Research Article

MEDIA AND HATE SPEECH: A DISCURSIVE STUDY OF HATE SPEECH ON NAIRALAND FORUM

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication has dominated a major space in our everyday discourses; reflecting how we create, organize, conduct, and express our identities in everyday activities. This study entails the discursive study of hate speech on the Nairaland forum. This study is hinged on Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive theory (2016) and Ruth Wodak's (2009) Discursive Strategies. The data for this study comprises twenty-eight (28) participants' comments extracted from Nairaland. Findings revealed that commenters of hate discourse on Nairaland used five discursive strategies which include nominalization, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification to produce their hateful comments on the forum. Strategic devices used include nominals, appositions, relative clauses, pronouns, predicative adjectives, metaphors, giving reasons, questioning, and hyperbole. The study also revealed that ethnic, political party, and religious affinities are the major triggers of hate comments on Nairaland. Thus, the study recommended that technology experts should be engaged to design features, using information derived from language experts to block or filter hate comments on social media platforms. Also, standard laws should be established to curb the menace of hate speech on social media platforms in Nigeria.

Cite this article:

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has dominated a major space in our everyday discourses; reflecting how we create, organize, conduct, and express our identities in everyday life activities. The power and influence of the media in any given society are enormous; this is because the media are the best and fastest route individuals, groups, and organizations have to the public space and interact between and among themselves in unending debates and mutual connections (Abimbola, 2022). This shows that the basic feature of the new media is accessibility which allows thousands of users to have connect with each other through interaction and networking. Despite the resourcefulness of the new media spaces, the various social media platforms could also be harmful to human existence as they could be exploited as avenues for bigotry, verbal attacks, discrimination, and polarization. Trindade (2018) reveals in his study that Facebook, a social media platform, has become a modern-day avenue for exhibiting different forms of racism, bigotry, and related discrimination against others. This implies that as much as digital communication fosters visibility and free expression, it could also be used to foster segregation, racism, discrimination, inequality, and verbal attack, which could even lead to physical attacks and destabilize the peace of the nation if appropriate measure is not taken to curb the menace. This study aims to examine the strategies, triggers, and linguistic markers of hate speech on Nairaland, a Nigerian indigenous social media forum, that reflect the ideologies of the hate makers on the forum.

1.1 HATE SPEECH

There have been diverse opinions on what hate speech entails and what should be regarded as hate speech. There is no international legal definition of hate speech and what should be identified as hate speech is controversial. Onuh (2019) posits that it is problematic to provide a specific definition of hate speech for two reasons; first, what may be described in one country as hate speech may not be regarded as hate speech in another country. For instance, what is regarded as hate speech in Nigeria may not be regarded as hate discourse in America. Describing and interpreting certain words as hate speech is problematic because the intentions are not easily subjected to objective scrutiny. For instance, if a Yoruba man tells his fellow Yoruba man that he is a goat, this might be regarded as an abusive word and the man might not take it seriously. But, if the same Yoruba man tells an Igbo man that he is a goat, this could be regarded as hate speech and receive a different interpretation, even though the words used are the same. The United Nations Strategy and Plans of Actions on Hate Speech (2019) identifies hate speech as any form of speech, writing, or behavior, that attacks or employs discriminatory utterances concerning a person or a group based on their personalities such as religion, ethnic, race, color, gender, descent,

nationality, or other identity factors. This is often rooted in intolerance and could be divisive or demeaning.

Scheffler (2015) posits that words are poisonous, and they are instigators of wars. This implies that words could be used as weapons of attack against other groups. Hate speech is considered an act of terrorism and a deterrent to a nation's harmony and development. Man's most instrumental weapon is language which can be used to perform different functions and achieve different aims. Language can be used as a means of integration among humans, and it can also be used as an instrument of seclusion and polarization. Humans use language in different contexts to achieve specific goals for their benefit. In some countries like Nigeria, hate speeches are seen as acts of terrorism, although no law has been signed in that regard. Koestler (1978) cited by Richter (2010) says that "Wars are not fought for territory, but for words. Man's deadliest weapon is language. He is susceptible to being hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases. And where there is an epidemic, the group mind takes over." Individuals show their affiliations to groups through their language use. This shows that language is very instrumental in achieving peaceful coexistence in human society.

Also, the legislative consideration of hate speech is an area that should be addressed. In Nigeria, hate speech is considered a punishable crime and an act of terrorism. However, it has not received a specific law to prohibit it; the hate speech bill is one of the controversial bills to be passed by the legislative arm of the government in Nigeria. The reason for this may not be farfetched from the fact that the constitution allows humans to enjoy freedom of speech and some stakeholders believe the bill is against the fundamental human right of free speech.

From the foregoing, some features of hate speech will be identified below to guide our description of hate speech in this study.

1. Hate speech is usually uttered to the out-group.

2. Hate speech is usually uttered to discriminate, abuse, or verbally attack the out-group due to some political, religious, ethnic, race, color, opinions, etc. differences that exist between them.

3. Expressions that spread, incite, instigate, or promote racial hatred, xenophobia, and other forms of hatred against others could be tagged hate discourse.

4. Hate speech makers make lexical choices to invectively represent others.

In addition, in this study, Van Dijk's ideological square will also be used to define and identify hate comments. The ideological square consists of four principles of ideological discourse that states that (Dijk, 2011):

1. Emphasize our good deeds   2. Emphasize their bad deeds.
3. De-emphasize our bad deed   4. De-emphasize their good deeds.

