

## Online Readers' Comments on Corruption Stories and Hate Speech in Nigeria

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### Abstract

**Background:** This study examines online comments on corruption stories by news readers to ascertain if such comments contain hate messages or not. The study examines the nature of conversation that takes place among readers. Readers interact with news content as presented online by reacting to stories as reported.

**Materials and methods:** The study adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis and purposively examines comments on four high profile corruption stories of 2016 in two national newspapers, Vanguard and Punch.

**Results:** Analysis shows the dimension of these conversations sometimes slides into hateful expression that is generally aimed at not just those commenting but the central figure of the corruption story as reported in the news. Such hateful expressions are targeted directly at the entire tribe and region of the main actors in the news.

**Conclusion:** The study also established that newspapers rarely moderate comments as seen in the vulgarity of some expressions by commentators. The paper therefore suggests a thorough moderation of readers' comments to guard against comments that tend to portray hate.

**Keywords:** Online Newspapers, Comments, Corruption and Hate Speech

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Online versions of newspapers offer themselves as important channels of expression. Idi (2017) avers that onlinenewspapers are gaining popularity among citizens because they pass information freely without control of government, powerful politicians and advertisers, thus freeing them fromconventional professional bottlenecks like gate-keeping. Online media's popularity not only comes from their ability to disseminate information but also provide readers the opportunity to engage in debate/discussion. They, thus, stimulate citizens' engagement and discussion. To keep pace with these changes, Ayotunde (2012) observes that virtually all Nigeria media (including newspapers) have websites and have social media presence. This internet presence has the ability to provide feedback fast and easily from receivers to senders. Internet publishing has introduced mass interaction to mass media through the use of comments, chats, blogs and applications which are being put to use in the field of mass communication. The innovation has led to a visible change in the way mass communication is being practised in Nigeria (Ayotunde, 2012).

Interactivity among readers of news stories is based on comments as enabled by online versions of newspapers in Nigeria. Uba and Chimuanya (2015) state thatthis form of interaction among readers enables them have arelationship that would have been impossible with physical contact and experience. The opportunities provided by online newspapers for after-news comments areundoubtedly turning the forum into anemporium of discussants. And as in manyother online communities whereparticipants post and respond to comments,online newspapers have their ownfollowers who interact with one another and exchange comments, usuallyemanating from news stories.

The free flow of online comments is largely attributed to the unregulated nature of the internet as a form of communication channel. This unrestricted access and use of the internet is enshrined in the principle of the freedom of expression. Goshirt (2016), however, observes that the freedom of expression and the press mean the liberty to say what one wishes to say, subject to the consequences under the law as the case maybe. Such laws, when in place, are expected to be fair and reasonably justifiable in a constitutional democracy. Thus, the liberty or freedom of expression and the mass media means that there should not be prior restraint on publication and the liberty of the media. Every person has the right to lay what sentiments, facts, information or publication he has before the public. Stopping this right is to destroy the freedom of expression and the media. However, the liability for publication, where a person publishes what is unlawful, criminal or defamatory or mischievous, is to face the consequences of his publication (Goshirt, 2016).

Unlike online comments, traditional feedback mechanisms in newspapers are based on letters to the editor and opinion based writer-ups. Such formal feedbacks usually face the scrutiny of editors as noted by Agbese(2008) that editors of even soft sell publications decide what material is suitable for publication or not in order to conform to established standards and respect for public taste. This differs from what may be obtainable in online comments where comments may not be edited. This could invariably lead to a plethora of unethical comments, including hate speech. Erjavec(2014) observes that the ease of interactivity has also increased the likelihood that hate speech, which is commonly defined as any form of expression that is directed at individuals or groups and could be objects of prejudice that perpetrators use to wound and denigrate their recipient, might appear among news websites' comments.

The unregulated nature of online conversations among readers of news stories on the internet using various newspapers' comment sections as platforms, according to Jubany and Roiha(2016), has the potential of rapidly increasing the spread of hate speech at a rate that extremist print media were able to reach previously. Apart from hate communication seen on the internet, Alakali, Foga and Mbursa(2016) observe that hate communication in the Nigerian media landscape stems from the dissemination of hate speech and vulgar language. Indeed, the press fell to the trap of reporting hate speech by quoting directly from interviews, press statements, advertorials and sometimes from alleged online sources. This was witnessed in the Nigeria mainstream media in the period leading to the 2015 general elections where mainstream media outlets in Nigeria were flooded with campaign messages displaying crass abuse of the right of free speech by way of hate speech and other types of foul language. This was with disregard to some guiding journalism codes of ethics such as the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage. Hate speech and foul language in Nigeria are mostly inclined to religion or politics (Alakali, Foga and Mbursa, 2016).

