

PROMINENCE OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE ON HERDER-FARMER CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA (2011 - 2020)

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Abstract

The conflict between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers is a disturbing issue in contemporary Nigeria that constantly puts the unity of the country in jeopardy and threatens its existence. This study ascertains prominence Nigerian newspapers gave to stories on herder-farmer conflicts from 2011 – 2020 and reasons for giving such prominence or otherwise. Mixed research methods using content analysis and in-depth interview (IDI) was employed and stratified sampling technique used to randomly select 800 copies of four purposively sampled newspapers from which 502 issues on herder-farmer conflicts in *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Nation* and *Punch* published within the study period were identified and analysed. For the IDI, a purposive sampling technique was used to select four editors in chief of the sampled newspapers. The findings reveal that herder-farmer conflicts report was given prominence as a Lead Story 40 times (7.9%) by the newspapers. Stories placed in the Inside-Page were 39.4%, and Front-Page placement were 38.2%. The results further show that content of the issue were mostly placed on the inside pages of the newspapers. The study reveals some of the factors that influence newspaper editors to give prominence or otherwise to stories on herder-farmer conflicts. These factors include the 'unusualness' of such news, impact, timeliness, public interest and utility. Other determinants were ownership, location and nature of the issues involved. The study concludes that the newspapers gave prominence to stories on herder – farmer conflicts within the study period. However, *Daily Trust* gave greater prominence and attention to the conflicts than the other newspapers. The study recommends that newspaper organisations should embrace balanced, accurate and objective reporting on issues of national importance such as the herder-farmer conflicts.

Key words: Conflicts, Coverage, Farmer-Herder, Newspaper, Prominence.

Introduction

The media have a tremendous role to play in the areas of governance, accountability, conflict prevention and development of the society. Schneider et al, (2010) note that, the mass media are recognized as constructive forces that contribute to the production of social reality in general and to the understanding of the nature of specific social problems in particular. The news media could therefore serve as major players during periods of conflict. Nigeria, a country with an estimated population of 223 million people composing of more than 250 ethnic groups (World Population Review, 2023) has experienced various internal conflicts since its independence in 1960. However, the conflict between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers is one of the conflicts that has recently assumed a disturbing issue in contemporary Nigeria.

The herder farmer conflicts have devastated many farmlands, and destroyed properties worth millions of naira. More devastating is the killings of innocent inhabitants of communities across the nation. It is estimated that Nigeria accrues an annual loss of 13.7 billion dollars in potential revenues as a result of the conflict (Mercy Corp, 2015). According to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index, attacks from the conflicts have escalated with 1,158 fatalities and approximately 300,000 people fleeing their homes with the violence assuming the notoriety of terrorism (Brown, 2019). Findings by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reveal that Nigeria has lost no fewer than 8,343 persons to herder-farmer conflicts as a result of 1,350 attacks spread across 16 states since 2005 (Yakubu, 2021).

Apparently, there has been a growing concern on how the conflict can best be resolved. The Federal and States governments, Nigerians and other concerned bodies within and outside the country have been working assiduously on how to overcome the problem. Towards this end, outside the efforts to physically intervene in the matter through deployment of security apparatus and conciliation measures, the role of the media is also very

critical. Quite often, messages are relayed through the mass media to educate people on the need to remain peaceful. The communication angle in helping to resolve the problem between herders and farmers and how the people perceive such messages remain some of the questions that should stimulate interest and attention. The media including newspapers, occupy the vintage position of illuminating important areas of our national life that have potentials for security threat, resulting from avoidable but incessant violence (Mustapha, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The herder - farmer conflicts have become one of the important issues reported by the media in Nigeria. The reporting has led to discussions and commentary on the subject of the conflicts. The issue has attracted media attention because of the conflict and loss of life and property with the discussions polarising Nigerians. It has become an important subject of conversations in the social media space and among individuals. While some people get their own information on the herder - farmer conflicts from their own contacts in the affected communities, most people get their information from the media: radio, television, newspaper blogs and social media networks. One medium that is a primary source of news and information on the conflict is the newspaper.

