

Content Analysis of Hate Speech in the 2023 General Elections in Two Selected Newspapers in Nigeria



Eric Msughter Aondover, Timothy Ekeledirichukwu Onyejelem, Collins Sopuruchukwu Iloanya

Abstract: *Hate speech is one of the communication challenges affecting the human society. Not restricted to any group, ethnicity or country, but rather a global mass phenomenon. Election is a common phenomenon where the masses raise accusative and provocative statements resultant to hate speech to individuals or specified groups. The research therefore aims to comparatively examine the prevalence of hate speech in The Nation and Vanguard newspapers. The study utilizes Agenda Setting and Framing theory in explaining the manifestation of hate speech during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Utilizing the content analysis, the study evaluates the manifestation of hate speech within the periods of six months (prior to election, during the election and after the election). The data was collected using the coding sheet and stratified sampling by days of the week was adopted. A sample size of five hundred and thirty-six (536) news on hate speech was analyzed in the two newspapers. Based on the findings, it was discovered that the two newspapers under study reported a high level of hate speech cases published prior to the election than during or post election time with 71.2%. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the media should strive to raise awareness about the consequences of hate speech during elections in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Global Mass Phenomenon, General Elections, Common Phenomenon.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Overtime, speech has been considered as a mixed blessing which has the ability in promoting peace or stimulates violence in any society. While freedom of speech is a fundamental human right, the boundaries of what is considered decent or hate speech have sparked debates globally. According to Abba et al., (2021) hate speech is an undesired language towards people with aim to discriminate [1], threaten or promote violence against specific individuals or groups.

Hate speech in its entirety signifies hatred in every aspect. It can target nations, ethnic groups, marginalized communities, or specific individuals, particularly among politicians.

A notable period when hate speech becomes prevalent is during elections. At the time, political campaigns among other facets of public life face criticism and unsolicited challenges. As a consequence, hate speech is perceived as not only a bad expression but an incriminating utterance. While elections in Nigeria have seen progress in strengthening its democratic process, the prevalence of hate speech remains a significant concern challenging the integrity of its electoral development.

In this era of globalization, freedom of speech has become a notable feature of governance across countries all over the globe. However, the freedom is often abused in some nationalists, thereby resulting in public violence and condemnation. The United Nations (2019) noted that such type of speech considered as hate speeches are harmful to the progress and development of the society [27]. This necessitates the imposition of sanctions that further prevent any form of hate and intolerant speech in the society. The Human Right Document in 2017 also affirmed that punishment should be made applicable not only to information or ideas that are untrue, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the state or any section of the population in a political jurisdiction. Hate speech is therefore regarded as an unwanted mode of communication in any society which Nigeria is not an exception.

In African continent, the problem of hate speech is increasing. It is not surprising that many countries in Africa are at risk for mass violence, with concerns growing over the role of hate speech. Specifically, countries like Angola, Cameroon, Gabon in central African and also in the western region are on the issue of bias and hate speeches. Even though, speeches have been made free through the mass media and cyberspace. Unfortunately, the intensity of this has permeated the prevalence of hate speech in many African societies. In the name of this freedom, individuals have expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of governance. However, in doing so, they have often promoted hate speech and expressed disdain toward electorates and prominent figures in society. Unsubstantiated and unverified stories have led to various forms of violence and crises across the continent. This is why the United Nations has deemed it necessary to draw a line on hate speech, categoring hate speech as a form of terrorism (Aliyu, et al., 2023) [3].

In every democratic society, newspaper and online platforms have become



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arenas for power struggles, leading to the widespread occurrence of hate speech. Activists and political campaigners in particular, they leverage the unmediated cyberspace, which has become a central hub for most Nigerians, to disseminate hate speech and legitimize the scourge. Meanwhile, Aondover et al., (2021) posited that the political contestations most especially during election campaigns often lead to the use of hate speech and subsequent violence [4], further exacerbating the fragile peace in Nigeria. Each country has implemented legal frameworks to address hate speech issues. However, the effectiveness of these laws in Nigeria remains questionable, as enforcement often depends on personal discretion. The European Court of Human Rights asserts that speeches do not incite violence, resistance, or revolt is classified as negations or insulting rather than hate speech.