Issues that trigger hate communication differ across societies, as acknowledged by Saleem, Dillon, Benesch, and Ruths(2014) that prevailing social norms, context, and individual and collective interpretation may determine hateful speech. Racism, for instance, they say could be a major reason for spreading hate comments in online social networking platforms. Hate speech in Nigeria according to Ezeibe(2014) is traceable to political campaigns that have permeated every nook and cranny of Africa. Online comments are not just used as an instrument of electioneering campaign; numerous elections related conflicts in Africa are credited to hate speech. Hate speech has somewhat become widespread among Nigerians and has continued unabated. The hatred between the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria has intensified as the use of hate speech continues unregulated. This hatred manifests mostly between the dominant ethnic groups in the country: the Igbos and Yorubas see the Hausas as *aboki* which means friend but derogatorily used as a moron. Similarly, the Hausas and the Yorubas see the Igbos as lovers of money while the Hausas and Igbos see the Yorubas as cowards and saboteurs (Ezeibe, 2014).

Apart from politics and ethnicity, corruption has remained one issue Nigerians use as a divisive means to express their hate not just for the corrupt act itself but the perpetrators as well. Smith(2007) avers that ordinary citizens are ambivalent about corruption. They recognise that it undermines the country's democratic political institutions, economic development and global reputation. Yet they also realise that wealth, power and prestige in Nigeria are commonly achieved through practices that can easily be labelled as corrupt. The condemnation of corruption could sometimes be sweeping as an individual is condemned alongside his ethnic group, religion and or region which forms the central concern of this study.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study assesses readers' comments on corruption stories in online versions of Nigerian newspapers to determine if the existence of hate speech in such comments. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the types of comments readers make on corruption news stories in online versions of Nigerian daily newspapers.
2. Assess the tone of comments that readers make on these corruption news stories.
3. Determine what specific hate comments readers make on corruption stories in online versions of Nigerian newspapers

### **Conceptual clarification**

#### ***Online newspaper***

The Internet has transformed how information is gathered and disseminated. Newspapers have also witnessed changes based on the application of internet technology to their operations. Chukwu(2014) describes this phenomenon as online journalism or digital journalism. It is a contemporary form of journalism where editorial content is distributed via the internet as opposed to publishing through print. This according to Ihlström(2006) has been made possible by the ongoing diffusion of personal computers, hand-held devices like mobile telephones and the advent of new technologies such as the e-paper. These have triggered a new pattern in the way news is produced and consumed.

What differentiates the online newspaper and the traditional one is the mode of delivery. Panda and Swain (2011) aver that the electronic newspaper or e-newspaper is a self-contained, reusable and refreshable version of a traditional newspaper that acquires and holds information electronically. They categorise such newspapers in three ways: online newspapers or web based newspapers which are online editions of newspapers available on the web with special characteristics such as navigation support, advertisement and style of presentation. This runs like any other website with frequent updates on news and other editorial content. The second category is the PDF newspaper which is an electronic replica of the traditional newspapers delivered exactly in electronic format as it appears on the print edition but in PDF. The third is the e-news via e-devices. This is an electronic newspaper service supported by e-paper technology and apps specifically designed for mobile phones, tablets and other electronic devices.

The means of delivery of newspaper content using internet technology may differ as acknowledged by Chukwu(2014) who opines that the primary product of journalism, which is news and features on current affairs, is presented solely or in combination as text, audio, video and some interactive forms, and disseminated through online media platforms. It has democratized the flow of information that was previously controlled by traditional media including newspapers, magazines, radio and television. A greater degree of creativity can be exercised with digital journalism and traditional media.

### ***Interactivity in online newspapers***

The concept of interactivity is explained across different layers. Larsson(2012) distinguishes interactivity in online newspaper at three levels which include functional, perceived and process interactivity.

