

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Hate Speech among Editors of *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* Newspapers in Nigeria

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Abstract

All over the world, hate speech represents a form of threat to damage the lives of individuals and increase the sense of fear in entire communities. Scholars have aligned with the description that it is a globally-endorsed paradigm that the press as an important institution in the democratic process plays a key role during elections. As the Fourth Estate of the Realm, the press provides the platform for narratives and discourses in the service of elections, political negotiations, and other features of the contestations among politicians and other civil organisations involved in election administration. However, problems associated with election reporting and media role in political contestations and machinations, particularly on the African continent, have been a recurrent clog in the wheel of politics in Africa. For instance, in Nigeria, since the 1950s up to the early 1980s, spiraling into the Fourth Republic that started in 1999 and beyond, several election problems that were rooted in perceived mishandling of the electoral process by the media has occurred in the country. The 1965 parliamentary and 1983 general elections were faced by conflicts with accompanying widespread violence, which resulted in military interventions. Within this context, the study adopts an interpretative phenomenological analysis with editors of Daily Trust, The Nation, and The Guardian newspapers in relation to the reportage of the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The theoretical tenets of Critical Race Theory serve the study goal. Nine Editors were purposively selected for an in-depth interview. Arising from the interview, the study discovered that there are implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice as it undermines the ethics of the journalism profession. The study recommends that as gatekeepers of the content, editors should engage in checking and cross-checking of facts as a guiding principle in the professional journalistic practice in Nigeria.

Keywords

Daily Trust, Editors; Hate Speech; The Guardian; The Nation



I. Introduction

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an experiential qualitative research approach developed specifically within psychology. It is now widely used by researchers in health, clinical and social psychology, particularly in the United Kingdom. It is also being used by researchers in human and social sciences, as well as in media and cultural communication. The method is essentially concerned with understanding lived experiences and with how participants make sense of their experiences. In other words, it is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants (Deacon, et al, 2007).

Smith in Ya'u (2016) argued that the aim of IPA is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social worlds and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings of particular experiences, events, states, texts hold for participants. He observed that the approach is phenomenological in that it involves a detailed examination of the participants' life world by exploring personal experience and perception or account of events as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event. The approach is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in the process. It involves double hermeneutics in which the participants are trying to make sense of their world and the researcher tries to make sense of how the participants make sense of their world (Somadi, et al., 2022).

IPA is phenomenological in that it wishes to explore individuals or social groups' perception, an account of events or state as opposed to attempting to produce an objective record of the events or state. Thus, the method is a holistic approach to the construction of philosophical social science of consciousness and identity through experience. Most IPA is conducted using intensive qualitative research approaches such as in-depth interviews, focused groups, or observation (Baran & Davis, 2012).

Deacan et al (2007) argued that these approaches enable the participants to provide a full and rich account of events or experiences while allowing the researcher considerable flexibility in probing interesting areas. Within this context, the interview was conducted among nine editors, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to detailed qualitative interpretation which elicit the key experiential themes in the participant perception.

The main theoretical commitment in IPA is that people are cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical beings, thus, it is assumed that there is a chain of connection between people's talk, thinking, and emotional state. IPA researchers realized that this chain is complicated- people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling and there may be reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose, thus the researcher has to interpret people's mental and emotional state from what they say (Irmanelly, et al., 2022).

The central concern of the methodology is not establishing a relation of cause and effect, but exploring the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express or communicate these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal styles, and social rituals (Beenish & Amir, 2022). Thus, it is based on ethnographic practices developed by anthropologists where the researcher engages in a particular social setting to know the people intimately observing how they organize their everyday life and talking to them at length about how they see the world and themselves. Interpretative researchers argued that social knowledge, experience, and meaning are co-produced out of the multiple encounters, conversations, and arguments they have with the people they are studying (ibid).