Reports from Benesch (2019) shows that the intensity of hate-induced violence in Nigeria has led to the loss of many lives due to sectarian conflicts [9]. At the core of these conflicts is the power struggle, facilitated by platforms offered by both newspapers and digital media. As a result, hate speech has become condemned in present day Nigeria as an act of terrorism and attached is a death sentence as punishment (Asemah, et al., 2022) [8]. This is attributed to people's indifferent attitude towards speeches. Former Vice President of the Federal Government of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osibanjo, categorized hate speech as a form of terrorism. In his view, hate speech involves the unlawful use of violence or intimidation against individuals or groups, particularly for political purposes. The Nigerian law on hate speech, under the Terrorism (Prevention) Act of 2011, defines hate speech as an international act carried out with malice that can potentially inflict serious harm or damage on a country or its population (Aondover et al., 2022) [5].

The impact of hate speech in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Specifically, it has resulted in increased ethnic tensions, ethno-religious disunity, and calls for disintegration in our society. According to Aondover and Phillips (2020) there has been a notable rise in Nigeria [6], exacerbated by hate speech from both aggressors (leaders) and victims (dispossessed and disenfranchised citizens). This ethnic tension has gradually evolved into religious tension. According to the 2019 report from the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust globally revealed that territorial and religious problems in North were result of perceived hate speech from the Fulani herdsman whose attacks have persisted despite the military's assertion that insurgency has been technically defeated (Msughter, 2023). Meanwhile, the people in Benue, Plateau and Taraba, with predominantly Christian populations, have been rendered homeless as a result of hate speech, living in internally displaced camps and sanctuaries (Aondover, 2018) [7]. Based on the preceding observation, this study therefore seeks to examine the prevalence of hate speech in the 2023 general elections in *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers [10].

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is no longer news that hate speech is a catalyst of violence and conflict in any society. The prevalence of hate speech and even hate songs in the recent elections in Nigeria

on different medium of mass media, especially newspaper, radio and social media is a great threat to the collective and peaceful coexistence of the nation. Msughter (2022) perceived this as an early warning signal and clear indication that national unity is under serious threat in Nigeria [17]. Moreover, the hate speech has shown that the sticking bond that keeps the people in the four regions together in Nigeria is weakened since the trust and confidence holding the nation's diverse ethnic groups together appears shaken through hate speech. Although, the issue of hate speech has been well quenched in the previous administration where hate speech was deemed as criminal offence in Nigeria (Msughter, 2023). However, the just conducted 2023 election in Nigeria witness uproar in youths' agitation against the prevailing government some of which induce the statements of hate speech in the society.

Traditionally, in elections, campaigns are being conducted to attract voters prior to the election. However, with evolving campaign strategies, social media emerged as a valuable platform which spreads political messages to garner voter support. Unfortunately, these discussions often contain hateful comments and posts that fostered divisions among different ethnic groups. As the election results came in, they brought out winners and losers, and the outcome has seen an increase in the propagation of hate speech, which has culminated in ethnic profiling and conspiracies to elicit support from varied groups of the political divide. False information was widely spread on social media, further aggravating the already divided political climate. Meanwhile, actions and speeches of hatred can easily motivate individuals or groups to engage in acts of violence against perceived opponents, leading to physical harm, property damage, and even loss of life (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022) [16].

The aftermath of Nigeria's 2023 election has brought to the fore the fault lines of the major ethnic groups in the country. The spread of hate speech and false information on social media has fueled ethnic profiling, creating an "us versus them" mentality. This toxic campaign of 'us' against 'them' would inadvertently create room for more voices on the need for the country to separate along ethnic lines, thereby depriving the country of the nationhood it craves since independence (Kuchi & Aondover, 2023) [15]. These incidents as a result continued to destabilize Nigerian communities and pose a direct threat to the peaceful conduct of elections in Nigerian societies today. Therefore, to address this gap in the literature, this study examines hate speech in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

A. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the frequency of hate speech in the 2023 general elections by selected newspapers.
2. To ascertain the target of reports on hate speech in the 2023 general elections by selected newspapers.
3. To interrogate the tone of hate speech in the 2023 general elections by selected newspapers.
4. To compare the manifestation of hate speech in the 2023 general elections by selected newspapers.



