

MEDIA COVERAGE/REPORTAGE OF FARMERS-HERDERS CRISIS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the media reportage of farmers-herders crisis in Nigeria. Three newspapers, (The Sun, Vanguard and The Nation) were randomly selected for analysis. The period covered was January to December, 2019. Variables measured include nature of covered issues, frequency of reportage, space allocated, placement and frames. Frequency counts, percentages and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the collected data. Calamity/killing (40%) was the most covered issue across the papers, while Vanguard newspaper had the highest (48.2%) reportage of and largest (470cm²) space allotment to the issue. The paper also gave the issue more (60.7%) prominence than other newspapers. More (52.0%) of the issues reported had ethnic slants in their frames, with Vanguard having the largest proportion (40.0%). There was significant coverage of farmers/herders crises across the newspapers ($F=3.418, P\leq 0.05$). It is noted that the current framing of herdsman-farmers conflict in the newspapers could aggravate the existing tension along ethnic lines. It is recommended that newspaper editors should be more socially responsible in their publications.

Keywords: Media Reportage, News frames, Allotment, Farmers-Herders Crisis

Introduction

The mass media is an important channel of information exchange. It operates in many forms. Newspapers are one of these channels. They serve as links between information dissemination and those searching for information, in addition to supporting new behaviours (Albrecht, Bergmann and Diederich, 2019; Lightfoot, 2003). Information in a newspaper is enduring because it can be read, kept and re-read at the reader's convenience. This makes the newspapers to serve as reference materials and allows for a better understanding of messages embedded in them.

The media, apart from being critical in information dissemination, also plays a great role in opinion moulding (Hadesian, 2016). They achieve this by focusing the attention of the audience on an issue, through the process known as framing. According to Bales (2001), "frames involve schemata of perception that allows individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label information". Therefore, reportage may be defined as the way a communication source defines or constructs a piece of information that is being communicated. This construction is meant to affect the perception of the audience about the issue and it therefore goes beyond mere reporting to influencing an understanding of the reported issue.

This role of the media becomes more critical in a conflict situation, as poor handling of it can lead to an escalation of the problem.

The whole world is currently grappling with a lot of conflict situations. In the Middle East, there is the perennial crisis between Palestine and Israel. Syria and Iraq are battling with civil wars and terrorism, The United States and Russia are spoiling for war over Ukraine on one hand, while North Korea and United States are on the verge of causing a nuclear crisis on the other. Nigeria is not immune to the conflict problem. While the country is gradually overcoming the Boko Haram insurgency in its North-Eastern part, another perennial problem which has taken a more dangerous dimension comes in the form of pastoralist-farmer conflicts. Although, Blench (2010) argues that conflicts between pastoralists and farmers are not recent, the occurrences have now reached an alarming stage and the situation requires urgent attention.

Apart from the immediate loss of lives and property, the situation portends far-reaching danger because it is agrarian in nature and therefore affects the production of food, as well as the sustenance of future lives. It therefore becomes important for the media to bring the attention of all stakeholders to the malaise, with a view to preventing it from festering. There are however, concerns about the interpretative and interrogative manner of the reportage of the situation because improper handling through misinformation and creation of panic could aggravate the already tensed situation. Therefore, the pattern of reportage and framing of the pastoralist-farmer conflicts in Nigerian newspapers needs to be looked into, with a view to empirically validating or debunking series of concerns emanating from the reporting trend and consequently chart ways of improving the current level of reportage of the conflicts in Nigerian newspapers.

This paper therefore examined the reportage and framing of pastoralist-farmer conflicts in selected Nigerian newspapers with the objectives to:

- i. Identify the categories under which pastoralist-farmer conflict issues are reported by the newspapers.
- ii. Assess the frequency of reportage of the pastoralist-farmer conflicts across the newspapers;
- iii. Determine the space allotted to the pastoralist-farmer conflicts in the newspapers;
- iv. Assess the placement of the pastoralist-farmer conflicts in the newspapers;
- v. Determine the frames of the reported conflicts framed; and
- vi. Analyse the difference in the frequency, space allotted and framing of reported conflicts across the newspapers.

