



Research Article

Insecurity, Peace Journalism and National Development: Perspectives of Herdsmen-Farmers' Conflict in Two Nigerian States

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Abstract

This article examined media's perspective on insecurity in Nigeria against the background of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Benue, State, North-central and Enugu States, Southeast Nigeria. With existing literature focusing more on causes and historical antecedents of the conflicts, the paper aggregates Peace Journalism as well as national development imperatives as key factors in resolving the conflicts. The study examined the newspapers' reporting and coverage of the conflict to highlight how and what issues are portrayed for public understanding. Adopting Content analysis, four national newspapers and two community newspapers were analysed. Findings show that of the 159 stories carried by the selected newspapers during the period studied, reports focused themes on the public condemnation/protests and government/public intervention while Peace Journalism and the economic/social implications of the conflicts received minimal attention. It further shows that correspondents and herdsmen agents were the major sources of information while a third of the reports were given prominence in the front page, back page or centre-spread. The study recommends that journalists should endeavour to be conflict-sensitive in their reports and draw attention to the economic implications of the conflict in addition to sourcing for reliable and balanced information on the conflict.

Keywords: Herdsmen, Farmers, Media Portrayal, Sectarian Conflict, Peace Journalism.

Introduction

Sectarian conflicts across Nigeria have become a nightmarish experience for citizens on a growing basis. In particular, the herders-farmers conflict – its nature, origin, motivation and impact – constitutes a subject of discussion across the media and among citizens. Since citizens depend on media channels such as newspapers, television and digital media for information to follow and understand the trends. A balanced, accurate, unbiased media interrogation and analysis of issues is expected for their proper understanding (Livingstone, 2007). Moreover, the media's capacity to set the agenda supposes that the general implications of the conflicts, especially the economic impact, need highlighting through adequate portrayal of the conflict. Similarly, information from unverified sundry sources can cause mixed reactions or impressions in people's minds - either positive or negative (Duan & Takahashi (2016)). Skorup (2017) and McQuail (2010) also observed that the media landscape is full of instances of distorted messages and emotion-laden content mostly commercially driven. The need to understand how the media covered the herders and farmers conflict, in addition journalists' peace orientation motivated this study which examined how the Nigerian media have interacted, interpreted and reported the conflict. This is against the background that past studies (Ekeanyanwu, 2007; Odunlami, (2017; Akpoghiran and Otite, 2012) suggest that Nigerian press operate more as active players in political crises and conflicts than as impartial judge.

Statement of the problem

There have been divergent views about the performance of newspapers in the conflict which could give rise to a warped perception by the public. The problem is that when issues are not properly articulated and presented, perception problems may arise, hence the need arises for a clearer presentation and analysis of the newspapers' performance about the

conflict. This paper presents the report of an analysis of newspapers' coverage and reportage of herders-farmers conflict in Benue and Enugu states with a focus on the prominence, source and themes emphasized in the reports.

Research Objectives

This article makes an analysis of the manifest content of selected newspapers in Nigeria, from May 29, 2015 to May 28, 2017, with the following objectives:

1. To determine the major themes focused by the newspapers in their reporting of the conflict;
2. To determine their peace orientation as expressed in their reports;
3. To determine the level of importance given the conflict through positioning and framing of reports.

The Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the major themes focused by the newspapers in their reporting of the conflict?
2. What is the level of peace orientation as expressed in the newspapers' reports?
3. What level of importance was given the conflict through positioning and framing of reports?

Theoretical Framework

The framing theory and agenda setting theory are applied as theoretical backgrounds to the study. Both are however distinguished as explained by [Scheufele's \(1999\)](#) in the sense that agenda setting is hinged on accessibility – whereby the media have the capacity to enhance the importance which media users can attach to issues discussed in the media space. Similarly, [Scheufele and Tewksbury \(2007\)](#)

explain that agenda setting theory looks on a story selection as limitation to the ability of the public to perceive important issues, indicating that the public are more inclined to respond to what they are exposed to than otherwise. Agenda setting, therefore, is interested in and deals with salience of issues; its counterpart, framing, focuses on how the issues are presented. This is further explained by [Zillman and Weaver III \(1994\)](#) who opine that media consumers get information through their exposure to the media in addition to attaching importance to such content based on the emphasis, prominence, repetition positioning, etc., placed on them.

