

The Media, Rhetoric of Fury and Electioneering in Nigeria

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Abstract

Words that strike, confront, resent and generally discomfort others, especially by persons gifted or skilled in the art of communication are often considered hateful by some people. Electioneering in Nigeria is largely characterised by this kind of rhetoric which actually get escalated by the involvement of the media. In this article the author examined the arbitrary characterization of all such remarks as hate-speech and asserts that, it is safer to characterise confrontational remarks by persons skilled or gifted in the art of persuasion as rhetoric of fury by examining the theoretical definitions of hate speech as it relates to varying contexts. The second objective was to evaluate certain remarks within proper contexts to see if they are actually hateful. The Persuasion Theory and Social Judgment Theory by Sherif and Associates formed the theoretical framework for the study. Content analysis was the chosen methodology adopted for this study. Results from the study shows that a significant number of comments made during electioneering merely express threats, bigotry, antagonism, resentment, frustration, and competitiveness, while only a few of such comments qualified as hate speech. In conclusion, the study recommended among others that the media should consciously give less vent to all such remarks that are likely to heat up the polity.

Keywords: Hate Speech, Media, Rhetoric, Electioneering, Nigeria.

Introduction

Words, be they querulous, angry, resentful, inciting, vile, hateful antagonistic, denigrating and in many like manner, made by persons skilled or gifted in the art of persuasion; and targeted at others with the intension to vent, hurt, devalue, demoralize, defeat or just get level are what I refer to here as rhetoric of fury. The potency of this phenomenon rests almost completely with the media, especially with its ability to escalate and reinforce infinitely. The usually offensive nature of rhetoric of fury is what is commonly referred to by some persons as hate-speech. Indeed, all forms of remarks by persons gifted with the art of communication that are provocative, angry, misogynistic, homophobic, ethnocentric, abusive, annoying, and or generally intended to engender discomfort can be characterised as rhetoric of fury.

Media as an important variable in this study encompasses all channels of mass communication through which information or messages are relayed in the communication process to a large or small audience. It includes electronic, print and the internet. The media serves as valuable sources of information and powerful modes of communication. It controls much of what people understand of events that occur around the world daily. There has always been a synergy between the political class and the media. Traditionally, the mass media are vital to all segments of the population through their functions. These

functions include education, entertainment, surveillance, agenda-setting, status conferral, interpretation, and mobilization (Daramola, 2003). For example, the media have been responsible for disseminating information regarding policy introduction or changes by government. Electioneering season in Nigeria is a time for politician to engage every sector of the society; none more crucial than the engagement between politicians and the media. The media organisations become indispensable to politicians as they seek to broadcast their campaign jingles and communicate their manifestoes to the electorates. Politicians along with their communication aide struggle to outdo each other on the respective media platforms. Furious rhetoric has as a result ensued between parties and some aggressive retorts have engendered animosities that further divide the country along ethnic and religious lines.

In its modern usage, rhetoric is described as any form of persuasive communication, whether oral or written (Keith & Lunndberg, 2008). The technique and practice of rhetoric give those in the wrong the advantage to win over the less skilled supporters or sympathisers that may be holding the truth (Keith and Lunndberg, 2008). As implied in Delgado and Stefancic (1995), the word, rhetoric of fury basically connotes inflammatory remarks and gestures that violate the sensibilities of others. Nigerian political elites and public office holders have not been able to restrain themselves from making inflammatory comments when their ambition or position are threatened. They often find it convenient to resort to angry rhetoric when addressing their political opponents.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria practices the presidential system of government which she adopted since 1979 (Jibrin, 2016). Individuals are accordingly elected into offices following an electoral process that involves extensive campaigns and balloting at regular intervals. Every ballot is preceded by electioneering campaign with various candidates trying frantically to outdo each other. This process of persuading electorates has led to many politicians going to the point of defaming each other in a most unacceptable manner. Vile rhetoric from some opinion leaders on issues bordering on national cohesion frustrates efforts at ensuring peace and unity.