Methodology

Content analysis was the main research design for the study. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative content analytical approach was adopted. Qualitative content analysis according to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data, through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.

Newspapers from January 1st 2019 to December 31st 2019 constituted the population of this study. This is because there were rampant occurrences of conflicts between the pastoralists and the farmers during this period. Simple random sampling technique was used to select three of the top ten Nigerian daily newspapers, i.e., The Sun, Vanguard and The Nation (Nigerian Finder, 2017). Systematic random sampling technique was used to select newspapers released on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays only in each week within the selected time frame.

The unit of analysis was a complete article, which could be feature, news, editorial or letter to the editor. Variables measured included categories of covered issues, frequency of

reportage, space allotted, placement and frames. This was done using a coding sheet that was developed by the researchers. The coding sheets were pretested and inter-coder reliability determined using Holsti inter-coder reliability formula:

$$R = 2M/N1+N2$$

Where M = the number of times the two coders agree

N1 and N2 = the number of coding decisions by the first and second coders

$$R = 2(25) + 30 + 30$$

$$= 0.83$$

An inter-coded reliability of 0.83 was considered high

Categories of covered issues were operationalised at the nominal level as killing/calamity prevention, government responsibility, threats, awareness, warning and call for peace. In all cases, the dominant theme of the reportage was used to do the categorisation. Frequency of reportage was measured at the interval level as the number of articles in each publication focusing on pastoralist-farmer conflicts. Space allotment was measured at the interval level as the area (cm²) covered by a complete article on pastoralist-farmer conflicts in the newspapers. Placement of conflict reportage was operationalised at the ordinal level of measurement as front page, back page, middle page and other pages in descending order of importance. Frames were operationalised based on the dominant slants used in the reportage, with special focus on the title, narration and conclusion of the articles. The identified dominant frames were political, ethnic, religious, economic and constitutionality. The frequency of occurrence of the frames was noted for analysis. The collected data were described using frequency counts and percentages, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to draw inferences based on the tested hypothesis at 95% level of significance.

Result and Discussion

Categories of Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts Reportage in Selected Nigeria Newspapers

Table 1 reveals that issues under calamity/killing (40.0%) were the most reported by the newspapers, while issues related to warning and peace (6.7% each) were the least reported. Calamity killing reportages were more covered by Vanguard (43.5%) and The Nation (40.0%) newspapers. Vanguard was the only newspaper that covered news on warning (13.0%) and government responsibility (16.76), while The Sun (16.7%) was the only newspaper that focused on awareness creation during the period under review.

The preponderance of reportage on calamity/killing could incite more killings as a result of reprisals, if not well-managed, considering the fact that gory pictures often accompanied a few of the reports. Gever (2014) found a significant relationship between exposures to horrible pictures and newspaper readers' aggressive behaviour in an earlier study in Nigeria.

Table 1: Content categories of pastoralists-farmers' conflicts in selected Nigerian Newspapers

Content Category	The Sun	Vanguard	The Nation	Total	
	F	F	F	F	%
Calamity/Killing	6	14	6	26	40.6
Prevention	4	7	3	14	21.8
Warning	0	4	0	4	6.3
Government Responsibility	0	3	0	3	4.7
Call for Peace	1	0	3	4	6.3
Threat	3	0	3	7	10.9
Awareness	3	2	1	6	9.4
Total	17	33	14	64	100

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Frequency of Reportage of Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts in Selected Nigeria Newspapers

Table 2 reveals that the conflicts were more (45.3%) reported in the month of May and least reported (1.5%) in January. Furthermore, the table reveals that the highest proportion of pastoralist-farmer conflicts was reported by Vanguard (50.0%), while the least (20.3%) was reported by The Sun, within the selected time frame. The results imply that the peak of the conflicts was in May 2016. This coincides with a critical period in the cropping season and is therefore not surprising. The dominant coverage by Vanguard is consistent with the paper's inclination towards covering human angle stories. High frequency of reportage is usually meant to sustain the topic for a long time in the public domain, with the hope that it will lead to extensive and hopefully intensive discussion that may spur some action from the intended audience. This is in line with the agenda-setting power of the media, in line with the assertions of McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) that the main strength of the media lies in being able to set agenda for the populace.