Several studies have been done on hate speech, particularly from the aspects of discourse analysis, communication studies, and other interdisciplinary approaches but not much has been done on the discursive strategies of hate speech and lexical markers of hate speech on Nairaland. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap identified by examining the discursive strategies, triggers, and lexical markers of hate speech on Nairaland.

1.2   CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

Scholars in the field of CDA consider language as an instrument of social practice; they investigate and challenge power relations and ideologies in discourse. Scholars in CDA include Norman

Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun Van Dijk, and James Paul Gee who have introduced different methodological approaches to the study of CDA. Johnson & McLean (2020) says that the multiple CDA approaches explicitly or implicitly attempt to create links between micro, meso, and macro-scale social phenomena, linking discourse analysis across the three scales. Van Dijk (2001) posits that CDA investigates the function of discourse in challenging the social problems created through the production and reproduction of domination or power abuse. Similarly, Wodak (2009) avers that CDA deals with analyzing and challenging issues of dominance, discrimination, and power as reflected in language. What is more, CDA pays attention to uncovering and challenging societal problems particularly those relating to issues of power, dominance, ideologies, and inequality.

Scholars in the field of CDA have developed different approaches to the study of critical discourse analysis. However, there are three main approaches related to Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun Van Dijk. Fairclough developed a three-dimensional framework for studying discourse which includes language practice, analysis of discourse practice, and analysis of discursive events. Fairclough maps these three frameworks into macro, meso, and micro levels interpretation. The micro level deals with linguistic analysis such as syntactic analysis, and the use of metaphors and rhetorical devices, the meso level deals with how discourse is produced and consumed, while the macro level deals with the intertextual and interdiscursive elements influencing the text being studied. Ruth Wodak's introduced the discourse historical approach which is an interdisciplinary approach that analyses and accounts for the diachronic changes that have occurred in discursive practices over time. Wodak (2009) identifies five discursive strategies that are employed in the production of ideologies, and these include nomination, prediction, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification strategies. Teun Van Dijk's approach to CDA shows that a relationship exists between cognition, discourse, and society. In this light, Van Dijk's approach involves cognitive, linguistic, and social theories. It is believed that humans' everyday social experiences influence and reinforce their ideologies. This approach is a three-layer approach that comprises discourse, cognition, and society. Van Dijk (2002) provides the ideological schema that shows how ideologies are construed through emphasizing "our good deeds", de-emphasizing "their good deeds", de-emphasizing "our bad deeds", and emphasizing "their bad deeds".

1.3   NAIRALAND FORUM

Nairaland Forum is a Nigerian social platform created in 2005 by Osawa Oluwaseun. It has about two million users across the globe, having Nigerians as most members. It mainly focuses on posting issues and events in Nigeria and other countries which attract various discussions and comments from the users. It is an avenue where Nigerians meet and interact on various issues concerning the nation and even private matters. Nairaland has various sections relating to various aspects of human life, whereby issues and events are classified and discussed under various sections based on the theme or idea of the topic. The forum is classified into three main sections namely Nairaland general, entertainment, science, and technology where issues relating to politics, education, jobs, religion, business, traveling, careers, agriculture, etc. are discussed.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of hate speech as an area of research has been explored by scholars. Within the Nigerian context, Abdulazeez

(2023) explored the impact of hate speech on the choice of the candidate among the Edo state electorates during the 2023 general election. The study shows that political actors employed hate speech as a political tactic during the campaign which was done on both digital media and traditional media, which was triggered by ethnic, personalities, and religion affiliations. Although the verbal attacks did not directly influence the choice of the electorates due to the hate speech; the study concludes that sanction should be placed on any media outlets that support or promote hate during elections. Asemah (2022) examined the degree of hate speech messages on Facebook against select clergymen in Nigeria, with a focus on the framing of the hate speech and the impacts of the hate messages on clergymen in Nigeria. The study concludes that hate speech is pernicious to individual and group rights in Nigeria. Also, Eneh (2022) assessed the social media usability and the proliferation of hate on media spaces in Benue state. Using the survey method, the study examined three hundred and eighty-four (384) randomly selected questionnaires employing the public sphere theory. The study concludes that Facebook and Twitter are the major platforms where hate speech is mostly produced in Benue State and that the abuse of political power by the politicians and religious segregation are the main trigger of hate speech. Thus, legal actions should be taken to curb the menace of hate on the media.

Auwal, A. (2018) examines users' comments on Biafra agitation and Arewa youth ultimatum to Igbo residents in the north from the lens of critical discourse analysis. Employing the discourse psychology approach, Facebook accounts of three popular news media with an online presence were purposively selected for the study due to their consistency in their coverage and reporting of Biafra agitations and Arewa youth ultimatum issues on their Facebook pages. Results reveal that social actors were marginalized based on a regional and religious affinity in their comments which mitigated attacks towards others. The study recommends an articulatory policy framework to moderate social media content to ensure peaceful co-existence. This study employs the discourse psychology approach to examine the comments, without considering the various strategies employed and the lexical markers of the hate discourse. This current study aims to fill this gap by identifying the strategies and lexical items used in the production of hate speech on Nairaland. Chuka (2019) examined the metalinguistic evaluators that index hate speech in Nigeria and relate them to certain pragmatic strategies through which the hate speech producer's intentions are communicated. Using a descriptive and qualitative analysis approach, the study sampled three manuscripts of hate speech made by three groups (Arewa Youth Consultative, Youths of Oduduwa Republic, and Biafra Nation Youth League) from three (northern, western, and eastern) regions of Nigeria. The study was anchored on Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory and Pragmatic Acts. Two aspects of the metalinguistic evaluator were unraveled (the positive and negative), which are also associated with three pragmatic strategies which include blunt condemnation, unshielded exposition, and appeal to emotion. Findings revealed that the condemning and exposing strategy mostly employs negative evaluators in inciting hate on target out-groups, while the emotion strategy employs positive evaluators in promoting the image of the hate speech producers.