The *functional* view of interactivity often focuses on the specific features that can be identified and categorised as interactive, which mostly defines levels of interactivity as the presence or absence of specific features. The second aspect, *perceived* interactivity, centres on the user of the medium with interactive features rather than being a purely functional feature. Simply adding more interactive features does not automatically increase the levels of perceived interactivity. The third aspect, which is the *process*, involves focusing on discourse and the reciprocity between the participants in communicative contexts. Interactivity here is seen as the relatedness of sequential messages in a specific communicative context.

In a similar and related description, Broekhuizen and Hoffmann (2012) provide three aspect of interactivity with specific reference to online newspapers to include *message centred*, *structuralist* and *perceptual approaches*. The message-centred approach relays on audience imputes/reactions to form the core basis of interactivity. Under the *structuralist approach*, interactivity is perceived solely as features available on the medium or website. Interactivity in this sense is based on the purpose for which the medium's interactivity was established. This means that technological features determine the level of interactivity. Features such as search engines, chat rooms and hyperlinks, may be included or excluded depending on the objective(s) of the interactivity. The *perceptual approach* focuses on how the user is easily satisfied with available interactivity features on the website. This approach assumes that consumers interpret interactive features to form perceptions of interactivity, which influence their cognitive, affective and responses.

Interactivity is one of the key elements that distinguish online newspapers from their print version. Beyers(2004) opines that print editions of newspapers tend to be one directional media with messages flowing from the editorial staff to a heterogeneous, often anonymous and largely non-interactive audience with a homogenous pattern of interest. Though online newspapers are similar to print media in that they disseminate their messages to a wide public, they can substantially extent interactivity and offer a wide range of feedback possibilities, unlike the print editions do not expect feedback (except for letter to the editor), meaning that public discussion in print is limited.

Interactivity in today's online newspaper has seen several online newspapers allow readers to contact journalists by mail or participate in discussion boards by way of comments online. Beyers(2004) avers that in this way, a newspaper website can become an extension of the print edition, a platform consisting of a series of services and products which stimulate communication between readers and editors and among readers themselves.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Readers of online newspapers engage with the stories by way of comments. Henrich and Holmes(2013) find value in their participatory appeal as it gives the public a medium for expressing their views on current issues. Comments have the potential our increasing our understanding of public opinions, how the public makes decisions and how beliefs are formulated.

Comments on news stories provide an opportunity for readers to interact with each other or express their agreement or disagreement with the content of the article and or other comments. This conversational nature of commenting online as Henrich and Holmes(2013) note gives comment makers the opportunity to also correct what they believe to be misinformation in other comments, provide support or share anecdotes, and

provide 'facts' and links to websites with additional relevant content. The back and forth scenario among comment makers creates a conversation in which ideas are debated and negotiated. Depending on the interactive features available on any news website, readers of comments often have the option of indicating whether they agree or disagree with a comment by simply clicking on the agree/disagree or like/dislike links that usually appear with each comment. Comments cannot be taken as representative of the views of the general population. However, due to the high number of comments available on certain articles, they can reflect the perspectives of a large segment of the population.

The engagement nature of online comments especially on news stories provides not just a forum for discussion. Strandberg and Berg (2013) opine that reader comments enable citizens to discuss topics in context since the article they are connected to marks the subject of discussion. This means that reader comments might be more visible than other independent online forums and at the same time facilitate an open and public discussion on issues as might have been presented in news stories.

Discussion on news stories between readers in online news content according to Chung (2008) is facilitated by interactive features that allow users to submit their opinions or stories to the news sites and this provides the audience with a sense of ownership. Sharing something personal obliges the user to put much more at stake. Chung (2008) study on identifying patterns and use of engagement online show that interactive features allow users to share their perspectives and become personally involved in the creation of content.

The democratisation of the online space means readers' comments have expanded beyond just letters to the editor or opinion based articles as traditionally found in print newspapers. Sikorski (2016) states that such expansion and free access for readers to post comments gives them the opportunity to emphasize and evaluate certain aspects of the stories and enables them to add their own opinions as well as particular aspects that, from an individual's perspective, have not been addressed sufficiently in a news story.