Beyond the issue of what the media present to the public, framing touches on 'how these things are presented' and this "how" is believed to be capable of having effect on how the audience attaches meaning to them. As [Drake and Donohue \(2007\)](#) posit, combatants and the professionals in a conflict frame issues with deliberately selected language and phrases which ultimately may influence the outcome of the conflict. In this regard, the ability of the two major non-state actors in the herdsman-farmers conflict to engage with the audience would determine substantially who would frame the communication that flows through the media - in an effort to explain how the media transfer salient issues in the herders-farmers conflict into the public sphere and thereby enable a discussion, deliberation, or debate on them.

Thus, the theory found expression in how, within the period of study, 2015 and 2017, the newspapers highlighted, discussed and gave prominence to them as a significant component of socio-political agenda in the country. [McCombs and Shaw's \(1972\)](#) argument that the media make certain political, economic and social salient issues in the society is validated here by how the media focused public attention on a few key public issues as reflected in the frequency and direction of reports. People acquire factual information about general developments from the media and also about the herdsman crisis. It also shows that, from the news media, readers and

viewers learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news.

Furthermore, [Herman and Chomsky's \(1988\)](#) Propaganda model explains the concept of filtering content and misshaping the news amidst contending issues in the conflict - including to protect certain interests, such as religious, ethnic or business; thus, this theory helps to explore the possibility of ethnic, religious and regional considerations interfering or having some influence in the reportage and coverage of the herders-farmers' conflict.

Review of Related Literature

In the last couple of years since it started, the herdsman--farmers' conflicts have elicited documented literature by some scholars reflecting various points of views. For example, Ekeanyanwu (2007) posited that the Nigerian press has operated more as active players in political crises and conflicts than as impartial judge. Similarly, Udomisor (2002); Eti (2009); Umar (2002); Owens-Ibie (2002); Galadima (2002) suggest that in spite of the volatility and the tragedies that ethnic violence has had and continues to evoke in the country, stories of the ethnic clashes do not enjoy sufficient prominence as a national crisis in the newspapers. This suggests that more attention is rather paid to politicians, groups, and associations as newspapers' primary sources of news, rather than the victims of the crises (Ogunlami, 2017,

According to Hamid and Baba (2014), reporting fundamental events such as insurgence requires that the media provide adequate coverage. Thus, the media owe the public an expedient responsibility not just to report such developments, but to adequately give such account. Adequacy is described as the volume of coverage to an issue. Furthermore, insurgencies, terrorism and other forms of conflicts are very devastating developments that easily attract adequate media coverage globally. In post-colonial Nigeria, there have been wars and other forms of ethno-religious conflicts which research findings, however, show that they received adequate media attention. Similarly, Bola (2010) affirms

that conflicts in Nigeria have consistently received maximum media coverage.

Bruner (2012), in his study, *“News framing in the United States of the violence in Jos, Nigeria,”* said that one of the most dominant themes in explaining violence in Jos is the theme of “Muslim-Christian strife.” He traced the theme to 2003 when The New York Times reported that Christians in Nigeria were uneasy about the adoption of Islamic law (Sharia) in eight northern states. Bruner also found that sometimes the clashes between gangs were attributed to an economic or political grievance, citing New York Times’ report on December 2, 2008, that the violence may have been triggered by perceived ‘rigged local elections.’ Bruner observed that the two newspapers he studied used existing fault lines to frame their report using and pushing the lines of religion, ethnicity and economy.

Agudosy, Anozie and Edegoh’s (2018) “Newspaper Coverage of Herdsmen Attack in Enugu State Nigeria” examined and analyzed *The Guardian, Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* to determine the prominence given to attacks by herdsmen in Enugu State. Against the background of high insecurity and the assumption that coverage may reflect these occurrences thereby creating awareness and raising the agenda on terrorism and insecurity, the authors wanted to: ascertain the level of prominence given to the Fulani herdsmen’s attack in Enugu State by the selected newspapers; and the dominant theme of the stories about the attacks. Using content analysis design, they found that the papers gave reasonable coverage to the incidents.

According to Adamu and Ben (2016), the activities of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen started surreptitiously in Benue State over two decades earlier but were neglected by various successive governments while the victims received little but insufficient attention. The authors also contend that the constant atrocities committed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen signify persecution because of the nature of the killings which ostensibly targeted a particular religious group, as

well as the destruction of their places of worship. They also opined that as the violence continued and government remained inactive, one conclusion was inevitable: it was suggestive of an agenda, championed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, to occupy an area already dominated by one ethno-religious group. The authors concluded that most of the victims were Christians, women and children.