Table 2: Frequency of reportage of pastoralist-farmer conflicts in selected newspapers

Table 1: Content categories of pastoralists-farmers' conflicts in selected Nigerian Newspapers

Reportage	The Sun	Vanguard	The Nation	F	Total	%
January	1	0	0	1		1.5
March	3	6	2	11		17.2
May	3	16	10	29		45.3
July	2	1	2	35		7.8
September	2	5	2	9		14.1
November	2	4	3	9		14.1
Total	13	32	19	64		100

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Spaces Allotted to Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts Reportage

Space allotment reflects the total area allotted to the pastoralists-farmers conflicts on the pages of the newspapers. The total space on a page of The Sun, Vanguard and The Nation was 910cm² each.

As shown in figure 1, the average spaces allotted to pastoralist-farmer conflicts per page, where there was coverage in the Sun, Vanguard and the Nation were 224.1 cm², 470.4cm² and 271.8cm² respectively. This implies that Vanguard allotted the highest space to report pastoralist-famer conflicts. Taken in conjunction with the results in Table 2, this suggests a relatively higher coverage of these conflicts by Vanguard newspaper, compared to the other papers.

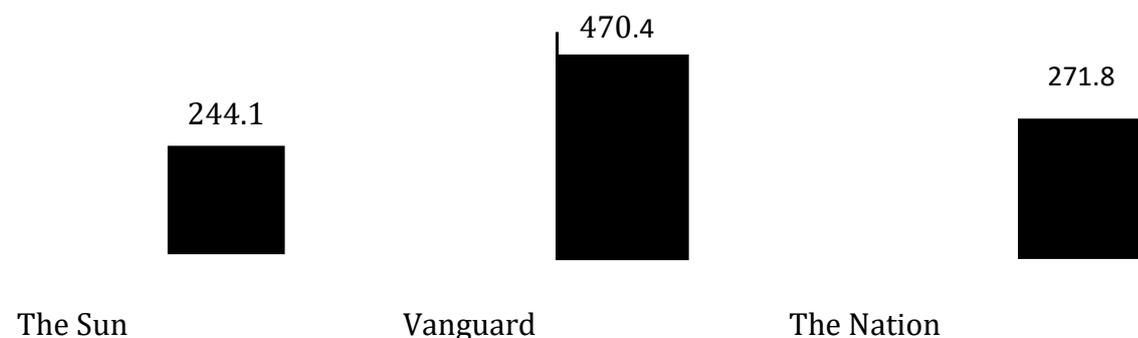


Figure 1: Space allotted to pastoralist-farmer conflicts across selected newspapers using bar chart

Placement of Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

Table 3 presents the placement of pastoralist-farmer conflicts in Nigerian newspapers. The largest proportion (42.26%) of the news was on the other pages, while the middle pages had the least coverage (4.76%) of the conflicts. This finding is in line with Gever and Essien’s (2017) findings that herdsmen-farmers conflicts were usually reported on the other pages of newspapers.

The Nation (55.6%) reported mostly on other pages, while Vanguard had the highest (32.1%) reportage of the pastoralist-farmer conflicts on the front pages. Considering that the front and back pages are regarded as the most prominent pages, this result implies that the pastoralist-famer conflicts were not given so much prominence by the newspapers in the period under review. However, Vanguard was consistent in giving the highest coverage to the issue among the papers under review.