The unregulated nature of most online comments, as observed by Diakopoulos and Naaman (2011), gives room for often-volatile participation patterns, imbalance between professional and amateur content, and interaction between regular users and other actors. Studies (Ahn 2011, Strandberg and Berg 2013, Erjavec 2014, Sikorski 2016) have enumerated the effects of online comments based on interactions between readers which have established that people are significantly influenced by the comments made by others. The nature of the comments also influences the responses and follow-up discussions. Thus online comments have been found to have created space for hateful expression in different climes. For example, Zuleta, The Danish Institute for Human Rights, and Burka (2017) examined hate speech in Denmark on public online debate and found that hate speech is most common in connection with news posts on topics concerning religion, refugees, migration, gender equality and asylum. A similar finding on hateful expression was established by Ianto-Petnehazi (2012) on issues of race, ethnicity and minority groups in Hungary.

Literature on how online platforms give room for hateful expression in Nigeria largely dwells on platforms such as Facebook, twitter and other social media. The *Guardian* (2017) observes that in the first half of 2017, Nigeria witnessed an unusual increase in the number of provocative statements emanating from different sections of the country. Most of the hate speeches were directed at ethnic groups and/or religion and the social media were used to circulate such content. Corruption, on the other hand, has also elicited strong reactions from Nigerians as seen in Baiyewu's (2018) report in the *Punch* newspaper quoting the President of Arewa Youths Consultative Forum, Mr. Yerima Shettima that there should be a law that would target the corrupt politicians who are parading themselves on the seats of power.

Empirical literature exists on research into the existence of hate speech in political, religious or ethnic messages. This study therefore seeks to investigate whether online comments on corruption stories are characterised by hate content. In other words, the study looks at how online readers' comments on corruption interface with hate speech as seen in how Nigerians engage one another in the comments' sections of online newspapers regarding corruption stories.

### **III. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to study how online newspapers offer themselves as platforms for citizens' conversation on corruption stories in Nigerian online newspapers to determine whether hate speech manifests in such readers' comments. Deployment of CDA in this study focused on the ideational interpersonal "metafiction" of language. This according to Tenorio (2011) enables the analysis to reveal author-to-audience power relationship or to be connected by further interpretation with author's positioning.

The analysis of how Nigerians write and speak about corruption will give an insight and the perception held by commenters about persons involved in corruption news. To achieve this, online comments from four high profile corruption stories of 2016 were purposively selected and analysed. These comments were treated as they appeared in two online versions of *Vanguard* and *Punch* newspapers. The two were purposively selected based mainly on their archival features. Although most of Nigeria's daily newspapers have section for readers'

comments, *Vanguard* and *Punch* features are more readily retrievable online. This analysis was based on corruption cases around four individuals: Olisa Metuh, Sambo Dasuki, Tompolo and Femi Fani-Kayodo.

After-news comments by readers on corruption stories were evaluated to ascertain whether such comments exhibited hate communication or not. The choice of readers' comments to determine their hate communication was based on the fact that comment sections on newspaper websites give users the option of remaining anonymous while posting their comments. This gives users the freedom to make whatever comment suits them.

#### IV. RESULT

##### Comments on high profile corruption stories of 2016

Personality	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
OlisaMetuh	110	51	161
Femi Fani-Kayode	267	49	316
Tompolo	12	72	84
Sambo Dasuki	548	44	592
<b>Total</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>1153</b>

Source:

Generally, these comments were retrieved from the electronic archives of the selected newspapers using search engines.

#### Associating Individuals to their Ethnic Group and Generalising the Labelling.

**Note: the comments as used in this study are unedited to accurately reflect tone, strength or otherwise.**

Comment by *Fatai* on Olisa Metuh's case in the *Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"I give thanks to Almighty Allah for giving me the opportunity to witness this day, Metuh! You of all people a certified lawyer claiming ignorant in the court of law, ok why chewing your statements in the first place, oh! You want to run away like your sister Allison? A strong warning to all concerned there's a new Sheriff in town. Where are your Igbo brothers and thieves like you in this forum saying you are been oppressed being an opposition. Others should follow before is too late"

Comment by *Okey Okeyon* Olisa Metuh's case in the *Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"Be truthful to yourself. You and I know that we Ibos don't use our brains most of the time. A trained Lawyer that destroyed a government property (his statement) must either be mad or something else I don't want to put down. Pls stop this your stupid sentiment because Metuh has not denied he torn his statement".

