CYBERHATE ON FACEBOOK: YOUTHS' REACTIONS TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN ONLINE REPORTAGE

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ABSTRACT: *Facebook has globally become a great news purveyor and one of the fastest-growing social media in recent times. Since its advent, Facebook users get gratified diversely as they interactively comment and participate in the virtual social network. Newspapers predominantly post social updates and incisive news reports on Facebook. The study examined the reactions of urban youths in selected cities in South Eastern Nigeria to selected women and children news reportage in two online newspapers in Nigeria: Punch Newspaper and The Sun Nigeria. Online content analysis and a survey of 249 purposively selected respondents were part of the methodology. The study explores the magnitude of cyberhate and whether there are gender-dependent differences in users' attitude towards cyberhate. The study also centres on the users' reactions to cyberhate comments on the stories in selected newspapers; and the factors propelling cyberhate on women and children on Facebook. Findings show that cyberhate incidences tilt toward ethnic relations, and there were some significant differences between male and female respondents as to what constitutes cyberhate in Nigeria. The study recommends that Nigerian media organizations and journalists should mobilize and empower the public through citizenship education to shun and confront hate speech and use of foul language online as part of their social responsibility.*

KEYWORDS: facebook, online newspapers, cyberhate, women and children news; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of hate speech/comments in the media is a challenging issue that is causing public outcries globally and in Nigeria. This phenomenon was unknown in the past. However, with the development of social media, hate speech and comments on social media known as cyberhate is becoming a trend today. Cyberhate, according to Ciftci, Gashi, Hoffmann, Bahr, Ilhan and Fietkiewicz (2017), is a kind of hate speech which occurs on the web. Visiting the web has become a universal communication practice among Nigerians youths with prevalence of smartphones and mobile Internet in society. The ubiquity of social media, especially Facebook, has increased the freedom of expression as well as the user's proximity to the media. Anybody with internet access can say or post anything on Facebook without any censorship. It is therefore essential to appreciate the consequence of adverse comments on news concerning women and children who usually,

might not have easy access to social media. Unger, as cited in (Crftci et al. 2017), corroborates that hate speech is similar though a bit different from insult or defamation. The author argues that hate speech constitutes expressions which debase "a person or a group based on a common characteristic such as white or black skin, Christian or Muslim faith or ethnicity" (p.426).

This assertion implies that hate speech on the Internet known as cyberhate degrades human, mainly when carried via international/virtual medium like Facebook. It is apparently, published defamation and other people might join in the character assassination. Facebook regards hate speech as "content that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease" (Facebook, 2016). UNESCO recently focused equally on this growing issue, mapping and analyzing the existing initiatives to combat online hate speech in their comprehensive 2015 report "*Countering Online Hate Speech*".

Women and children usually constitute the most vulnerable and unprotected group in most societies. They are regarded as victims who cannot protect themselves and are often the natural recipients of hateful speeches and actions (Morah, 2016). The media as a pervasive, powerful and profoundly influential socializing force informs, educates, socializes, entertains, and promotes the cultural heritage of the people in society, especially with regards to women and children. The media perform these functions by bringing relevant and timely media contents to societal gaze. Punch Newspaper and The Sun Nigeria are two national dailies with online versions and social media accounts. They are among the first Nigerian newspapers to go online at the initial advent of the Internet and social media in Nigeria. Punch Newspaper founded in 1976; created its Facebook page on May 23, 2011; while The Sun Nigeria started operationally in 2003. Since, social media become significantly trendy in Nigeria (Morah, 2018), most media outlets own social media accounts; post their daily contents online, and people react to those contents in diverse ways. This study examined the extent of cyberhate and youth's perceptions of activities core in online news reportage of women and children in Nigeria.

The Problem and Significance

Globally, Facebook continues to advance as a great news source (Morah, 2012). Nigerian newspapers are increasingly becoming accustomed to posting assorted news contents on social media, especially on Facebook. Availability of diverse information on the Internet is one factor that helps increase the adoption of social media, particularly among young people (Morah & Omojola, 2018). Some users, however, tend to exercise unlimited freedom of expression on Facebook as they resort intentionally or otherwise to cyberhate, particularly in instances relating to women and children news reportage in Nigeria.

