



# JACKSONITES

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

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Date of Event : July 30, 2021

Jacksonites Professional  
Development Series Seminar

Theme:

# A 'CAPTURED' MEDIA IN AN INSECURE NATION:

*DEMOCRACY AND FREE  
SPEECH ON TRIAL?*

Rapporteurs: ▾

JOSEPH IFEANYICHUKWU  
DINWOKE

TREASURE OGHENEVWARHE  
ADOGBEJI



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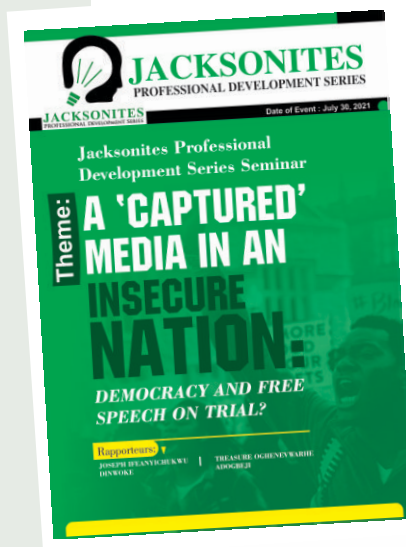
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ALUMNI OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
MASS COMMUNICATION, UNN.

PRESENTS  
HER INAUGURAL PROFESSIONAL  
& PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT

*Seminar*

## THEME A CAPTURED MEDIA IN AN INSECURE NATION



ZOOM



July 30th, 2021



3pm - 5pm (GMT +1)  
9am - 11am (EST)

ZOOM LINK:

<https://bit.ly/JacksonitesDevelopmentSeries>

ATTENDANCE BY REGISTRATION ONLY: LIMITED SEATS

FURTHER ENQUIRIES:

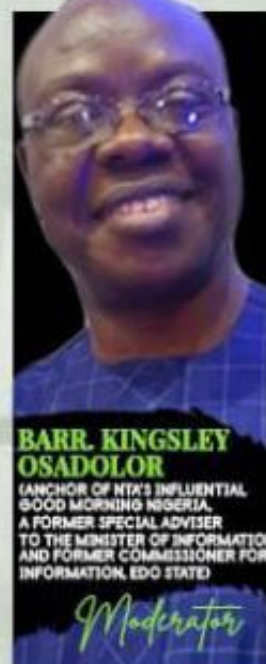
[YouTube](#) [LinkedIn](#) Jacksonites PD Series

[jacksonitespdseries@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonitespdseries@gmail.com)



**DR. NDUKA OTIONO**  
(WRITER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR &  
GRADUATE SUPERVISOR AT  
THE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES,  
CARLTON UNIVERSITY,  
OTTAWA, CANADA)

*Speaker*



**BARR. KINGSLEY  
OSADOLOR**

(ANCHOR OF NTA'S INFLUENTIAL  
GOOD MORNING NIGERIA,  
A FORMER SPECIAL ADVISER  
TO THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION  
AND FORMER COMMISSIONER FOR  
INFORMATION, EDO STATE)

*Moderator*





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### PREAMBLE

*The seminar kicked off with the moderator of the event, veteran journalist Barr. Kingsley Osadolor, welcoming participants from different parts of the world. He gave a highlight of the seminar theme as insecurity has become a topical issue in Nigeria. Further, he recognised the presence of some dignitaries who had joined the event early. These included Senior Special Assistant to the President, Mallam*

*Garba Shehu, first Registrar of Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON), who is also a former lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in the 1980s, Prof. Charles Okigbo. Thereafter, the moderator then invited the Chair of the Steering Committee of the Jacksonites Professional Development Series (PDS), Professor Chinedu Ihuoma Mba, a Jacksonite and a senior faculty at Algonquin College, Ottawa, Canada, to give her opening remarks.*

## JACKSONITES PDS CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME ADDRESS



**CHINEDU MBA**  
JPDS Chairperson

**T**he Chair of the Jacksonites Professional Development Series Steering Committee, Chinedu Mba said that the seminar was a proof of what committed volunteers across the globe could achieve when they had a shared vision and mission. She assured the participants that the programme would exemplify commitment to advancement in professionalism.

She further pointed out that Nigerians in diaspora had been making massive positive contributions in their host nations adding that the same spirit had been brought to bear in the Jacksonites Professional Development Series (Jacksonites PDS).

The Chairperson restated that Jacksonites PDS is an initiative of the Alumni Association of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It aims at ensuring the personal and professional development of Jacksonites worldwide, other like-minded professionals as well as students in communications and allied fields. She announced that the seminar series which is set to hold quarterly will be hosted in collaboration with professionals in the field to help facilitate continuous growth in the profession.