Various Nigerian newspapers have been reporting the herder farmer conflicts both as news and commentary or analyses from the point of view of their house style, focus and location. This provides a rich and pluralistic perspective that is helpful to readers that bother to read more than one newspaper on the subject. As Nigeria has a rich and diverse newspapers, it is important to examine over a relatively long period the prominence given to the coverage of herder - farmer conflicts in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine prominence Nigerian newspapers gave to the coverage of herder – farmer conflicts. The specific objectives of

the study are to:

1. Examine the level of prominence given to the herder-farmer conflicts by *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Nation* and *The Punch* newspapers.
2. Examine the factors that influence the editors of *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Nation* and *The Punch* newspapers to give prominence or otherwise to reports on herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

The herder-farmer conflicts fall within the purview of ecological resource conflict. Competition over land is a common feature in most studies as the major reason for the conflicts in Africa. Nyong & Fiki (2005) reveal that the need to provide food of crop and animal origin, as well as raw materials for industry and export in order to meet ever growing demands, has led to intensification of land use. Berry (2002) observes that Africa has largely gone from an abundance to scarcity of land in one century. In Nigeria, farmland and grazing route encroachment readily incite clashes between pastoralists and farmers. This encroachment has continuously become a major problem, especially with population explosion. The herder-farmer conflicts are also often placed within ethnic and religious contexts. Blench (2003, p.2) adduces that “in a case where the religious and cultural views of a pastoral group are in stark contention with those of the agrarian community hosting them, to the extent that these views supersede all conceivable economic advantages both parties stand to gain in cordiality, the outbreak of violent conflict becomes more likely.”

The conflicts which gradually kept degenerating into violent attacks on communities across Nigeria also precipitate the acts of cattle rustling and banditry made sophisticated by proliferation of arms and dagger (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021). Abbas (2012) aptly observes that the fusion of religion, politics and ethnicity has made the herder-farmer conflicts susceptible to

manipulation and rendered resolution a difficult venture. The media in Nigeria are also not free from these ethnic, religious and regional connotations of the herder-farmer conflicts. In a study of the Implications of newspapers framing of farmers-herdsmen conflict and citizens' reaction, Abubakre (2016) reported that *Vanguard* newspaper was highly unsupportive of the Fulani herdsmen in its reportage of the conflict (70%) than *Daily Trust* newspaper (18.8%). She observes that *Daily Trust* was less critical and seem to show an understanding for the challenges confronting the Fulani herdsmen in reportage of the same conflict in the period under study. Many critics have noted the tendency of the media to focus on violence, controversy and to provide little attention to the issues underlying the conflict, which is highly dramatic. Puddephatt (2006), observes that operating within the canon of objectivity, accuracy and balance is crucial for the media to exert constructive impacts during a conflict period.

Oyero (2019) observes that the level of prominence such as page placement given to a report, determines to a large extent how the newspapers have set the agenda for the issue. Marks et al, (2007) have also posited that the greater the volume and prominence of media coverage, the more important the public will evaluate the issue to be. Richey (2022), affirms that newsrooms prioritise the story they cover according to the most newsworthy story that the most number of people will care about, and this news value is called prominence. Boukes et al, (2022) reveals that a larger total number of news factors in a story positively predicts an item's length and likelihood of front page publication. Boukes et al also reveal news factors such as 'conflict' and 'eliteness' as having the strongest impact. Schultz (2017) identifies six dominant news values for the media to decide what is news, and these are; *timeliness, relevance, identification, conflict, sensation and exclusivity*. As noted by Indurthi and Gupta (2018), bizarre or unusual are major news values and they refer to those news items so strange and unusual that readers might question the claims presented in the news. Armstrong, et al. (2012) observe

that traditional values of prominence, impact and controversy are still very important to audiences and readers of news, while timeliness and proximity are gradually becoming less important. Proximity or location is another common and popular traditional news value advanced by mass communication scholars. They refer to events occurring within the newspaper circulation area, or better still, closer to the newspaper home. Tunez and Guevara (2009) describe proximity as a news value that have impact over the nation and the national interest. Tunez and Guevara further see, proximity as capable of being geographic, social, psychological and ideological, and the geographic distance varies according to the range of diffusion of each medium. Zajechowski (n.d) lists eight news values or guiding principles as determinants of placements in the media, and these are; *impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, the bizarre, conflict, currency and human interest.*

Empirical Review

Gever and Essien (2017) conducted a study on the coverage of herder-farmer conflicts in central Tiv Land and reported that the inside pages of the newspapers had the highest percentage (71.3%) of stories on herder-farmer clashes, followed by the back page (11.7%), front page (9.9%) and editorial page (7.2%). Gever and Essien believe that the two selected newspapers did not give high prominence to the herder-farmer conflicts in Benue State. Though the researchers examined only two newspapers which may not be sufficient for generalisation, the study suggests the need for newspapers to give more prominence in the coverage of the herder-farmer conflicts. Odiegwu-Enwerem et al (2020) conducted a study on news sourcing, positioning and thematic focus of the herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria and observe on the level of prominence newspapers gave to the herder-farmer clashes that most of the stories were found inside the pages. The researchers believe that altogether the papers allocated 33.3% prominence out of 288 total stories on the conflicts and inferred that the

stories received prominent positioning.