The study becomes apt as the number of Nigerians with internet connectivity and on social media continues to soar daily amidst public outcry on hate speech. Instances of cyberhate have caused some women to refrain from using Facebook. Invariably, this factor helps widen knowledge gaps in information and positions gender disparity as factors in the digital divide among vulnerable groups in Nigeria. It is, therefore, imperative to have a clear understanding of the intensity of this growing trend on women and children news reportage on Facebook as well as the perceptions of young people on the hate speech syndrome. The study is, therefore hinged on investigating the

above issues in a mixed-methods approach. The findings contributed to the pool of knowledge on social media use in journalism. The recommendation made in this study provides insights and expertise into managing cyberhate on women and children across Nigeria.

Research Objectives

This study investigates reactions of urban youths in selected cities in South East, Nigeria, to selected women and children news items by two newspapers on Facebook. The following specific objectives thus guided the study:

1.   To find out the extent of cyberhate in women and children media reports in Nigeria.
2.   To probe whether there are gender-dependent differences in youth's attitude towards cyberhate.
3.   To ascertain the level of reactions of urban youths to cyberhate comments on the reports in selected newspapers.
4.   To identify the factors propelling cyberhate comments on women and children media reports on Facebook.

Research Questions

In line with the above objectives, the following research questions arise:

1.   What is the extent of cyberhate in women and children media reports in Nigeria?
2.   Are there gender-dependent differences in youths' attitude towards cyberhate?
3.   How do urban youths' react to cyberhate comments on women and children media reports in selected newspapers?
4.   Which factors are driving cyberhate comments on women and children media reports on Facebook?

Cyber-Hate Trends in Nigeria

Hate speech and fake news became a common issue in the media since after the 2015 Nigerian general election and American election of November 8, 2016. The media should provide truthful information about every member of society that is not defamatory. In Nigeria, Section 34(1) of the 2011 Amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria centres on fundamental human rights and states that:Every individual is entitled to have respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly, (a) no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment; (b) no person shall be held in servitude, and (c) no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour. (p. 39)

The preceding notwithstanding, women and children are abused in many ways by some users who comment on online stories concerning them, which goes contrary to the constitutional provision and that of United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (Morah, 2016).

Some scholars have conducted different studies on hate speech, especially as it concerns cyberhate. Burnap and Williams (2016) developed machine classification models to identify different types of cyberhate to apply to a range of categories such as race, disability and sexual orientation. These cyberhate classification models can help inform those responsible for managing content in social networks. It will allow content managers to verify and react, rather than having to search for

offensive content in large data streams, in particular in the aftermath of a potential trigger event. Erjavec and Poler Kova (2012) studied the characteristics of hate speech discourse in Slovenian news websites' comments. The authors differentiated between organized and self-organized producers of hate speech comments. In Nigeria, few studies have been recorded in the area of cyberhate, especially as it concerns women and children news reportage on Facebook. The above is an indicator of the significance of this study and a contribution to the existing literature on social media and journalism.

Facebook and reporting women and children
The adoption of social media in Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented powerful effects especially with regards to purpose and dignity of men such as lawlessness, hate speech, drug abuse, rape, killings of all sorts, kidnapping, terrorism, and a high disrespect for God, lies, deceit among other vices (Morah & Duru, 2018). The authors agree that some positive effects of social media include: enhanced communication flow, globalization, freedom of expression, interactivity, participation in governance, economic and health development and so on; which are equally good trajectories of social media adoption in the society (p.150). The views above imply that social media has positive impacts on society and should be used by news outfits to report various issues concerning women and children for sustainable development.