B. Empirical Review

Vasist et al (2023) conducted a research on the polarizing impact of political disinformation and hate speech [28]. The main objective of the study is to identify the configurations that explain societal polarization within a cross-country configure narrative. The study adopted a complexity theory and a configurationally methodological approach to investigate the impact of diverse disinformation campaigns and hate speech in polarizing societies across 177 countries through a cross-country investigation. The results demonstrate the definitive role of disinformation and hate speech in polarizing societies. The findings also offer a balanced perspective on internet censorship and social media monitoring as necessary evils to combat the disinformation menace and control polarization, but suggest that such efforts may lend support to a milieu of hate speech that fuels polarization. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Another study conducted by Ilori (2023) seeks to examine alternative methods of hate speech interventions in Nigeria [14]. The main objective of the research is to consider specific ways to make hate speech interventions in Nigeria more effective while guaranteeing the protection of the right to freedom of expression, especially in the digital age. The study utilized a qualitative methodology to consider the international human rights law and ideas on hate speech interventions, various hate speech interventions in Nigeria, and Nigeria's obligation to comply with international human rights instruments to achieve better results. It concludes that one of the best ways to ensure these interventions' effectiveness is combining alternative methods, such as strategic training, education, public awareness, and a multistakeholder approach.

Sponholz (2023) also carried out a similar research on the challenges and perspectives of hate speech research [26]. The aim of the study is to unravel how and why conceptual change has taken place on hate speech in research and the consequences it unleashes on the society. It specifically addresses the problems of hate speech stretching, concept shrinking, and the inflation of concepts. The study adopted a conceptual methodology. The result of the study however showed that the concept of hate speech is probably the one with the longest research tradition. Many issues being discussed in the field of platform governance, however, in spite of vagueness with regard to which cases the concept can be applied to, the concept is unambiguous as there is a broad consensus among different social actors about what hate speech means. Thus, it concludes that such conceptual issues jeopardize the potential that digital media research on hate speech has to provide guidance to a broad range of social actors.

Asemah et al., (2022) also qualitatively carried out an academic discourse on the impact of hate speech on Nigeria's democracy. The aim of the research is to explore political communication and its impact on national security with special treatment on the dangers posed by hate speech across new media platforms to Nigeria's democracy. Adopting a documentary research method, the study assessed necessary information to investigate the interrelationship between political communication and national security in a digital age, focusing on the impact of

hate speech on Nigeria's democracy. The researchers highlighted the dangers of hate speech in the form of political commentary as amplified by new media platforms. The result thereby asserted that appropriate steps necessary to navigate through difficult political atmosphere created by sophisticated technology and made even worse with the use of harsh political language/ tone.

In the research conducted by Abro et al., (2021) the prevalence of hate speech and ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria was unraveled being an implication for political stability [2]. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study utilized a conceptual analysis and the study findings revealed that while freedom of expression or free speech is a fundamental human right of all, hate speech heralds' danger for a country. Using a qualitative research approach, this study examines the connection between hate speech, ethno-religious conflicts, and political stability in Nigeria. The study argues that the threat to internal security in Nigeria is a resultant effect of social injustice in the country. In Nigeria, hate speech has been on the increase instigating ethnic and religious sentiment, mistrust, and conflicts.

In summary, these empirical studies collectively emphasize the diverse contexts and consequences of hate speech, offering valuable insights into its prevalence, impact, and potential mitigation strategies. The findings call for a multifaceted approach that encompasses legal measures, public awareness, media responsibility, and political accountability to effectively address and counteract the detrimental effects of hate speech.

III. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Various related theories were reviewed in this research. As posited by Onyejelem and Aondover (2024a) [23], a theory can be referred to as the body of knowledge that explains the basis of a phenomenon, providing an insight on how things function in general knowledge. Onyejelem (2024b) stating the importance of theoretical frameworks revealed that theory provides the reason and essence of curtailing hate speech in the society as well as how hate speech undermines the activities of individuals and groups in a society [24]. In this research, the Agenda Setting theory and Framing Theory were selected for the study.