Professor Chinedu Mba further stated that the theme of the maiden seminar aligns with the Mission and Vision of the PDS Series because it explores the state of the Nigerian media and the options available to citizens and media practitioners. She expressed the hope that the quarterly seminar, a meeting of town and gown, will facilitate professional growth of students and practitioners.



## THE KEYNOTE SPEECH

The keynote speech was delivered by Professor Nduka Otiono of the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa. Prof Otiono laid the foundation of his presentation by referencing Section 39 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, as amended. He further referenced Article 9 of the United Nations (UN) Declaration and Article 19 of African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights that emphasizes the necessity and centrality of freedom of expression.

Quoting Sheldon Burshtein (2017: n.p) he defined fake news as a fabricated account that is meant to spread virally. Prof. Otiono, however, adding, however, that the definition of fake news is subjective, hence he limited his selection of definitions for the purpose of his presentation.

To further contextualize his discussion, Prof. Otiono showed images of four Nigerians who represent different tendencies that the media have had to deal with in the light of the attempt to gag free speech by the Nigerian government.

### They include:

1. Omoyele Sowore, convener of #RevolutionNow Movement
2. Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra
3. Sunday Igbogho, leader of Yoruba Nation Movement
4. Sheikh El Zakzaki, the leader of the Shite Muslim groups

### The New Millennium and It's Promises

He took the audience down the memory lane when he recounted experiences of Nigerians towards the end of the military regime, 1999. According to him, at the



**PROFESSOR NDUKA OTIONO**

turn of the century, many Nigerians looked optimistically to a progressive new era and the basis for this optimism was the new democratic fourth republic of May 29, 1999 that ended military rule in Nigeria. Many people also thought that the end of military dictatorship would usher in all-round exponential growth, especially economic, in the country.

Similarly, the rapid advancement in information and communication technology and concomitant rise of independent online media and its challenge to traditional media oligarchy gave many Nigerians and observers reasons to believe that things would turn out better in the country. Unfortunately, 25 years and seven Presidents down the line, Prof. Otiono observed that all the promises of the new millennium have all faded like fake jeans.

Otiono noted that under the rule of President Buhari, Nigeria is teetering on the brink of state failure with the challenges of insecurity manifested in Boko Haram terrorists, herders who preside with impunity, and the media that appears captured.

### Hate Speech and Fake News; Not Novel

Otiono posits that although fake news and hate speech are not novel concepts that surfaced in this dispensation, they have become so ubiquitous that the Oxford Dictionary declared post-truth as its 2016 international word of the year. He stated that in this day and age, "we don't suffer a shortfall of truth but have been buffeted by its excesses".

According to him, fake news, hate speech and post-truth increasingly gained attention with the emergence of Donald Trump (of the USA), and all around the world including Nigeria, where in an attempt of government's effort to deal what he calls "Aproko Press", the government indefinitely banned Twitter in June 2021 after it deleted tweets by President Buhari warning the people of South Eastern Nigeria.

Fake News, hate speech and post truth, he continued, have their antecedent back in Plato republic where discussions on truth and falsehood existed; however, it has resurfaced and gained popularity in recent times in the USA, as well as in Nigeria especially in the era of new and social media.

Dr Nduka Otiono is of the view that although war against the press and rumour mongering is not new to the Nigeria media, it has worsened under the current dispensation thus reminding us of Decree 4 with its attack on freedom of expression and civil liberties in the 1980s.

Chronicling the evolution of fake news in Nigeria's recent memory, he said, "Fake news has been in Nigeria since the early 90s." He recalled the rumoured death of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe; the tale that Prof Wole Soyinka made a third class from University of Ibadan; again how former Ekiti State Governor, Ayo Fayose, sponsored a front page



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advertorial in Punch Newspaper claiming that candidate Buhari would die in office like past leaders, if he (Buhari) elected into office in 2015; and then, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, (IPOB) Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's claim that President Buhari was dead – only his body double was being paraded as the president in Aso Villa!

### Why Hate Speech and Fake News Thrive

Prof. Otiono stated that the toxic atmosphere and erosion of public trust are implicated in the causes of the rise of hate speech. According to him, erosion of public trust is often reflected where the representatives of the state and individuals are suspicious of each other along ethnic lines and see the media space as a battlefield.

He further noted that hate speech and fake news are like two sides of a coin but have always been with the same intention: to damage or impugn someone's character through deliberate misinformation. Fake news which he described as a piece of information created and presented to appear true to the consumer with the hope that it's spread by the consumer. Although it dates back to the 1990s, it has gained momentum with the advent of social media which empowers users to disseminate any trite information to millions with the click of a button.