Drawing from this approach, human interpretation is apparent. As such, the interpretation of editors regarding hate speech in this context is apt. Hate speech is a globally-endorsed paradigm and the press, as an important institution in the democratic process plays a key role during elections. As the Fourth Estate of the Realm, the press provides the platform for narratives and discourses in the service of elections, political negotiations, and other features of the contestations among politicians and other civil organisations involved in election administration. However, problems associated with election reporting and media role in political contestations and machinations, particularly on the African continent, have been a recurrent clog in the wheel of politics in Africa. For instance, in Nigeria, since the 1950s up to the early 1980s, spiraling into the Fourth Republic that started in 1999 and beyond, several election problems that were rooted in

perceived mishandling of the electoral process by the media has occurred in the country. The 1965 parliamentary and 1983 general elections were faced by conflicts with accompanying widespread violence, which resulted in military interventions (Popoola, 2019).

Apparently, the 2015 and 2019 elections were very keen to the extent that an alliance of opposition parties was formed to produce All Progressives Congress (APC) in a strong bid to dislodge the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that had been in power since 1999. Findings from the monitoring of the media coverage of these elections showed that there were cases of sponsorship of hate advertorials by the then Ekiti State governor, Ayodele Fayose who, on January 19, 2015, ran adverts on the front pages of national dailies such as *The Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *The Punch* titled “Nigeria Be Warned”. In the advert, satirical reference was made to Buhari, the presidential candidate of the APC, that given his age and speculated illness and frail nature, he might die in office should he win, according to *Sahara Reporters* of January 19, 2015.

Incidentally, section 95 of the Electoral Act 2010 disapproves of hate campaigns by stipulating that: (1) A political campaign or slogan shall not be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly likely to injure religious, ethnic, tribal, or sectional feelings. (2) Abusive, intemperate, slanderous, or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reactions or emotions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns. Yet, there were other instances of lack of discretion on the part of the media in the countdown to the 2015 and 2019 elections, in terms of inappropriate language use and inciting headlines. This was evident in the outcome of the monitoring of 12 National newspapers like *Daily Trust*, *The Nation*, *The Sun*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Independent*, *National Mirror*, *Leadership*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *ThisDay*, and *Daily Champion* (Arogundade, 2019).

Findings by IPC (2015) revealed that stories capable of inciting one section against the other were recorded 45 times during this monitoring period while hate speech featured 8 times despite these provisions. A total of 117 reports were recorded in these categories in the six-month period at an average of about 20 per month across the 12 selected national print media. The documented inciting headlines also include the following: APC presidential candidate is a fundamentalist- Clarke (*ThisDay*, Jan. 17, 2015, page 15); will you allow history to repeat history itself? Enough of state burials (*Daily Sun*, Jan. 19, 2015, page 1); we’re set for war – PAC (*Nigerian Tribune*, November 22, 2019) among others. Given this scenario, it is important to undertake an interpretative phenomenological analysis of hate speech with editors of these newspapers in Nigeria, regarding newspapers’ coverage of the 2015 and 2019 general elections.

1.1 Problem Statement

Scholars like Gwandu (2019) and Aondover (2021) observed that editors of newspapers business did not subject adverts to necessary checks, which necessitated the spread of hate speech and inciting statements by the two major political parties (PDP) and (APC) in the media. Findings by Adaba (2015) also revealed that studies on mass media coverage of national elections in Nigeria have shown that the newspapers often promote ethnic, regional, and religious interests. Suleiman and Owolabi (2018) studies of newspaper coverage of the first republic politics also revealed that newspapers owned by the leaders of different political parties published negative reports on the opponents and their ethnic groups. Oriola (2019) further observes that the comments deemed as offensive employed hate speech, threats, abusive language, and assassination of character. The International Press Centre (IPC) Report (2015) corroborates that many of the news reports

at the 2015 presidential campaign had dangerous and outrageous headlines. Some of the statements were largely disparaging while a great number turned out to be a figment of the imagination of politicians. Stories capable of inciting one section of the nation against the other were recorded forty-five (45) times during the 2015 presidential campaign.