Framing Theory, initially proposed by Gregory Bateson in 1972, is a valuable lens through which to examine the issue of hate speech. At its core, framing theory involves the act of placing news items and information within a recognizable context or frame. In the context of hate speech, it means shaping how incidents and messages related to hate speech are presented to the audience (Obasi & Aondover, 2023) [22]. Bateson's foundational concept posits that the decisions individuals make about how they interpret information are heavily influenced by the way that information is framed (Msughter, 2024a) [20]. Framing is deeply intertwined with communication and its role in shaping public understanding. This theory suggests that the media plays a pivotal role in drawing attention to specific events and subsequently interpreting them for the audience. News outlets are skilled in framing news items



through contextualization, essentially setting the stage for how audiences perceive and understand the information. In this context, framing theory emphasizes how news or media organizations frame their content, giving it a particular, often limited, contextualization (Msughter, 2024b) [21].

Frames serve various purposes, including enhancing comprehension and providing shortcuts to connect stories to a broader context. Hate speech is not exempt from these framing mechanisms. The media's framing of hate speech-related content can significantly influence how the public perceives these issues and the actions and policies they deem necessary in response. In this way, framing theory underscores the media's role in both defining the agenda and influencing how the public engages with issues, including hate speech (Msughter, 2023a) [18].

In the context of hate speech, framing theory helps us understand how hate speech incidents receive special attention and focus in news coverage. Journalists and editors are often deliberate in crafting story frames, as this defines the context and interpretation of events. This process underscores the media's role as gatekeepers who meticulously select, organize, and present information, reinforcing the importance of media organizations in shaping public discourse and opinion (Msughter, 2023b) [19]. Framing theory's application in the context of hate speech illuminates the power of media in influencing public perceptions, shaping the agenda, and fostering deeper public engagement with this critical societal issue. It highlights how the framing of hate speech incidents can impact public understanding and policy responses, making it a crucial theoretical framework in discussions related to hate speech.

Agenda-Setting Theory, which has its roots dating back to Walter Lippmann's concerns in 1922 regarding the media's role in shaping public perceptions, offers a valuable framework for understanding the role of the media in discussions related to hate speech. This theory, proposed by McCombs, Shaw, and Funkhouser in 1972 posits that mass media has the power to influence what topics or issues the public deems important. It suggests that the media's selection and presentation of news stories can significantly impact the public's perception of reality and the relative importance of various issues (Mojaye & Aonder, 2022). In the context of hate speech, the Agenda-Setting Theory highlights the media's role in determining the salience and prominence of issues, including those related to hate speech. When media organizations choose to cover hate speech incidents extensively, they can influence the public's perception of these incidents, making them appear more important or urgent. Conversely, if hate speech incidents receive minimal media coverage, the public may perceive them as less significant or overlook them entirely.

Furthermore, the Agenda-Setting Theory emphasizes that the media's influence on the public agenda is not about instructing people on what to think but rather about guiding their focus on particular issues. This holds particular relevance when addressing hate speech because it highlights the media's role in steering public attention toward the prevalence and impact of hate speech in society (Garba & Msughter, 2023a) [11]. This theory also points out that agenda-setting can occur at various levels, from shaping the national or societal agenda to influencing specific groups or

communities. This multilayered influence is particularly pertinent in discussions surrounding hate speech, as different media outlets and platforms may set agendas tailored to their target audiences. Although Agenda-Setting Theory does not contend that the media directly dictate people's beliefs or opinions, it does underscore the media's significant role in shaping the public's focus, which, in the context of hate speech, can have a considerable impact on public opinion, discourse, and policy priorities. The media's ability to influence the public agenda has far-reaching implications for addressing and mitigating the adverse effects of hate speech in society (Garba & Msughter, 2023b) [12].

Since its inception, Agenda-Setting Theory has been widely studied and applied in various contexts, demonstrating its continued relevance and providing valuable insights into how the media, public perception, and the formation of public opinion are intertwined. This theory remains a fundamental framework for understanding how media coverage can shape discussions surrounding hate speech and other societal issues.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design adopted in this study aligns with the positivist approach. According to Sileyew (2020) [25], positivist approach seeks to uncover regularities and patterns in social phenomena through the use of measurable and observable variables. Based on the traditional approach of positivist design, the study employed content analysis as a research method. The population of the study comprises the entire (64) newspapers in Nigeria, as reported by the Nigerian Press Council in 2020 while the sample size consists of *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The study employs a stratified sampling technique to select editions of newspaper publications. Specifically, the stratification is done based on days of the week. The method of data collection in this study involves the systematic application of content analysis using a coding sheet. A coding sheet is a tool used in content analysis to systematically record and categorize data from the media content under investigation. The study considers four distinct units of analysis: political news, editorial, cartoons, and advertorial.