Many of the articles reviewed indicated a focus on herdsmen-farmers conflict and related crisis, little effort was spared for understanding how the media portrayed or highlighted some important elements in the conflict, such as the key themes focused and the peace orientation of the media in their coverage. This has left a gap that this study attempted to fill.

Brief profile of analyzed newspapers

The Punch was founded by the late business man, Olu Abodurin and Mr. Sam Amuka-Pemu (who later founded Vanguard). It began operations in March, 1973 with Sunday Punch, rolling out the daily editions on November 1, 1976. As Oladokun (2008) indicates, The Punch is regarded as the ‘most widely read newspaper’ and the management believes that ‘it is the largest circulating national newspaper’ in Nigeria; it has six columns in the front page with a few variations in the inside pages. The Guardian was established in 1983 by the late Alex Ibru, an entrepreneur, and Stanley Macebuh who was then a top journalist with the defunct Daily Times newspaper. It is reputed to have pioneered high-quality journalism in Nigeria with insightful and thoughtful editorial content. The paper was rolled out first as a weekly on 22 February 1983, appearing on Sundays. Five months after, on 4 July 1983, it started daily publication. Daily Trust is one of the stables of Media Trust, a privately held Nigerian newspaper publishing company based in Abuja, the FCT. The company publishes the English-language Daily Trust, Weekly Trust, Sunday Trust and the Hausa-language Aminiya newspapers, as well as a new pan-African magazine, Kilimanjaro. Leadership

newspaper is a daily national newspaper published by Leadership Group Limited and based in Abuja, Nigeria with offices in some cities like Lagos. Leadership newspapers publish breaking Nigerian news in politics, business, entertainment, sports, opinion and more. Orient Daily was established in Awka, Anambra state, as a daily newspaper, by a renowned philanthropist and a private entrepreneur, Chief Ezeemuo, who is equally a politician of repute. The newspaper has been in business for some years and its core coverage areas are the five eastern Nigeria states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, with the hope to expand into a national daily, while The Voice is a Benue state-owned newspaper located in Makurdi, Benue State. It was established in 1979, initially circulating in the northern states. In its early days, the paper was producing between 12000 and 14 000 copies per day.

Methodology

Content analysis research design was used in the study while the coding sheet was the instrument applied to scoop articles from relevant newspapers for the purpose of content-analyzing the herders-farmers' conflict (Wimmer and Dominic (2000). The unit of analysis for this study was the written stories or reports (news, editorials, commentaries, opinion pieces, letters-to-the editor, feature articles, personality interviews, and editorials) related to

herdsmen/farmers conflict in Benue and Enugu States. The study sought to establish among others, the type of story, location of the source, position of the story on the newspaper, length of story measured in inches as well as source (either reporter, opinion piece, press release, the combatants, the government, peace-maker, etc.), and slant of story (positive, negative or neutral); genre of story - whether news story, opinion piece or article, editorial, as well as headline treatment of the stories, etc. This article, however, reports the themes highlighted, prominence given to the stories, the peace orientation of journalists and sources relied upon for information.

To establish intercoder reliability, three raters (including the researcher) coded the newspapers in line with the content categories (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003) and using the guidelines by Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2005). The period 2015-2017 provided the perspective of 24 months - a period of significance for the country and the present administration. The constructed week technique (Hester & Dougall, 2007) was used to select two working days in a week (Monday to Friday), in each month, between May, 2015 and May, 2017. A total of the 156 newspaper issues became the real editions, were finally coded for the study.

Presentation of Data

Table 1: Thematic presentation of newspaper stories on herdsmen and farmers conflict

Theme/Topic	%
Offensive Attack	15.0
Reprisal Attack	3.1
Arrest	3.1
Public Condemnation / Protests	24.4
Investigation	2.5
Govt./Pub. Intervention	31.9
Conciliatory	10.0
Others	10.0
Total	100% N = 159

Source: Researcher's coding of Nigerian Newspapers, 2018.