Traditionally, some earlier investigations of hate-speech have focused on online hate-speech (Oluwakemi, 2020; Alkomah & Ma, 2022; Asemah, Nwaoboli & Nwoko, 2022). However, these studies did not examine the use of hate-speech during electioneering in Nigeria. Arguably, notable individuals and institutions who have been most provocative in their utterances to the point of being branded hateful, include Femi Fani Kayode, Asari Dokubo, Dino Melaye, Ayo Fayose, Nnamdi Kanu, Yinka Odumakin, Miyetti Allah, and the Coalition of Northern NGOs amongst others, yet their rhetoric of fury unless proven otherwise by a competent court of law, remains merely controversial. The advent of social-media may have compounded the hate speech problem as even issues that ordinarily would have gone unnoticed get unnecessarily escalated unduly, thereby causing damage.

Healthy competitions often engender quality in many situations. This is true for politics too as politicians during electioneering, strive to show how they are superior to their opponents in many ways. While due campaign is inevitable to electioneering, desperation often set in and politicians become extreme in their remarks targeted at each other. The extreme remarks degrade, defame and denigrate opponents, and may sometimes lead to violence with telling consequences for nationhood. The amplification of these remarks, rests substantially on the functioning of the media as invectives, provocations and all forms of stereotyping enjoy traction and escalation unduly. This negates the primary functions of the media which includes fostering unity, and promoting democracy. However, in labeling remarks and actions as hate speech and or vile rhetoric, a blanket supposition ensues as even antagonism or counter positions are subsumed under such categorization.

The difficult concern has been the politics of balancing the privilege of freedom of expression as nationally and globally guaranteed against the consequences of the abuse of such rights especially when it causes others to suffer. The partisanship, biases or sentiments of those who run media houses are factors that affect the prevalence of hate-speech against the ideals of respect and fairness. This study therefore will seek to highlight these challenges with a view to striking a better understanding of the phenomenon especially when it concerns electioneering.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the theoretical definitions of hate speech as they relate to varying contexts.
- To evaluate certain remarks within proper contexts to see if they are actually hateful.

Theoretical Review of Literature

Media

The mass media are viewed as powerful social institutions that have great effects on society. This is so because we live in an information age, where most of what people know about events around them is as conveyed by the media. Nwosu (2009) in his study of the mass media and African wars, notes that the media can influence the outset, conduct, or escalation and end of most forms of social violence. In a similar vein, McQuail (2005) posits that the media specifically plays important roles in peace-building and the resolution of conflicts or escalation of violence through their function of information dissemination. Al-Quran, (2022) also reckon that the media basically entails outlets, channels or tools of general communication. From exchange of information to reaching a large or limitless number of people is the primary concern of the media.

Rhetoric

According to Keith and Lunndberg (2008), rhetoric is a concept that originated from the Greek word rhetor, which means orator. Related to that is the word rhema, which means

that which is spoken. Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the power of observing in any given situation, the available means of persuasion. All other such disciplines are limited to their field of interests. Rhetoric indeed has the capability to persuade on almost any subject (Aristotle, 1954). Persons with a great grip of oratorical skill and general communications ability, blending the attributes of ethos, logos and pathos appear believable and thus in a place to stir emotions and reactions of people in a manner that can further heat up the polity.

Influential speakers and writers in the political space are often persuasive, manipulative or coercive, depending on their conscience and or background. Persuasion in this context means hinting at facts and situations to make the audience or readers draw conclusion on an issue or personality towards a predetermined end. True persuasion according to Omotoyinbo (2019) is ethical, honest, and truthful. On the other hand, being manipulative involves twisting of facts and situations to mislead audience or readers so they can react in certain ways. Drożdż (2016) states further that manipulation is in some way an ambiguous concept and understandably controversial. Humans are generally susceptible to manipulation; a gap often exploited by mischievous characters. Manipulation is an intentional and secret action, by means of which a false image of a certain reality is imposed on a person or a group of people.

Also, some persons employ threat and outright withdrawal of privileges to get people to react in certain ways: Such tendencies amount to coercion which can cause animosity. Humans by the reckoning of Cohen-Almagor (2021) detest coercion, and where practicable, they resist it. A perception therefore of anyone being coercive can lead to a negative reaction. Believability however according to Murthy and Ghosal (2014) is dependent largely on the speaker being able to stamp his credibility through a conscious and unconscious display of his character, temperament, intelligence, virtue and sensitivity. The speaker seeks the trust of the audience by hinting at his beliefs, values, and philosophy as it relates to the subject.

