legislate against the racist speech.

The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019) defines hater speech as, communication that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, decent, gender or other identifying factor.

Kayambazinthu & Moyo (2002) in Uzochukwu (2019) refer to hate speech as “war waged on others by means of words”. This understanding of hate speech is mainly characterized by the use of symbols and words.

Scholarly definitions and points of view on Hate Speech

The study examined hate speech from several scholars as it relates to this study. Enahoro (2017) sees hate speech as polluted statements, especially by Nigerians attacking each other on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Nadim & Fledmoe (2016) describe hate speech as any persecuting, degrading or discriminating speech on ground of the recipient’s minority group identity; and that such speech regarded as hate speech must be conveyed publicly or in the presence of others and be directed at a certain group or on individuals’ assumed group identity.

Furthermore, Brown (2017) highlighted different terms of expression that can be regarded as hate speech. They include: insulting, defaming, degrading, negative stereotyping or inciting hatred, violence or discrimination against people in virtue of their nationality, religion, race, ethnicity, identify among others.

Vanguard.com (2017) avers that Professor Yemi Osinbanjo refers to hate speech as any unlawful use of violence or intimidation against individuals or groups especially for political aims. On the other hand, European Court of Human Right (2017) states that hate speech(es) in its entity connotes “hatred” in all ramifications. It may be hatred expressed towards a nation, ethnic groups, marginal groups or personalities especially among the politicians.

Related Literature

Factors Underpinning the Proliferation of Hate Speech on the Social Media Space in Nigeria and its Adverse Impact on the Construction of National Unity

With regards to what motivates hate speech, this study posit that some of the factors that spur people into hate speech(es) is the quest for power, dominance, arrogance, ignorance, lack of tolerance, lack of respect for people and authority and most times out of frustration from bad governance and injustice”.

. Many scholars have pointed out several factors that motivates people into hate speech(es), they include factors such as lack of tolerance, political clashes, discrimination, enmity and the openness of the social media. For instance, before the emergence of social media, Spiegel (1999) in Uzochukwu (2019) predicted that the internet will be another communication tool for racist and hate “mongers” to spread their message which is considered by Nemes (2002) in Alakali, Faga & Mbursa (2017) as very important channel for those who want to be spreading hate messages.

Witschege (2008) in Uzochukwu (2019) however presented a more balanced understanding of the web’s potentials within political communication that whether the web enables deliberation or not, it depends on how people utilize the opportunities provided online because of the presumed horizontal, and user friendly nature of the social media which affords opportunities for greater participation in the public-spheres. According to Olga & Roihu (2016) “hate speech” includes every stance purporting to jeopardize the rights of an ethnic, religious or national group, in clear violation of the principles of equal dignity of and respect for the cultural differences among human groups.

Nemes (2002) in Alakali, Faga & Mbursa (2017) avers that hate speech can provoke pain, distress, fear, embarrassment and isolation to individuals. While hate speech towards a group of

people can bring inequality problems and isolations, it creates the feeling of fear and discourages them from participating in the community and expressing their opinion

According to Gagliardone et al (2015) online hate speech is not essentially different from similar expressions found offline; however, there are some specific characteristics as well as challenges unique to online contents and its regulations.

Regarding anonymity or pseudonymity (false names), the possibility of anonymous posting on social media networks tend to make perpetrators of hate speech more comfortable to express their feelings, because their hidden identities dissipate their fears of having to deal with any consequences of their action.. Citron & Norton (2011) in Alakali, Faga & Mbursa (2017) added that Anonymity especially social media may also be obstacle to prosecution.

On the causes of hate speech, Eziebe (2015), Okafor & Alabi (2017) and Rasaan et al (2017) argue that beyond the nation of stereotypes, the phenomenon of hate speech has been rigorously investigated and linked to politics and power contestation. From a critical perspective, Rasaan et al (2017) establish that hate speech in Nigeria is the instrument of political campaigning and expose the Nigerian press as allies of politicians when evoking hatred and violence among ethnic and political groups through their newspapers.