As Table 1 above shows, Government/Public Intervention (that is, stories dealing how the government or the public intervened or tried to intervene in the conflict) has the highest volume of reports with 31.9% stories; this is followed by public condemnation (which describes how the public reacted/condemned certain

actions of the actors) with 24.4% stories; while offensive attack (which focuses on stories bordering on unprovoked attack by either of the parties) is third with 15% entries. The lowest entry of 2.5% came from investigative report while conciliatory and 'other' each recorded 10% stories. Reprisal attack and arrest each had 3.1%.

Table 2: Newspaper coverage in terms of themes

Theme/Topic	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Leadership</i>	<i>The Voice</i>	<i>Orient Daily</i>
Offensive Attack	12.50	0.00	33.30	0.00	8.30	45.80
Reprisal Attack	20.00	00	20.00	40.00	00.00	20.00
Arrest	20.00	00.00	60.00	20.00	00.00	00.00
Pub. Condemnation	00.00	10.30	15.40	7.70	30.80	35.90
Investigation	00.00	00.00	00.00	00.00	25.00	75.00
Govt./Pub. Intervention	8.00	12.00	10.00	10.10	44.00	16.00
Conciliatory	00.00	6.20	12.50	12.50	62.50	6.20
TOTAL	60.5	28.5	151.2	90.3	170.6	198.9

Table 4 above is a comprehensive view of the newspapers' areas of focus. Daily Orient had the most stories on investigation (75%), and arrest (45%); but low in conciliatory news. The Guardian's low volume of reports also manifested in the thematic stories where it had 20% for both arrest and reprisal attack stories as the highest. Daily Trust was strong on Arrest (60%), while Leadership had a good showing in reprisal attack (40%), but low in public condemnation (7.7%).

Furthermore, this may also explain the volume on reprisal attacks which also occur unannounced and without prior warning. Stories on investigation are quite

few, suggesting that newspapers probably do not invest enough energy and resources into digging into causes and other implications of the conflict, hence the limited report on it. Lack of investigative effort on the part of Nigerian media especially in reporting these conflicts could be a factor in the failure to arrest the situation as intelligence information is very crucial to the resolution of conflicts of this nature. This dwindling of rate investigative journalism in the country and which has been amplified in this report has been a source of concern to stakeholders. In this report also, newspapers did not focus on peace journalism or conflict-sensitive communication.

Table 3: Page placement by newspapers

Page position	%
Front page	17.6
Page2	2.5
Back page	6.9
Centre-spread	6.3
Other pages	66.7
Total	100 (N = 159)

The above table shows that 17.6% of stories were in front page position, 2.5% back page, 6.9% back page, 6.3% centre-spread while 66.7% was other type of pages. Most of the stories were hidden

inside the pages of the newspapers. One would see the 18 percent allocation to front page as relatively small compared to 67 percent to inner pages and back page and centerspread 15.7%.

Table 4: Sources of information on the conflict

Story Source	%
Herdsmen Rep/Miyetti Allah	31.4
Farmers	1.9
Politicians	1.3
Others	1.9
Newspaper reporter/Correspondents	42.8
News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)	0.6
Newspaper source/in-house	10.7
Security agents	9.4
Total	100 N=159

The above table shows that Miyetti Allah, herdsmen's representatives in Nigeria, constituted 31.4% of news source. Only 1.9% of the sources was farmers, while 2.5% was government officials, and 1.3% was made up of politicians at the national level. Furthermore, 1.9% was made up of 'other' sources that could not be classified, 42.8% were newspaper reporters, 0.6%

was of News Agency of Nigeria, (NAN), 10.7% were newspaper sources while 6.9% of the sources were from sundry commentators. Some people harbor the notion that the Miyetti Allah and the herdsmen operate freely without any inhibitions. With this scenario, this suspicion is further increased.

Table 5: Volume of reports on "Allusion"

Allusion	%
Pro-conflict	25.6
Pro-peace	25.6
Neutral	48.8
Total	100 n=159

The above table also shows that 25.6% of the stories made allusion to conflict in the reports, which is categorized here as pro-conflict; another 25.6% was pro-peace while 48.8% was neutral, alluding neither to conflict nor to peace. In relation to the research question which sought to determine the orientation of Nigerian journalists with regard to peace journalism, this table shows that Nigerian journalists' peace orientation can be said to be low. That implies that in covering conflict issues, journalists' orientation

towards the negative sides of the conflict appears to balance out with their orientation towards peace.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study show that seven specific themes were focused on by the newspapers and together they defined the specific nature of the reportage and the newspapers' overall portrayal. These include:

Offensive attack – this has to do with reports highlighting the first offensive action, sometimes unprovoked, initiated by either of the parties. These types of stories, by the way they are written, highlight how and who initiated the attack and possibly when as well as point the way to a possible understanding of who the aggressors could be.

