

NEWS SOURCES AND FRAMING OF FARMERS/HERDSMEN CONFLICT BY NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS FROM 2017 TO 2020

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ABSTRACT

The recurrence of farmers-herders' conflict in Nigeria with significant implications on security and socio-economic lives of the people had made it a center of attraction to the media. The media being a double-edge sword has the potential to positively or negatively frame the conflict through selection of issues and news sources to quote on the issue. This indeed has impact on public perception on the matter and conflict resolution efforts. This study therefore analysed the contents of *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *Leadership* and *Vanguard* newspapers examining the type of news frames they used and the dominant news sources they quoted in the news frames. The study was anchored on framing and media indexing theories. Quantitative content analysis was employed as the research method while multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting the newspapers and the dates for analysis. Some of the major findings of the study revealed that political, militancy and solution frames were the most dominant news frames used across the newspapers. *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers were leading in labelling the conflict as militancy activity and in politicizing issues on the conflict while *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* were leading in proffering solution to the conflict. State Government officials and the newspapers' correspondents were the most dominant news sources quoted in the political, militancy and solution news frames across the newspapers. The study recommended that the newspapers should refrain from politicizing issues related to

the conflict or assigning pejorative labels like “killers”, “criminals”, or “murderer” to any parties involved in the conflict. This is because the use of such frames not only escalate the conflict but also threaten the conflict resolution efforts. To ensure this, the Nigerian Press Council, and Nigerian Guild of Editors should actively censor, monitor and enforce ethical journalistic standards to minimize the use of biased and inflammatory reporting that can promote tension and undermine national security.

Key Words: News Sources; News Frame, Conflict Framing; Farmers/ Herdsmen Conflict; Nigerian Newspapers.

Introduction

Farmers/Herdsmen conflict has a long history in Nigeria. Different research findings and reports have confirmed the progressive increase in the reoccurrence of clashes between the two groups which usually leads to loss of lives and making many people homeless. Perpetua et al (2018) note that the conflict has been responsible for the death and displacement of many people other than the conflicting herdsmen and farmers in various regions in Nigeria. The spread of the conflict is experienced in all the regions of the country and therefore aggravating the already existing misunderstanding among the country's regional, ethnic and religious groups. The conflict had since taken not only economic identity but also political, ethnic and religious dimensions triggered by the actions of some interest groups who use some members of the conflicting groups or the media to achieve some goals (Muhammed et al 2015).

Studies on conflict reporting or farmers/herdsmen conflict in Nigeria such as those by Francis (2017), John (2014) and Jibril (2010) have accused the media of being partisan or for the exacerbation of the conflict through their manner of reporting. John (2014) observes the existence of one-sided reporting by the media, researchers and other parties. Ekeanyanwu (2007) notes that the Nigerian media usually practice “advocacy journalism” when reporting conflicts and crises. Hence, the presence of media in conflict situation can affect the resolution process or escalate the conflict (Francis, 2017).

Media framing being a multifaceted area of research has three major perspectives: the frame definition (focusing on the content of news stories), the framing effects (focusing on the outcome of news framing), and the frame construction (focusing on constructing views of reality through limiting the range of stories that get reported, strategic selection of news sources, and news placement) Many studies on framing analysis revealed how news coverage of various topics is framed but offered no insight about the social forces that produce the news content or issues using selected frames (Zhou & Moy, 2007). It is in line with the above that Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) opine that besides identifying and examining media frames, researchers should as well explore the process of how a frame is constructed. This study adopted the last perspective of research in media framing identified above to examine the use of news sources in the construction of frames used to report stories of farmers/herders' conflict in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Although media framing research has been popular within Mass Communication for decades, apparently not many studies have looked closely into the relationship between news sources and the frame emphasized by a news article. Gover (2018) while acknowledging the power and influence of the news source, noted that the news source is the news frame used in media frame building process. However, Kee et al (2012) observed that most of the studies that investigate frame-building process and factors that moderate the formation of frame have their attention centred on internal factors such as media organizations' ideology, professional norms and organizational routines. Yet, external factors like news sources used for the construction of news frames are thus far being overlooked. Hence, the focus should not only be on mere identification of media news frames but also on the news sources used in the construction of the news frames. This is because conflict news always consists of mix of different news sources

trying to advance their agenda or perspective on issues.