Social media also affect communication flow in some other ways. Research has shown that social media are effective in promoting communications with the public and between businesses (Morah & Omojola, 2018; Chun &Warner, 2010; Jaeger & Bertot, 2010). Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes (2010) predict that social media will create a culture of openness and transparency and thus reduce corruption. This prediction might, however, be far-fetched, especially in Nigeria, with the present trend of fake news and hate speeches that are pervasively communicated online. Shogan (2010), on his part, argues that social networking websites hold the greatest potential for development in fundamental communication strategies. Little wonder the extent of change envisaged when placed side by side negative remarks and attacks on people online; especially on women and children reportages in Nigeria.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory
Diffusion of Innovation theory developed by Rogers in 1962 predicts that media, as well as interpersonal contacts, provide information and influences opinion and judgment. Diffusion is concerned with the spread of messages perceived as new ideas. Innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption. The characteristics of an innovation, as perceived by the members of a social system, determine its rate of adoption. Studying how innovation occurs, Rogers (1995) argued that it consists of four stages: invention, diffusion (or communication) through the social system, time and consequences. The information flows through networks. The nature of networks and the roles opinion leaders play in them determine the likelihood that the innovation will be adopted. In this context, hate speech and cyberhate has become an innovation in the Nigerian public sphere while some users now serve as online opinion leaders to propel others to cyberhate. The spread of cyberhate is therefore assumed to be a trendy innovation diffusing into the Nigeria society as a result of the pervasiveness of the use of social media, especially Facebook.

Agenda Setting Theory

Another related theory is the Agenda Setting Theory developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. The theory posits that audience members not only learn about public issues through the media but also attach importance to such issues, from the emphasis the media place upon it. The media influence the importance of topics on the public by attaching prominence and frequency to coverage of such issues. It also involves the media's ability to control the topics the public perceives as necessary (McCombs; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod) in Uzochukwu, Morah & Okafor (2016). According to the theory, the frequency with which the media cover specific topics causes the audience to be concerned more about those topics or believe they are more relevant in their lives. In other words, media coverage of women and children stories might determine how the readers will react to such stories. The media in Nigeria is expected to anchor the timely, regular and fair reporting of issues concerning women and children as agenda setters and ensure the availability of such contents on popular media such as Facebook. The harnessing of social media in content distribution help the news media performs its agenda-setting role effectively and adequately.

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Content analysis was one of the mixed methods adopted in the study. Two highly circulated and most-read national newspapers that run an online version were selected, and their contents analyzed to provide answers to research questions: RQ 1 and RQ 3. The researchers selected a search period of June 1, 2018, to August 31 2018, during which there was a significant increase in hate speeches due to increased interest in social media communications among Nigeria youths arising from 2019 election campaigns and political party members' defections. The Facebook website search function was used to identify related editions of the Punch and The Sun Nigeria online newspapers, respectively. The two newspapers were selected because generally, they are both regarded as national dailies that attract popular comments and readership in the Nigerian news terrain.

The search string identified articles that contain either one or more mentions of 'women and children'. Duplicate articles were removed, and articles were manually excluded if they did not predominantly focus on Nigerian women or children; or if they were not in the news, column, feature or editorial formats. Initial online searches of women and children news stories on the two selected newspapers identified 127 articles, out of which only 92 met the inclusion criteria above and were eligible for detailed coding and analysis. A content analysis was, therefore, done to systematically and comprehensively code and analyze the media contents. This approach involves using quantitative content analysis to measure the frequency of content within the articles across the whole sample and analyzing the content of a sub-sample of articles and comments for more in-depth, reflexive analysis.

The study also adopted the survey research method to investigate the reactions of urban youths in selected cities in the South-East to selected women and children news reportage of Punch Newspaper and The Sun online editions in Awka and Enugu metropolis. The study investigated

young people's perceptions in the urban cities of Anambra state comprising 4,055,048 residents; and Enugu state with a population size of 3,267,837 residents (NPC, 2006). The survey method provides answers to RQ 2 and RQ4. Obasi cited in (Morah & Omojola, 2011, p.151) describes the survey as a process of eliciting data from a target population through either questionnaire or interview instrument and subjecting such data to statistical analysis to conclude. Thus, a total of 249 purposely selected urban youths was studied.

The two cities were selected because of the (1) large concentration of young people and students; (2) due to the location of about ten tertiary institutions and markets in the cities; and (3) the preponderance of smartphone usage in the region. Primary data were collected utilizing a questionnaire that was specially developed following the objectives of the study. Pre-tests were conducted to validate the content of the questionnaire in terms of logic and accuracy. Copies of the questionnaire were personally administered using the face-to-face technique. The first part captures demographic data, while the second part contains items that relate to the core of the study.