Reprisal attack - this also formed part of the specific nature in which the reports were presented and they accounted for five mentions in the same way that arrest accounted for five. As the name suggests, reprisal attack indicates that the newspapers wrote the stories following a response to an earlier attack.

Public condemnation - by far, the specific issue in the conflict report that received the highest coverage was public condemnation (39) which was an indication of citizens' reaction and rage against the killings. It could be argued that the newspapers gave reasonable amount of space to citizens to air their views about the controversy much of which manifested in a rage and condemnation of the conflict. It goes without saying that in conflict situations, intervention efforts such as by individuals and groups are likely to assist in finding solutions and the media provide ample opportunity for people to air their views. In this regard, our analysis is important to point this out that within the period of the study, citizens expressed their views and rage against the crisis through the media.

Conciliatory efforts - From the outlook of newspaper reportage in this variable, many of the national newspapers appear to have paid little attention to conciliatory news, which in a way is inclined to peace. One possible explanation may be that since conciliatory news tend towards peace, it could be inferred that the newspapers are more interested in crisis-prone news than peace-oriented news. In this period of global clamour for peace journalism or conflict-sensitive communication, this position among these Nigerian newspapers is not encouraging as it tends to support the traditional notion that the media are

more inclined towards the negative events. This situation is obvious from the data showing that *The Voice* had 62.5% while the other four shared the remaining 37.5%.

Overall, conciliatory news was reported in 16 occasions which implies media efforts to bring the parties to a negotiating table. Incidentally, investigative stories came out very lean with only 4 mentions, indicating that not much was done in the area of getting the 'news behind the news' or putting some background to the stories through deeper and wider analytical perspectives. This is indeed a bane of present-day journalism. But this may be a result of insecurity that surrounds journalism practice in Nigeria.

Besides poor background to the stories and lack of interpretative or investigative insights, there is also an apparent low interest of newspapers for peace orientation. Instead, much of the stories are characterised by negative/war frames. This suggests that journalists are more attuned to war journalism mindset than peace journalism – a situation that encourages the conflict rather than discourages it. Peace journalism exponents argue that to stand a chance of resolving conflicts, journalists should report the facts with an orientation for peace rather than emphasizing the negative imageries. From the data shown, more than a quarter of the stories made allusion to conflict in the reports, which means pro-conflict with another quarter being pro-peace. The remaining half was neutral, alluding neither to conflict nor to peace. Invariably, this shows that the peace orientation of Nigerian journalists is quite low. That implies that in covering conflict issues, journalists' orientation towards the negative sides of the conflict appears to balance out with their orientation towards peace.

The thematic focus of the reports indicates a major gap in what the newspapers considered important – the economic and social impact of the conflict. By failing to constantly highlight the economic and social implications suggests that the impact of the crises does not constitute an

important area of focus. In their capacity to set agenda for the public, the need to portray the general implications of the conflict becomes necessary in order to build necessary interest towards its resolution. Some world bodies have, however, drawn attention to this. According to World Poverty Clock (2018); United Nations (2015b) and the MDGs Report (2015b), conflicts at both national and global levels portend serious negative impact in the development process especially in conflict-prone countries.

Security challenges associated with herdsmen and farmers' conflict constitute threats to lives and property and also hinder business activities while discouraging local and foreign investors (Anekwe 2018). Similarly, Arowosegbe (2018) and Clark (2013) contend that the dwindling national development is a direct consequence of social violence as well as youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. In view of these scholarly positions, it is therefore a thing of concern that the newspapers remained silent in bringing this aspect of the conflict to the fore in form of raising the agenda of debate on the consequences of social conflicts.

In terms of prominent positioning of stories, a total of 37 (24.8%) out of 159 news items were found on the strategic positions, consisting of front page (major – 17.4%, front page minor – 4 %, and back page major – 24.8%). In addition, some stories (4) 2.5%) were found on page 2 of the newspapers, which this researcher considers as also prominent; while 6.3% (10) items were found in centre-spread also considered prominent by virtue of its location in the newspapers. Altogether, the papers allocated 33.6 percent prominence out of the total stories on herdsmen and farmers conflicts within the period of study. If we add the stories that appeared on such special pages as editorial page (5.4%) and leading pages (26.2%), it can be inferred that the stories received prominent positioning.