Hangeior, D. (2020) examines online comments on corruption stories by news readers to determine if the comments contain hate features. Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, the researcher did a purposive sampling of comments on four high-profile corruption stories in two national newspapers, Vanguard, and Punch newspapers. Findings revealed that the comments exhibit hate features and the hateful comments are targeted at the ethnic groups of the main actors in the corruption story. What is more, this study only focuses on examining the comments to ascertain if they exhibit hate features or not from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, without examining them within a particular CDA theory. This current study sets out to examine hate comments on Nairaland using socio-cognitive theory and to identify the strategies, triggers, and lexical markers of hate speech on the Nairaland forum. Al-utbi (2019) carried out a critical analysis of hate speech targeted at Muslims and Islam on Facebook. The study employed Fairclough's dialectal relational approach to recognize and examine instances of speech as relating to freedom of expression or hate speech. Findings from the research reveal that the language of the posts and the semiotic features depict that the texts demonstrate hate speech which could result in genocide and not just freedom of expression. The study only identifies the hate texts on Facebook without identifying the various strategies employed by producers of the hate comments on Facebook, as well as factors that trigger the disparaging comments. This current study aims to fill this gap by examining the various strategies used by hate speech producers on Nairaland and identifying the triggers of hate comments. This current study aims to contribute to the existing literature by paying attention to the strategies, triggers, and markers of hate-inducing comments on the Nairaland platform, using Van Dijk's Socio cognitive theory and Wodak's discursive strategies.

2.1   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The socio-cognition approach is the system of mental representation and processing of group membership introduced by Van Dijk (2016). Socio-cognition is related to social memory which involves the ability to store and remember information. The cognitive interface plays a mediating role in understanding the relationship between discourse structure and social structure. The cognitive representation of events and actions is based on shared socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies. Ideologies are regarded as the beliefs of a group of people in a society. According to Van Dijk (2006, p. 369), 'Discourse is produced and understood in terms of mental models that combine personal and social beliefs in a way that both explain the uniqueness of all discourse production and understanding and the similarity of our understanding of the same text'.   This implies that the interpretation of discourse is based on personal beliefs or shared social or cultural beliefs which determine how to explain and react to events or actions. The belief systems are socially shared by the members of a social group. Ideology here is peculiar to the belief of a group of actors about other groups in a society. It entails social representation that defines the social identity of a group. Van Dijk (2008) asserts that ideologies are the foundational beliefs that define the shared social representations of specific social groups. These ideologies serve as the basis of discourse and other social practices. However, it is believed that ideologies are garnered from discourse through spoken and written communicative interaction by a group. That is, any communicative interaction a group is involved in occurs based on their ideological disposition, which determines how this group relates and converses with other groups in society. For instance, the feminist movement and its beliefs determine their ideological disposition toward other groups. Feminist ideology agitates for gender equality and female rights, any other group that goes against the Feminist ideology will be seen as the opposition group against the feminism aims, and as a result, such group will be reproachfully represented.

Ideology also has a schema, in which some conventional categories allow social actors to easily and quickly understand,

reject, or modify an ideology. Van Dijk (2001) asserts that the categories that define the ideological schema should depend on the basic properties of the social group. That is, as ideologies determine the social beliefs of a group, the identity and identification of group members must reflect a fixed pattern of basic categories with flexible rules of application.

Categories of the Ideology Schema:

Membership criteria-   Who does (not) belong.

Typical activities –   What do we do?

Overall aim –   What do we do?

                   Why do we do it?

Norms and Values –   What is good or bad for us.

Position-   What are the relationships with others?

Resources –   Who has access to our group resources?

The above schema of six categories shows what it requires to belong to a group. It reflects the polarization of the in-groups and the out-group representation, with the use of the pronoun pair US vs. THEM and some other discourse elements. According to Van Dijk (2007), the form of positive self–presentation and negative other-presentation reflects the way we address ourselves in a social group, relate with other groups, and present others in the opposition groups. Since a group's ideology can be reflected through a communicative interaction, the way members of a social group position themselves and talk to other opposition groups determines their ideological beliefs and dispositions. This group polarization can be seen as a form of discrimination and segregation against members of other groups.

2.2 WODAK'S DISCURSIVE STRATEGY

Wodak and Reisilg (2009) identify some discursive strategies to be taken into consideration when analyzing a specific discourse. Wodak (2009) defines "Strategy as a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal". The below questions are put forward to explain the discursive strategies.

1. How are social actors, objects, events, processes, and actions referred to linguistically?
2. What characters and features are used to qualify social actors, objects, events, and processes?
3. What are the arguments used in the discourse in question?
4. What are the perspectives through which the nominations, attributions, and arguments are expressed?
5. Are they produced statements intensified or mitigated?

Based on the above questions, Wodak (2009) explains five discursive strategies that should be considered when analyzing a discourse.

1. Nomination Strategy: The nomination strategy involves the representation and projection of social actors, objects, events, etc. using membership categorization devices such as nouns, metonymies, and verbs denoting processes and actions. This strategy explains how group dichotomy is achieved and how social actors are represented in a particular discourse.
2. Predication Strategy: Predication strategy entails negative and positive representations of social actors in discourse.