### The Elite & Hate Speech

Dr. Otiono remarked that the elite have institutionalized hate speech in Nigeria as reflected in the threat by the Oba of Lagos to Igbo leaders to vote for Akinwunmi Ambode, his anointed candidate in the buildup of the 2015 General Elections or prepare to drown in the Atlantic Ocean.

There is no scarcity of Nigerians generally interested in the unity of the country as seen in the civil society organizations that converge to discuss the need for free speech within

responsible limits. Unfortunately, the acrimonious exchanges between the politicians posed a threat to the cord of unity bonding the country; thus the early warnings to politicians about their use of the media to spread hate speech.

In the light of how the elite (can) fuel hate speech that could trigger death, peace speech, the National Peace Committee, tried to prevent willful destruction of lives and properties by inviting President Buhari and candidate Atiku to a peace accord as witnessed by two former heads of state and diplomatic organization in the build-up of 2019 General elections.

Prof. Otiono referenced Bishop Hassan Kukah's admonition to leaders in the country to be their brother's keepers and avoid ethno-religious profiling in dealing with each other, especially the Fulani tribe.

### Capturing the Press through Hate Speech Bill?

Prof Otiono cited instances of attempts at press capture. A key example was Senator Abdullahi Sabi's attempted intervention to curb hate speech by sponsoring hate speech bill. That bill prescribed death by hanging for anyone whose hate speech triggers the death of another person, in addition to a fine and jail terms to any defaulter. Dr. Otiono is of the view that the bill died on arrival because of its opaque nature and wondered if such measures would not contravene freedom of expression. He said that the inadequacy of the Hate Speech Bill to serve as a potent bullet against hate speech includes its failure to clearly define what constitutes hate speech, proposition of obnoxious fines and jail terms as well as failure to differentiate between hate speech and abusive language.

He observed with dismay government's focus on citizens in its fight against hate speech and fake news; while developed nations have been accused of interfering with elections in

other nations like the Russian alleged role in Trump's win of the 2016.

### Recant of Jewish Genocide in Nigeria?

The most ardent promoter of hate speech is Adolf Hitler who convinced Germans that the Jews in Germany were their problem and created fake news that spread until enough hatred arose that drowned 6 million Jews dead in the wave of their hatred. Xenophobia in South Africa and Rwanda are examples of the destructive power of hate speech.

These destructive powers of hate speech and fake news led Dr Otiono to ask the question: will such hate speech as seen in these climes trigger such calamity from Nigeria?

He further queried how we [Nigerians] balance the need to curb hate speech while promoting free speech and free press which is now on trial under the incumbent President in Nigeria.

He highlighted that Sunday Igboho, Nnamdi Kanu and Omoyele Sowore depend on the media for their activities and wondered if the media can be impartial in their coverage of what they represent considering different media owners have different interests in the different subjects these agitators represent.

Dr Otiono pointed out that increasing agitation for restructuring of the country and concerns over widening insecurity had become the gasoline influencing mass movement, hate speech and fake news.

He ended his presentation by stating categorically that the Nigerian media cannot be captured as they have survived different repressive regimes at different times. He describes Nigerian media as one of the most vibrant media in the world having surmounted challenges posed by military dictatorship as seen in Decree 4.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

### Q1. Dr. Chidebere Nwachukwu

*What exactly constitutes hate speech and who defines it?*

**Response:** What constitutes hate speech is not easy to define because it is very amorphous. However, with Fayose's advertisement as an example, one can say although there is free speech, there can be a borderline between free speech and hate speech. Hate speech is subjective and relative because what constitutes free speech for Mr. A might be hate speech for Mr. B but we can also have something close to a universal standard of definition of what constitutes hate speech.

Regarding who defines hate speech, he said it's a well-known fact that there is a limit to which common sense is common. There's a certain kind of speech that is intended outrightly to destroy an opponent, but some people say that anything is fair in war; so that even becomes problematic to define.

### Q2. Moshood Isamotu

*How do the media apply the self-censorship button in the fight against fake news or hate speech?*

**Response:** If the media can apply self-censorship then it means that the media is also reasonable enough not to cross the lines. Media professionals are trained to be reasonable and to understand the law governing its practice. Self-censorship entails having to make certain decisions consciously or subconsciously before sending out a news story to the public.

Furthermore, self-censorship is important to the extent to which the best interest is served by the media story which is designed to protect the masses or advance the interest of the masses which is why it becomes problematic especially in the context where media practitioners depend on politicians in statehouses to release gazette.

He concluded by saying that the first principle of true journalism is skepticism. It's not to trust whatever information you are given because you have to weigh and interrogate it. This means self-censorship

becomes a huge responsibility for media practitioners because it requires the best judgment to decide. Unfortunately, we don't always cross the bar in that decision.