There were specific studies on media framing of farmers-herders' conflict in Nigeria such as by Okopi et al (2024); Wilson (2023); Aja, et al (2022); Abonyi and Ohaja, (2021); Nwachukwu et al (2020). However, those studies either used a few copies of newspapers or only focused on identifying the news frame and the primary source of the news stories (whether official or non-official). The studies did not make efforts to examine how the news frames were constructed and the categories of news sources quoted in the news frames by the newspapers.

The study will therefore attempt to provide an answer to the question, whose views or voices were used by the Nigerian National Newspapers to construct news frames on farmers/herdsmen conflict in Nigeria? Specifically, the focus of this study is on examining the news sources and perspectives used by four selected Nigerian national dailies namely; *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard* newspapers in the construction of news frames on farmers-herders' conflict.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research question:

- a. What are the types of news frames used in farmers-herders' conflict reports by *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard* newspapers?
- b. What are the dominant news sources cited in news frames on farmers-herders' conflict by the selected newspapers?

Review of Relevant Studies

Building News Frame

Bateson (1955) who first introduce the notion of framing notes that frames facilitate perception of meaning by giving individuals a point of reference, providing a focus for everything beyond which should not be paid attention to. Goffman (1974) borrowed Bateson's concept of frame and applied it in his explorations of the construction of meaning. He defined

frames as means which people use to “organize what they see in everyday life” and understand the world and events around.

Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) while working on the factors that influence the construction of news frame note at least three different factors, namely; the journalist-centered influence (journalist's ideology, attitudes and professional norms), the type or political orientation of the medium, and the sources of news. (which include political actors, authorities, interest groups, among others). This last factor implies that news events are covered with “journalists simply holding a mirror to the news sources and reflecting their image to the audience” (Gans, 1979). Thus, frames suggested by news sources like government officials, interest groups or political actors as sound bites are adopted by journalists and incorporated in their coverage of an issue or event. To corroborate the above arguments, Carragee and Roefs (2004) note that media frames do not develop in a vacuum, but are shaped by actors or claim-makers through series of competition. Also, recognizing the power of news source as key stakeholder in frame building process, Kee et al (2012) note that stakeholders in frame building make sure that the messages are framed in a way that is consistent with their preferred framing in such a way to capture editors and journalists' attention.

Media and Conflict Framing

In every human society, conflict is said to be inevitable. However, when it occurs, it could bring a system to a halt and threaten the survival of the entire society. Eti (2009) notes that conflict by its nature holds a forceful attraction for the mass media. while Francis (2017) submits that reporting conflict by the mass media is a social responsibility that must not be compromised. However, Howard (2002) once observes that the media are a doubled-edged sword that can serve as frightful weapon of violence when they propagate messages of intolerance, or as instruments of conflict

resolution, when the information they present is reliable, respects human rights and represents diverse views. No doubt, Odunlami (2017) accused the media of sensationalisation, creation of stereotypes, instigating and sustaining conflict in Nigeria. In his argument to defend the accusation labeled against the media, Francis (2017) notes that framing of conflicts by the media helps in shaping the meanings, opinions or interpretations which the audience and other stakeholders might adduce to particular events. He added that the media is just but a platform whereby not only the journalists but also political or other groups present their views on given issues.

Media and News Sources

News sources are individual or group of people who are attributed or quoted in a news story. They are significant because they are constantly or occasionally being asked by the mass media to provide news or comment on news events that have occurred. News source is identified in news stories in form of direct communication using attributions such as "said," "reported," "stated," and "noted," or indirect communication using verbs related to mental states such as "hopes," "feels," and "believes."

To explain the relationship between media news stories and news source, Cozma et al (2012) note that news stories need sources the way human being need oxygen. Scholars like Fortunato (2008) and Stovall (2012) have recognized the significance of news sources as those who make news stories credible, authoritative and legitimate, and, Strömbäck, et al (2013) describe the relationship between journalists and their news sources as a tug of war, each struggling to 'manage' the news in their own favour. News stories, then, become a forum for framing contests in which these actors compete in sponsoring their definitions of an issues (Ryan et al 2001). This may be the reason why Zeng et al (2014) noted that on one hand, the media tend to rely on government official source for credibility and availability while on the other hand, the government officials are using the

media as a tool to promote government positions and sentiments. However, Shoemaker and Reese (1991) once noted that heavy reliance on government officials as news source may be viewed as political propaganda and also highlighted the power of the politicians to manipulate issues to their advantage.