In a study titled 'Reportorial analysis of herdsman and farmers conflicts in Southern Kaduna,' using news sourcing across selected newspapers (*Daily Trust* and *Guardian*) mainly through field coverage investigation, Bello (2019), identified that the position of stories published on herder-farmer conflicts in Southern Kaduna indicate that majority of the stories were on the inside pages (94.1%). He infers that the selected newspapers accorded low prominence to the conflict, though the *Guardian* gave more prominence to the conflicts than *Daily Trust*. Bello only content analysed two newspapers for six months limited to the conflicts in Southern Kaduna. Abonyi and Ohaja (2021) also content analysed a sample of 111 editions of *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard* and *The Nation* from July to December 2018 to explore the frequency of publication and level of prominence as well as the dominant frames in newspaper reportage of the herder-farmer conflicts. The study reveals that *Daily Sun* gave greater prominence and attention to the herder-farmer conflicts than *Vanguard* and *The Nation*. The study also reveals that the stories on the herder – farmer conflicts were mostly placed on the inside pages of the selected newspapers.

In a study on framing the coverage of herder-farmer clashes by *The Punch* and *Guardian* newspapers, Nwachukwu et al (2021) observe that the two papers did not prioritise the stories much. They believe cover page stories on newspapers are considered relatively important to their readers with no such placement by *The Punch* while *Guardian* had 25 issues on the front page within the study period. Majority of the stories were reported on other pages outside the front, back and centre spread of the newspapers with 2018 having the highest number of reports and front page coverage (Nwachukwu et al., 2021, p. 115). This study corroborates Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017) who examined four newspapers framing of the herder-farmer conflicts in 2016 and reported that news on herdsmen-farmers conflicts were mostly reported in the inside page of newspapers (90.0%). Most of these

studies on the conflicts focused on newspaper coverage within a limited area or a limited period and without consideration on why certain decisions on coverage and placement of the stories by newspaper editors. Therefore, one of the research gaps of this study is emphasis on longer duration and wider coverage area. It looks at how the four selected newspapers covered the issue within ten years in the wider Nigeria and thus not limited to State or a region of the country.

Theoretical Framework

The media framing theory underpins this study. Framing as a theory was first posited by Gregory Bateson in 1972 who defined psychological frames as a 'spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages' that operates as a form of meta communication (Hallahan, 2008). Framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context. Framing draws from the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning (Davie, 2017). Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called 'the frame') influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Framing theory is therefore, relevant to this study based on one of its core assumptions that that the media's framing of news influences how the media audience would interpret social issues. Framing helps specify the ways in which journalists interpret and evaluate stories on herder-farmer conflicts and how they represent particular sides in given debates.

Methodology

This study relies on content analysis and IDI. The study covers the period of January 2011 – December 2020 because other studies were limited in time. The period was also considered based on Nigeria return to civil rule in 1999 and when the conflicts began to change nature and get tied to politics,

ethnicity and religious leanings. The study was also limited to four newspapers, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*. The four newspapers were selected due to their readership and circulation figure and national coverage. The choice of these newspapers was also with due cognisance to their ownership and location which are likely to impact on the reportage. For the IDI, the editors in chief of the sampled newspapers were purposively selected and considered well experienced in news reporting and editing to provide first hand and credible information on how newspapers give prominence or otherwise to stories on conflicts, specifically, the herder – farmer conflicts. Since mixed research method advances the integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation in both data collection and analysis, in the data analyses, the quantitative results were explained in more detailed format through the qualitative data. This approach is often used to explore the benefit of using the strength of one data type to mitigate the weakness of another data type (Delve Tool Online Class, 2022).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1.1 shows the level of prominence given to the herder-farmer conflicts by the four selected newspapers for the study.

