

MEDIA PRESENTATION OF HERDERS- FARMERS' CONFLICTS AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF FARMERS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of the presentation of herders-farmers' conflicts in the media on the perception of the public about farmers. The research design adopted for the study was survey while the instrument used was questionnaire. A total of 327 copies of the questionnaire were distributed purposively to residents of Oyo town in Oyo State, Nigeria. Data generated were analysed with the aid of frequency counts and presented in percentage tables. Result of the findings showed that members of the public have adequate information about herders-farmers' conflicts. The sources of information about the conflicts were social media, mainstream media, interpersonal communication religious organizations and international media. The media presentation enhanced the sympathy of the people towards farmers who were seen as helpless victims, neglected, unprotected, compromised, frustrated and betrayed. The media effectively set the agenda for the public's reaction to the conflicts by framing the conflicts in their presentations. The conflict was framed most often in the manner that engendered public sympathy in favour of farmers. The study recommended that the government and security agencies should scale up their response mechanism in order to stop the deadly conflicts and also address other security issues in the country. Strengthening of law enforcement and support of local conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms are also recommended.

KEYWORDS: Herders, farmers, conflict, media presentation, perception.

Introduction

The problem of insecurity has increased in Nigeria over the years ranging from political, ethnic, and religious conflicts leading to violence and general fear of the unknown are literarily redefining the concept of understanding and trust as the basis of peaceful co-existence in different parts of the country (Pete & Oso, 2017). The trend of insecurity in the country including that of the herders-farmers' is one of the insecurity issues threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria as a nation. The conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, which have grown in frequency over the years, have had negative impact on the prosperity of communities and the nation at large. The current herders-farmers clashes have a long and complex historical background as it is nothing new (Gursoy, 2021). But it has transformed by time and has turned into a destructive and violent conflict since the beginning of 21st century (Egbuta, 2018).

The conflict has increased in frequency in the past decade especially with the new dimension to the conflicts since 2015. It has become worrisome in the recent time, and since 2016 it entered a very dangerous state because the conflict is already threatening the national cohesion of Nigeria as the herders-farmers clashes have been linked to many social problems such as poverty, migration and religious groups (Egbuta, 2018; Ningxin, 2018; Nwankwo, Ayadiuno, Ali & Madu, 2020). There are different actors to the conflict such as nomadic Fulani herders and farmers as primary actors and government, security agents, politicians and others as secondary actors and pseudo parties respectively. All these parties have added another dimension to the conflict, making it more worrisome, and as such, has generated much agitation among concerned Nigerians (Gursoy, 2021). Fulani herdsman continuously attack farmers on their farmlands in the north and some parts of the southern regions of Nigeria. They have equally been accused of armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing, rape and even ethnic cleansing. The consequences include reprisal attacks by farmers as well as increasing agitation for secession by the Independent People of Biafra(IPOB) and calls for Oduduwa Republic by some Yoruba groups in the South -West of Nigeria. Government and security agencies claim to be working, condemning those gruesome attacks and mindless killing of innocent souls of Nigerians. Yet, the conflicts have continued unabated, leaving the affected farming communities helpless and frustrated.

The mass media are distributors and packagers of information and moral amplifiers and organisers and are thus central institution of modern life (Oso, 2017). This is so because anything presented in the media have substantial effect on the public perception of events. This is possible because the popular opinions on the role of the media in the society are informed by hope and fear according to Corner (2007: 22), because the media "are not only the social mechanism through which majority experience the world, but are also the main institution in contemporary society for the construction of meaning". Such meaning affects

opinions which range from the perception of the conflict, the herders, the farmers and the handlers of the conflict such as security agencies and government among others.

The media can influence the course of a conflict situation by setting the agenda for such conflict through their reportage (Olumojobi & Ajilore, 2018) because the media have significant influence over their audiences; and in that sense they are powerful (Blumler & Gurevitch 1982). Investigating the functions and dysfunctions of the local media within the context of a conflict should be a research priority because of the local population. This is because the media as purveyors of other people's views play a vital role in shaping our views of the world around us, thus using the framing power to affect opinions or perceptions in conflict situation. The perception may be positive or negative or even neutral. Thus, this study investigated the effect of media presentation of herders-farmers' conflicts on the public perception of farmers.