Review of Relevant Empirical Studies

Nwankwo, (2024) did a study on constructing farmer-pastoralist conflict as Islamization using the Nigerian Benue Valley as a case study. The findings of the study revealed that newspapers used Islamization themes which suggest that religious factors exacerbate the conflicts and also transforming the discourse around resource competition.

Wilson, (2023) studied how *Daily Trust*, *The Sun* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers pictorially framed the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria using a period of six months (June to December, 2018). The findings of the study revealed that the newspapers used accompanied images with positive tone in the coverage of the conflict pictorially showing the different sides of the conflict.

Aja et al (2022) content analysed *The Sun*, *Guardian* and *Punch* Newspapers for ten months to assess the coverage of herdsmen and farmers' clashes by the newspapers. The findings of the study revealed that criminality frame was the dominant frame used across the newspapers to report the issues on the conflict. Majority of the issues on the conflict were placed in the front pages of the newspapers.

Nwachukwu, Ajaero et al (2021) studied *The Punch*, *the Sun* and *Leadership* newspapers' coverage of farmers/herders' conflict in Nigeria from January to July 2018. The findings revealed that militancy frame was used to frame herdsmen as killers, murderers and terrorist across the newspapers. Government officials and victims of the conflict were used as the dominant voices heard in the news reports.

Kolawole, (2021) used mixed method approach to content analysed *Nigerian Tribune* and *Vanguard* Newspapers' framing of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. Part of the major findings disclosed that causal frame was the dominant frame used for name-calling and construction of identity of the parties involved in the conflict. It also recommended for the practice of peace journalism as a panacea to conflict de-escalation.

Oyeoku et al (2020) used content analysis and structured interview to examine the use of news source, frame and language in the media coverage of IDPs of farmers/herdsmen conflict in Nigeria. The findings of the study reported that impact/socio-economic is the dominant frame used by the newspapers and that government officials and security personnel are the most dominant sources used in the reports of victims of the conflict.

Odiegwu-Enwerem et al (2020), content analysed six Nigerian newspapers for two years to examine the use of primary sources of news and the prominence given to them in newspaper reports on farmers/herdsmen conflict. Parts of the findings of the study revealed that the newspapers relied mostly on their correspondents/reporters and the herdsmen representatives as their primary source of news. The study recommended that newspapers should not mainly rely on third party source in order to avoid problem of source credibility deficiency.

Abimbola, (2020) used content analysis method to investigate the framing of Fulani Herders/Farmers clash in Benue State by the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. The major findings of the study comparatively revealed that *Daily Trust* newspaper majorly used militant and political frames while the *Punch* majorly used ethnic and political frames in reporting the conflict. Furthermore, *Daily Trust* mostly used government officials as their sources while the *Punch* relied on their own reporters/correspondents as their sources of reports on the conflict. Olabode, and Victoria, (2018)

studied the reportage and framing of pastoralist-farmer conflict in Nigeria by the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and the *Nation* Newspapers for twelve months period. The findings showed that calamity/killing and ethnic frames are the dominant frames used across the three newspapers. Comparatively, *Vanguard* has the highest number of reports, used ethnic frame more than the others and also gave the issues on the conflict more prominence than the other newspapers.

Abdulbaqi, and Aremu, (2017) did a content analysis of the *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* Newspapers to examine the framing of herdsmen-farmers' conflict and its implication on peace journalism. The finding revealed that all the newspapers analysed used solution-oriented frame as their dominant frame in reporting issues on the conflict. However, all the newspapers framed herdsmen as violent, killers, criminals and jihadist.