Comment by *Nubian Okey* on Olisa Metuh's case in the *Punch*(June 30, 2016)

"It's in your blood, cannibalistic animals from the accursed Zooafra"!

The following is a chain of comments on a claim that Olisa Metuh was being framed.

*The Truth Ughorin Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"It's a cock and bull story but Metuh and his respected lawyer did not deny the incident, so who are you to deny for them? Why do you guys love corrupt politicians more than the interest of the nation? well corruption is already become a cancer in your brain and your blood.

*Umar Jibril to The Truth in Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"Don't worry. It appears that SE is synonymous with corruption because of the way and manner they support their own even at instance of grandiose corruption. My take with these guys is if they are not interested in Nigeria project, they should go and leave us to solve our corruption problems as we understand it and deem fit to solve it. Otherwise, how could a seasoned lawyer of Metuh's standing do such if actually he has nothing to hide and in this he knows that he is subverting the course of justice. The truth is, if this is the kind of person that is PDP publicity secretary doing things like this, it goes to show that the party had all through been lying to the public in all ramifications on the ground that all records to these lies can be destroyed".

*Naija United to Umar Jibril Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"Mallam who taught you how to use computer u should be rearing cows in the bush where you belong and not on enlightened forum like this. Abacha, IBB and atiku the most corrupt and biggest thieves of all times are all from your parasitic north. Deal with individual and stop generalizing"

*Bongale Naija to United in Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"You must be one of okotoko sons".

*Umar Jibril to Naija United in Punch* (June 30, 2016)

“Igbo man and a Hausa man, who are more parasitic than the other. Go back home and take statistics to see how many of your people who are living outside your enclave that are parasiting everywhere all in the name of business which is an ingenious name of your parasitic tendencies. If I am in the bush tending my cattles, what is bad in that - compared to your own side of parasiting and having done that is not even grateful at all. In your greedy tendencies, you will still go about crying marginalisation. For you to reach a conclusion that you consigned me to an uncivilised level shows how uncivilised you are. From your insinuations one can glance a fact that you are the worst educated illiterate in our midst. Anyway, this is the average tendencies of an Igbo man who show hallmark of too know yet the worst illiterate around. When others are gunning for better things, you will never see an Igbo man but when the chips are down, you see them at the lower strata of irrelevance and when they realised fully their precarious position, they wake up naked running around shouting marginalisation. May you and your lots continue to live in the reality of marginalisation forever. If you believe IBB, Atiku etc. stole and you have compelling evidence to nail them, why don't you prosecute them. The ones we know of Igbo extraction are being prosecuted and so shall it be. Corruption is corruption and that you choose to express your ethnic bigotry and absurdity in support of an Igbo corruption agenda is an indication that if an Igbo man is entrusted with leadership, he will mess up the entire country in a monumental corruption and the likes of you will go on to say nothing is wrong. In a scenario like this, you raised up to defend corruption by insinuating that one who commented in a corruption issue is not educated and civilised - meaning your forum eulogising corruption is the most civilised is a great disservice to yourself, tribe and generations. It is only uncivilised, illiterate and ill mannered child that brings insults to his parents, community and tribe. That an average Igbo man will hold you in high esteem and regard you as their own remain to be seen”.

*Naija United to Umar Jibril in Punch (June 30, 2016)*

“Is it only atiku and IBB you rememberd to ask for evidence. Why did you gloss over Abacha if you are being honest. An average hausa man is a thief and well rotten in corruption. You only use religious garb to cover your stench and pretensions. it was you and your brothers at the helm of affairs that kept nigeria in this backward state till date. meanwhile have you attended to your cows and by the way how did you get access to computer”

*Umar Jibril to Naija United in Punch (June 30, 2016)*

“You are good at fucking your mother and that is why your are good in insulting people because everyone now is seen within the prism of your mother whom you so much abuse. I don't contest intellectual wherewithal with anybody on the basis of class or creed but ask any of your Igbo extraction who studied medicine from UI and those who attended Unimaid to attest to Jibril Aminu's intellectual prowess to you. By and large he is a fulani man who's origin is cattle rearing that you are trying to use as basis of intellectual superiority of an Igbo man against others. Sorry for you. If intellectualism is the measure of wiseness and success, Igbos would have had the entire space to themselves. Unfortunately, this is not the case, what a failed race. Because, intellectualism in addition to economic prowess could have made your race a colossus in the comity of races unfortunately because of your racial ill intentions, your race is a shadow of itself. Maybe, you are lacking in so many things that is why your wit failed you. Your readings did not show etc indicated in the article? Whether, it is Abacha or not, corruption is corruption and no sensible person support it. If this case, why speak over corruption issue as if it is entirely Northern affairs?”.

