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Tackling Hate Speech on Refugees and Migrants in Nigeria: What can the Media do?

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to examine the extent to which the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants and the ways in which the media can effectively tackle it in Nigeria. The agenda-setting was used as theoretical foundation. A structured questionnaire was used by the researchers as the tool for their descriptive survey investigation, with 180 journalists as the population of the study. The results showed that the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria, as 100% of the respondents confirmed. Regarding the extent, 54.3% of them revealed that the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants to a moderate extent. Further results showed that the media can effectively tackle the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in certain ways as identified in the study. The theoretical, practical, and policy implications of this study have been stated in this study.

Keywords: Media, refugees, migrants, hate speech, agenda-setting, tackling, Nigeria, journalists, migration, media personnel

Introduction

Around the world, there are about 272 million migrant workers. Despite accounting for only 3.5% of the global population, the number of people living in countries other than their birth country has tripled since 1970 (Edmond, 2020). According to the most recent estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), (2021), 3.6% of the world's population, or 281 million people, are international migrants. Looking at the percent, it looks insignificant. However, considering the human implication of the percent, there is a need for migration concerns to surface in global debates because it involves over 270 million denizens of the world. The vast majority of people migrate internationally for reasons related to work, family, and education. Global pandemics have not impeded mobility regimes; these migration processes typically take place without fundamentally posing a challenge to either the migrants or the host countries.

In addition to migrants who leave their countries in search of greener pastures (jobs, livelihoods, studies, etc.), other migrants and refugees are forced out of their countries as a result of natural and environmental disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, tsunamis, among others. Others, however, flee their

homes and nations due to a variety of compelling—and occasionally tragic—causes like war, persecution, and natural disasters. Despite constituting a very small part of all migrants, individuals who have experienced displacement, such as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), usually have the greatest need for support and assistance (Ihejirika & Krtalic, 2021). Both these factors, the quest for better living and the displacement due to natural disasters, have contributed to the ever increasing rates and numbers of global migrant counts from 1950 to present.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019) sees migration as "the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state." Migration is notoriously hard to predict because it often co-occurs with other factors like extreme instability, economic crisis, or conflict, among others. The concepts and practises of migration have been received with so many opinions and perceptions by governments, human rights organizations, and indigenes of countries with the highest number of migrants. Like with every other human concept and ideology, there are always two-sides to the coin. Positivists and pessimistic opinions fill the discourse of refugees and migrants. As we see in the social media, it seems that there is a prevalence of negative opinions and perspectives about refugees and migrants.

Hate speeches and insensitive use of language are used to make comments and reports on refugees and migrants. Hate speech uses offensive slurs to degrade and stigmatise someone based on their race, sexual orientation, or other group memberships. It is forbidden to engage in any actions, words, expressions, writings, or displays that might incite violence or other negative behaviour (Mrabure, 2016). Hate speech is defined as any expression that disparages an individual or a group on the grounds of their race, colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or any other trait. This is a definition that is accurate. It usually denotes the instigation of violence or prejudice against a person or a group and can take the form of any speech, behaviour, writing, or exhibition. This has raised concern about the use of hate speech in the media about refugees and migrants.

Although the UN has long been concerned with hate speech, it is now more vital than ever to understand the specifics of hate speech directed at migrants and refugees (Tendayi, 2014). This calls for urgent and timely attention because, according to Dieng (2019), "big massacres start with small actions and language." This opinion is supported by the International Organization for Migration (2019), who opined that "we all have to remember that hate crimes are preceded by hate speech. We have to bear in mind that words kill. Words kill like bullets."

Mr. Al-Nasser emphasised the significance of the media, particularly the mass media, which can shape perceptions in either direction, stating that despite the progressive policies supported by some European leaders, some media outlets continue to portray refugees as "potential terrorists" and "threats to national security." He continued, noting that this environment has increased host communities' sense of fear and mistrust toward migrants and refugees worldwide, having a negative impact on their rights and freedoms. "Social media provides a wide and open platform for hate speech, facilitating the rapid spread of negative narratives and ideas online," he said (United Nations, 2017). as well as their emotions and psychology.