Within this context, editors of newspaper organizations, more than any other outfits have more responsibility and need to understand that they have a moral, legal and social obligation to protect the lives of Nigerians, through their actions or inactions. At the same time, editors of newspapers have the power to facilitate the rapid spread of hate speech and verbal combat. These have thrived for years unchecked in the country. How well this has augured with the herculean task of democratic consolidation is a subject of serious research and worth investigating. Hence, there is a need for the interpretative phenomenological analysis of hate speech among editors of newspapers in Nigeria, considering the manifestation of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria because politics is a game of numbers and lowering a person's or group's patronage through media reportage of discriminatory expressions could have negative consequences on electoral victory, which have created an important knowledge vacuum in the existing literature.

1.2 The Basic Tool of Scientific Inquiry

The problem statement informed the choice of this research question as to the basic tool of scientific inquiry in this study:

1. What are the implications of the use of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice in the 2015 and 2019 general elections?

II. Review of Literature

In relation to the literature, the study observed that the media did not comply with the code of ethics in publishing and broadcasting advertorials while hate speech and inciting statements especially by the two major political parties (PDP) and (APC) were used in the media. As a result of the influence of advertising as a source of revenue, owners of newspaper businesses did not subject adverts to necessary checks. The existing literature presupposes that newspapers coverage of national elections in Nigeria often promotes ethnic, regional, and religious interests. Theoretically, exponents of The Functional Theory of Campaign Discourse argued that the functional theory of campaign discourse renders a helpful scheme to classify and synthesize political advertising. They add that elections are intrinsically competitive, political actors deploy campaign messages, which include advertising to present a more preferable image of them. They use political ads to acclaim themselves, positive statements about their credentials as the better candidate; attack an opponent's credentials, or defend with reputations against an opponents' attack through media platforms.

This supports the literature argument (Suleiman and Owolabi, 2018), that newspaper coverage of general elections and newspapers owned by the leaders of different political parties published negative reports on the opponents and their ethnic groups. In addition, comments deemed as offensive employed hate speech, threats, abusive language, and assassination of character are published by the media. Corroborating, Ogbuoshi, et al., (2019) observed that hate speech is now a common phenomenon in present day society and it is mostly made to achieve some sinister goals.

In this repeatedly corroborated incident of hate speech, Critical Race Theory explains the contexts of media used of phrases sponsored by politicians that refer to other opposition groups from descriptions that are not merely rhetorical but pedestals on which

hate speech flourishes. Based on Durkheim's Social Fact and Weber's Social Action or Relations Theory, depict that social reality focused attention on individualistic autonomy in terms of ideas and desires vis-à-vis social regularity to achieve sinister goals of hate speech in the society.

Similarly, the existing literature attests that hate speech has become more vivid in the successive democratic dispensation than the previous ones thereby keeping the citizens more divided, as hate speech is now the focal point and the instrument of the campaign. Thus, the parade of hate speeches in several newspapers analyzed showed that the media was used by politicians to stoke up hatred and stimulate violence among ethnic and political groups during the electioneering periods. Critics of Critical Discourse Analysis Theory argue that neutral representations are opposed to ideological representations, which are deemed to 'distort reality. Ideology is, accordingly, conceptualised in negative terms, as the opposite of 'truth', which systematically connotes how hate speech and language, dialects, and acceptable statements are used in a particular medium across different audiences.

The trend of discussion in the literature is disturbing, as scholars corroborated that commentators employ the use of hate language, verbal assault, name-calling, insults, and derogatory words to describe subjects. In relation to the above, this study armed with Katz and Lazarsfeld's two-step flow theory, which asserts that information from the media moves in two distinct stages. First, individuals (opinion leaders) who pay close attention to the mass media and its messages receive the information. Opinion leaders pass on their own interpretations in addition to the actual media content. The reviewed literature also underscores the findings by the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) (2018) that in the last election in Nigeria, instances of hate speeches were seen on conventional and social media. Largely on conventional media, the speeches were broadcast on certain television stations and published in some newspapers as well.