Wodak (2009) avers that it is the discursive projection of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, and actions positively or negatively. The devices or tools employed in the realization of this strategy include stereotypical expressions, evaluative qualification of negative and positive traits, using adjectives, appositions, relative clauses, metaphors, similes, euphemisms, and other rhetorical figures.

3. Argumentation strategy: Argumentation strategy involves the producer's effort to justify the discourse produced. Argumentation schemes are reasonable or fallacies. If they are fallacies, they are called 'fallacies'. There are rules for constructive arguing that enable differentiating reasonable topio from fallacies (Wodak, 2009). The rules include correct references to the previous discourse by the antagonist, the obligation to give reason, logical validity, etc.
4. Perspectivization strategy: Wodak (2009) posits that the perspectivization strategy involves projecting the speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing it in group or out-group membership. It involves the use of deictics, direct or indirect speech, tag questions, explaining, describing, etc.
5. Intensification/ Mitigation Strategy: Wodak (2009) states that intensification and mitigation strategies modify the illocutionary force of the uttered utterance as intensifying or mitigating. The strategic devices include hyperboles or litotes, indirect speech acts, verbs of saying, feeling, thinking, tag questions, hesitations, vague expressions, etc.

Van Dijk's (2016) and Wodak (2009) theories as discussed above are applicable to the analysis of hate speech on media. By applying Van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory, the relation between the linguistic patterns, discourse pattern, and cognitive process that produce and reinforce stereotypic beliefs and ideologies are examined. Also, Wodak's discursive strategies are employed at various levels of linguistic organization when analyzing a specific discourse. The strategies investigate how group classification is achieved and how social actors are projected either positively or negatively. These theories will be used to analyze the linguistic and discourse markers such as use of predicative adjectives, pronouns, nouns, appositives, metaphors, etc. and the sociocultural knowledge and experiences that influence media users' production of hate speech.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section explains the methods and procedures used for data collection and analysis for this study. It comprises a procedure for data collection, data analysis procedure, and data presentation procedure.

3.1 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study were extracted from an online forum, Nairaland, through www.nairaland.com. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select comments that portray hate speech features which include derogatory expressions, discriminatory assertions, and invective portrayals of others through lexical choices. Specifically, comments that portray these qualities were chosen from three posts in the Nairaland general section. These selected posts include: Cow ban: IPOB is blowing the trumpet of war –Northern coalition (posted on January 14, 2022), Why do Nigerians of other ethnic groups reject Igbo presidency? (Posted on January 16, 2022) and why can't an Igbo man be the president? (Posted on June 29, 2022). These three posts

were chosen because they discussed prevalent issues in the country. The choice of Nairaland as the social media platform from which the data were gathered was due to its consistency in coverage and reporting of issues in the country which are usually categorized and discussed under different sections of the forum, and this makes it different from other social media platforms. Also, Nairaland is an indigenous media platform that reflects local and international events. Therefore, it is necessary to examine hate speech on this indigenous platform. Twenty-eight (28) comments that exhibit hate features were purposively extracted for this study. Then, the collected data were analyzed through the lens of critical discourse analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis is adopted for this study because it is found suitable for the analysis of discourse and ideology. Regarding ethical considerations, the comments are extracted from a forum that is regarded as a public domain which is tagged as public discourse. Also, the privacy setting of the forum is not restricted but open to the public. Marlow (2017) defines public discourse as political or social debates found in newspapers, television, radio, and online media forums. However, following the Association of Internet Researchers' 2019 report on ethics in Internet research and to enhance privacy, the data do not include usernames, profile pictures, or personal information of the commenters.

3.2 PROCEDURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative technique of data analysis was utilized in the study. According to Pritha (2020), qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as text, audio, or video, to clarify ideas, viewpoints, and experiences to gain extensive knowledge of a subject and generate original research ideas. In this context, the study examined the ideologies and diverse strategies used by the commenters in generating hateful remarks on Nairaland through the theoretical lens of Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive theory and Wodak's discursive strategies. Van Dijk (2006) posits that there is a relationship between discourse, cognition, and society, which shows how social actors interpret and understand social events and actions based on their ideologies and cognitive beliefs. Therefore, commenters' cognitive beliefs and ideologies which result to in- in-group and out-group polarization were unearthed and explained. Also, some deliberate lexical choices for out-group invective representation and lexical markers of hate speech were identified and explained. In addition, triggers of hate comments were identified in the analysis. The extracted data were categorized and analyzed under the identified discursive strategies, using the qualitative method of data analysis. Data that exhibit features of each strategy were categorized together. The extracted comments are numbered and analyzed under the discursive strategies. The commenters' identities are not revealed during the analysis, only the comments made are extracted from the platform and subjected to analysis. The comments are edited to correct grammatical errors.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 NOMINATION STRATEGY

The nomination strategy involves group polarization to achieve positive and negative representation. Social actors are categorized into in-group and out-group members which is often achieved using some membership categorization devices which include linguistic items such as nouns, metonymies, and deictic to create positive self-representation and negative others representation, appositions, and relative clauses for invective description of other groups.