Level of prominence given to Herders - Farmers conflicts by the Newspapers									
Placement	Daily Trust		Leadership		The Nation		Punch		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Lead Story	15	37.5	9	22.5	9	22.5	7	17.5	40
Front Page	62	32.3	40	20.8	46	24.0	44	22.9	192
Back page	7	20.6	8	23.5	11	32.4	8	23.5	34
Inside Page	35	17.7	55	27.8	52	26.3	56	28.3	198
Centre Spread	6	15.8	8	21.1	9	23.7	15	39.5	38
Total	125	24.9	120	23.9	127	25.3	130	25.9	502
Chi-square = 20.599, df = 12, p = 0.057									

Factors that influence prominence given to stories on Herder-Farmer conflicts by Editors

To ascertain why newspaper editors, give prominence or otherwise to reports on herder-farmer conflicts, the qualitative data collected from each of the respondents were assessed with thematic approach for identifications of the determinants. The respondents cited determinants of news prominence as unusualness, impact, vision and mission of the organization, timelines, public interest, utility and location:

Unusualness: According to the Editor-in-Chief of *Leadership* newspaper “there is a maxim that when a dog bites a man, it is not news but when a man bites a dog, it is news.” Similarly, the Editor in Chief of *Daily Trust* affirms that 'stories that amaze people or that are odd would always be interesting to newspaper editors.’ According to the General Manager, *Punch*, “As a practitioner for many years, conflicts, contests, crises will always lead the paper, because your readers will want to know what is happening that is unusual, and conflict is one of such attractions. Priorities will therefore be given to some stories in satisfying that, and these include the herder – farmer conflicts which keeps changing and already costing lives and loss of huge resources.”

Impact: According to *Daily Trust's* Editor-in-Chief “The impact or effect that a story can generate on people's economic well-being and security is also considered. But generally, stories on tragedies tend to draw people's attention, especially where many people are affected or lives are lost.” As *Leadership's* Editor-in-Chief puts it, “The impact of the story should always influence your judgment as an editor. You need to ask yourself what is the potential of the effect of that story.”

Timeliness: According to the Editor-in-Chief of *Daily Trust* newspaper, “selection of a story for publication depends on how relevant the information is to the public. Most published stories are meant to create awareness on current issues, potentials either of danger, emergencies, health and other

public concern. This was also the case with the coverage of the herder-farmer conflicts.” The Editor of *the Nation* states “there is also the factor of timeliness, for instance the biggest talk about now is the expected ministerial list. There was a time Aguleri/Omuleri in Anambra, Ife/Modakeke in Osun were the attractive news points. But herder-farmer conflicts became prominent within the last ten years in particular and its nature keeps changing, so it is a current issue in news climes.”

Vision and Mission of the Organisation: Editor-in-Chief of *Leadership*, states that the “major philosophy of the founder of *Leadership*, Sam Ndah Isaiah is uniting Nigeria. This interest is one major determinant of the prominence given to stories on the herder-farmer conflicts by the newspaper.” The *Daily Trust's* Editor-in-Chief states that “newspaper organisations have interests of course, and it is also noted that some of these interests are what bring issues of religion, geopolitical and ethnic considerations. However, such interests should not be at the detriment of national security and development.” *The Nation* Editor, also states that “newspapers tend to take sides in this herder-farmer conflicts. I will not mention names but some papers obviously take sides. This could be due to interests, location and alliances or this North-South thing. It is good to be more professional, report both sides, practice ethical journalism and balance the story, write editorials to express your opinion if it feels so.”

Public Interest: The Editor in Chief of *Leadership* Newspaper, states that “apart from the guiding philosophy of newspaper organization, national interest or public interest is another major determinant of the prominence given to stories on the herder-farmer conflicts by the newspaper because of the sympathy and concern for people's lives and property.” The economic interest of communities and that of the nation in general comes into consideration in this aspect from the view of the respondents. The herder-farmer conflict is a sensitive issue to the individual herdsmen and the farmers as well as to communities, States and the Federation with potential impact on

food scarcity. According to the *Daily Trust's* Editor-in-Chief, "In a content analysis of Boko Haram insurgency or banditry crisis, you could see the *Daily Trust* probably reporting the issues more than other newspapers or give more prominence to such stories. This is largely because the issues affect our base and where most of our readers live. So, we need to report it so that they get the deserved attention from relevant governments and agencies." It is also noted that some of these interests are what bring issues of religion, geopolitical and ethnic considerations.