Population, Sample Size and Procedure
The population of the study comprised urban youths in Awka and Enugu metropolis. A survey of purposively selected 249 respondents from the two cities constitute the sample size for the survey research while 92 women and children based stories on the Punch and The Sun Nigeria online newspapers formed the sample for content analysis.

Enugu state, created on 27, August 1991 is one of five states that made up the South-East geopolitical zone out of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria and is home of the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. The name of the state originates from its capital city, Enugu, which locally translates *Enu Ugwu*- meaning 'top of the hill' (Morah & Duru, 2018). It was formerly known as the capital of the then Eastern Region (now divided into nine states of the South-South zone) and the then capital of the now-defunct Federal Republic of Biafra. Enugu state has 17 local government areas with a population census size of 3,267,837 people which comprises of 1,596,042 males and 1,671,795 females, according to population.gov.ng (Morah & Duru, 2018). Anambra is the 10th most populated political subdivision in Nigeria. The state was also created on August 27, 1991, with 21 local government areas and a population of 4,177,828 (NPC, 2006). It occupies a land area of 2,168.2 squares with about 60 per cent of the population living in urban areas (Ekwenchi, Morah &Adum, 2015).

Research Instruments
The measuring instruments of the study are questionnaire and coding sheet utilized in a mixed methods research.

Content Categories and Units of Analysis
The unit of analysis comprised all stories on women and children's issues in the form of news reports, editorials and feature stories. Simple descriptive statistics were used for the analysis. The manifest data were examined for frequency and prominence of cyberhate on women and children related issues, concerning their rights.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The mixed-methods approach in this research for content analysis comprised the following steps: constructing a coding frame; coding manifest content using the coding frame; establishing the reliability of the data collected and excluding unreliable data; analyzing the quantitative data; identifying aspects of manifest content to examine further using qualitative analysis, and finally performing thematic analysis of the latent content of articles containing the manifest content of interest. The data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS version 19 and descriptive statistic tools. In terms of the age of the respondents, results from the study indicated that 189 of the respondents sampled representing 77.8% are youths between the age brackets of 18-22 years; 46 respondents representing 18.9% are within age brackets 23-28 years. Other age brackets sampled is an insignificant 3.3%, representing age brackets 29-40 years. This finding indicates that a great proportion of the respondents in the study are youths. Out of the selected sample investigated, 128 respondents, representing 54.2%, are females, while 108, (45.8%) are males. Results equally show that the majority (195) of the youth sampled representing 81.3% are single while 45 respondents represented by 18.7% are married, which implies majority youths in this study are single. Most of the respondents are educated because findings reveal 168 respondents have tertiary education, 7.4% secondary education, 7.0% primary education, while 2.0% indicated they are not literate.

RQ1 **What is the extent of cyberhate on women and children media reports in Nigeria?**

Table 1

Online newspaper	Frequency	Percentage
The Punch	12	57%
The Sun Nigeria	9	43%
Total	21	100

This table reveals that in the two online newspapers monitored; the result of the frequency of cyberhate in coverage of children and women issues in the various newspapers indicates that such women and children related issues got few coverage in the various newspapers studied. Further analysis of the issues reported on women and children show that the story: '*2019*: *Ojukwu's widow begins L.G. tour of Anambra South'* and *'Governor Abubakar's wife to tackle drug abuse in Bauchi'* was reported by The Sun Newspaper. However, The Punch had 12 stories (57%) containing cyberhate comments while The Sun Nigeria had nine (43%). This finding clearly shows that there exists cyberhate in women and children's stories in online newspapers on Facebook.