This coalesces with Castells' Theory of Network Society, which examines the concept of the network to a high level of abstraction, utilizing it as a concept that depicts macro-level tendencies associated with the social organization in informational capitalism. The role of networks in social theory is apt as follows dominant functions and processes in the information age, which are increasingly organized around networks. So far, related literature shows the potentials of newspapers or mainstream news media in spreading hate speech through news reporting using the journalistic genre, which in turn has implications on the professional journalistic practice in the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Critical Race Theory (CRT) to serve the study goal. The theory provides a compelling structure by which media concepts and hate speech can be analyzed and understood. According to Odera (2015) CRT indicates that media use phrases sponsored by politicians that refer to other opposition groups from descriptions that are not merely rhetorical but pedestals on which hate speech flourishes (Rasaq et al., 2017). Theoretically, critical race theory underscores that violent political rhetoric is capable of producing the same psychological dynamics as violent entertainment.

Therefore, the nexus between the theory and the study is that it provides a compelling structure by which media concepts and hate speech can be analyzed and understood. This indicates that media use phrases sponsored by politicians that refer to other opposition groups from descriptions that are not merely rhetorical but pedestals on which hate speech emanate. Arguably, some literature challenged the dominant ideology of Critical Race Theory on the basis of race and racism, the social construction of race

storytelling and counter storytelling as well as the notion of white supremacy. Despite this debate among scholars, the study considers the theory apt.

III. Research Methods

The study adopts Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as its primary method of scientific inquiry, which was informed by the constructivist worldview. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an experiential qualitative research approach developed specifically within psychology. It is now widely used by researchers in health, clinical and social psychology, particularly in the United Kingdom. It is also being used by researchers in human and social sciences, as well as in media and cultural communication. The method is essentially concerned with understanding lived experiences and with how participants make sense of their experiences. In other words, it is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants (Deacon, et al, 2007).

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The population of this study consists of nine editors selected from three newspapers (Daily Trust, The Nation, and The Guardian). Purposive sampling was used to select the three newspapers and the editors for an in-depth interview. The papers are selected because they are among the 12 national papers, which means they share certain characteristics. Three editors each were chosen from the selected newspapers making a total of nine participants. The editors were sampled because they are gatekeepers of the content and they are directly involved in the processing and selection of stories. Additionally, for an editor to be part of the study, he must have six to ten cognate work experiences in Nigerian print media organisations. A code was given to each of the participants like P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, and P9 for easy identification of the participants for the in-depth interview.

IV. Results and Discussion

Implications of the use of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice in the 2015 and 2019 general elections is a research question that guided the qualitative data generation process, which was designed and directed to elicit responses on the implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice because editors are violating the code of ethics. The interviews were recorded and transcribed thematically, where words spoken by interviewees are evident in the following themes:

4.1 Understanding of Hate Speech

In answering this question, all the participants agreed that they are aware of hate speech, and hate speech according to them is any abusive or threatening speech or writing

that expresses prejudices against a particular group, especially based on race, religion, and sexual orientation. For instance, P1 said:

Hate speech is an expression or any writing that expresses prejudice against a particular group, especially based on race, religion, or sexual orientation. So, any abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses that prejudice against a particular group of people based on their race or religion can be considered hate speech (IDI with Editors, 2021).

From the above, it can be said that the participants are aware of hate speech. However, they admitted that being aware of hate speech is one thing, and abiding by the code of ethics in publishing stories is another thing. This means that they are aware of hate speech, yet they violate the code of ethics by publishing stories that contain hate speech. P5 admits that even the laws of the country (Constitution) are not being obeyed 100%.

4.2 Prominent of Hate Speech on the Pages of Newspapers

From the interviews, the participants agreed that hate speech was prominent on the pages of newspapers in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Contributing to the question, P8 stated that:

To an extent, it was prominent in the sense that during the political period a lot of media organisations let down their gourd, and politicians use certain words or phrases that tend to inflame passion. They also tend to misinform the public or try to mislead people by their utterances or statements and press releases. So, yes in the 2015 and 2019 elections there were a couple of hate speeches that were actually on display. To which extent, I will say to a very significant extent (IDI with Editors, 2021).