The hate speech identified through these indicators was meticulously placed into the following categories:

- *Category of Hate Speech:* This refers to the classification or grouping of hate speech incidents based on their underlying themes or types. Hate speech can manifest in various forms such as ethnic-based, religious, political, or other identifiable categories. Categorizing hate speech helps in understanding the predominant narratives or topics that were used as tools for incitement or discriminatory language during the election period.
- *Target of Hate Speech:* Identifying the specific recipients or victims of hate speech is crucial. It involves recognizing the groups, individuals, communities, or entities that were the primary subjects of the hate speech. Understanding the targeted audience or victims helps in assessing the impact and scope of the rhetoric employed in the newspapers.
- *Tone of Hate Speech:* Analyzing the emotional



tenor and linguistic style of hate speech is essential. Hate speech can be expressed through various tones such as aggressive, derogatory, inciting, inflammatory, or even subtle and coded language. This analysis aims to decode the emotional and linguistic elements used in hate speech to gauge its severity and potential impact.

- *Context of Hate Speech:* Understanding the circumstances, events, or broader contexts surrounding hate speech is critical. This involves exploring the political, social, or cultural milieu in which the hate speech incidents occurred. Examining the triggers or underlying events that led to the propagation of hate speech during the 2023 elections provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing its dissemination.
- *Time of Reports:* This category focuses on the temporal aspect of hate speech coverage in the selected newspapers. It involves recording and analyzing the specific dates or times when hate speech incidents were reported or highlighted within the newspapers during the election period. This temporal analysis helps in identifying patterns, spikes, or shifts in the frequency of hate speech occurrences over time.
- *Size of the Story on the Newspaper:* Measuring the space or length dedicated to reporting hate speech incidents within the newspapers is significant. Analyzing the size, placement, and prominence of hate speech stories, whether in terms of column inches, number of pages, or specific sections within the newspaper, provides insights into the priority or importance given to such incidents by the media outlets.
- *Headlines on the Newspaper:* Examining the headlines used to report hate speech incidents is crucial in understanding how these incidents were framed and presented to the readers. Headlines play a pivotal role in shaping readers' perceptions and understanding of the content. Analyzing the tone, emphasis, and framing of hate speech incidents through headlines provides insights into the editorial choices and messaging strategies adopted by the newspapers.

Descriptive and inferential statistics would be utilized for the analysis of the data gathered for the study. The descriptive statistics includes the table and percentage which would be used to describe the frequency of hate speech, the rate of hate speech prominence as well as the direction of hate speech. The independent sample T-test on other hand would be utilized to compares the means of the two independent newspaper publishers. This aim can best be achieved using the sample analysis, which will yield unbiased, consistent and efficient estimates for the research questions. Such result lends itself to easy and clear interpretation.

Table 1.1: Independent T-Test Samples Statistics

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Confidence of Diff.		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Speech	Publications	2.400	11.39298	5.09510	-11.746	16.54625	.471	4	.662

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The independent t-test reveals a statistical comparison of means between the rate of hate speech in *The Punch* newspaper and Vanguard publications. The result showed a low mean value of 2.4 which indicates that there is less

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Frequency of Hate Speech in 2023 General Elections by Selected Newspapers

Newspapers	The Punch		The Vanguard		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Hateful	72	26.3	57	21.8	129	24.1
Mockery	86	31.4	79	30.2	165	30.8
Provocative	33	12.0	45	17.2	78	14.6
Dehumanizing	24	8.8	31	11.8	55	10.3
Offensive	59	21.5	50	19.1	109	20.3
Total	274	100	262	100.0	536	100

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 1 illustrates the analysis of hate speech in the recently conducted 2023 general elections in sampled publications of *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in Nigeria. The analysis provides a detailed breakdown of various hate speech categories alongside their respective frequencies and percentages. The findings reveal that *The Punch* newspaper reported 274 instances of hate speech, whereas *Vanguard* Newspaper documented 262 instances, totaling 536 instances between both publications. Notably, both newspapers emphasized categories like mockery and contempt speech significantly as more occurrence of hate speech in the recently conducted election. An instance of 86 cases of mockery was reported from *The Punch* publications while, 72 cases of contempt speech was reported indicating 31.4% and 26.3% respectively. On the other hand, *Vanguard* detailed 79 instances of mockery (30.2%) and 57 instances of hateful speech (21.8%). These figures highlight a pronounced focus by both newspapers on language aiming to ridicule or stir animosity during the election period.