Utility: Editor of *The Nation* affirms "The most important part of a paper is the Front Page, the consideration starts with how many people are affected by the story. The next is commercial interest, can the story sell? You might have a good or big story but it might not be interesting to sell or have commercial value. In this instance, you take it to another place but certainly not to lead the page." According to the General Manager, *Punch*, "You need to prioritise to identify stories that will sell. Surely, conflicts crises and sex are stories that human beings are naturally wired to be attracted to. Remember that you are not selecting the stories for yourself but for the readers."

Location: *Leadership* newspaper is located in the region where such conflicts usually occur and according to the Editor in Chief, "proximity imposes on us an additional burden of being careful with what we report and how we report it. The implication is that some news could generate adverse reactions among the people of that particular place. At the same time certain issues could not be ignored even if they do not conform with the interests of the newspaper ownership." According to the Editor of *The Nation* newspaper, "if ten people are killed in America and another ten killed in Lagos, definitely, the Lagos story will be more interesting to us because that is where we are located."

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study on prominence conforms with the report of Gever and Essien (2017) who conducted a study on the coverage of herder-

farmer conflicts in central Tiv Land and reported that the inside pages of the newspapers had the highest percentage of stories on herder-farmer clashes, followed by the back page, the front page and editorial page. Similarly, Odiegwu-Enwerem, et al. (2020) observe on the level of prominence newspapers give to herder-farmer clashes that most of the stories were found in the inside pages of the newspapers. Also, it was found that *Daily Trust* newspaper gave more prominence to the herder – farmer conflicts within the period of the study than the other newspapers studied. This further confirms the factor of proximity of a newspaper to the main location of an event or conflict and how such affects the newspaper coverage of the conflicts.

The *Daily Trust* Editor-in-Chief sheds more light on this when he avers that” the conflict between herders and farmers has been there for a very long time. In *Daily Trust*, it is a core area because it happens commonly in our location that is the Northern part of Nigeria, and we have to pay a lot of attention to it. Secondly, it involves humanity, because majority of members of these communities are farmers, and you also have the herders, therefore, it cannot be ignored. Human lives, economy and security of the affected States or areas are also involved. Definitely it is a topical issue and a strong news item for us.” Similarly, the Editor-in-Chief of *Leadership* newspaper states that “Keep in mind that we are located where the herder – farmer conflicts take place. This proximity imposes on us an additional burden of being careful what we report and how we report it. We are more or less near the frontline of where all these is happening. We have to step up and take additional responsibility to ensure that we do the needful.” The Editor-in-Chief also reflects that although, newspaper editors are not always perfect, but there is the need to help the society, help the newspaper and help the reporters to understand that they have a responsibility by ensuring that all sides are covered whenever there is an incident as well as speak to security agencies and community leaders instead of relying entirely on politicians. He submits that as much as possible, media practitioners need to get all angles to

the situation and these are some of the things *Leadership* started insisting on “influence of ownership does not arise in our professional duties. The major philosophy of the founder of *Leadership*, Sam Ndah Isaiah is 'uniting Nigeria,' so, the interest of ownership will never be reckoned in *Leadership* newspapers,” says *Leadership* Editor in Chief.

To ascertain why newspaper editors, give prominence or otherwise to reports on herder-farmer conflicts, the results of the qualitative data were discussed below:

Unusualness: Readers always want to know more about what defies normal or what is strange. Unusualness as a factor in determining story selection or placement in a newspaper has been affirmed by many scholars of mass communication. From Galtung and Ruge (1965) who mentioned twelve criteria as news values and captures 'unusualness' as 'unexpectedness' to Brighton and Foy (2007) who reinforced some of Galtung and Ruge's criteria including the 'unusualness.' Harcup and O'Neill (2016) calls it 'surprise' or stories that have the element of contrast and/or the unusual about them. Schultz, (2017) gives it a term 'exclusivity' to refer to stories generated by, or available first to, the news organization as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on. Findings of this study on unusualness as a major news value agrees with the view of communication scholars, (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Brighton & Foy, 2007; Schultz, 2017; Indurthi & Gupta, 2018). As espoused by *The Punch* General Manager, the herder-farmer conflict is already assuming the status of unusual due the number of lives lost, destruction of property and dimensions of the conflict. The media can be packaged to facilitate the mitigation of the herder- farmer conflicts or its resolution. This approach could be in harmony with the assertion of Kuusik (2010) who sees the media as capable of inciting or escalating conflict on one hand and, facilitating the mitigation or even the resolution of a conflict situation on the other hand.