This indicates that in the 2015 and 2019 general elections, there was a climax of hate speech as far as Nigeria is concerned. Hate speeches were prominent on the pages of newspapers as words spoken by interviewees are evident in the study. Validating the tenets of the Critical Race Theory, media use phrases sponsored by politicians that refer to other opposition groups from descriptions that are not merely rhetorical but pedestals on which hate speech flourishes.

4.3 Hate Speech Stories in the Newspapers

The pervasive opinion about hate speech stories in the newspapers, according to the participants should not be a belief, because newspapers published stories that contain hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Contributing to this question, P 2 recalled that:

I don't think it was a belief sitting from my position and a couple of us in the media, we could see clearly that there were practical cases of hate speeches. For instance, you will recall the Ayo Fayose's publication saying that every leader we had from the North had to die in power, Murtala Mohammed and Musa Yar'adua that if we settle for this man giving his age, he might die in the office, that is hate speech in his own right. We remembered that about four national newspapers had it on the cover page of their newspapers because somebody paid them money for it. Some turned it down, because of some gatekeeping process within their organisations, because it may upset the fragile peace that we have in the country (IDI with Editors, 2021).

In the above example, as stated by P2, it is clear that the selected newspapers published stories that contain hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. As

corroborated by P9, “yes, there were a couple of hate speeches that were published during the 2015 and 2019 general elections.”

4.4 Dissemination of Hate Speech and Vulgar Language

All the respondents agreed that election periods are usually very rapid information periods for us so if you are naturally used to seeing about 500 news items at a normal time, as the elections draw closer you will be receiving about 1500 news items. With all political interests, people and groups struggling to get a mention in the papers turning out all kinds of things, and unfortunately newspaper production as the case may fall into the trap. P5 stated that: “newspapers naturally constitute platforms through which those speeches could be dished to the public because the newspaper is a veritable means of mass communication.” From the above submission, it can be said that newspapers contribute to the dissemination of hate speech and vulgar language in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Corroborating, Suleiman and Owolabi's (2018) study on newspaper coverage of the first republic politics revealed that newspapers owned by leaders of different political parties published negative reports on the opponents and their ethnic groups.

4.5 Editors as Gate-Keepers of the Content

Generally, from the responses garnered from the interview, they admitted that the job of the editor is to gate-keep and to ensure that whatever is accorded of the newspaper is accomplished. To that extent, if any explosive interview gets published in the newspaper the editor should be held responsible. However, the gatekeeping process starts with the reporter. As captured by P4:

Yes, editors are the gatekeepers, and they are the last gatekeeper. Gatekeeping process in the newspaper industry starts from the reporter that goes to the field to gather information, gatekeeping start from there, but the final gatekeeper is the editor because he is the last window before the information is exposed to the reader (IDI with Editors, 2021).

Based on the interview, editors are gatekeepers of the content, but the issue of newspapers publishing stories that contain hate speech should not be allotted to editors alone. Reporters and politicians also have their share as pointed out by P8, “to an extent, editors should take responsibilities, but reporters and politicians too should also take a larger percentage of the blame.”

4.6 The implication of Hate Speech on Journalistic Practice

Responses from the interview confirm that there are so many implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice. All the participants agreed that the manifestation of hate speech on the pages of newspapers undermined the ethics of the journalism profession. Back then people believed what is published in the newspaper, but now people are skeptical. Again, the truth is journalists are also violating the code of ethics, which also have negative implication on the profession, like people not believing in what journalists do. As P2 put it this way:

It does have implications if something is capable of inciting people negatively against other people naturally. The implication is that professional bodies like the NUJ, NBC, NGE, among others may also sanction journalists or media organizations for allowing hate speeches to go out into the public domain. For example, recently, NBC gave *Channel Television* a query for granting Samuel Ortom, the Governor of Benue State

interview, where he attacks President Buhari on the issues of Anti-Open Grazing Law (IDI with Editors, 2021).