Following this, it is warned that hate speech should not be directed at migrants because doing so simply makes their personal misfortunes worse. Hate speech also discourages people from pursuing effective, cooperative solutions to assist them and their host societies (Ettema, 2017). As a result of this, there are several studies and symposiums conducted and held to readdress the issue. According to the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) (2020), "as individuals, as political leaders, and as churches and agencies, we must counter hate speech against migrants and refugees, especially on social media." Of concern to us, it is

a common assumption that since it is through the media that hate speech is spread, the media should be intentional about redirecting the narratives held against migrants and refugees.

There is a belief that the media's involvement in influencing opinions of migrants and refugees has expanded as a result of hate speech and the emergence of unhealthy rhetoric against them in various regions of the world (United Nations, 2017), both positively and/or negatively. Previous studies have focused on how the media, particularly social media, has been used both positively and negatively in the rise of anti-refugee and anti-migrant sentiment. From the positive side, on which this study also stands, Talabi et al. (2022) in their study reported that the use of social media storytelling is effective for seeking and receiving help among Nigerian refugees; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) found that social media have been utilised to raise funds for people in need; Althoff et al. (2014) in a study stated that social media can be used as a channel for soliciting and receiving humanitarian aid; as well as Chugh (2018), who examined how social media platforms are used to raise funds for foreigners who have been affected by natural hazards.

From the above, it is clear that previous studies on the discourse of media and hate speech towards refugees and migrants largely considered how social media are used positively in terms of hate speech. Also, previous works within this area of discourse treated refugees and migrants independently. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are no studies that have looked at the issues of hate speech on refugees and migrants from the perspective of the conventional media in Nigeria. Nonetheless, there is a need to explore the use of the conventional mass media to tackle hate speech against refugees and migrants. With its agenda-setting theory, the mass media, including newspapers, radio, and television, as well as news media with handles on social media, can stand as the game changer in redirecting hate speeches to realistic and positive narratives about refugees and migrants. Therefore, the key concern is to appraise ways that the media can not only help combat hate speech directed at migrants and refugees but also how the media can look into issues that have hampered the efforts of important bodies and institutions to successfully address this issue of hate speech. Based on this, the researchers asked the pertinent questions below to guide the study.

Research Question

The study is guided by the following questions

RQ1: To what extent do the media play the role of tackling the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria?

RQ2: What are the ways through which the media can effectively tackle hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria?

RQ3: What are the challenges that may hinder the media in addressing the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria?

Literature Review

The number of migrants and refugees in major European nations as well as other parts of the globe has risen to an unimaginable scale in recent years. As millions of families continue to be uprooted by war in Libya, Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, Europe alone faced an unprecedented influx of more than one million asylum seekers in a very short period of time, most of whom were from these nations (European Union, 2015). More than 20 million refugees and asylum seekers who were fleeing violence or persecution in their native countries made up the 244 million people who resided outside of their country of origin in 2015. Dieng (2019) submitted that every day, we are made to witness migrants and refugees being humiliated and dehumanised. This has grown to become much more of a norm with the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, who was known for labelling immigrants as animals. Amodu, Usaini, and Ige (2014) claim that the

mass media frequently play the crucial functions of the fourth estate, the defenders of the public interest, and the keepers of democracy. All of these factors add up to a critical analysis of the media's role as the fourth estate of the realm in tackling this tendency.

In the past twenty years, not only have traditional media, digital media, and social media platforms been more pervasive in people's lives around the world, but hate speech, racism, and other types of prejudice have also increased in frequency over that time. Hate speech directed at migrants and refugees is a phenomenon which appears to be witnessed across different climes and international societies as it involves the inter-crossing of citizens from one country or geographical area to another, hence it becomes an international dilemma. Furthermore, the UN has long been concerned about hate speech, but it is now more critical than ever to understand the specifics of hate speech directed towards migrants and refugees (Tendayi, 2014). In response to this new issue, the UN has made a concerted effort to address concerns about migration and the rights of migrants. This effort culminated in the presentation of the Global Compact for Migration, a non-binding document that contained a renewed commitment from member states to respect human rights and fundamental principles of international law, in July 2018. It strengthened the UN's agreement to combat xenophobia and other types of discrimination even more. Despite having the support of the majority of nations (152 to be exact), the agreement was roundly rejected by far-right leaders and parties, demonstrating how important anti-immigrant feelings are to their agenda.