It is perceived in some quarters that the very art of persuasion is itself suspect, given the extensive effort put into it. This position is buttressed significantly by legendary Greek philosopher, Plato, who posits that Rhetoric was a disconnected set of technique without a central ethical concern on philosophical systems. He believes Rhetoric was dangerous because it lacked the rigour of an empirical venture or the thorough quality of a philosophical exercise. Rather, it was a practice or technique that gives those in the wrong the advantage to win over the less skilled speakers/writers that may be holding the truth (Keith & Lunndberg, 2008).

Fury/Hate-Speech

Hate-Speech is a conscious and wilful public statement intended to denigrate a group of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995). As implied above, the word, fury in this context basically connotes inflammatory remarks and gestures that violate the sensibilities of others. What constitutes hate-speech has remained a subject of debate

amongst scholars, activists and politicians, finding meaning only in time and location. A consensus definition of hate speech has remained elusive. However, there are no shortages of attempts by scholars at defining the subjective concept of hate speech, but, definitional ambiguities were observed in the available texts. While most definitions possess certain unified features, there remains divergent sub-text in other definitions. Different from other forms of rants or flames, hate-speech uses offensive and threatening language that targets certain groups of people based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, colour or gender. Historically, the term hate speech according to Brown (2017) was often associated with liberal progressives, especially in America – who use it to highlight and problematise remarks that they view as misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, Islamophobic, or in some other way targeted at minority groups in a manner that undermine the ideals of respect, solidarity, and tolerance (p.9). Erjavec and Kovačić (2012) contend that those who propagate hate speech, are not necessarily a homogeneous group. Some seek to discredit those they consider opponents, while others actually carry on like they are the watchdogs of society. The prevalence therefore of hate speech is indicative of the failures of multiculturalism as a social experiment. For instance, Zhang and Luo (2018) defined hate speech as any form or dimension of communication that is intentionally targeted at disparaging an individual or a group on the basis of characteristics which includes race, colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or political affiliation. Similarly, about the same period, Elsherief, Kulkarni, Nguyen, Wang *et al.* (2018) defined hate speech as a direct and serious attack on any protected category of people based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease. From these definitions, there is a preconceived mind-set of isolating individuals, or group of persons that possess certain innate characteristics which are at variance to the person initiating what could be regarded as hate-speech.

Another very interesting definition of incitation to hatred states thus:

an advocacy, promotion or incitement of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat of such person or persons and any justification of all these forms of expression—that is based on a non-exhaustive list of personal characteristics or status that includes race, colour, language, religion or belief, nationality or national or ethnic origin, as well as descent, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation (ECRI, 2016).

Generally, hate-speech undermines the dignity of people by using derogatory descriptions to degrade and stigmatize people on the basis of their skin colour, ethnicity, gender, or any other type of group association. This, according to Adibe (2014) serves as a catalyst for other forms of prejudice, such as pestering and threats of direct attack. Hate-speech by the reckoning of Omotoyinbo (2019) can manifest as defamation, calumny, vilification, or inducement which leads to falsehood capable of hurting the image of others depending on the laws of such a country. People often use media to propagate hate-speech, laced with cultural, political, economic and social biases to create crisis and even genocide among innocent citizens.

There are scholars who believe that the unregulated or relatively weak regulation of social media spaces or platforms have consequently emboldened those with the intention of denigrating others. Although media companies have moved to clampdown on hate-speech by installing auto-detection tools on their apps and website, many still go undetected through their implicit posts and use of emoji's (MacAvaney, Yao, Yang, Russell *et al.*, 2019). According to Elsherief, Ziems, Muchlinski, Anupindi *et al.* (2021), the Social Media Community defines hate-speech as explicit and implicit contents that encourages, attacks, or threatens other people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, age, religious affiliation, sex, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or disease. In an attempt to stem the tide of hate-filled comments online, one of the renowned social media company tagged certain posts by its subscribers for hate speech to include: when the content contains comments that are adjudged to be violent threats; intent to cause physical harm or death of individuals or groups, sly references to mass murder or violent events which some groups have been the primary targets or victims, and statements that promotes fear about a protected group, repeated slurs, epithets, racist and other contents that degrades a person.