*YianisIto Umar Jibril in Punch (June 30, 2016)*

“Ola hausantroprosinemalakias”

“You are not saying anything yet. All I can say is that you have just finished having sex with your mother. To show you enjoyed sleeping with your mother, you threw caution into the wind and resort to speaking in tongues”.

*Umar Jibrilto YianisI in Punch (June 30, 2016)*

“You are not saying anything yet. All I can say is that you have just finished having sex with your mother. To show you enjoyed sleeping with your mother, you threw caution into the wind and resort to speaking in tongues. This is the hallmark of an average illiterate commentator here who in their characteristic manner will want to show you that they are educated but not at all. If you enjoy fucking your mother, please insult me again. Already, I am told that only Igbos who sleep with their mothers do insult almost everyone that comes their way”.

Engr. Wale Oginni in *Punch* (June 30, 2016)

"Methu, is an ineffectual buffoon-goat eating every paper in sight"

Comment by *Sitanda* on Fani-Kayode in the *Vanguard* (October 21, 2016)

"Well, we'll, well,

It appears dear FFK may be on his way to jail.

Gen. Buhari will claim his first political scalp from the South west!

Well, well, well..."

Comment by *Meon Kimi* on Tompolo in the *Vanguard*(April 19, 2016)

"Tribalism will destroy many people in Nigeria.

Did the itsekiri man not steal?

Maybe he betrayed Patrick to be safe because that is the way of the itsekiri's."

### **Associating Individuals to their Political Parties**

Note: the comments as used in this study are unedited to accurately reflect tone, strength or otherwise.

Comment by *Naija\_Conscience* in the *Vanguard*(October 20, 2016)

"If Nigerians don't destroy apc and kick out Buhari, they will destroy Nigeria"

Comment by *Okoko* in the *Vanguard*(October 20, 2016)

"It is very shameful that EFCC witness is only telling them how he printed A2 poster at N50. Was it ghosts that printed APC posters in the last election?"

Comment by *Military rule returns* in the *Vanguard*(October 20, 2016)

"heiii! to sip water don become offence? Haba Judge abi Daura Secret Service don visit you?"

Comment by *Owoeye Gbenga* in the *Vanguard*(October 20, 2016)

"This is absurd in all ramification. What kind of govt is this. God will deliver us from the hand of tyrant one day. Those APC people who embezzled money meant for IDP Camp are all enjoying themselves and EFCC has not arrested any one of them. What kind of govt is this? We are tired of this kangaroo govt. Nothing is working,no light,no water,no good road,not even single road has been constructed since the inception of this administration. What have they achieved self? Dogara budget padding has been swept under the carpet, till today nothing has happened and some good for nothing elements will be using their leprosy fingers to type nonsense. Why re-arresting FFK again after the court has already granted him bail? Is it because his wife exposed EFCC propaganda lies? I am furious against this power drunker. God give us another IBB to deliver us from this man o.He is at it again o.I cried at the top of my voice then that Yoruba nation should not vote for him but they ignore my plea. You can see the way the man is treating Yorubas because of campaign fund. Please can somebody help me ask Buhari and EFCC where APC campaign fund emanated from? Was it donated to them by angel or by ghost? If this EFCC fail to probe APC campaign fund we the youth of this country will revolt against them because what is good for the goose is also good for the gander. Probe APC campaign fund Nigerians should tell EFCC. Over billions of naira were lavished by APC during their electioneering campaign,where do they get the money from,Nigerians need explanation.Yoruba should think and think well if not this Fulani man will treat us the way they treated Afonja by Alimi in olden days which till today only Fulani man is being installed as Emir of Ilorin.Yoruba should think.We should not because of partisanship allow this old Fulani to be treating us like slave. I don't belong to any party and I will never support any party because since the annulment of June 12 election widely believed to have won by late Chief M.K.O Abiola,I have seized to support any party.Even if I should support any party,I will never support any party that involve Buhari because of the way he is ruling like military dictator. I still prefer Jonathan because during his time Nigeria was peaceful and calm. What a president we all miss!!"