### Q3. Obi Emekekwe.

*When we talk about fake news a lot of what people call fake news stems from the work of citizen journalists and the social media so, how does the media protect itself from fake news?*

**Response:** The idea of citizen journalism and professional journalism has continued to engage media scholars and practitioners because professional journalists are trained to have the capacity to value judgment as much as possible. In the traditional media, before a story gets published it passes through the process of gatekeeping which guarantees a higher quality of what is published in the news, unlike the online media where gatekeeping is not in existence and everybody is a publisher. The media has a role to play to be quite impartial."

It is difficult to draw to some extent what we call a professional journalist and citizen journalist because the professional journalist also depends on citizen journalism for reporting as people have also begun to look up to these citizen journalists for authentic report. This is more so because of the compromised system where the brown envelope or some journalist in the traditional press may have become subject to the powers and the money of the rulers of the day. Traditional media are now struggling to have instant news reports and we know the consequences where even pictures no longer speak the truth because of sophisticated editing that can corrupt the image and the story to give it a slant that favours the platform from which it is published.

### Q4. Dr Chinedu Christian Odoemelam.

*In your opinion, sir, is there a nation in the world where the media can prevent being captured? Can the media be ever independent?*

**Response:** The media space is a battle

of different ideologies and interests. The media, according to him, in Igbo is called 'ikuku' air. You can't battle it. You can't trap the air. If it was possible to trap it; it would have become a weapon of war. Many activist journalists have been killed, many have suffered incarceration, and will continue to suffer incarceration. These actions have not captured the media because many media practitioners are ready to do anything possible to get across their stories to be published. The media can be repressed and suppressed but it cannot be captured. It will keep undergoing different kinds of metamorphosis to deal with regression and censorship.

### Q5. Asuquo Solomon.

*Can we also see a captured media in terms of the government trying to gag the media from reporting news in its factual state, especially in the recent order by the Nigeria Government that some ongoing violence should not be presented?*

**Response:** "There's no way in the world that the media does not have any kind of restraining or judgment." The great journalist, according to him, weighs the benefits of any story before publishing it because it is supposed to serve the interest of the people. In a shrinking world made possible by technology, it seems inevitable that regulations have to be applied either self-consciously or regulated through different media. The media practice in the western world is quite different from that of Africa including Nigeria because the media space most of the time, does not have a clearly defined ideology. One thing that has affected the readership of some traditional media is lack of investigative journalism. Investigative journalism appears now to be antithetical. The media is called the fourth state of the realm with responsibility to hold the government accountable. For this reason, there will always be tension between the state and the media, especially the alternative media. Within this context, the best-case scenario is the negotiation because you cannot typically legislate what the alternative media should publish.



## COMMENTS SESSION

**M**allam Garbu Shehu, Senior Special Assistant (SSA) to the President on Media, commended Dr. Otiono for the presentations; he described it as “a well-delivered first-class lecture. He posited that that technology companies were working against the nation by promoting hate speech and fake news stressing that the enemy is the technology companies and the excesses of the media need to be curtailed especially when it intends to cause harm just like it has done in other countries. According to him, hate speech has been the problem of humanity but public officers such as him always draw the attention of leaders to the importance of not suppressing the media because there is that very thin line between that and an attack on freedom of expression. He further pointed out that practitioners should note the need for freedom of expression to be within reasonable limits. He concluded by saying. “You cannot kill the press; you cannot chain it. The press in the country is healthy; it is vibrant; it is aggressive, and will continue to be. Nobody can stop it.”



## CLOSING REMARKS

**D**r. Chuks O. Enwerem a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, National Open University of Nigeria Abuja and a member of the Jacksonites PD Series Steering Committee gave the closing remarks. The Chairman of the Professional Development Series Steering Committee, Chinedu Mba in her remark, announced that the next edition of the seminar would be held in November 2021.

Over 50 participants attended from across the globe. The participants included: Prof Pat Utomi, Prof Charles Okigbo, Dr. Isah E. Momoh, Mallam Garba Shehu, 'Nnaemeka Maduegbuna, Dr. Chinedu Christian Odoemelam, Dr. Chuks O. Enwerem, Susan Eshiet, Obi Emekekwe, Moshood Isamotu, Ugo Onuoha, Ogechukwu Udeagha, Dr. Ijeoma Ajero, Cletus Ukpong, Asoquo Solomon, Emmanuel Nwofe, Bernadette Ojiaku among many others.





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For all inquiries, email:

[jacksonitespdseries@gmail.com](mailto:jacksonitespdseries@gmail.com)



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