It can generally be deduced from the literature reviewed that news coverage of conflict is shaped by factors inside and outside media organization. Also, source dominance from one side of the controversy could lead to different treatment of the two sides of the controversies in the volume of text, and is likely to affect balance of the coverage. That is to say, stories dominated by sources from one side are more likely to be imbalanced. The empirical studies reviewed on news source and framing of conflict especially on farmers/herders' conflict have either scope, periodization, empirical or theoretical limitations. More so, another justification for this study is that almost all the studies reviewed on farmers/herders' conflict did not attempt to explore the relationship between news source and the frames used on farmers/herders' conflict.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on media framing theory and media indexing theory. Media framing theory was first used by Goffman in 1974. Entman (1993) notes that the media construct frames by selection and

highlighting issues. The argument of framing theory is that the use or choice of words, phrases, statements or rhetorical devices by the mass media to report particular events can go a long way in not only affecting the transformation of the event but also shaping the opinions of the audience. Zilman (1994) citing Lippman (1922) notes that it is the media that sketch most of the pictures people have in their heads. That is to say, the way we perceive events is as a result of the way the media present them to us. However, Bruggermann (2014) argues that news framing does not only emanate from the media alone but also from the news source. The framing theory therefore is relevant to serve as the theoretical underpinning of this study as it will be used to explain how the newspapers present their news reports on farmers/herdsmen conflict which invariably may influence the readers' perception and sense of judgement on issues about the conflict.

Media indexing theory which was first introduced by Bennette in 2009, explains the norms used by news media organizations to select news sources and frame. Bennett (2015) notes that Journalists in various national press systems rely on established norms that implicitly filter or “index” the sources and their viewpoints in the news according to perceived power balances among factions in the society. Part of the argument of the theory is that the media index (filter) their news sources and their view points. The theory also argues that, by concentrating on one-sided sources may deny the public the opportunity to weigh the claims and argument of those arguing both for and against a controversial issue. This by implications means the voices of a group may tend to be marginalized and that of others overemphasized by the media. The theory also argues that the media reflect and index the dominant views or narratives and those in power position. In the content of this study, the theory is adopted to examine and explain the selection of news sources and frame on farmers/herdsmen conflict by the newspapers.

Methodology

This study adopted content analysis method and specifically, quantitative content analysis which Drisko Maschi (2016) describes as an accurate method that relies on the use of word counts as a core analytic technique. The universe or population of the study comprises all national newspapers in Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting the sampling frame, the newspapers analyzed and the dates for the study. Thus, purposive sampling technique was used to select four national daily newspapers (*Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, the *Guardian* and *Vanguard*) based on their perceived wide circulation and readership for four years period (2017 to 2020). Composite week sampling technique was used to construct a calendar. The calendar was used to select seven days in each of the twelve months calendar. A composite week was formed for each month using simple random sampling to select one Monday, one Tuesday, one Wednesday, one Thursday, one Friday, one Saturday and one Sunday within the available days of every month within a year. It means that every day of a week, a month or a year has an equal chance of being selected.

The sample size for the study was drawn from the sampling frame which comprise four-year period from January 1st 2017 to December 31st 2020. Thus, January 1st to December 31st 2017, 2018 and 2019 have 365 days each while January 1st to December 31st 2020 has 366 days. All together have a total of 1,461 days. Thus, since the newspapers are dailies, there was a total of 1,461 editions per newspaper for a year period and for the four newspapers therefore, $1,461 \times 4 = 5,844$ editions. Thus, for the sample size, a total of 1,344 editions was drawn from the sampling frame of 5,844 editions of the four newspapers for four years period using composite sampling technique. Using the composite sampling technique, every month of a year will have 7 composite weeks and therefore 84 composite weeks for a year. Hence, for a period of four years there is 336 composite weeks. In the 7 composite weeks of 12 months (1year), a sample of 84 editions was sampled. That means for a period of 4 years (84 months), 336 editions of the sampled newspapers were sampled and hence for the 4 sampled newspapers,

a total of 1,344 editions were used.

Research Instrument

The study employed a self-designed coding sheet as instrument to content analysis the newspapers. Coding sheet has been described by Wimmer and Domnick, (2011) as a standardized sheet that is usually used in content analysis research to ease data collection.