Comment by *Dictator* on Dasuki in *Vanguard* (November 17, 2015)

"Note: if anyone hate Dasuki more...then it's me

However, Nigerians should know that APC and Buhari dont know their maths. How many times have they come up with foolish figures of missing money and after probes and probes. The figure reduced to ZERO....

Also dont be fooled when you hear BILLIONS....it would interest you to know that these modern weapons, one single one cost close to hundreds of thousands of dollars. So by the time you buy like 100 from the black

market...you are close to almost A BILLION DOLLAR...not to talk of the sorting here and there to have access to the black market....

And high security matter like this(black market) do not need to have documents made public as this can lead to serious consequence....remember there is a new USA law...you cannot buy weapons from countries that bought weapons from the USA...so having documented evidence of how money went is having evidence to be used to prosecute you by International organisation...

APC and Buhari should address some issue behind close doors...with all these made public...USA and other countries will want to know where those money went...lets not forget that weapons were bought...even Buhari and APC testified that our Military now have the fire power...these weapons did not fall from the sky....neither did APC and Buhari govt bought them”

Comment by *ally* on Dasuki in *Vanguard*(November 17, 2015)

“Buhari is a dictator and will never forgive or forget. He will never forgive any region that gave him 5% of their votes, just as he will never forgive or forget Dasuki for being one of the three soldiers who were sent to keep Buhari under house arrest following the 1984 coup. We all know what happened to the other two soldiers who went with Dasuki to arrest Buhari. It is all about pay back. The man,Buhari will never be a statesman but an illiterate and a dictator”

## V. DISCUSSION

Findings from the study show that indeed readers engage themselves with the content of news in online newspapers as can be seen from the number of comments generated on stories. These comments are not just reactions to those corruption stories as reported in the news; some are reactions to other comments posted by readers.

It is often these reactions that trigger the element of hate speech against those seen to be from a different group. For example a comment maker in the *Punch* (June 30, 2016) on the story of OlisaMetuh reacted by claiming that Metuh was unjustly being prosecuted thus: “Where are your Igbo brothers and thieves (sic) like you in this forum saying you are been oppressed being an opposition”. Such outburstswere met with responses that tried to demean others and their ethnic lineages: “It's in your blood, cannibalistic animals from the accursed Zooafra!” It is instructive to note here that “Zooafra” is a coinage of the writer from the two words of ‘Zoo’ and ‘Biafra’ giving birth to “Zooafra”. This is a reference to the Igbo tribe in the country in disparaging terms. The expression of hate in this form confirms previous views by Ezeibe(2014) that hatred manifests mostly between the dominant ethnic groups- Hausas, Igbos and Yorubas. This stokes the embers of animosity between these tribes that cooperation between them in little, unless in political situations of personal aggrandisement that one tribe supports the other.

Some common features of hate expression as seen in comments across newspapers on corruption stories indicate similar generalisations and attributions of crime to one’s region. For example, a comment maker, *Umar JibrilYianis*, (*Punch*, 2016), in trying to get back at another comment ended up demeaning the entire tribe in the comment:

You are not saying anything yet. All I can say is that you have just finished having sex with your mother. To show you enjoyed sleeping with your mother, you threw caution into the wind and resort to speaking in tongues. This is the hallmark of an average illiterate commentator here who in their characteristic manner will want to show you that they are educated but not at all. If you enjoy fucking your mother, please insult me again. Already, I am told that only Igbos who sleep with their mothers do insult almost everyone that comes their way.

This clearly is a product of the writer’s imagination as it is naturally an abomination for a man to have sexual intercourse with members of his family, not to talk of his mother. If this situation is naturally unacceptable to nature, it then means that the Igbos too can never be party to such oddity. The nature of hate communication in online readers’ comments on news stories is further buttressed by this.