Nominal as Discursive Strategy for Nicknaming and Profiling

Nominal expressions deal with naming entities, objects, or persons to provide individual or group identification and categorization. In the hate discourse below, nominal is employed to give individual or group identity, which aids the polarization of social actors into in-group and out-group. The nominal expressions either have the structure of Adjective + Noun (Modifier+ Headword) or Noun (the headword) and they perform the syntactic function of modifiers in group structures and subject complements in clause structures; this reveals the ideological stance of the commenters in the texts. Nominal as a discursive tool for nicknaming and profiling will be discussed as exemplified in the following texts:

Text 1	They are very stupid. If not, Christians calming Igbos down, I can finish *two lehpa aboki* with my bare hands.	*(January 14, 2022 /11:11am)*
Text 2	They are *criminals*	*(April 25, 2022/ 11:0am)*
Text 3	You are *idiots*	*(January 14, 2022 /11:20 am)*
Text 4	They are *bastards*	*(July 16, 2022 /11: 45am)*
Text 5	They are *fools*	*(July 16, 2022 /11: 45am)*
Text 6	See tribalist glutton who sold his people to Fulanis. Who doesn't know average Yoruba man cannot be trusted reason they are called *demons*	*(June 30, 2022 /6: 41am)*

The above texts are comments made on the Nairaland forum. The texts show how nominal expressions are used for nicknaming and profiling which reflect groups' identification and enhance group polarization based on members' ethnic and political party affiliations. Ayodele (2020) describes profiling as a discourse strategy employed to portray racial and ethnic polarization in society. Nominal expressions in the above texts have the structure of Adjective + Noun in text 1 where it functions as a direct object and Noun (the headword) in text 2-6 where it functions as subject complements. The syntactic function of nominal as a complement in the above texts implies invective description and representation of the out-groups. For instance, text 1 is a comment made on the topic "Cow ban: IPOB is blowing the trumpet of war", the nominal group 'two lehpa Aboki (two thin Aboki) which consists of structure Adjective + Noun (Modifier + headword) was used to invectively describe the Hausas. In the Hausa language, the lexical item "Aboki" denotatively means 'friend', but the term has received another connotative meaning among non-Hausas, whereby they use it derogatorily to describe Hausas as illiterate and backward thinkers, particularly those involved in casual street works. The choice of this nominal expression in text 1 reveals the ideological stance of the commenter who believes that Hausas are illiterates, and this contributes to their ill mannerism. Text 2 portrays the ideological stance of the commenter who believes that members of the Northern Coalition are criminals. The Northern Coalition is a group whose main interest is to agitate the interests of the northerners whom they claim are being marginalized. The nominal expression 'criminals' functions as a subject complement in the sentence, whereby it complements the subject of the sentence 'they'. The choice of this nominal expression as a complement to the plural subject reveals that the commenter

profiled the Hausa/Fulani as criminals. This degrading representation may be linked to the insecurity issue rampaging northern Nigeria and gradually transgressing to other regions. It is believed that most of the grievous events happening in the country are carried out by the northerners, particularly the Fulani herdsmen. Calling them 'criminals' implies that they can commit grievous acts.

Similarly, texts 3, 4, 5, and 6 exhibit stereotypical representations of the Igbos and Yorubas. The nominal expressions function as subject complements in the sentence. They have the structure of Nouns which serve as the headwords in the sentences. In text 3, the commenter used the nominal 'idiots' to complement the subject 'they' to vituperatively identify the Igbos. The use of the pronoun 'they' points to a segregated situation. This invective expression presents the Igbos as a group with low intellectual ability which signifies that Igbos cannot lead the nation. Also, texts 4 and 5 describe and profile the Igbos as illegitimate members of Nigeria through the nominal expression 'bastards', functioning as a subject complement to show that Igbos are not legitimately Nigerians, therefore they are not fit to govern the nation. This vituperative comment aims to denigrate the Igbo by making them appear socially irrational and invoke their rejection by other Nigerians. What is more, in text 6, Yorubas are profiled as 'demons. This is a negative representation that presents Yorubas as devilish people.

4.2 PREDICATION STRATEGY

This strategy involves the speaker's intention to positively or negatively portray or represent social actors. It is the discursive projection of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, and actions positively or negatively. Metaphors, predicative adjectives, and pronouns as discursive tools for predication strategy will be discussed as exemplified in the below texts.

Pronouns and Predicative Adjectives for Polarization

Polarization involves the biased classification of groups into in-groups and out-groups due to the differences in their ideological views. Soporuchi (2021) posits that polarization occurs through evaluation, descriptions, and references. The dichotomy is projected through positive self-representation and negative others representation. Pronouns occur as grammatical words, and it is used to replace one or more nouns in an expression. A pronoun can function as the subject or object of the clause,

Text 7	Nobody is blowing any trumpet of war. You guys should keep your *bloody thirsty herdsmen* in the north.	*(January 14, 2022 /11:11 am)*
Text 8	I cannot believe those uncircumcised gworo eating bastards. Let them bring it on.	(January 14, 2022 /11:12am)
Text 9	Those northern coalitions are foolish	(January 14, 2022 /11:12 am)
Text 10	You Igbos are *delusional sociopaths and megalomaniacs* for real.	*(January 16, 2022 /1:30 pm)*
Text 11	They (Igbos) are greedy, unfriendly, and not loyal to the project in Nigeria.	(January 14, 2022 /11:15am)

Texts 7 – 11 also exhibit the delineation of social actors into in-group and out-group classification which is achieved using various pronouns in different contexts to exhibit group polarization. For instance, the demonstrative pronoun 'those' as used in texts8 and 9 functions as a pointer that signifies the distance relationship between the speakers and the target group. Also, personal pronouns 'I, you, we, they, and them' in subject and

object cases as in texts7, 10, and 11, are used to refer to members of other groups and show social distance between the in-group and out-group. The use of these pronouns corroborates the ideology of positive self-representation and negative others representation. Also, adjectives such as 'uncircumcised', 'bastards, foolish, megalomaniacs, sociopaths, greedy, unfriendly, selfish, etc. are used with other nouns where they function as modifiers or serve as headwords when they occur alone in a clause. In texts 7, 8, and 9 lexical items such as uncircumcised, bloody thirsty, and foolish serve as adjectival expressions used to derogatorily describe the Hausa/ Fulanis in Nigeria. It is known that Circumcision is an important activity in African society which is performed on the tip of a male genital by a medical professional and a circumcised person is regarded as sexually fit and clean. Therefore, calling Hausas uncircumcised implies that they are filthy. Also, calling them bastards implies that they are illegitimate members of the nation which makes them commit grievous act; it is culturally known in Nigerian society that a bastard child destroys the legacy of the family.