Validation of Instruments

A study is said to be valid if it measures what it claims to measure and if there are no logical errors in drawing conclusions from the data (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The face validity and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by experts in the field and through consultations of related literature. To determine the inter-coder reliability of the coding sheet, two coders were trained on coding procedures prior to the coding exercise. Thirty-Two editions (i.e. 8 editions for each of the 4 sampled newspapers) were used for the inter-coder reliability. ReCal2, an online reliability calculator that is based on Percent Agreement, Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa and Krippendorff's alpha was used to calculate the inter-coder reliability. Freelon (2013) notes that *ReCal* as a Web service software offers flexibility, convenience and removal of user bias inherent in manual calculations. The results for the inter-coder reliability showed that both dominance (frequency) and prominence (page placement) were substantial with 0.75. This therefore signifies a consistency in the level of agreement between the coders as noted by Drisko and Maschi (2016) that a Kappa value of 0.71 or higher is acceptable.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the study was restricted to the published news stories on farmers/herdsmen conflict in the selected newspapers within the selected period and dates. In each news stories, the type of frame(s) used was identified then the news source(s) cited in the news frame(s) was also identified.

Content Categories

Content category has been described by Prasad (2008) as 'compartments or 'pigeon holes' with explicitly stated boundaries into which the units of content are recorded for analysis.' Prior design was used to identify the categories of analysis in this study. To identify the content categories for the study, a review of related previous studies like Fredrick, (2023), Aja et al (2022) and Odiegwu-Enwerem et al (2020), among others was done and their categories of analysis were adopted with little modifications to capture the purpose and objectives of this study. The categories of analysis are:

Category	Sub-Category
(a). Frame Type – This means the kinds of news frame used by the newspapers in their news reports on farmer - herders' conflict in Nigeria during the period under study.	i. Causal: When a news content identifies an individual(s), or a group, responsible for the conflict. Or when it identifies issues like land encroachment , blame game, conspiracy, migration, retaliation/reprisal, favouratism, proliferation of small arms or government failure or government's incompetency as the cause of the conflict.
	ii. Ethnic: This means when a news report describes or categorises the conflict as ethnic/tribal, or when it associates one of the warring groups with an ethnic group or tribe. or when a content focuses attention on ethnicity and the region of an individual or group involved in the conflict.
	iii. Impact: When a content describes an individual or group as a casualty or as helpless or incapacitated, mentioning of financial loss due to the conflict.
	iv. Militancy: When a content qualifies the conflict as militancy activity or qualifies people involved in the conflict as militants, criminals, terrorists, killers, or murderers.
	v. Solution: When a content suggests a way forward or offer recommendations for the conflict.
	vi. Religious: When a content portrays any religious differences or discrimination or portrays the conflict as religious agitation or as one religious group lording it over to the other.
	vii. Political: When a news content gives the conflict political colouration.

(b). News Source Type:

This means the kind of news source used by the newspaper in their news frames on farmers/herdsmen conflict reports during the study period. This includes:

- i.** Farmers: When an individual or group of farmers was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - ii.** Herders: When an individual or group of herders was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - iii.** Security Operatives: When any security personnel like the military, the police, civil defense or vigilante group was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - iv.** Victim/Eyewitness: When casualties from either of the warring groups or the community was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - v.** NGO/Human Right Group: When an official of an NGO at local or international levels was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - vi.** Federal Government: When any official of the federal government was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - vii.** State/Local Government: When any officials of a state or local government was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - viii.** Lawmakers: When any member of a state/national assemblies, or the judiciary was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - ix.** Religious Group/Leader: When a follower of Islam or Christianity was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - x.** Ethnic Group/Leader: When any ethnic group or leader from either of the two warring parties or from any other ethnic groups was quoted or used in a news story on the conflict.
 - xi.** Foreign Govt/Organisation: When an official an international government or organization was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - xii.** Reporter/Correspondent: When any reporter/correspondent of the newspapers was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - xiii.** Political/Opposition Party: When any representatives or official of either the ruling political party or the opposition party was cited in a news frame on the conflict.
 - xiv.** Tradition Leader/Group: When any traditional ruler like king, emir, obi, oba was quoted in a news frame on the conflict.
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Results and Discussion

Data gathered in this study were presented and analysed using SPSS version 23. Frequencies and percentages were used to create a rank-order for the news frames and the news sources.

Answering Research Question One:

The first research question was set out to examine the types of news frame used on farmers/herdsmen conflict by *Daily Trust*, *Guardian*,

Leadership and *Vanguard* newspapers. The data on table 1.1 and 1.2 were used to answer the research question.