Gagliardone et al (2015) posit that hate crimes rarely occur without prior stigmatization and dehumanization of targets. In an analysis of hate contents on Slovenia's news website, Erjavec & Kovaic (2012) in Ayansola (2021) attempted to expose the individuals behind hatred and their reasons for its expressions. Their interviews with some of hate speech users revealed that speakers disseminate stereotypes and damage the reputation of their opponents in order to draw attention prevailing social problem.

Falana (2017) similarly argued that, multi-ethnicity, multi-religious and multi-cultural characteristics has made Nigeria prone to sharp divides that influence political and social affiliations in addition to other issues instigating hate speech. Furthermore, Uzochukwu (2019) opines that the advent of social media has amplified citizen journalism and everyone has become a reporter. She states further that the social media has established an ideal platform to adapt and spread hate speech.

Because of its decentralized, anonymous and interactive structure, Okoh (2018) states that tribalism reigns in Nigerians and it play a great part in the country's current quagmire. However, Suberu (2006) in Ogbonna, Okoro & Wogu (2020) argue that the absent of collective identity by way of ethnic groups in Nigeria worsens its experience of hate speech.

Ogbonna, Okoro & Wogu affirm that during the 2015 general elections, violent political metaphors such as framing of electoral participation in violent terms and political backlash were freely and extensively used by the politicians to discredit their opponents. These hate speeches, came in the form of advertorials, name-calling, mudslinging and other forms of abusive language which in turn heightened the level of political instability.

The submissions of Ogbonna, Okoro & Wogu depicts the political instability in Benue occasioned by the fangs of hate-speech and foul language as has always been involving the former senator representing the Benue North-West and the present Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on Inter-Governmental Affairs Senator George Akume and the Governor of Benue State Samuel Ortom witnessed recently in a controversial protest organized by women said to be loyalists of incumbent Governor to disparage Senator Akume where abusive language was used describing the former Senator as a failed abortion. Describing the influence of hate speech on citizens, Adibe (2015) posit that, it is a catalyst for violence..

Hate Speech on Social Media: Its Effects on Morality and the Need for Laws Protecting Against it.

Scholarly studies have established the effects of social media hate speech on Nigerian communities and the efforts by relevant authorities to mitigate the menace. Alakali, Faga & Mbursa (2016) posit that though many people understood what hate speech is yet, do not understand its legal consequence. They found that hate speech and foul language is mostly prevalent on social media platforms in Nigeria. They thus recommended that there should be awareness as to what constitute hate speech, and that a monitoring mechanism agency should be put in place to identify and remove hate speech content on social media platforms.

According to them, each country has devised legal ways of dealing with issues of hate speech. However, the effectiveness of handling the laws dealing with hate speech remains questionable in Nigeria because dealing with perpetrator depends on one's personality. The

European Court of Human Right states that when speeches do not incite others to violence, resistance, revolt, it is either negationist or insulting; it cannot be termed hate speech.

When dealing with cases concerning incitement to hatred and freedom of expression, the European Court of Human Right made use of two approaches. The approach of exclusion from the protection of the convention provided for by Article 17: prohibition of abuse of rights which is aimed at preventing persons from inferring from the convention any right to engage in activities or acts aimed at destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth in the fundamental values of the convention.

The second is the approach of setting restrictions on protection, provided for by Article 10, paragraph 2 which is restrictions deemed necessary in the inherent national security, public safety, the prevention of disorder and crime, the protection of health or morals and the protection of the rights and freedom of others. This approach is adopted when the speech in question, though considered as hate speech is not meant to destroy the fundamental value of the convention, European Court of Human Rights (2017).

The above submission implies that much as freedom of speech is allowed in countries of the world, such must not be abused to the detriment of other people or the nation. Hate speech in some countries is not a legal term and is constitutionally protected while in some, a victim of hate speech may seek redress under civil law, criminal or both restriction on hate speeches become necessary as some critics are of the opinion that hate speech is used to silence the critics of social politics that have been poorly implemented especially with the internet which is a major part of media communication. Thus George Orwell in Wikipedia.org (2017) states that Directors of Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter should agree on European Code of conduct obligating them to review articles to be hired and give notification for removal services within 24hours. However, with the signing of the agreement, social websites still find it difficult to identify and remove hate speech from their sites.