According to Alkomah and Ma (2022), hate-speech is considered a malicious attack on people's dignity, including their race, origin, or ethnicity. Similarly, it is clearly stated as part of Twitter policies that tweets which threatens or harasses other users on account of their ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other factor shall be taken down once considered as hate-speech.

Gitari, Zuping, Damien and Long (2015) viewed hate-speech as an uncouth writing, comments, or statements that disparages and has a potential to cause harm or danger to its victims. It is a bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It is a kind of speech that demonstrates a clear intention to hurt, to incite harm, or to promote hatred. Similarly, Gitari *et al.* (2015) cited the definition offered by Umati's project, where hate speech is considered as harmful speech that calls the audience to condone or take part in violent acts against a group of people with similar demographics as those discussed earlier. This definition of hate-speech also extends to comments that draw vivid or metaphorical comparison between a group of people and animals or insects. Furthermore, Gitari *et al.* (2015) observed that the six calls to action common in hate speech are, calls to: discriminate, loot, riot, beat, forcefully evict, and kill.

One of the most profound definitions of the concept was offered by Vaught (2012, p. 243) who succinctly described the phenomenon as:

"Messages of structural, bodily, and/or psychological subordination that are grounded in historical and contemporary ideological and structural practices of violent tribal power."

Vaught's (2012) expression found connection with established race theorist (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993), a view that related hate speech grand norms that justifies any conduct that reinforces the power and supreme status of the dominant social group.

Theoretical Overlap in the Definition of Hate-Speech and Rhetoric of Fury

Over the last two decades of democracy in Nigeria, politicians have during electioneering seasons made controversial statements laced with rage, malice, and bigotry that many consider as hate-speech; a more critical evaluation of some of these remarks however reveals otherwise.

In Kansok-Dusche, Ballaschk, Krause, Zeißig *et al.* (2022) systematic review of hate-speech among children and adolescents, their investigation revealed an overlap between hate-speech (and online or cyber-hate) and the concept of bullying. For instance, Lehmann (2019) attempted to show the intersection between bullying and hate-speech, and established that, phenomenologically speaking, both behaviours (bullying and hate-speech) were targeted at individuals or group. Thereafter, Lehmann (2020) further established a connection between hate-speech and bullying, in that the intention of bullies is to harm a person or group, same as those who are accused of hate-speech (Gitari *et al.*, 2015; ElSherief, 2018; McAvaney *et al.*, 2019; Alkomah & Ma, 2022). With these established overlap in the theoretical definition bullying and hate-speech victims, it may be theoretically difficult to distinguish between hate-speech and controversial statements made during electioneering in Nigeria.

Contrary to Lehmann (2020) and Kansok-Dusche *et al.* (2022) perspective of an overlap in the theoretical definition of hate-speech and bullying, Wachs and Wright (2019) argued that the differentiators between hate-speech and other maligning act targeting an individual or section of the population were usually identified by the bias thoughts perpetrators usually have towards the social groups they were targeting. Evidence from other scholarly investigation underscore the fact that hate-speech was consistently based on prejudicial and intolerant views about different social groups (Hawdon, Oksanen & Räsänen, 2015; Blaya, Audrin & Skrzypiec, 2020; Wachs, Gámez-Guadix, Wright, Görzig *et al.*, 2020). Perpetrators of bullying may hold prejudicial views, but that is not always the case. In contrast, prejudice was said to always be present in cyber-hate, even if it was directed towards an individual rather than a group.

Evidence of Media Role in Hate Speech

Ezeibe (2016) and Okafor and Alabi (2017) in their individual work on how the media helps the spread of hate-speech especially as it relates to previous elections in Nigeria, accused the media of stoking the flame of hatred and stimulating political motivated violence. Engendering bitterness in the media happens mostly through hate-speeches, a practice that negates media ethics. This phenomenon is only a part of what many refer to as Media Show. Drożdż (2016) avers that information dissemination by the media is tailored along entertainment fashion: radio – the dynamics of fact simplification, television – the show, press – tabloids. It is paramount for the media to attract and sustain listenership, readership or viewership as the case may be for which ethics may be violated: The end, as often said, probably justify the means.