Through carefully crafted programmes covering everything from news to information, music, etc., the media have been identified largely as a means for the quick conveyance of information. In essence, it aims to inform, educate, and entertain while showcasing various cultures, thereby reducing the world to a global village (Ogunyombo, 2016). Addressing this seemingly worrying situation might not only entail seeking ways through which the media can assist in tackling hate speech directed at migrants and refugees, but also how the media can investigate challenges that have disrupted the efforts of key bodies and institutions to successfully tackle this issue. The lack of a modern approach to hate speech that will be focused on protecting refugees and migrants may mean that this trend is more likely to be prevalent given the steady rise in displaced people around the world and the fact that immigrants are now the target of hateful attacks in many countries.

Notably, freedom of speech is still a contentious topic in both academic writing and political discourse, particularly when hate speech is the main topic of discussion. However, hate speech is often mysteriously tolerated abroad. Due to the effects that hate speech and hate crimes have historically had on people and communities, hate speech laws are based on substantive equality. After the Second World War, when Nazi attempts to exterminate the Jewish population were accompanied by widespread campaigns of hatred, hate speech became an issue for international law (Nowak, 2005; Van Blarcum, 2005). Hate speech has fueled ethnic conflict in past years in areas like the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda (Legesse, 2012).

The place of the media in tackling hate speech on migrants and refugees, however, requires a careful approach. The powers of media operations indicate that the media are, at the same time, limited and limitless. The media's strength as a whole can be attributed to both its explicit advocacy capabilities and its underlying potential to frame sociopolitical concerns. According to Chinkin (2004), soft-law instruments may be a useful tool to build international treaty law with regard to hate speech against migrants by clarifying treaty provisions, offering states' policy recommendations, and overseeing treaty implementation. Shelton (2012) asserts that soft-law instruments, which are documents issued by international independent expert bodies or signed by States and institutionalised by treaties, will have force and offer a platform for important actors to review and issue reports, gather data, and engage in dialogue to advance the effective implementation of the rights and objectives addressing hate speech against migrants and refugees as stated in the treaty.

This again draws attention to the agenda-setting role of the media and begs the question of how much the media has genuinely attempted to tackle the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants. Even if pressmen eventually choose, filter, and reorganise news information, Cobley and Schulz (2013) contend that people still rely on the mass media because they have a limited number of other news sources. As a result, the public perceives those issues as having a higher priority than other matters due to the media's focus on the issue, thereby setting the agenda for public discourse. In the Nigerian context, media concentration could simply be by way of sensitising members of the public on the woes and social difficulties experienced by citizens-turned-refugees or creating fora to debate with political analysts and other professionals and to advise the government on policies to protect refugees and migrants against hate speech. The inclusion of groups already included in discrimination case law would broaden protection from hate speech beyond racial or ethnic grounds, according to Clooney and Webb's (2017) study, which established this as a suggested strategy for combating hate speech directed towards migrants. As a result, domestic court case law addressing migrants and hate speech has started to develop, offering a fresh perspective on touchy subjects, including how the media and political discourse might strengthen the process.

According to Muiznieks (2014), the European Council in combating forms of racism should be conscious of the contextual and evolving nature of hate speech and must define the grounds on which hate speech to categories of targeted groups takes place. This move would enable nations to address worries about discrimination based on gender, race, colour, religion, descent or against migrants and refugees. Notably, however, certain idiosyncrasies tend to question the commitment of key European bodies in providing grounds for the eradication of hate speech towards migrants and refugees. Calamur (2016) drew attention to the fact that Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, particularly cautioned "possible unlawful economic migrants" by saying: "Do not come to Europe. Don't put your lives and your money in jeopardy. Everything is worthless. There will be no more transit through Greece or any other European nation. " While this may have genuinely been part of a new push to solve the EU migrant crisis, there is a huge possibility that this would rouse action groups and citizens of many EU countries to direct hatred towards migrants and refugees, legal or illegal.

Markelu (2013) looked closely at Kosovo while examining national interests and foreign policy. He discovered that the idea of protecting Kosovo's independence from alleged external threats is a crucial interest that ought to be taken into account as a foundation for protecting any country's national interest. It was further established that Kosovo, like Nigeria and a host of other African nations, has a large diaspora community and many citizens find themselves migrating to other developed countries while fleeing from insecurity or threats of war. In the interest of the national interest, African states should pay special attention to defending the interests of ethnic minorities living abroad. Many African states prioritise maintaining their physical, political, and cultural identities, but in their national interest and foreign policy strategies, African countries should place a secondary emphasis on safeguarding the interests of their citizens abroad in accordance with international norms and standards as well as maintaining their national and cultural identity.