Moreover, while reporting tendencies varied between the newspapers – with *The Punch* showing slightly higher figures in categories such as mockery and offensive speech, and *Vanguard* indicating slightly elevated counts in provocative and dehumanizing speech – the percentages offer deeper insights into the proportional representation within their respective instances. For example, *The Punch* reported 21.5% offensive speech and 8.8% dehumanizing speech, while *Vanguard* noted 19.1% offensive speech and 11.8% dehumanizing speech. These percentages delineate the distribution and importance of each category within the comprehensive coverage of hate speech evident in Nigeria's recently concluded general election. It's argued that the prevalence of such hate speech has the potential to undermine democratic principles by fostering division, discrimination, and animosity among diverse societal groups.

significant difference between the publications of hate speech cases in the sampled newspapers. The relatively



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high standard deviation (11.39) suggests high variability within the dataset [30]. The standard error of the mean stands at 5.09510, indicating the variability of sample means if multiple samples were taken. A 95% confidence interval for the difference between the means spans from -11.746 to 16.54625, implying no statistically significant difference between the groups, as the interval encompasses zero [31].

Therefore, the research concluded that there is prevailing high rate of hate speech evidence in sampled newspaper publications which has an implication in undermining the quality of election in Nigeria [32]. Vincent and Enyindah (2022) argued that the prevalence of hate speech [29], particularly characterized by expressions of intolerance and ridicule targeted at specific groups or tribes during the 2023 Nigerian election, reflects a distressing reality impacting human and electoral integrity in the country [33]. This aligns with Sponholz (2023) supposition that hate speech not only undermines the dignity and respect of individuals belonging to targeted groups but also erodes the foundational principles of democratic processes [34].

Table 2: Target of Reports on Hate Speech in 2023 General Elections by Selected Newspapers

Newspapers	The Punch		The Vanguard		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Hate Speech Targets						
Tribalism	86	34.7	83	28.8	169	31.6
Religious Based	60	24.2	97	33.7	157	29.2
Political Based	91	36.7	89	30.9	180	33.6
Socially Based	11	4.4	19	6.6	30	05.6
Total	248	100	288	100	536	100

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The analysis in table 2 reveals that hate speech during the 2023 elections in Nigeria was notably prevalent across various targets, prominently targeting tribal, religious, political, and social groups. Both newspapers covered hate speech incidents, but differences in the number of instances reported for each category were observed. The data revealed a substantial focus on hate speech directed at tribalism, with *The Punch* reporting 86 instances (34.7%) and *Vanguard* reporting 83 instances (28.8%). Together, these accounted for 169 instances, approximately 31.6% of the total hate speech reports. Moreover, instances targeting religious groups were prevalent, with *The Punch* reporting 60 instances (24.2%) and *Vanguard* reporting 97 instances (33.7%), totaling 157 instances (29.2%).

Similarly, while both newspapers highlighted hate speech targeting political affiliations, *The Punch* specifically reported 91 instances (36.7%) and *Vanguard* reporting 89 instances (30.9%), totaling 180 instances (33.6%). In contrast, instances categorized under social groups were fewer, noted by *The Punch* with 11 instances (4.4%) and *Vanguard* with 19 instances (6.6%), totaling 30 instances (5.6%). This data underscores the prominence of hate speech directed at tribal, religious, and political groups during the 2023 elections, suggesting these as focal points in the discourse. However, instances aimed at social groups were comparatively lower. This analysis therefore highlights the concerning prevalence of divisive language in election-related hate speech, urging measures to counter such rhetoric for societal unity and democratic stability.