Violence is actually that shock staple within a news bulleting that helps the media attract greater listenership, readership or viewership. These, yields profit ultimately, hence the media is inclined to condoning hate-speech covertly and overtly. Drożdż (2016) corroborates this position further by stating that, astonishing the recipients with extreme forms of messages containing hostility and hatred to get at their emotions is one of the most deployed tools of the media. Accordingly, broadcast stations and Newspapers have been very inclined to giving vent to remarks by individuals that are inflammatory and sensational. The ambiguity of what can be characterised as hate-speech is believed to be exploited by corporate media organisations to cleverly condone hate-speeches. A very controversial article for instance was published by the Nations Newspaper in Nigeria on the 1st August 2022 targeted at Mr. Peter Obi, presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. Mr. Sam Omatseye in the article titled OBI-TUARY castigated, maligned and disparaged the personality of not only Mr. Obi, but his supporters. Omatseye alleged of Obi's followers:

'And they have not spared any incoherence, any lack of finesse, and threats and tantrums, any show of rabid, primitive chants, or any ululations. They have abused, cursed, thrown imprecations. They have hugged lies about their candidate. They have pelted lies about others. They have distorted material'.

He stated further that:

'Obi has become a shelter for both miscreants and activists of the crowd'.

This summation most likely became very contentious and controversial because the author is a senior employee of the Nations Newspaper and a celebrated essayist. His pedigree, personality and ethical commitment are critical to the general consideration. The truth or otherwise in his allusion is of minimal significance here as long as the gesture hurts the sensibilities of a particular group.

Social-Media is perhaps the biggest offshoot of the internet revolution and without a doubt the chief conveyor of hate-speech. When compared to the conventional media, the internet is clearly a more potent medium of disseminating information. Technological devices like mobile phones, computers, tablets and computers makes the internet much more accessible (Khalil, 2010). The monstrosity social media channels like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram have constituted is apparent to all. With social media, gate-keeping which served as a form of censorship or control is virtually non-existent as people push out at will and at an incredible volume and frequency, volatile contents. It is instructive still that content on radio, television and newspapers that would have conservatively circulated and faded, get over-escalated via social media by individuals who find them interesting.

Electioneering in Nigeria

Electioneering refers to the entire process by which politicians or political gladiators seek to canvass and win votes for themselves, their candidate of choice and or the political party they belong to. The partisan actions by people in the opposition party in a bid to defeat the

incumbent party through strategic messages and mobilization also constitute electioneering. It is in practical sense the real meaning of 'politicking' in the electoral process (Okoye, 1996). It is about persuading or dissuading potential voters in an attempt to outdo opponents in the electoral process (Bassey, 2013).

Anifowose (1982) claims that political rivalry prior to a major election or series of elections happens as people seek to hold, or maintain power. Furthermore, Ugoh (2004) contends that such delicate politicking portends adverse implications for the progress of the country. Many will aver that the many incidents of thuggery, assassination, voter suppression, vote buying, arson, looting and kidnapping are only symptomatic of bad electioneering. Tense moments in the course of Nigeria's journey through nationhood can be largely attributed to tough stances and uncompromising remarks by various opinion leaders.

Though not related to electioneering, the Nigeria civil war of 1966, where the tirades between Col. Odimegwu Ojukwu and Gen. Yakubu Gowon went overboard is about the most tragic of all such similar incidents that stem from combative stances. Okolo (2010) observed that the belligerents: North and Eastern leaders engaged in a virulent war of words through their radios and newspapers in a manner that served to worsen the situation. Unfortunately, too, the pre-elections exchanges between both candidates, Akin Omoboriowo and Governor Adekunle Ajasin also led to serious bloodletting in the aftermath of the 1983 governorship elections in Ondo State (Nwanze, 2018). Also, the 1993 June 12 election and the subsequent annulment had in tow, an uncompromising stance from the presumed winner, MKO Abiola and a hostile attitude by then Head of State Gen. Sani Abacha that eventually left Nigeria in a dire strait. It must be noted that the utterances of Chief Abiola then were more of defiance and antagonism rather than hate-speech even though they provided a basis for a plethora of ethnic slurs with many alleging the Hausa/Fulani agenda to deny Yorubas the presidency. While the remarks may have invariably served to heat up the polity, the reaction of Gen. Abacha then was basically suppressive and intended to preserve the status-quo. According to Shiner (1994) in the Washington Post daily, Abiola eventually got arrested for treason on the orders of Gen. Sani Abacha.