In a study, Talabi et al. (2022) found that social media storytelling is beneficial for Nigerian refugees who were displaced by the war in Russia and Ukraine to ask for and receive aid. In their study, Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) found that social media have been used to raise funds for people in need. According to a study by Purohit et al. (2013), social media platforms can be useful places for communities and people who need humanitarian assistance to ask for and receive it. According to a study by Althoff et al. (2014), social media can be used as a channel for soliciting and receiving humanitarian aid. Chugh (2018) conducted research to determine how social media platforms are used to raise funds for foreigners who have been affected by natural hazards. In a study by Etumnu (2020) that focuses on how well social media works to combat hate speech, fake news, and extremism in Nigeria, it was found that there are a number of obstacles that prevent

social media platforms from being successful in this area. Oladele, Nkwam-Uwaoma and Akpabio (2021) in a study reported that apart from climate change, other issues such as human rights, child's rights, women's rights and human trafficking are some of the issues which are under-reported in Nigeria. So far, the majority of the studies reviewed provide insight into the use of social media on issues concerning refugees and migrants; however, the implication is that these studies do not address how the mainstream media can be used to combat hate speech against refugees and migrants.

Theoretical Framework

The study finds expression on the Agenda-setting theory. The agenda setting theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. The theory argues that the media are not always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about. This means that the media invariably create and set the agenda for discourse in society. An agenda is an issues or subject of discussion. It is a topical issue such as hate speeches against refugees and immigrants being deliberated. Such issues have the potential to elicit positive or negative comments from members of the public depending how the issue is being reported (Alphonsus, et al 2022). By implication, the media are saddled with the responsibility of monitoring the events happening in society. That is, the media are the watchdog of society that sets agenda for public discourse (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022).

In line with this study, it is the responsibility of the media to constantly investigate and report on issues regarding hate speeches against refugees and migrants as they happen and affect the Nigerian image. Such issues should not be allowed to go unreported. For instance researchers (Aesmah, 2011; Gevers, 2015, Okoro & Onyebuchi, 2020) note that we learn about what is happening in society through the media, attention should be paid to all important issues as they arise in our society. This will lend credence to the symbiotic relationship between nations which in-turn will change the perception of society as regards how news reports about refugees and immigrants are perceived (Edim, Odok & Osaji, 2016). Based on the agenda-setting theory argument the media can play a role in helping to tackle the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants by giving prominence to issues that have to do with refugees and migrants in their reports by so doing the attention of people both those in authority will be drawn and then actions will be taken. This theory is significant to this study because it can help address the problem of hate speech against refugees and migrants by making it widely known through the agenda-setting function of the media.

Method

Design/Population

This study used the descriptive survey research design approach. This approach was considered appropriate because of the nature of the issue under investigation, which requires getting the opinions of journalists on the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants. As used in the study, the survey attempted to describe and explain why certain situations exist based on data collected from respondents (Igweonyia, 2006). The population of this study consists of all registered and practising journalists in Owerri. According to the Nigerian Union of Journalists [NUJ], fact sheet, as of 2019 as reported by (Obayi, et al., 2020) there are 180 registered and practising journalists who work in broadcast, print and online media in Owerri, Imo state.

Sample/sampling technique

Considering the nature of this study and the population involved, the sample size consisted of a total of 180 journalists. The census sampling technique was used since the study's population size is what Asemah (2012) says is evidently manageable. Given that the census technique as established by Toparh Economic School

(2020) allows for researchers to analyse a small population within a confined space, there is no need to compute the sample size. The sampling strategy was purposive because of the census principle employed. The ability to select journalists is based on their understanding of hate speech reporting as regards refugees and migration issues.

Research Instrument

The instrument for data collection was a close-ended questionnaire, which had two sections. Section A and Section B: Section A contained questions that generated the respondents' bio-data, while Section B was structured to generate the needed psychographic data that was used to address the questions raised in the study. There are 13 items on the instrument. Questions were structured in a likert scale and dichotomous format.