4.3 Metaphors for Invective Representation

A metaphor is defined as a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two things that possess something in common (Nordquist, 2018). Duan (2013) posits that focusing on cognition and metaphor functions as the organizer of our conceptual system. Also, understanding metaphor polishes our text and emotionalizes the readers. This implies that metaphor as a figurative tool shows direct similarity between two things, adds aesthetics to the text, and attracts the readers' attention. Metaphor is one of the devices of the predication strategy used to disparagingly describe the others.

Text 12   The North is boasting of war against the East because of their new fighter jets which are recently parked in the North and awaiting quack testing in the East. After all the leader of IPOB is still cramped and chilling in the north too and may never be released till after 2023. They do not want to hear anything against their cows because they are *cows* and until the referendum takes place, these backward thinkers will keep drawing us back. *(January 14, 2022 /11:34am)*

Extract 13   Without the middle belt, Russia, Britain, and Nigeria cannot stand the Igbo race. It is not bragging, it's a certainty. We know the story, do not re-write it. It is not a bad thing to separate from *animals.* We want our place. Is it too much to ask? *(January 14, 2022 /11:44am)*

Text 14   More trouble, well Biafra War Pro Max will be awesome to watch, see how those troublesome mosquitoes will be attacked in Computer Village, Oyingbo market, and then Alaba. *(January 14, 2022 /11:04am)*

Text 15   *They are Animals (January 14, 2022 /11:11 am)*

Text 16   *Pig* idiots Igbos (June 29, 2022/10:02 am)

The above extracts employ a predication strategy to portray group segregation and digressive others' representation.

Metaphoric expressions are employed to derogatorily represent and describe others. The commenters invectively represent the out-group members through some reproachful expressions. In text 12, the commenter compared the northerners to a cow, hence, transferred the attributes and unpleasant characteristics of a cow which is an herbivore animal in the description of the northerners. This representation, however, could be linked to the atrocities committed by the Fulani herdsmen in the country. Fulani herdsmen are northerners whose main occupation is livestock farming, particularly the rearing of cows which are to be consumed by humans. Contrarily, Fulani herdsmen kill and attack people who attack their cows for grazing on their farmlands and products. The metaphoric representation of northerners as cows reveals the belief that northerners behave inhumanly due to their overzealous affection for their cows. This direct comparison makes the northerners appear socially unacceptable. Extract 14 portrays a metaphoric representation of northerners as 'mosquitoes' which are flying insects that perch on other organisms for survival but cause harm to them during the process.   This direct comparison suggests that northerners' relationship with other groups is harmful.   This comment shows the commenters' ideology that Hausas disturb the peace of the nation. The invective description makes the Hausas appear socially unacceptable. The comment shows an instigation of a physical attack on the northerners in certain marketplaces in Lagos. It claims that Biafra War Pro Max will be delightful to watch again which be an avenue to attack and eliminate the Hausas in the Lagos markets known to house many northerners. What is more, this comment clamors for the Biafra war which had previously occurred and was a bloody attack that recorded many losses of lives and destruction of properties. Extract 15 displays a metaphorical representation of northerners as animals. This disparaging comment could be due to the various inhuman activities such as kidnapping and Boko haram sect malicious acts occurring in the northern part of the nation which is also gradually generating to other parts of the nation. This direct description is used as an ideological reference point to degradingly present the Hausas and make them unacceptable in society. Extract 16 employs the noun 'pigs' which is an omnivorous mammal as a metaphoric device to represent the Igbos. This direct representation links the filthy reputation of pigs to the Igbos. This implies that Igbos are filthy and unpleasant. Also, the adjective 'idiots' is used to reproachfully describe the Igbos as retarded set of people. However, this negative representation shows the ideological belief of the commenter who views that Igbos do not have the required qualities to be in a position of power.

4.4   ARGUMENTATION STRATEGY

This strategy involves the speaker's attempt to legitimize or justify his utterance by providing reasons for the justification of the uttered discriminatory statement. There are rules for constructive arguing that enable differentiating reasonable topio from fallacies (Wodak, 2009). The rules include correct references to the previous discourse by the antagonist, the obligation to give reason, logical validity, etc. Giving reasons as discursive tools for argumentation strategy will be discussed as exemplified in the below texts.