Positional placement of news items by most of the newspapers can be interpreted to be an indication that Nigerian

newspapers viewed the issues of herdsmen and farmers' conflict as very serious and newsworthy. Oyero (2010 p.112) supports this assertion when he states that "the level of prominence, in terms of page placement given to a report, has implications on the extent to which the newspapers have set the agenda for the issue." Similarly, Fedyk (2018 p.3) in a study of the effect of news positioning on financial markets found that "front page news is accompanied by substantially high trading volumes and absolute price changes for the tagged securities immediately after publication." The level of prominence accorded to a report in terms of page placement reflects implications on the extent to which the relevant newspapers have set agenda for the issue within the period under study.

A further breakdown of the page placements indicates that over quarter of the stories on the front page (major) were positive with nearly half being negative and 19 percent neutral. On the back page (major), 40 percent were positive, 20 percent negative and 40 percent neutral while on the editorial page 50 percent were positive, 25 percent negative and 25 percent neutral. The volume of reports that appeared on front page (minor), page lead and editorial pages, was equally significant with the front page (minor) being 17 percent and page lead stories at 43 percent.

Prominent placement and highlighting of the herdsmen and farmers' conflict stories in the newspapers to a large extent portrays the importance which the newspapers attach to the issues under discussion and can give a hint to the frame being projected. Through placement of stories in particular strategic positions, certain aspects of the conflict are highlighted and emphasized, enabling people to interpret and comprehend the issues from the frame that is projected. It is argued, therefore, that in view of this finding, the conflict received adequate placement in the pages of newspapers - showing that Nigerians had a good chance of reading, following and understanding what was going on. Framing theory maintains that frames emphasize specific aspects of reality.

The finding from the study showed that the majority of news items had their origin from newspaper reporters or correspondents (42.8 %) or herdsmen and their associates (31.4%), or government officials (including the police) and a few sundry commentators while farmers were recorded as source in 1.9% times. Source is used here in the sense of being those either in possession of the information, or those offering the information as observers to the conflicts or those acting on behalf of the conflicting parties. That herdsmen were commenting more frequently on the issues reflects the group's vocal and outspoken nature, as against the farmers which manifests in their tendency to address the media almost every time following outbreaks of conflicts. This audacity of the herdsmen also raises questions of their complicity in the whole crisis, which, however, the newspapers failed to highlight as an issue.

With regard to the above scenario, what can be inferred from the situation is that the sources of news in a conflict situation such as in the herdsmen/farmers' clashes are as varied as they are unpredictable since the activities that generate the news are not predetermined both in time and place. This means that since the attacks or reprisals are not prearranged, journalists are usually not the first to learn of or witness the development. This is unlike regular news beats where journalists are sometimes primed for an event; or they are invited to a press briefing/conference to announce an upcoming event. In this study, offensive and reprisal attacks which dominated this report occurred at unplanned times or occasions when journalists are very unlikely to be present to take direct sound bites from participants – the non-state actors - hence their resort to third parties for information. As the study shows, Miyetti Allah representatives constituted much of the sources with the implication that the victims and participants in the conflict were hardly contacted or quoted a situation that questions the fairness and objectivity of the reports.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the newspapers focus on seven main themes such as: offensive attack, reprisal attack, public protests as well as government intervention efforts among others which the public ought to know about but excluded investigative efforts as well as peace journalism or conflict sensitive communication which is crucial towards resolving the conflict. However, they gave prominence to the conflict by their positioning and allocation of space both in their front pages, back pages and inside pages. This must have guaranteed a high attention score for the stories. Furthermore, the newspapers focused on relevant themes. The newspapers relied, in most part, on third parties for their sources of information on the conflict and those also were the sources that were quoted. This could be seen as a challenge in the reporting process and example of communication barriers which can lead to distortions in the news reports. The study recommends that Nigerian newspapers should endeavor to devise more reliable and dependable information sourcing from the main participants in a conflict – including the victims. Dependence on third parties or one-sided attribution is likely to convey a biased view of the reports. A situation in which most of the attributions or sources were traced to 'third parties – the police, or the herdsmen representatives' - leaves much to be desired and should be addressed.

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