The build up to the 2015 General Elections marked a new height in the manner political opponents took on each other. The language was brutal with a recklessness that portended a catastrophic end. The likes of Mallam Nasir El Rufai and Dino Melaye openly denigrated the then incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, ascribing the crudest of compliments to him. President Muhammadu Buhari as the main opposition presidential candidate then was equally drenched in invectives and much more. The vitriol came heavily from the likes of Femi Fani Kayode, Ayo Fayose, Asari Dokubo, Reno Omokri, Doyin Okupe and several others. The attacks touched on his health, intellectual capacity and his ethnic leaning. Olanrewaju and Afolayan (2017) avers that such inflammatory rhetoric of politicians is objectionable and very obnoxious and that indeed, abusive use of language has gone ahead to reduce the Nigerian electioneering scene to a verbal estate of nothing but provocative expressions.

Theoretical Framework

Persuasion Theory

Simons (1976, p. 21) defines persuasion as human communication that is designed to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values, or attitudes. With persuasion there is fundamentally a goal to be achieved by the author, followed by the means, which is communication with which to accomplish the task and finally the supposition that the recipients of the message are of a free will to digest and accept or reject (O'Keefe, 1990).

Persuasion is basically to influence the behaviour or attitude of the audience(s) it is targeted at. This theory according to Gordon (2022), see audiences as passive recipients of messages, rather than active participants in the consumption of communications.

Four categories of audiences are identified:

- **Interest—Attention:** This refers to people that are generally receptive to information; messages therefore are crafted to arrest their attention further.
- **Selective Exposure:** People looking out for messages or information that will reinforce the notions or ideas they are already nursing.
- **Selective Perception:** People in this category are selective of what they want to see or hear and are more likely to turn deaf ears if they find the messages inconveniencing. Such an audience is intolerant to shock, and unreceptive to any radical information that runs contrary to what they previously know. The likeability of the messenger is also very important.
- **Selective Memorization.** Members of the audience may even memorize content of the message if it aligns with their thoughts. The message length also contributes to reinforcing the idea being sold.

Social Judgment Theory

The categories of audiences cited in the persuasion theory reaffirm the Social Judgment theory's postulation, created by Sherif and associates; the theory emphasise peoples' evaluation of persuasive messages. This theory proposes that people make judgments about messages depending on their anchors, or prior disposition on particular issues (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Foreknowledge of a person's attitudes on issues can enable a messenger determine how to approach an audience and eventually provide clues on how best to manage a targeted audience.

Furthermore, each person's attitudes can be considered on: firstly, the latitude of acceptance, constituting notions and ideas such a person or persons is comfortable with. Next is the latitude of rejection: notions and ideas such a person detests. Lastly, is the latitude of non-commitment, which includes ideas for which such a person or persons have no opinion—they neither accept nor reject these ideas. How people react to a persuasive message is dependent on their prior disposition on the issue(s) (Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

On the whole, Social Judgment Theory proposes that persuaders should first consider people's prior disposition to an issue before crafting a message. Pushing a message that is completely contrary to the recipient's latitude of acceptance will likely not succeed.

However, if the message aligns with the recipient's latitude of acceptance, then it becomes more of reinforcing what she or he already believes. True persuasion therefore is more likely to happen if the messages fall within an individual's latitude of non-commitment or at the edges of his/her latitude of acceptance (Miller, 2002).

Persuaders within the context of this article seem keener on reinforcing the biases of their targeted audiences; and also, at many instances concerned with making the opposition uncomfortable. Campaigners during the 2023 General elections at the end, may not have succeeded in swaying votes on the accounts of their messages as it seems the individual blocks remained adamant and voted devotedly. Those in the realm of latitude of non-commitment were not significant enough to make any difference.