Table 3: Pastoralist-farmer conflict placement across selected Nigerian newspapers

Placement	The Sun		Vanguard		The Nation		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Front page	3	16.7	8	28.6	2	11.1	13	20.3
Back page	6	33.3	9	32.1	6	33.3	21	32.8
Middle page	1	5.6	2	7.1	0	0.00	3	4.7
Other pages	8	44.4	9	32.1	10	56.6	27	42.2
Total	18	100.0	28	100.0	18	100.0	164	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2019)

Framing of Pastoralist- Farmer Conflicts in Selected Newspapers

From the analysis of the reviewed pastoralist-farmer conflicts reported in the Sun, Vanguard and The Nation newspapers, five frames emerged. These frames were: political, tribal, religious, economic and constitutionality. Table 4 shows that more of the reportages had ethnic-related frames (53.1%), while religious, economic and constitutionality-related frames (3.1%) were the least reported. This implies that the reportage of the pastoralist-farmer conflicts could lead to an interception of an ethnic group rising in arms against another. This could deepen the sense of suspicion and mutual distrust existing among various ethnicities within the country, if urgent solutions are not found to the problem, considering Adisa's (2012) assertion that media carelessness in the use of language could worsen a conflict situation.

Table 4: Pastoralist-farmer conflicts according to frames across the selected newspapers

Frames	The Sun	Vanguard	The Nation	Total	
	F	F	F	F	%
Political	11	7	6	24	37.5
Ethnic	11	14	9	34	53.1
Religious	0	2	0	2	3.1
Economic	0	2	0	2	3.1
Constitutionality	0	2	0	2	3.1
Total	22	27	15	64	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2019)

Difference in the Frequency of Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts across Selected Nigerian Newspapers

The results of ANOVA in Table 5 reveal that there was no significant difference in the frequency of reportage of pastoralist-farmer conflicts across the selected newspapers ($F=0.664, p \geq 0.05$). This implies that the frequencies with which the conflicts were reported across the newspapers were not so much different. The frequency of reportage was generally low across the newspapers.

Table 5: Differences in the frequency of pastoralist-farmer conflicts across Selected Nigerian Newspapers

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Between Groups	14.778	2	7.389	0.664	0.529
Within Groups	167.000	62	11.133		

Differences in the Space Allotted to Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts across Newspapers

Results in Table 6 reveal that there was a significant difference in the spaces allotted to pastoralist-farmer conflicts across the newspapers ($F=3.418, p \geq 0.05$). This implies that the newspapers did not allot equal space for reportage of pastoralist-farmer conflicts.

The results of the post hoc test presented in Table 7 show that the difference recorded in Table 6 was accounted for by the space allotted to the issue by Vanguard. This indicates that Vanguard allotted more space to articles on pastoralist-farmer conflicts than

the other two newspapers. This is consistent with earlier findings that Vanguard covered conflicts more than the other newspapers under review.

Table 6: Space allotted to pastoralist-farmer conflicts across the newspapers

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean	F
Between Groups	628221.664	2	314110.832	3.418*
Within Groups	4962100.266	62	91390.746	

Table 7: Post hoc (Duncan) of space allotment across newspapers

Duncan (a.b)	Papers	N	Means
	The Sun	12	244.0909 ^a
	The Nation	20	271.8333 ^a
	Vanguard	32	470.4286 ^b

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigerian newspapers' reportage of pastoralist-farmer conflicts varied. The focus of the reportage was more on killings and calamity. Vanguard reported the conflicts more frequently, more prominently and in larger spaces than the other newspapers. The conflicts were generally framed along ethnic lines. Considering the negative effects that this slant in reportage could have on the situation, it is recommended that editors of newspapers be more socially responsible to their reading audience by improving on the framing of the reportage to focus more on prevention and resolution of the pastoralist-farmer conflicts. In addition, relevant media regulatory agencies should ensure that journalists adhere to the ethics of their profession to promote peaceful coexistence.

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