Table 1.1: Yearly Distribution of News Frames on Farmers/Herders Conflict in the Newspapers

Year	<i>Daily Trust</i>		<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Leadership</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		Total	
	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	%
2017	35	(5.2)	47	(7.0)	36	(5.3)	32	(4.8)	150	(22.3)
2018	59	(8.8)	88	(13.1)	65	(9.7)	81	(12.1)	293	(43.7)
2019	34	(5.1)	38	(5.7)	30	(4.5)	52	(7.7)	154	(23.0)
2020	07	(1.0)	14	(2.1)	08	(1.2)	45	(6.7)	074	(11.0)
Total	135	(20.1)	187	(27.9)	139	(20.7)	210	(31.3)	671	(100)

The data in table 1.1 showed that from January 2017 to December 2020, the four sampled newspapers used a total of 671 news frames on farmers/herdsmen conflict. The year 2018 recorded the highest number of news frames (293, 43.7%) while the year 2020 had the lowest number of news frames (74, 11%). This means that more news frames were used by the newspapers in the year 2018 than the other years and less were used in the year 2020. This was not surprising as scholars like Nwachukwu, Ajaera and Odikpo (2022) have earlier noted this and related it to the increase of recorded cases of the conflict across Nigeria which led to the lost of lives and properties.

Table 1.2: Distribution of Dominant News Frames on the Conflict Reports by the Newspapers

Type of frame	<i>Daily Trust</i>		<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Leadership</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		Total	
	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
Personal	16	(11.8)	33	(17.6)	10	(7.2)	22	(10.5)	81	(12.1)
Ethnic	3	(2.2)	11	(5.9)	6	(4.3)	10	(4.8)	30	(4.5)
Impact	17	(12.6)	5	(2.7)	0	(0.0)	7	(3.3)	29	(4.3)
Violence	21	(15.6)	51	(27.3)	31	(22.3)	72	(34.3)	175	(26.1)
Political	37	(27.4)	58	(31.0)	54	(38.8)	63	(30.0)	212	(31.6)
Religious	2	(1.5)	9	(4.8)	3	(2.2)	9	(4.3)	23	(3.4)
Solution	39	(28.9)	20	(10.7)	35	(25.2)	27	(12.8)	121	(18.0)
Total	135	(100)	187	(100)	139	(100)	210	(100)	671	(100)

Table 1.2 reveals that the newspapers used seven (7) different news frames on the conflict to either frame the causes of the conflict, to qualify the conflict as an ethnic clash between the warring groups, to identify human and socio-economic lost recorded due to conflict, to describe one of the groups as killers, murderers, terrorists, etc., to give the conflict a political colouration, to qualify the conflict as a religious conflict between two religions, and to proffer solution to the conflict. Political news frame was the most dominant news frame on the conflict reports by the newspapers. This implies that all the newspapers framed issues on the conflict from the political angle, given issues on the conflict political colouration to either praise, take side with the government policies or decisions on the conflict, to condemn political opponents, or express solidarity and political alliance to the government on all issues concerning the conflict.

It was followed by the militancy news frame where by the newspapers especially *Vanguard* and *Guardian* framed herdsmen as militia group, terrorists, killers and murderers involved in killing innocent people in the society. This coincides with the findings of Olabode and Victoria (2018), and Kolawole (2021) which note that militancy was the most dominant frame used on farmers/herders' conflict reports mostly used to describe the herdsmen as violent killers, criminals and jihadists who murder innocent people, and in comparative term, *Vanguard* used it more than the other newspapers. These findings are in consonance with the postulate of the framing theory because as revealed by the findings, the newspapers used different types of news frames on the conflict reports and as noted by the theory, doing this has an influence on the audience perception about issues on the conflict.

Answering the Research Questions Two:

The second research question was set out to determine the dominant news sources cited in the news frames on the conflict. The data on table 1.3 were used to answer the research question.