Another of such comments, *Umar Jibril*(*Punch*, 2016) states: “Don't worry. It appears that SE is synonymous with corruption because of the way and manner they support their own even at instance of grandiose corruption”... clearly shows a common generalisation and attribution of a criminal act of one individual to his entire tribe and even extended to the entire South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This kind of exchange perhaps finds expression online because of the anonymous nature and absence of moderation or gate keepingfeatures. This is in tandem with the views of Uba and Chimuanya(2015)that these forms of interactions enable readers to accomplish a kind of relationship that would not have been possible with physical contact and experience. If there had been physical contact between the people involved in this exchange of words, apparently in the defence of each other’s geopolitical area, it is possible to hypothesize that it would have gone beyond fisticuffs to enveloping tribal fighting. The negative consequence of this would have been repeated

by the country.

Name calling for those perceived to have committed corrupt acts or those perceived to be responsible for arrest and detention of suspects was also seen in the comments by readers. A comment in the *Vanguard* on the arrest of Sambo Dasuki by Ally(2015) illustrates this:

Buhari is a dictator and will never forgive or forget. He will never forgive any region that gave him 5% of their votes, just as he will never forgive or forget Dasuki for being one of the three soldiers who were sent to keep Buhari under house arrest following the 1984 coup. We all know what happened to the other two soldiers who went with Dasuki to arrest Buhari. It is all about pay back. The man, Buhari will never be a statesman but an illiterate and a dictator.

The use of words like “dictator”, and “illiterate” to refer to a president in a democratic dispensation smacks of hate communication as seen in the above comment. One might argue that negative words are also used in other climes to describe leaders. For instance, Donald Trump has been variously described negatively as "incompetent," "arrogant," "idiot," "egotistical," "ignorant," "racist," and "narcissistic," (Verhovek, 2017). What is more, the use of vendetta as a signpost for having Dasuki arrested, insinuatingly on Buhari's orders, does not click, which lends credence to the existence of hate communication as seen above.

Apart from hateful expressions on the bases of one's tribe and region, some comments express hate through insults directed at the other guests on the forum or personality involved in the corrupt story as exemplified by this comment regarding Olisa Metuh, by *Oginni Punch* (2016) that “Methu, is an ineffectual buffoon-goat eating every paper in sight”. Some of these comments are indecent, pejorative and disapproving and may not be published in a regulated media or indeed formal public discussion.

Comments also show hate expressions that malign political parties. For instance, *Dictator* on Dasuki in *Vanguard* (2015) states “Note: if anyone hate Dasuki more...then it's me. However, Nigerians should know that APC and Buhari don't know their maths. How many times have they come up with foolish figures of missing money and after probes and probes, the figure reduced to ZERO...” Similarly, Jibrilin the *Vanguard*, (October 20, 2016) opines that “This is absurd in all ramification. What kind of govt is this. God will deliver us from the hand of tyrant one day. Those APC people who embezzled money meant for IDP Camp are all enjoying themselves and EFCC has not arrested any one of them. What kind of govt is this?” These two comments are directed at the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari and indeed the entirety of his APC party. It is not known whether the makers of these two comments were aware of the fact that there are different components that make up the Federal Government of Nigeria which have their separate functions. If this had been the case, they would have known which arm of government, Ministry, Department or Agency to hold accountable and not the whole political party.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that publishing newspapers online has indeed stimulated more readers to engage with the news they read by way of offering their opinions on news content through online comments. As shown in this study, more stories on corruption are getting comments in Nigerian online newspapers. The flexibility of online discussion sometimes gives room for debate among commentators that do degenerate into hateful expression. This paper was also able to establish that the anonymous nature of commentators gives guests the leverage to rain hate and insults on others for holding contrary views. Among the dominant hateful expression in online comments on news stories are hate with regards to tribe, ethnic and political cleavages. Hate expression on the bases of religion towards people who are allegedly involved in corrupt acts is not obvious. To check these anomalies for the progress of the country and avoid possible breakdown of order, it would be good if citizens are aware of the destructive effect of their comments on issues published online, especially corruption issues. Similarly, citizens should comment on issues in constructive manner that would lead to the progress of the country. It is also recommended that newspapers should put in place a mechanism that would avail them with the opportunity to go through comments before they are released like in print newspaper situation. This will not amount to gagging the people as editing could be done to remove offensive material. Moderation can help reduce the use of indecent and provocative language of commentators.

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