Impact: The potential effect of a news item on the audience is a major determinant of a story to be given prominence by newspaper editors. Among the factors that define impact of a story are the interests such a story will generate or the effects it would have on the publics. Some stories generate adverse reaction among audiences while others require the need for immediate action on the part of the government or stakeholders concerned with those issues. Impact has remained one of the most important values to audiences and readers of news. This corroborates Armstrong, et al. (2012) and Zajechowski (n.d) position. Infact, Zajechowski lists 'impact' as the most important news value for audiences' attention. He sees the story that affect readers' lives as the most important story, and also, the greater the number of people affected, the greater the impact. Some scholars even assert that other factors or news values only make meanings when they contain the elements of impact in them. Boukes, et al. (2022) analyse the why how and which news factors affect the prominence of news items and reveal that news factors such as 'conflict' and 'eliteness' also tend to have the strongest 'impact' to be selected as stories in the media. Herder – farmer conflict in Nigeria, of recent, has assumed one of the stories with biggest impact in the media with its changing nature and huge losses to lives and properties.

Timeliness. Timeliness as a news value refers to 'what is new. Armstrong, et al. (2012) observes that the factor of timeliness and proximity are gradually becoming less important in news selection, nevertheless, they still feature in most traditional media organisations as strong news values. For instance, Schultz (2017) lists timeliness as the first criteria among the six news values listed in his study 'the journalistic gut feeling.' Zajechowski (n.d) lists timeliness as second out of the eight news values or guiding principles as determinants of placements in the media, and describes it as addressing the issue of 'why are you telling me this story now?'

The Vision and Mission of the Organisation: This refers to effort by publishers and editors to be mindful of the goal and interest of the publishing

organization in determining what is published or where it is placed in the newspaper. This finding corroborates Armstrong, et al. (2012) position. They argue that 'newspaper agenda is a major value for selection and placement in a newspaper.'

Public Interest: Public interest brings along responsibility on the publishers and consideration for readers and the society. This interest is one of the propelling determinants of the prominence given to stories on the herder-farmer conflicts by the newspaper because of the sympathy and concern for people's lives and property. The economic interest of communities and that of the nation in general comes into consideration in this aspect from the view of the respondents. The herder-farmer conflict is a sensitive issue to the individual herdsmen and the farmers as well as to communities, States and the Federation with potential impact on food scarcity. Zajechowsk (n.d), sees public interest stories as stories that answers questions on whether there are attractive people who are impacted by the story and whether there is a human face to the story. The public interest aspect could also bring in political considerations of stories along the newspaper ideology in terms of its focus and placement of such stories.

Utility: The commercial interest or how profitable the story could be to the newspaper is another factor that determines the placement or prominence given to herder – farmer conflict stories by the newspapers. This view on utility as a news value is in tune with Allern (2017) who emphasizes the commercial values and market interests of the media organization as recently assuming strong factors in determining placement of stories. Weaver, et al. (2007) also see news values more as a reflection of organizational, sociological and cultural norms combined with economic factors. Similarly, this is also in agreement with Pullmeyer (2013) who observes that in recent years, some news editors and producers are turning attention towards a marketing orientation focusing on what readers and viewers want, or at least what they say they want.

Location: The location of the newspaper could play a prominent role in the selection and placement of a story. Proximity or location as a news value is considered as a strong factor in studies on peace journalism and media framing (Tunez & Guevara, 2009; Galander, 2012). The factor of location of the newspaper in Nigeria serves as influence on the newspaper coverage of conflicts including the herder – farmer conflicts. The North – South dichotomy especially with the farmers predominantly in the Christian South and herders mostly in the Muslim North has been revealed in this study as in other previous studies on the conflict (Abubakre, 2016; Shehu, 2017; Ojemola & Olawumi, 2019; Innocent, et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The results of this study on prominence of newspaper reports on herder-farmer conflicts show that *Daily Trust* gave greater prominence and attention to the herder – farmer conflicts than the other newspapers within the study period. The results further reveal that content of the issue under discussion were mostly placed on the inside pages of the newspapers. Determinants of prominence given to newspaper reports on Herder-Farmer conflicts were found to include 'unusualness' of such news, impact, timeliness, public interest and utility. There are also other factors like location, readership considerations and the potential effect of the story.

Recommendations

1. Newspaper organisations should embrace balanced, accurate and objective reporting on sensitive issues such as the herder-farmer conflicts as a way of engendering true national development.
2. Also, journalists should place the interest of the nation and its people above all other considerations in line with the ethics of the profession.

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