Methodology

Content Analysis method is adopted for this study. This method according to Krippendorff (2004) is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. This method is consistent with other studies that investigated hate-speech locally, nationally, and globally (Fortuna & Nunes, 2018; Nwaoboli & Nwoko, 2022). The data-set for this study were drawn statements issued by politicians, political actors, and influencers. These statements were purposively selected because of the researcher's interest in rhetoric of fury and electioneering in Nigeria. Themes were selected from the theoretical definitions of hate-speech and they formed the benchmark for evaluating politically motivated controversial remarks. These excerpts were evaluated using six (6) themes (incitement, threat, denigration, stereotype, rage, and prejudice) contained in certain definitions of hate-speech to predict whether this political rhetoric qualify as hate-speech or something else. If a statement is evaluated and found to contain incitement, threat, and any other two or more variables, it is considered hate-speech; But, if a statement has less than four (4) variables, even if it is inciting or threatening, it will not be considered hate-speech.

Contextual Content Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section is dedicated to the analysis of a selection of contentious statements made by certain professionals in the art of communication. The content of these statements is filtered through certain selected variables to determine if these comments qualify exclusively as hate-speech, rhetoric of fury, bullying, or other related phenomena.

Excerpt 1

'If they don't steer clear of Rivers State, since you have given me the machete, I will not look back, I will just use it and cut all of them.'

Table 1: Analysis of a statement by Nyesom Wike (Former Governor Rivers State)

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#1	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	Rhetoric of fury/Bullying

This statement in table 1 above is attributed to the former governor of Rivers State at a ceremony organized to confer a chieftaincy title on him; the conferment of this title was accompanied by a symbolic machete. An analysis of the excerpt in table 1 shows that it had elements of threat and rage, but is missing other variables for such comment to be considered hate-speech. Based on the observed themes in this statement, the verdict is that it can be regarded as rhetoric of fury or bullying. This result is consistent with Lehmann's (2020) observation that there exists a connection between hate-speech and bullying (in this case rhetoric of fury), in that the intention of the perpetrator is to harm a person or group. However, the result is contrary to Wachs and Wright's (2019) assertion that the differentiators between hate-speech and other maligning act targeting an individual or section of the population were usually identified by the bias thoughts perpetrators usually have towards the social groups they were targeting. This bias or prejudice is clearly absent in the excerpt analysed.

Excerpt 2

'Muhammadu Buhari, like Yar'Adua will die in office.'

Table 2, present an analysis of a controversial statement made by Ayo Fayose in 2015. It was a malicious comment intended to discourage voters from electing Muhammadu Buhari.

Table 2: A pre-election statement by Ayo Fayose (Former Governor Ekiti State)

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#2	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	Malicious

Evaluation of the excerpt in table 2 shows that though the statement was prejudicial and negatively stereotypes the personality of Muhammadu Buhari. Although, the statement showed desperation and malice, but it cannot be tagged as hate speech. The result is different from Gitari *et al's*. (2015) observation which highlighted six common features that must be contained is a statement for such to be tagged hate-speech. These features include, calls to: discriminate, loot, riot, beat, forcefully evict, and kill.

Excerpt 3

'If what happened in 2011 should repeat itself in 2015, the baboon and the dog will be soaked

in blood.'

Table 3: Pre-election comment by Muhammadu Buhari (Former President of Nigeria)

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#3	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	Hate speech

The excerpt in table 3 featured a statement from one of the leading contenders in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. This statement by Major General Muhammadu Buhari was meant to instill fear in his opponent (the incumbent President) and incite his support base against the other party. The statement is tacitly and explicitly inciting, malicious, and hateful. From the evaluation of the excerpt, it was clearly inciting, it threatened and stereotyped perceived opposition; it was also filled with fury and prejudice for those that do not share his views. This result is consistent with ECRI (2016) observation that hate speech is the advocacy, promotion or incitement of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat of such person or persons and any justification of all these forms of expression. This result also aligns with the definition of hate-speech that draws vivid or metaphorical comparison between a group of people and animals or insects (Gitari *et al*, 2015).

Excerpt 4

'What is happening now is very clear. Buhari is just working for this Fulani's to take over the country.'

Table 4: Analysis of a statement by Samuel Ortom (Former Governor Benue State)

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#4	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	Bigotry

Table 4 present the content evaluation of Samuel Ortom's statement. As the Chief Executive of the state at the time, his bigoted comments were unsubstantiated with fact. Though, his comment labeled a particular ethnic group and was borne out of resentment for the manner in which the national executive handled the farmer-herders clash, but, the statement did not incite violence against or threaten the existence of the ethnic group he referred to. Therefore, the verdict is that the comment is not hate-speech. This result defers considerably from Adibe's (2014) submission that hate-speech serves as a catalyst for other forms of prejudice, such as pestering and threats of direct attack.