Table 2.1: Independent T-Test Samples Statistics

Speech	Publications	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	Confidence of Diff.		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
		10.00	18.67262	9.33631	-39.7123	19.71230	-1.07	3	.363

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The independent t-test reveals a statistical comparison of means between the rate of hate speech in *The Punch* newspaper and *Vanguard* publications. The result showed that the mean value of publications from *The Punch* is 62 with a sample unit of 8 and a standard deviation of 36.61512. Whereas, *Vanguard* on the other hand reports a mean of 72 average from a sample size of 8, with a slightly lower standard deviation of 35.79572. These statistics suggest that, on average, *Vanguard* reported 10 more hate speech instances than *The Punch* in the sample. Also, the confidence interval (-39.71230 to 19.71230) indicates the plausible range of the true difference in hate speech instances between the two publications.

Since the interval contains zero, it implies that there isn't enough evidence to claim a statistically significant difference in hate speech reporting tendencies between *The Punch* and *Vanguard* based on this sample. Sponholz (2023) asserted that the widespread dissemination of hate speech, laden with expressions of intolerance and mockery, infringes upon human integrity by *fostering* an environment of divisiveness and hostility. It degrades the sense of respect and dignity owed to individuals or groups, leading to societal tensions and potentially fueling conflicts among

different communities. Such derogatory language undermines the moral fabric of society, impacting social cohesion and the sense of belongingness crucial for a harmonious society.

Table 3: Tone of Hate Speech

Newspapers	The Punch		The Vanguard		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Hate Speech Tones						
Explicit	45	17.3	17	6.2	62	11.6
Implicit	215	82.7	259	93.8	474	88.4
Total	260	100	276	100	536	100

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The presented table illustrates the distribution of hate speech tones published by *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The figures delineate the number and percentage of hate speech instances categorized based on their tones. The data reveals notable disparities between the newspapers in reporting explicit hate speech tones. *The Punch* reported 45 instances (17.3%) categorized as explicit hate speech, whereas *Vanguard* reported a substantially lower count of



17 instances (6.2%). Collectively, these figures account for 62 instances, constituting approximately 11.6% of the total hate speech reports. In contrast, both newspapers predominantly reported hate speech instances categorized under implicit tones. *The Punch* reported 215 instances (82.7%) falling under this category, while *Vanguard* reported a higher count of 259 instances (93.8%). Together, these figures sum up to 474 instances, representing around 88.4% of the total hate speech reports.

The presented figures depict varying patterns in reporting explicit and implicit hate speech tones by *The Punch* and *Vanguard*. Explicit hate speech instances, characterized by overt and direct language intending to incite hatred, were reported more prominently by *The Punch* compared to

Vanguard. Conversely, both newspapers significantly reported higher instances of implicit hate speech tones, denoting subtler, indirect, or implied forms of derogatory language or innuendos targeting particular groups or individuals. The disparity in explicit hate speech reporting between the newspapers might indicate differing editorial approaches or thresholds for categorizing and reporting overtly offensive language. On the other hand, the prevalence of implicit hate speech instances, reported more prominently by both newspapers, suggests a broader tendency to cover hate speech conveyed through subtler means, which might require nuanced analysis and understanding.