Corroborating, P3 remarked that:

Yes, there are implications. Apart from the fact that it causes injury to other people, it also affects our jobs. Some people look at us as agents of hurt capable of inciting trouble to the already fragile nation. It also makes people think that information coming from such media is not credible enough. Others think that the codes of ethics are mere documents and it is not effective as far as the profession is concerned (IDI with Editors, 2021).

According to P5:

Certainly, the implication is that it shows crude journalism. As media practitioners, there is a theory of mass communication that is known as development theory, which says you are supposed to be a co-runner in the development of your country or society. A media house is not supposed to be anti-government or anti-people. We are not supposed to be antagonistic to either people or the government. We have a role to make sure that people understand what is happening in the context in which the sender sent it. Also, it makes people doubt the credibility of the media (IDI with Editors, 2021).

Based on the responses generated from the participants, there are so many implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice. All the participants agreed that journalists are violating the code of ethics, and this paved way for issues of hate speech in the 2015 and 2019 general elections.

4.7 Challenges Faced by Editors

Some challenges were put forward as confronting editors like the overbearing political influence on every opportunity to control the media, while other editors see it as an opportunity to make money as put forward by P3: “There weren’t much of challenges we benefitted a lot from paid adverts. We had a lot of commercial messages from all political parties. So, for us, it was good business.”

In the view of P4:

The challenge was that of multiple checks when a report is brought to you, you need to double-check, cross-check, or fast check your facts and figures to ensure that the report you want to put up there is balanced and credible, so that you won’t cast assertions as a journalist or editor (IDI with Editors, 2021).

Corroborating, P8 was of the view that:

One of the challenges for me is balance, how do you balance a story? How do you balance what the other party is saying? How are you sure that you are not being unnecessarily partisan in the prominence you give to your report? So, there is an issue of balance, issue of fairness, issue of cross-checking, trying to get to the other side of the story (IDI with Editors, 2021).

4.8 Solutions to the Identified Challenges

Several participants strongly feel that journalists and the journalism profession in general, need constant skills update because the new way of doing journalism is coming out every day. Especially, now that we are in the digital age, we should update our skills always and stick to journalism code. Although that code was designed in 1979, up till today, it is still the code that we are using and it is still relevant, let every journalist uphold

it, read it always and put it to practice. Once you upgrade your knowledge and skills by training and retraining and then you are so conversant with the code of practice, you won't become a victim of publishing stories with hate speech whether deliberately or unknowingly.

P5 put forward that:

Now as a country, politicians, and candidates of elections, the solution is to have respect for our laws, for, we have a responsibility to carry out. The rule of law is there, it takes care of all these things; you have the right to swing your arm, but you have no right to allow your arm to touch me. If we follow the rule of law am sure that these problems would be solved. We need to be ethical conscious (IDI with Editors, 2021).

According to P8:

Fact-checking is the solution, we need to fact-check much more. We need to also have a code of conduct for politicians, what they shouldn't say during the campaign. Then we also need to be open as a people to respond to reactions when people call us and we editors need to be bold, courageous to make sure that we weed out anything that will put this country at arm's length by way of hate speech (IDI with Editors, 2021).

V. Conclusion

This paper is an interpretative phenomenological analysis of hate speech among editors of three selected newspapers in Nigeria. The constructivism approach, which beliefs in quantitative data was adopted using in-depth interviews. Nine editors were selected for the in-depth interview, who responded to some questions raised by the paper. Arising from the interview, the study concludes that there are implications of hate speech on the professional journalistic practice as it undermines the ethics of the journalism profession. The study recommends that as gatekeepers of the content, editors should engage in checking and cross-checking of facts as a guiding principle in the professional journalistic practice in Nigeria. Again, professional bodies like NUJ, NBC, NGE, among others should ensure strict adherence to the code of ethics for the journalism profession, and sanction impendent. Similarly, subsequent studies to be done in the area should examine the implications of hate speech on society and the motivation for the use of hate speech by politicians. Also, the replication of the study in different parts of Nigeria using other media platforms for the strengthening of the theory, methodology, and the general knowledge base on hate speech is fundamental.

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