Excerpt 5

'Elections will be marred by violence and gross loss of life if not allowed to go free and fair.'

Table 5: Assessing Mallam El Rufai's statement leading to 2015 general elections

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#5	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	Hate speech

An assessment of the excerpt in table 5 above revealed that the statement has potential for inciting violence; it is obviously a threat to whomever it is directed at, it is borne out of fury and prejudiced. Although there were no obvious evidence of vilification and stereotype in the excerpt, but the other variables (incitement, threat, rage, and prejudice) present in the statement are sufficient to reach the verdict of tagging it hate speech. This result is similar to ElSherief *et al's*. (2021) definition of hate speech as any statement with contents that are adjudged to be violent threats, desire to cause physical harm or death of individuals or groups, sly references to mass murder or violent events which some groups have been the primary targets or victims.

Excerpt 6

'And I want to tell those in Lagos to realise that there is no war between us and Yoruba, Yorubas are just political rascals and we are going to handle them.'

Table 6: Chief Emmanuel Iwanyanwu's statement after the 2023 gubernatorial elections

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#6	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	Rhetoric of fury

The purported statement was an angry response to the ill treatment meted out to Igbo electorates during the recently concluded governorship elections in Lagos State. Although, he denied his statement was doctored; nonetheless he claimed he was not referring to all Yorubas as rascals. Result shows he angrily stereotyped a section of Yoruba ethnic group and his comment can rightly be described as rhetoric of fury. This finding is similar to Cohen-Almagor's (2021) description that humans detest intimidation, and where practicable, they resist it.

Excerpt 7

'The imbecilic Goodluck Jonathan is a disgrace to humanity and deserves to be skinned alive for handing over to a Hausa goat.'

Table 7: Anonymous supporter's comment after the 2015 Presidential election

Excerpt	Evaluation						Verdict
	Incitement	Threat	Denigration	Stereotype	Rage	Prejudice	
#7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Hate speech

This comment was attributed to an anonymous supporter of President Goodluck Jonathan. The supporter was disappointed that the former President conceded defeat to Major Gen. Muhammadu Buhari after the 2015 Presidential election. This comment incited those who shared the same subjective view that the incumbent should not have conceded defeat; it threatened bodily harm, denigrated and stereotyped the adjudged winner, and there is no doubt that this prejudiced view is borne out of fury. This outcome is consistent with previous studies (Zhang and Luo, 2018; ElSherief *et al.*, 2021; Gitari *et al.*, 2015) which pointedly adjudged comments with similar content as hate speech.

Univariate Analysis of Hate Speech Themes in Political Comments

Table 8: Frequency distribution of Hate Speech Themes

Themes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Incitement	3	13
Threat	4	17
Denigration	1	4
Stereotype	5	22
Rage	5	22
Prejudice	5	22
Total	23	100

Results from Table 8 shows that from the seven (7) excerpts analysed above, a significant proportion 15(66%) of those comments contained stereotype, rage and prejudice. Also, the evaluated excerpts revealed that 4(17%) of them were statements contained threat, while 3(13%) were inciting. But, only 1(4%) of these comments were denigrating.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the author reckons that remarks that are provocative, hateful, deceitful, ethnocentric, controversial and generally discomfoting are synonymous with electioneering, especially in Nigeria. Characterising certain remarks therefore as hateful or otherwise is however a subject of contexts that can be judged differently. The author asserts therefore that it is safer to categorize all such remarks that strikes, resent, defame, vilify, antagonize, and generally discomfort others, especially from persons skilled and or gifted in the art of communication as **Rhetoric of Fury**.

Recommendation

It is hereby recommended that:

- Broadcast stations and formal print organisations should give less vent to comments with a potential to heat up the polity.
- Sanctions should be instituted or prescribed for all pollical candidates who sign the peace pact and afterwards utter inflammatory remarks; and finally,

- Superintending authorities at the various social-media platforms, should tighten the control mechanism to minimise inflammatory remarks online.

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