Argumentation (Giving Reasons)

Text 17   because they (Igbos) are not accommodating, not united, they don't respect their elders, they have been given the position of the third citizen of the country and we know what they did. Also, they are always angry. *(June 29, 2022/ 11:08)*

Text 18   Igbos have an inferiority complex and compensate for that feeling with empty and noisy boastfulness. Anyone who knows Igbos will know, they have chronic jealousy, bad mouth, and bad-mouthing are very common and typical traits of Igbos even when relating with other Igbos. *(January 16, 2022 /10:05am)*

Extract 19   Other Nigerians don't like Igbos and never will if the average Igbo has the mindset of the Douch bag above. Nigerians tolerate you but they don't like you because of your arrogance and disrespectful acts based on nothing. *(January 16, 2022 /11: 51am)*

Text 20   An Igbo man will never be Nigerian's president because Igbos want Nigeria to split. Peter Obi is an IPOB project. I wish he wasn't so that power can change from PDP and APC criminals, but the truth is Peter Obi is an IPOB project. *(June 29, 2022 /2:45 pm)*

Extract 21   Igbo cannot be the president because Igbos can easily betray you once money is involved.   *(June 29, 2022 /11:32am)*

In the above texts, commenters employ the argumentation strategy to provide reasons in justification of their comments. The argumentation strategy is used by commenters to argue their points and justify their utterance. For instance, texts 17 and 18 describe Igbos as the least patriotic group because of their indecision and desire to secede from Nigeria. This reason is given to reject the Igbo presidency and justify the degrading description of the Igbos. Also, texts 19, 20, and 21 state that other Nigerians do not like the Igbos because of their arrogance and pride. The lexical item 'because' is used to indicate reasons for such attitude towards the Igbos; justifying their claims that the Igbo group cannot lead the nation because of their interest in seceding from the nation. This shows that the comments were triggered because of the ethnic and religious affinity of the commenter.

4.5   PERSPECTIVIZATION STRATEGY

This strategy refers to the attempt of the speaker to get his audience involved in his discourse and point of view. This is achieved through some discursive tools which include questioning (tag questions), explaining, reporting, quoting, narrating previous events, etc. Narrating previous events and questioning as discursive tools for perspectivization strategy will be discussed as exemplified in the below texts.

QUESTIONING (tag questions, wh-questions, and polar questions)

A question is a form of sentence also known as an interrogative sentence which requires a response or an answer. Questions are usually asked to elicit responses from the listeners or readers. Question types include polar questions, wh-questions, tag questions, etc. syntactically, in forming a question, there is an inversion of the subject and the verb (polar &tag questions), beginning with an interrogative pronoun (wh-question) and ending with a question mark.

Text 22   War is an art that could teach us one thing or another. It is funny when certain dingbats from the northern region of Nigeria talk about war. One

thing that comes to my mind when these dumbass punks invoke war in their silly speeches remains the goons who learned nothing from Nigeria/Biafra war. Who shall be the principal combatants, foes, and allies? I shall advise Nigerians to go to the table of negotiation to seek ways of disunion from the shithole called Nigeria. If the Dam called Nigeria would burst, the rapid currents will not obey the silly and imaginary boundaries. *(January 14, 2022/ 10:51am)*

Text 23   How can you people lead a nation with this despicable selfish mindset?? Yorubas don't trust you, while the Hausas don't respect you. Why? Because you can't even trust yourselves. So sad! *(June 39, 2022 / 2:10am)*

Text 24   If Nigeria gets divided, the Igbo nation will not last past 8 months. Why? This group of people is not only senseless but also lacks unity and integrity. *(June 30, 2022 / 2:35 pm)*

Text 25   What are you talking about dude? How can you liberate anything when you, senseless people, continue to kill each other like flies, when you sell each other like a sachet of pure water, when you lack unity and integrity, when you hate everything, etc.? *(June 30, 2022 / 2:26am)*

Text 26   Please leave the Labor Party and its candidate alone, why is the focus on Obi whom you claimed has no structure? Leave the OBidients alone and focus on your *owomi da* and your ancestors, we don't have time for *agberos*(tout), we are progressive, all churches will vote accordingly, and all patriotic Nigerians will do the same, leave me alone, and go eat *agbado* (corn) or Amala, we move! *(June 29, 2022/6:41 pm)*

In texts 22-26, questioning as a perspectivization strategic tool is employed to involve other readers in the discourse and make them agree with the commenters' point of view. Through questioning, the commenters elicit responses in favor and justification of their hate speech. The texts used the wh-question type to question the eligibility of an Igbo candidate to rule the nation. In the interrogative sentences of wh-questions type, the subject of the sentences includes who, why, what, and how. 'Who' and 'what' as the subject of the clause points to the outgroup members, while why and how to justify the ineligibility of the out-group members (Igbos) to function in a position of authority. For instance, the use of 'who' in text 22 points to the Hausas as those who will suffer the effects of war, even though they are the perpetrators of war. Also, texts 23-26 possess the wh-pronoun why and how, which question the out-group members' eligibility to rule the nation. For instance, text 23 posits that other ethnic groups do not trust the Igbos due to their despicable acts, and as a result, they are not eligible to lead the nation. Also, texts 24 and 25 claim that the Igbos will not survive if they secede from Nigeria because the group lacks the unity and integrity required to survive as a nation. Text 26 describes followers of the presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu, as louts who lack in an uncouth manner. The 'owomi da' is Yoruba expression which means 'where is my

money', a term commonly used by louts who aggressively demand money from people and cause disturbance in the community. The commenter posits that followers of the Labor Party candidate, Peter Obi should not be disturbed and threatened because they are progressive and organized.

4.6 INTENSIFICATION STRATEGY

Wodak (2009) describes the objectives of intensification and mitigation strategies as modification of the illocutionary force of the uttered utterance as intensifying or mitigating. The strategic devices include hyperbole or litotes, indirect speech acts, verbs of saying, feeling, thinking, hesitations, vague expressions, etc. Hyperbole as a discursive device for intensification strategy will be discussed as exemplified in the below texts.

Hyperbole for Intensification and Emphasis

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that uses exaggeration for emphasis or effects (Nordquist, 2018). It is an extravagant utterance that produces heightened effects through deliberate exaggeration to emphasize an act that may not be true. Hyperbole as an intensification device will be discussed as exemplified in the below texts.