According to Wikipedia.org several laws have been promulgated to prevent people and groups from hate speech. Such include: The International Convention on Civil and Political Right (ICCPR) which states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitute incitement or discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Hate speech laws have different goals in different countries for example. In Australia, hate speech law seek to prevent victimization on account of race. In Belgium, it is targeted at making acts of racism or xenophobia illegal, while in Brazil it is targeted at racism with no right to bail for the defendant. In Chile, it is a punishable offence for anyone who through any means of social communication makes publication and transmission intended to promote hatred or hostility toward person due to their race, sex, religion or nationality and this law extends to expressions transmitted via internet.

In South Africa, the promotion of equality and prevention of unfair discrimination Act 2000, states that no person may publish, propagate, advocate or communicate words based on one or more of the prohibited grounds, against any person that could reasonably be constructed to demonstrate a clear intention to hurtful, to be harmful or to incite harm or clear intention to hurtful, be harmful or to incite harm or propagate harm (Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 2000, S.10 (1) Wikipedia.org). However in Nigeria in the words of the Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, hate speech is equated with terrorism (Vanguardngr.com, 2017).

The foregoing view implies that each country knows what constitute hate speech and decides the penalty to be meted on the offender. Falana (2017), however, states that Nigeria has enough laws to deal with hate speech but the political will to arrest and prosecute those who contravene the law is lacking. He also cites various criminal codes that apply to offences such as criminal defamation, inciting statements, breach of peace, criminal intimidation and publication of statements, rumours or reports which may disturb public peace.

Enahoro (2017) however strongly oppose the Vice President's view on hate speech submitting that hate speech is unknown in Nigeria law that equating it with terrorism means hate speech carrying death penalty. He submits that there are laws under which police can charge citizens for seditious incitements against government; and that the government must legislate for hate speech against group taking cognizance of the International Convenient Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitements to discrimination, hostility, or violence against a group should be prohibited by law.

Such laws can be to protect human dignity and those meant to maintain public order. Various reasons have been adduced for causes of hate speech in Nigeria such as impunity which makes people to be status drunk, negative roles of media due to the fact that they want advert patronage, failures of governance, low level education, which culminates into low level of awareness and enlightenment and illiteracy. Others include class war, which is due to disparity between the rich and the poor, religious intolerance and ethnic differences among others. Okupe (2018) in Olufunke (2019) sums up to the causes of hate speech as being a societal frustration among the rich, the poor, the government and the governed.

The social media phenomenon is one of the most remarkable innovations in the 21st century. It has changed the way individuals share, understand and react to social events in general and conflicts in particular, Dauda et al (2017).

Nigeria is pluralistic in terms of ethnic, regional and religious identities. Political elites, ethnic and religious organizations have over the years exploited these identities which later stirred up agitation for power and control of resources by the social groups that were once silenced, Danaan (2017).

According to Eziebe (2015) the phenomenon of hate speech has taken an extensive dimension in Africa due to poor regulations. Hate speech has permeated every nook and cranny of Africa. Observably, hate speech has eaten deep into the bone marrows of Nigerians and it has continued unabated. Hatred between ethnic group that make up Nigeria has intensified as the use of hate speech continues unregulated.

Bello (2017) argues however that, Nigerians have failed in their comments on national values, to draw a line between hate speech and constructive criticism. Considering the porous nature of the country's fault-lines of ethnicity and religion, the need to regulate the proliferation of hateful and inciting speeches through the social media therefore becomes inevitable. In view of that, the Nigerian government has taken steps to curb hate speech. Nigerian vice-president in August, 2017, bewailed that, "hate speech will no longer be tolerated, as the silence of the country's leaders on hate speech would be a grave disservice to the nation, its peace and future. We have drawn a line against hate speech, it will not be tolerated, it will be taken as an act of terrorism and all of the consequences will follow. Ayitogo (2017) & Bello (2017)

Vanguard (2017) recently avers that, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) launched a strategic campaign tagged: 'say no to hate speech' on social media platforms. As the Director General of NOA observed, "in the last few months, our country and its people have witnessed a disturbing trend in social and political conversations that sometimes call to question our traditional friendship, love for neighbor and sense of unity. If you look at the social media continuous Vanguard (2017), a channel mostly used by our youths, the voices of hate is what you hear. There is an urgent need for all men and women of good will in Nigeria to take measures of goodwill in Nigeria to take measures to curb hate speeches and promote national cohesion, love and unity.