Validity/Reliability of Instrument

The researchers employed a face validity check by an expert to verify that the instrument generated the necessary response to answer the study questions. The instrument was subjected to two experts to ensure that necessary modifications and observations were made as regards the instrument. For the reliability a pilot test was carried out with 17 journalists that were not within the population of the study. The Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the research instrument on 7 items with the application of SPSS version 21. According to Laerd Statistics (2018), the Cronbach alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency. The results of the Cronbach alpha showed .90 level of internal consistency. The implication is that the instrument is reliable.

Method data collection and data analysis

The research adopted the personal and face-to-face approach of data collection to reduce the mortality rate of instruments and put the expected return rate at 100%. First, the researchers obtained ethical clearance from Ianna Research Academy before the commencement of the administration of the instrument. The consent of the journalists was sought. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses as no identifier was attached to the questionnaire. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data that was collected. Tables were used to present the data.

Ethical Considerations and Disclosures

The Ethical Unit of Ianna Research Academy reviewed our study design and offered their ethical approval (CSF/00141) to conduct the current study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this study, 180 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to journalists in Owerri. However, 171 were the valid retrieved copies that were used for the study. The return rate stood at 95%. The analysis presented below was done with the 171 copies retrieved.

Table 1: Bio-data of respondents Distribution

	Options	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	95	55.5%
	Female	76	44.4%
	Total	171	100%
Qualification	Diploma	15	8.7%
	1 st degree	112	65.4%
	Masters	41	23.9%
	Others	3	1.7%
	Total	171	100%
Years of Practice	1-5 Years	71	41.5%
	6-10 Years	52	30.4%
	11-20 Years	33	19.2%
	21 and Above	15	8.7%
	Total	171	100%

Source: Field survey, 2022

This table shows that 55.5% of the journalists in the study were males, while there were more first degree holders at 65.4% among the respondents. Furthermore, in this study, many of the journalists who were sampled (41.5%) have practised between 1–5 years.

RQ1: To what extent do the media play the role of tackling the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria?

Table 2: The extent to which the media play the role of tackling the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria

Questions	Responses	Frequency	Percent
Do the media play any role in tackling issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants?	Yes	171	100%
	No	-	-
	Can't say	-	-
Total		171	100
To what extent do the media play a role in tackling the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants?	Very large extent	17	9.9%
	Large extent	28	16.3%
	Moderate extent	93	54.3%
	Low extent	29	16.9%
	Not at all	4	2.3%
Total		171	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

As shown in this table, all the respondents (100%) indicated that the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria. When asked about the extent to which they play this role, the majority of the journalists (54.3%) confirmed that the extent to which the media plays a role in tackling the issue is at a moderate level. This implies that the media engage in the act of tackling this issue but at a moderate level.

RQ2: What are the ways through which the media can effectively tackle hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria?

Table 3: Ways through which the media can effectively tackle hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	N	STD	Mean	Decision
Sensitization of the public through campaigns on the danger of hate speech on refugees and migrants	119 (69.6%)	48 (28.1)	3 (1.8%)	1 (.6%)	171	(.54233)	(3.6)	Accept
Advising government to make policies to protect refugees and migrants against hate speech.	125 (73.1%)	42 (26.4%)	1 (.6%)	3 (1.8%)	171	(.54233)	(3.6)	Accept
Keeping hate speech comments against refugees and migrants off their platforms.	75 (43.9%)	91 (53.2%)	3 (1.8%)	2 (1.2%)	171	(.58891)	(3.3)	Accept
Proper education of media ethics to practitioners in promoting peaceful society.	92 (53.8%)	71 (41.5%)	6 (3.5%)	2 (1.2%)	171	(.62628)	(3.4)	Accept
Partnering civil society groups in organising programmes aimed at curtailing the hate speech on refugees and migrants.	119 (69.6%)	48 (28.1)	3 (1.8%)	1 (.6%)	171	(.54233)	(3.6)	Accept
Average Mean							3.5	

Source: Field survey, 2022

***Variables: SA=Strongly Agree, 3.3-4.0: A=Agree, 2.5-3.2:D=Disagree, 1.8-2.4:SD=Strongly Disagree, 1.1-1.7*

At a mean average of 3.5 (N=171), respondents confirmed that the media can effectively tackle hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria through the aforementioned ways as indicated in table 3. This result implies that through all these ways identified, the media can effectively tackle the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria.

RQ3: What are the challenges that may hinder the media in addressing the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria?