Table 3.1: Independent T-Test Samples Statistics

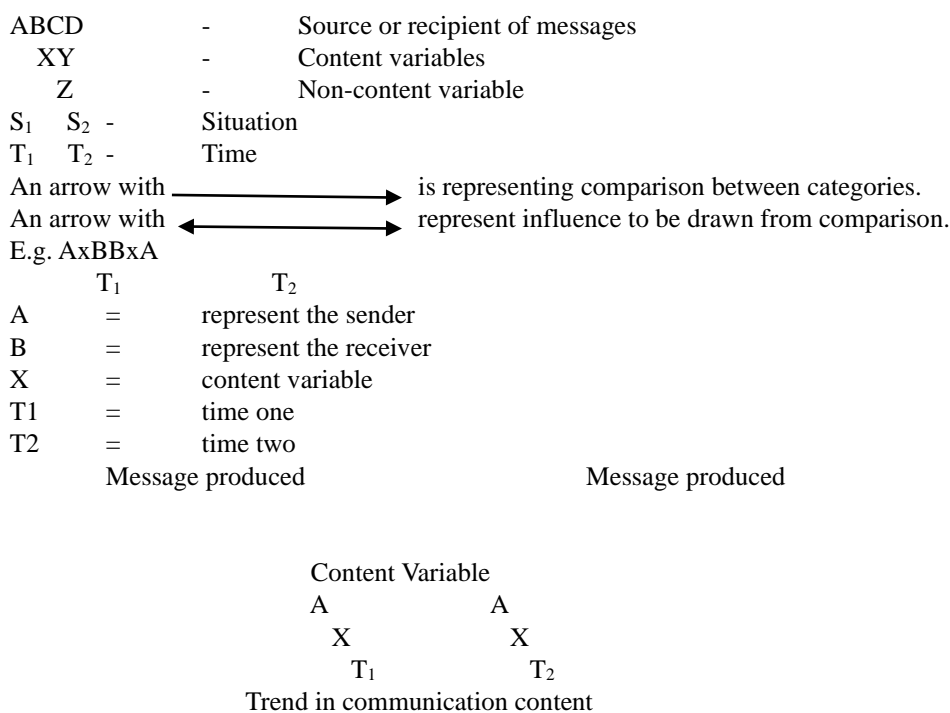
		Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	Confidence of Diff.		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Tone	Publications				Lower	Upper			
		8.00	50.911	36.00	-465.4	449.42	-.222	1	.861

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The statistical analysis suggests that, within the parameters of this sample, there isn't enough evidence to support a significant difference in the tones of hate speech reported by the two publications. The confidence interval, spanning both positive and negative values, signifies a wide range where the true mean difference could lie, including zero. Therefore, based on this analysis, it is affirmed that there is a lack of statistically significant difference between the reported hate speech tones by the two publications based on the sample data. These findings underscore the complexity in identifying and reporting hate speech, highlighting the need for consistent and clear categorization standards within journalistic practices.

Moreover, the higher prevalence of implicit hate speech instances suggests a deeper societal issue requiring attention, as such forms of hate speech might be less conspicuous but equally harmful in perpetuating divisive narratives within society. According to Hassan et al., (2020) [13], the use of inflammatory language targeting specific groups or tribes during election periods can manipulate public perceptions, influence voting behaviors, and polarize communities. This compromises the fairness and transparency of elections, impeding the electorate's ability to make informed choices based on legitimate information and constructive discourse.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Hate Speech in The Punch and Vanguard Newspaper



Therefore, A = *The Punch*, B = *Vanguard*. Going by the comparative trend analysis of the level of hate speech

published by *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers in



different phase of general election, the result showed a fascinating significant difference between the pre- and post-election period in Nigeria. Specifically, both newspapers exhibited a considerable emphasis on an extreme high rate hate speech reporting that majority of the hate speech published were prior to the general election. This contrast suggests a divergence in hate speech coverage strategies between the two newspapers during the electoral phase, with *The Punch* showing a more significant reduction in reported instances while *Vanguard* seemingly reported a higher volume. However, the reduction in hate speech instances post-election indicates a general decrease in the coverage of hate speech content by both newspapers after the electoral activities concluded. This decline could imply a shift in media focus to other topics or a decrease in hate speech occurrences post-election, contributing to reduce reporting on this specific issue.

Therefore, the time series analysis reveals distinctive patterns in hate speech reporting by *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers across different phases surrounding the election. The data showcases fluctuations in hate speech instances, indicating varying levels of emphasis on this issue before, during, and after the electoral period, offering valuable insights into media coverage trends concerning hate speech.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study examined hate speech as reported in the Nigerian publications *The Punch* and *Vanguard* during the 2023 general election. The data revealed a large incidence of hate speech incidents over this time period, with *The Punch* reporting more hate speech than *Vanguard*. The recently conducted election in 2023 witnessed a high surge of hate speech in newspaper publications many of which were statements of intolerance and mockery towards a certain groups or tribes. Many of the hate speech reports in the sampled newspapers were not surprising as they are politically centered with focus on ethnicity and tribalism. Also, while the hate speech was ethno-social based, majority of them were inexplicit such that it requires in-depth understanding of words and proverbs to comprehend the nature of the speeches. Evident from the publications of selected newspapers i.e., *The Punch and Vanguard*, most hate speech in the context of news article more than any other editorial outlet.

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After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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