Yet, the moves against hate speech by the Federal Government triggered fresh controversies among civil society and political organization about what constitutes hate speech. While some political and public affairs commentators lament that such move is unconstitutional as it runs the risk of trampling on citizens' rights (particularly that of freedom of speech and expression). Others succumb to the need for a law to regulate hate speech. A Lagos-based human rights lawyer, Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa expressed in a statement to Premium Times, that "any law capable of hindering the freedom of expression granted under section 39 of the 1999 Constitution and the African Charter would be illegal and unconstitutional... This is just an attempt by the ruling APC government to gag citizens and such law is ever passed, we shall challenge it to court, Ezeamalu (2017).

Similarly William (2017) gather the views of the Ekiti State Governor, Ayodele Fayose who considered the move to classify hate speech an act of terrorism as a plot by the APC led government to silence the opposition party – PDP. In his words Fayose stated, "this appears as another plot to silence the opposition and make bold to say that, saying the truth concerning the country and its rulers cannot be termed as hate speech..." In a related statement, Rivers State Governor, Nyeson Wike, described the move as a threat merely aimed at instilling fears into members of the opposition, PDP. The statement reads "I don't know what they refer to as hate speech, I don't know whether we should all keep quiet when things are going wrong" Gogo (2017).

A former aide to ex-president Goodluck Jonathan, Doyin Okupe, emphasizes the need to protect those in government against what is said about them on social media and to also prevent

reckless statement from media that can incite or dehumanize people for no other reason except that they are in government offices.

Okupe stated that... I agree that there is a justification for the law and that we need to look into the situation properly and a proper law should be enacted to control what we say and how we say them especially on the social media. There is absolute need for sanity because what goes in the social media is pathetic, it is unthinkable” Bello (2017). Further Governor Nasiru El-Rufai of Kaduna State observed hate speech and fake news are the biggest threat to national security and called for collective action to tackle them. According to him “the social media have been used to incite people to violence... there is need to curtail the emerging trend of using social to create crisis in the country. I think collectively, we have to fight it and discourage those behind it by wresting and prosecuting them”. NAN (2017) admits situations of this sort, it calls to question, the possibility of achieving harmonious living in a society and polity enmeshed with provocative tendencies as evident in Nigeria. While the negative use of social media poses serious threats to peaceful coexistence (through the proliferation of hate speech), its potential to contribute positively to peaceful coexistence will remain untapped, until these excesses are duly check mated.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and gratification theory was propounded by Blumler & Katz (1974) with 5 basic assumptions. According to them, it is assumed that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The theorist posits that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. Uses and gratifications assume that the media user has alternate choices to satisfy their need.

According to McQuails (2008, p.424) uses and gratification theory is promised on understanding why people actively seek out specific media outlets and contents for gratification purposes. The theory discusses how users proactively search for media that will not only meet a given need but enhance knowledge, social interaction and diversion. It assumes that members of the audience are not passive but taken an active role in interpreting and integrating media into

their own lives. The theory also holds that audience is responsible for choosing media to meet their needs. The major assumption of the theory suggests that people use the media to fulfill specific gratification. This theory according to McQuail would then imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewer's gratification.

Applying the uses and gratification theory to this study, users of social media are intentional seekers of such messages. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose. Thus, they are active and not passive.

Public Sphere Theory

As regards public spheres theory, the term was coined by a German philosopher Jurgen Habermas in 1962 in a book he titled "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. The public sphere is an area where people come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. Such a discussion is called public debate and is defined as expression of views on matters that are of concern to the public—often, but not always, with opposing or diverging views been expressed by participants in the discussion. Public debate takes place mostly through the mass media, but also at meetings, social media or academic publication".