Text 27   After you all have sex with your cows, you want us to eat that shit, spits. Killing, raping, displacing local indigenous Nigerians in the name of cattle rearing business. We do not want to eat your rotten Fulani sperm-induced cows again. You should eat them alone. *(January 14, 2022/11:10am)*

Text 28   To me, Nigerians in general should stop eating any of their cows. It's an anomaly abomination and satanic to eat meat that had been sacrificed to the devil. You eat such meat at your peril and damnation for all I care. Those Fulani terrorists and their cows can go to hell and burn to ashes. *(January 14, 2022 /11:12am)*

In texts 27 and 28, hyperbole as an intensification device is used to emphasize, intensify, and exaggerate others' acts. The commenters accuse the Fulani herdsmen of committing abominable acts with their cows. The cows are described as rotten sperm-induced cows, satanic, and devilish just to intensify others' hatred towards the consumption of the Fulanis' reared cows. This statement is made to lay emphasis on and intensify the bad acts of the Northerners, the Fulani cattlemen, to discourage other Nigerians from patronizing them and make them socially unacceptable. In Nigeria, the main job of the Fulanis is cattle rearing and wildlife farming and Nigerians consume their cows in large quantities. Thus, if the same cows being consumed by Nigerians are now described as satanic and devilish, it is to intensify the hatred of other regions towards the Northerners.

5. Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the data shows that commenters of hate discourses on Nairaland employ some strategies in producing hate-inducing comments and each of the strategies performs specific functions. These strategies are employed to foster the polarization of social actors into in-group and out-group categorization, invective representation of others, justification of the hate discourses, etc. The in-group members are involved in positive self-representation and negative others' representation by de-emphasizing their bad deeds and emphasizing others' bad deeds. Nominals, appositions, and relative clauses are used as

nominalization devices to project in-group and out-group categorization. Nominal structures are used for nicknaming and profiling the out-group members to emphasize the bad acts of the out-group members and make them socially unacceptable. The analysis of the nominal structures shows that the nominal groups have the structure of either modifier + head or only headword. In the case of modifier+head structures, adjectives function as modifiers of the headword, performing the function of complement. The nominal, appositives, and relative clauses show the ideological construction of the in-groups against the out-group which prompts the degrading representation of the out-group. Also, pronouns, predicative adjectives, and metaphors are used as predicative strategic devices for polarization and invective descriptions of the out-group. The metaphoric expressions serve as the ideological reference points of the commenter; the metaphoric expressions negatively construe the identity of the out-group. Also, pronouns and predicative adjectives are used to polarize the social actors into in-group and out-group membership. Pronouns such as I, us, them, and we occur at both the subject and object position of the clauses to establish group membership. The study also shows that commenters of hate comments on Nairaland employ the argumentation strategy to buttress their points by providing reasons to justify their claims and ideology.

Furthermore, interrogative sentences (questioning) are used as a perspectivization strategic device to involve the readers in the discourse and make them agree with the points of view of the commenter. The wh-question and polar question types are used to elicit responses from the readers to involve them in the discourse and make them agree with the commenter. Also, explanation and narration of previous historical occurrences are used by in-group members to justify their points against the out-group. Hyperbolic expression is used as an intensification tool to exaggerate the bad acts of the out-group and instigate attacks and hatred against the out-group members. What is more, the study reveals that nouns, pronouns, and adjectives are the main lexical markers of hate speech on Nairaland, where they are used for profiling, polarization, and invective descriptions of out-groups. Also, the study reveals that commenters' ethnic, religious, and political party affiliations triggered their hateful comments against others on the forum. This is evident in the analyzed texts above where commenters show their ethnic, religious, and political party interests against others who do not belong to their affiliations. The study reveals that the various experiences of the commenters on Nairaland influence their ideologies against others.

6. CONCLUSION

From this study, it could be said that various individual's or group's experiences influence their beliefs and ideology and in turn their ideology influences their discourse. According to Van Dijk (2006), 'Discourse is produced and understood in terms of mental models that combine personal and social beliefs in a way that both explain the uniqueness of all discourse production and understanding and the similarity of our understanding of the same text'. This implies that our personal and social experiences influence our ideology and language use. Our analysis shows that commenters use each discursive strategy for different purposes; nominalization for nicknaming and profiling, predication for polarization and invective descriptions, argumentation and perspectivization are used to justify hateful comments, while the intensification strategy is used to intensify the bad deeds of others. Also, social actors are involved in positive self-description and negative others' descriptions through social actors' polarization. The findings have major implications for the comprehension of hate speech effects in digital spaces and measures to mitigate its occurrence. Considering the above findings, we therefore stress the need to curb hateful comments in online discourses. To achieve this, the government should engage Information Technology experts to design features, using information derived from language experts to block or filter hateful comments on social media platforms. Also, social media users should be sensitized to the effects of hate comments on national harmony and peaceful existence in society.

Although this study offers insightful details about the nuances of hate speech on the Nairaland forum, it is not without limitations. One limitation is that the data collection only depends on a single online forum, Nairaland, which may not fully capture the occurrence of hate speech in the larger digital environment. Also, the study only focuses on textual data without considering other multi-modal resources such as images, graphics, or videos that could be used to project hate on digital platforms. Going forward, future researchers could focus on the comparative study of the analysis of multimodal resources for the projection of hate across online platforms to provide a more comprehensive overview of hate speech in digital spaces. To further the studies on hate speech in digital media spaces, future researchers could also consider examining the role of algorithms in the mitigation of hate speech in digital spaces.

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