Table 1.3: Distribution of Dominant News Source Types cited in the News Frames

Type of News Source	Daily Trust Freq (%)	Guardian Freq (%)	Leadership Freq (%)	Vanguard Freq (%)	Total Freq (%)
Farmers	02 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	04 (0.5)
Herders	24 (16.1)	13 (6.0)	9 (5.9)	9 (3.8)	55 (7.3)
Security	15 (10.1)	12 (5.5)	9 (5.9)	15 (6.4)	51 (6.8)
Victims/Eyewitness	10 (6.7)	15 (7.0)	3 (2.0)	7 (3.0)	35 (4.6)
NGO/H-Right	07 (4.7)	13 (6.0)	7 (4.6)	15 (6.4)	42 (5.6)
Federal Govt	09 (6.0)	9 (4.1)	10 (6.6)	5 (2.1)	33 (4.4)
State/LGA	35 (23.5)	33 (15.2)	44 (28.9)	42 (17.9)	154 (20.4)
Lawmakers	5 (3.4)	10 (4.6)	8 (5.3)	12 (5.1)	35 (4.6)
Elder statemen	3 (2.0)	4 (1.8)	7 (4.6)	4 (1.7)	18 (2.4)
Ethnic Groups	2 (1.3)	29 (13.4)	13 (8.6)	28 (11.9)	72 (9.6)
Foreign/Int'l Govt	1 (0.7)	2 (0.9)	2 (1.3)	3 (1.2)	08 (1.1)
Correspondent	19 (12.8)	35 (16.1)	19 (12.5)	42 (17.9)	115 (15.3)
Political Parties	3 (2.0)	10 (4.6)	5 (3.3)	12 (5.1)	30 (4.0)
Traditional Rulers	5 (3.4)	6 (2.8)	5 (3.3)	15 (6.4)	31 (4.1)
Religious Leaders	9 (6.0)	26 (12.0)	9 (5.9)	26 (11.1)	70 (9.3)
Total	149 (100)	217 (100)	152 (100)	235 (100)	753 (100)

Table 1.3 shows that the four sampled newspapers cited fifteen (15) different types of news sources in different news frames on the conflict. In all the newspapers, a total of 753 news sources were cited in different news frames on the conflict. The *Vanguard* had the highest number of news sources cited in the news frames (235, 31.2%) followed by The *Guardian* which had 217 (28.8%). It further shows that State/LGA represented by 154 (20.4%) and the newspapers' own correspondent/reporters with 115 (15.3%) were the most dominant news sources cited in the news frames on the conflict by the newspapers.

These findings are in consonance with the findings of Oyeoku et al (2020), Odiegwu-Enwerem et al (2020) and Abimbola (2020) who all note that government officials and newspaper reporters are the most dominant voices cited in the conflict reports. Meanwhile, Nwachukwu et al (2021) note that citing government officials as the most dominant news source on the conflict reports should not be a surprise because conflict is a security issue which naturally attracts government attention at all levels. But the more a particular news source is cited in news report, the more prominent their issues

and stand are represented (Miller & Riechart, 2001).

These findings are in agreement with the argument of the media indexing theory which assumes that newspapers index (filter) their news sources by dominantly concentrating on state government officials and their correspondents as news sources in which the theory noted that it may deny the public the opportunity to weigh the claims and arguments of those arguing both for and against a controversial issue, or marginalize a group and overemphasize the other.

Conclusion

The recurrence and increase of farmers/herdsmen conflict and the threat it is posing to the cohesion of not only the northern part of Nigeria but also the country at large can serve as a justification for any study. The major findings of the study imply that the state government officials were used to politicize issues on the conflict while the newspaper correspondents were used in qualifying the conflict as militancy activity or the conflict stakeholders as criminals, killers and terrorists. The findings are significant in that they will be of help to media policy makers, journalists, communication researchers, communication and information agencies, as well as all individuals or groups that serve as news sources, especially in the aspect of ensuring that conflict related reports get all the necessary attention they deserve before going to the press.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were offered based on the findings of the study:

1. The Nigerian newspapers should not use their medium or allow themselves to be used by their news sources to selfishly politicize the conflict or issues about the conflict.
2. The newspapers correspondents/reporters should not judge the conflict as militancy activity and should equally not qualify any of the warring groups as criminals, killers or terrorists.

3. All newspapers covering and reporting conflicts should use more of solution-oriented frames to facilitate resolutions and not politicizing, criminalizing or ethicizing the conflict.

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