Research Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design while questionnaire was used as research instrument. The population comprises the total number of social media users in Benue State. In order to determine the accurate population of social media users in Benue State, the researchers utilized the January (2021) projection as published by Simona Varrella, March 20, 2021. According to the figure released by the source stated above, social media users figure was estimated at approximately thirty three (33) million. Therefore, since the focus of this study had been reduced to capture only social media users in Benue State, the projected thirty three (33) million was then distributed equitably among the 36 States including the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja).

Thus:

$$\frac{33,000,000}{37}$$

$$= 891,891.891$$

$$\cong 891,892$$

This therefore implies that the population figure for social media users in Benue State was 891,892.

The study therefore selected major towns from the three senatorial zones in Benue State including Katsina-Ala for zone A, Gboko zone B, Otukpo for zone C and Makurdi the State capital. Furthermore, getting the exact population figure of social media users in the four selected towns necessitated another equitable distribution of social media users in Benue State among the 23 local government areas in Benue State. Therefore the distribution was done as thus:

$$\frac{891,892}{23}$$

$$= 38,777.91$$

$$\cong 38,778$$

Therefore, 38,778 was multiplied by 4 selected LGA including the state capital (38778 x 4) which gave a total of 155,112 as population of the study.

The sample size was statistically determined using the formula provided by Aroaye (2004). According to him the formula can be used where the population size is greater than 10,000. The sample size was determined using Aroaye (2004) formula.

Thus:

$$N = \frac{Z^2 Pq}{d^2}$$

Where:

N = The desired sample size (when the population is greater than ten thousand)

Z = The standard deviation set at 1.96 since a significant level of 95% is desired.

P = Proportion in the target population estimated to have a particular characteristics under study. If there is no reasonable estimate then 50% i.e. (0.50) is used.

$Q = I.O.P$ i.e. the proportion of the population that does not share the characteristics under study

$D =$ Degree of the accuracy desired.

$$ZP = 1.96$$

$$P = 50\% \text{ i.e. } 0.5$$

$$Q = (1 - P) = 0.5$$

$$d = (0.05)^2$$

Therefore:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 384$$

In addition, the sample was selected using Aroaye (2004) formula of equitable distribution technique by dividing 384 (Sample size) by 4 (LGA) which gave a figure of 96. Therefore 96 respondents were randomly selected from each of the four major towns as listed below:

Table 1: Number of selected respondents from each council ward

S/N	Town	No. of Respondents
1.	Gboko	96
2.	Katsina-Ala	96
3.	Makurdi	96
4.	Otupko	96
5.	Total	384

While data was analyzed using simple percentages to determine the frequency of response in relation to questions contained in the questionnaire.

Data presentation

Table 2: Social Media Platform in which hate speech is mostly used

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	162	44
Twitter	134	37
WhatsApp	41	11
Instagram	29	8
Total	366	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Information from the table shows that Facebook and Twitter is the social media platforms in which hate speech is mostly used in Benue State.

Table 3: Factors Responsible for the Spread of Hate Speech on Social Media

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Abuse of power	120	33
Favouritism	115	31
Lawlessness	96	26
Ordinary hatred	35	10
Total	366	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Data on the table implies that, abuse of power by political leaders is the major factor for the proliferation of hate speech in the social media space in Benue State.

Table 4: Nature of the Relationship between Social Media and the Proliferation of Hate Speech in Nigeria

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cheap accessibility	120	33
Protection of identity	161	44
Lack of control	52	14
Availability	33	9
Total	366	100

*Source: Field Survey, 2021*Summary

Data from the table show that cheap accessibility and protection of users' identity is the major backbone for the proliferation of hate speech on social media in Benue State.

Socio-cultural Factors that could be responsible for the Proliferation of Hate Speech in Nigeria

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Multicultural divide	157	43
Marginalization	112	31
Cultural history	78	21
Frequent hostility	19	5
Total	366	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Information from the table above, implies that multicultural divide and marginalization were discovered to be the reason responsible for the proliferation of hate speech on social media in Benue State

Discussion of Findings

The study assessed social media usership and the proliferation of hate speech in the Nigerian social media space with emphasis on Benue State. It sought to examine the ever increasing hate speeches on social media space amongst others.