Table 2: Type of Stories (Genres) Reported on Children and Women

The Punch	Frequency	Percentage	The Sun Nigeria	Frequency	Percentage
News	26	74.2	News	43	75.4
Column	3	8.6	Column	8	14
Feature	4	11.4	Feature	5	8.8
Editorial	2	5.7	Editorial	1	1.8
Total	35	100	Total	57	100

Table 2 shows that the majority of stories on children and women reported by the two online newspapers are mostly news as The Sun Newspaper has 75.4%, while Punch Nigeria contains 74.2% issues. Column and feature stories followed this. The least attention given to women and children by the two newspapers was in the editorial with a total of 7.5% reported issues.

RQ2   Are there Gender Dependent Differences in Youths' Attitude towards Cyber Hate?
Table 3: Do male show more cyberhate than female?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	65	26.1
Agree	106	42.6
Strongly Disagree	23	9.2
Disagree	44	17.7
No Idea	11	4.4
Total	249	100

This research question was tested in the survey as the online content analysis could not identify the sex of site visitors. The response showed that young men (68.7%) tend to exhibit more cyberhate to women and children's stores than young women (31.3%). The result implies that males are predominantly found online than female and might be a pointer to gender disparity in technology use in Nigeria.

RQ3 How do urban youths' react to cyberhate comments on women and children media reports in selected newspapers?

Table 4: Youth perception of comments on online news reportage

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Positively	6	28.6
Negatively	13	.61.9
Indifferent	2	9.5
Total	21	100

The content analysis results in table 4 showed that the majority of the comments depict negative attitudes towards cyberhate on women and children's stories (61.9) as fellow commentators always attack such comments. This result implies that cyberhate is not a socially acceptable norm on Facebook, though some people do it.

RQ4   Which factors are driving cyberhate comments on women and children media reports on Facebook?

Table 5: Factors fuelling cyberhate

Variables	Respondents who blame the newspaper for cyberhate in media content		Respondents who blame women or children for their plights		Respondents who genuinely expressed comments based on ethnicity	
Yes	118	51.3%	111	49.3%	164	66.7%
No	112	48.7%	114	50.7 %	82	33.3%
Total	230	100%	225	100%	246	100%

This table showed ethnicity is a significant factor that drives cyberhate comments on women and children media reports on Facebook as 66.7% of the respondents attest to this. Another factor pointed out in the survey result was the newspaper/media organization's content (51.3%). The respondents believe that some newspapers sometimes carry fake news; distort the news and under-report incidences which generate debates in comments, casing hate speech. Surprisingly, the blame on the influence of women and children got exonerated by 50.7% of the respondents, which implies that cyberhate does not involve the character (the person) defamed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has been able to investigate the perceptions of urban youths to cyberhate comments on women and children news reportage of two online newspapers. It has demonstrated high visibility of cyberhate on women and children news reports on Facebook in the two selected newspapers. The finding aligns with Erjavec &Poler Kova (2012) and Crftci et al., 2017 views and descriptions of hate speech and therefore, a contribution to knowledge. The result is probably an implication of the multi-ethnicity nature of the people of Nigeria. The findings of the study constitute a significant contribution to literature as the magnitude of cyberhate occurrences in areas of women and children news reportage was found appalling on Facebook, especially among young males. The finding, therefore, was able to x-ray the influence of Facebook, especially on young people who have commonly embraced social media as their primary media of communication. Males tend to show more cyberhate attitudes and their reactions to cyberhate comments on the reports in selected newspapers negatively tilted. The paper, however, concludes that cyberhate incidences lean toward ethnic relations, and there are some significant differences between male and female respondents as to the meaning and what constitutes cyberhate in Nigeria. The findings should be a pointer to prospective research on the areas of gender and technology use and influence. The study shows that stories related to women and children do not attract much comment from users which resulted in the minimal comments on the few stories. Political, sports and economic topics tend to attract more comments on Facebook. Based on the findings, the paper recommends that:

1.   Media organizations and journalists who are morally inclined to ethical journalism should mobilize and conscientize the public through citizenship education to shun and confront hate speech, abusive and foul language online as part of their civic responsibility.

2.   Again, there should be purposeful enforcement of the crime of hate speech by law enforcement agencies in Nigeria, to implement the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2011 and the Nigerian Cybercrime Act 2015

3.   Further research should concentrate on the influence of gender on social media and new media technology use in Nigeria.

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