Table 4: The challenges that may hinder the media in addressing the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	N	STD	Mean	Decision
Government reluctance in making policies to protect refugees and migrants against hate speech.	72 (42.1%)	83 (48.5%)	9 (5.3%)	7 (4.1%)	171	(.74738)	(3.2)	Accept
Media ownership control	88 (51.5%)	74 (43.3%)	6 (3.5%)	3 (1.8%)	171	(.65179)	(3.4)	Accept
Poor diplomatic ties with the affected countries	125 (73.1%)	41 (24.0%)	2 (1.2%)	3 (1.8%)	171	(.58885)	(3.6)	Accept
Average Mean							3.4	

Source: Field survey, 2022

Result shows that at a mean average of 3.4 (N=171), it was confirmed that Government reluctance in making policies to protect refugees and migrants against hate speech; media ownership control and poor diplomatic ties with the affected countries can hinder the media in addressing the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria. This implies that aforementioned challenges hinder the media in addressing the issues of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

The goal of this study was to examine the extent to which the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants and the ways in which the media can effectively tackle hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria. The result of the study showed that the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria, as 100% of the respondents confirmed. Regarding the extent, 54.3% of them revealed that the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants to a moderate extent. The implication is that, to a moderate extent, the media may not be able to do much in their efforts to tackle the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants. These findings extend previous studies (Talabi et al., 2022; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Purohit et al., 2013; Althoff et al., 2014; Chugh, 2018) that have examined the use of social media in helping refugees by taking a look at how the conventional media can tackle the issue of hate speech towards refugees and migrants.

The result of the study further showed that through the sensitisation of the public through campaigns on the danger of hate speech on refugees and migrants; advising the government to make policies to protect

refugees and migrants against hate speech; keeping hate speech comments against refugees and migrants off the media platforms; proper education of media ethics to practitioners in promoting peaceful society and partnering with civil society groups in organising programmes aimed at curtailing hate speech on refugees and migrants are the ways the media can effectively tackle the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants in Nigeria. The implication is that when the media adopts these strategies, the possibility of addressing the issue of hate speech against refugees and migrants will be very high, especially when they adopt their agenda-setting function. This study has extended previous studies (Clooney & Webb, 2017; Muiznieks, 2014; Markelu, 2013) related to refugees and migrants by looking at ways through which the media can effectively tackle the issue of hate speech towards refugees and migrants especially in a developing country like Nigeria.

In this study, some of the challenges limiting the media in addressing the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in Nigeria include government reluctance in making policies to protect refugees and migrants against hate speech; media ownership control; and poor diplomatic ties between affected countries. This result is consistent with the study by Etumnu (2020), which demonstrates that due to a number of issues, social media has not been successful in combating the problem of extremism, hate speech, and fake news in Nigeria. The implication of this finding is that, if these difficulties are not solved, hate speech towards refugees and migrants may continue to be a problem. Here, the media's ability to set the agenda is crucial in order to bring the public's attention to these problems and the need for a solution.

Conclusion/Recommendation

Drawing from the findings of this research we conclude that the media plays a role in tackling the issue of hate speech at a moderate level. However, they should intensify their efforts to a large extent so as to effectively tackle the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants through the identified ways highlighted in the study. Also, the Nigerian government should not relent in their efforts to make policies that can protect refugees and migrants in Nigeria, thereby improving diplomatic ties among affected countries. This study has some limitations. First, the study did not consider the motive behind hate speech against refugees and migrants. Another limitation is that the study focused only on journalists in Owerri without paying attention to all the journalists in Nigeria. Again, the researchers utilised only descriptive survey research in the study without paying attention to qualitative methods to explore more detailed data to address the issue. Also, the study did not include the opinions of refugees and migrants. The researchers recommend that further studies should look at these limitations.

Study implications

This study has theoretical, practical, and policy implications. The theoretical implication is that, through the agenda-setting theory, issues such as hate speech towards refugees and migrants can be addressed when the media make it a priority in their reports. This information could be handy for future researchers who would want to apply the agenda-setting theory to tackle issues in society. This study also has practical implications by showing that conventional media can serve as an instrument in the campaign against hate speech against refugees and migrants through their content. The findings of this study will help policymakers who are interested in assisting refugees and migrants to know the usefulness of the media in tackling the issue of hate speech on refugees and migrants in the general interest of society.

Conflict of interest

We declare no potential conflict of interest exist

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