Findings established that Facebook and Twitter are mostly explored by users on social media platforms to post hate speech(es) on social media. This clearly gave answer to the first

objective of the study which was to identify the social media platform in which hate speech is mostly used in Benue State. This is in line with the uses and gratification theory by Blumer ^ Katz (1974) which serve as one of the theoretical standpoint for this study. One of the assumptions of the theory is that “media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user” in this case social media users in Benue State considers Facebook and Twitter as the most suitable media source to satisfy their need to air out their views on any issue, they also choose the platform based on the fact that it can hide their identity.

Furthermore, findings from the second objective of the study revealed that abuse of power by political leaders and favoritism are the major factors for the proliferation of hate speech in the social media space in Benue State

In line with the third objective of the study which sought to find out the factors responsible for the spread of hate speech in Benue State. Findings revealed that cheap accessibility and the fact that users identity is hidden gave most people the impetus to engage in hate speech with reckless abandon.

More so, this finding, aligned with Citron & Norton (2011) in Alakali, Faga & Mbursa (2017) they categorically stated that “Anonymity especially on social media may also be obstacle to prosecution and the fact that it has the ability to protect users’ identity. Regarding anonymity or pseudomity (false names), the possibility of anonymous posting on social media networks tend to make perpetrators of hate speech more comfortable to express their feelings, because their hidden identities dissipate their fears of having to deal with any consequences of their action”.

In addition to that Uzochukwu (2019) will be considered to be right in their opinion about the liberality of social media when they stated that “the advent of social media has amplified citizen journalism and everyone has become a reporter. She states further that the social media has established an ideal platform to adapt and spread hate speech”.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the relationship between social media usership and the proliferation of hate speech on the social media space in Benue State is due to the frustrations the masses usually get by the activities of bad governance. This bad governance can be likened to what the researchers posit in this study. They posited that “some of the factors that spur people

into hate speech(es) is the quest for power, dominance, arrogance, ignorance, lack of tolerance, lack of respect for people and authority and most times out of frustration from bad governance and injustice”

The fourth findings of this study imply that multicultural divide and marginalization were discovered to be the reason responsible for the proliferation of hate speech on social media in Benue State. This implies that a greater number of hate speeches on the social media are based on politics and cultural divide.

Furthermore, Eziebe (2015), Okafor & Alabi (2017) and Rasaan et al (2017) shares the same line of thought with this study when they argue that “beyond the nation of stereotypes, the phenomenon of hate speech has been rigorously investigated and linked to politics and power contestation” beyond all reasonable doubt, we can conclude that most hate speeches on social media are not far-fetched from politics in one way or the other.

Conclusion

In line with the findings above, the study concludes that politics, marginalization of some cultural and religious groups, favouritism, and bad governance constitute the major reasons underpinning the gratification of the social media by users to perpetuate the act of generating and distributing hate contents on the social media space in Nigeria. The porosity of the social media platforms especially the cheap accessibility provided by Facebook to its users’ and lack of control forms another fundamental reason behind the proliferation of hate speech on the social media. Furthermore, the adverse effect of the proliferation of hate speech on social media platforms provides impasse to the construction of national/cultural alliance in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions reached, it is important to note that:

- (1) Hate speech is capable of dividing the country and hence laws protecting against hate speech should be enacted by the national assembly as fast as possible to help curtail the proliferation of hate speech on the social media in Nigeria. Provided such laws are not enacted in sentiment to suppress or witch-hunt certain truths, groups or individuals.

- (2) The fact that relevance of social media in the country cannot be denied, laws should be enacted to control the abusive use of it in Nigeria as a means of reducing the spread of hate speech in Nigeria.
- (3) The Federal Character should be utilized in order to ensure equitable distribution of resources and avoid marginalization of some religious ethnic groups which are the socio-cultural factors necessitating the proliferation of hate speech in Nigeria social media space.

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