Statement of the Problem

The rising scale of conflicts between Fulani herdsman and farmers has become a major security challenge in Nigeria. The conflicts have turned bloody, and yet, have continued unabated leading to destruction of property worth billions of dollars, claiming numerous lives and thus culminating in collateral economic damages. Many farm settlements have been taken over by herders, and farmers driven away from their farms. International Crises Group (2017) has complained that "a worrisome pattern is the increasing attacks by those labeled as Fulani herders on farmers and farming communities in different regions of Nigeria according to International Crises Group (2017), and according to Amnesty International (2018) the attacks have caused more death than that of the deadly terrorist group, Boko Haram, adding that 57% of the death occurred in 2018 alone, precisely between January and October 2018, while 21% occurred in 2017 and 22% in 2016.

The conflict has provoked a renewed scholarly attention in Nigeria as it has continued to escalate especially since 2015 (Gursory, 2020; Ali & Madu 2020; Adeoye, 2017), because it has become a major threat to National security and peace. The intensification of the crisis has spurred renewed scholarly attention. Concerned Nigerians have continued to consider the magnitude and consequences of the matter and the ways the conflict could be understood. Therefore, much of the scholarly attention has essentially been concentrated on the conflict, looking at the causes and course of the conflict, economic effects and security implication on the nation, the effect on national integration, media coverage of the conflict, the framing pattern in the media, news sources and other related areas (Gursory, 2020; Ali & Madu 2020; Odiegwe-Enwerem, Oso & Amodu 2020; Olumojobi & Ajilore 2018; Nwankwo, Ayadium & Genyi, 2017; Oboh & Abugu 2016; Onuga, 2015).

However, the implication of the presentation of the conflict in the media on the public perception is yet to be adequately explored in the literature. Yet, we live in a society where the media influence issues in other institutions. Against this backdrop, stakeholders in different social reality strive to determine media narrative of issues. Invariably, the media can then determine the perception that the public have on events such as herders and farmers conflict

Also, most extant studies on the conflicts adopted content analysis to understand the presentation of the conflict. Yet, few studies on perception concentrate on the perception of the herders by the members of the public ignoring the perception of farmers. In order to fill these gaps, this study sought to investigate the impact of media presentations of herders-farmers conflicts on the public perception of farmers, using survey approach.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed in order to put the study in perspective:

1. To what extent are the members of the public aware of herders-farmers conflicts?
2. What are the respondents' main sources of information about herders-farmers conflicts?
3. How have media presentations affected the perception of the members of the public about farmers?

Review of Related Literature

The trend of insecurity in Nigeria has taken a new dimension for about a decade with insurgency, terrorism, banditry and herders-farmers' conflicts holding sway. The attack between nomadic pastoralists and farming communities have become worrisome as it has become very deadly with impunity for the assailants (Crisis Group, 2022), with both political and socioeconomic consequences (Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). The growing trend of the conflict has generated a renewed academic discussion with much academic attention being concentrated on the understanding of the conflict. The conflict has been viewed from the angle of ethnicity, religious, climate change, illiteracy, politics, underdevelopment, among others angles (Gusoy, 2020; Odiegwe-Enwerem, Oso & Amodu 2020; Genyi, 2017; Lynch, 2008; Kempf, 2007 and Lynch and McGoldrick 2005).

The conflict has increasingly taken the form of scorched-earth campaigns that kill scores, raze villages and burn down farms (Crisis Group, 2022). Genyi (2017) argues that Fulani herdsman started their attacks on villages with weapons at the beginning of 2000. Buttressing this, Amnesty International (2018) gave an extensive report with the information they collected directly from a research. The interviews conducted with the victims of the attacks revealed the level of

escalation in the violent conflict. Their result showed that farmers also started reprisal attacks against Fulani herdsmen and as a result, both sides have suffered from the attacks and the government response is worrisome. The report showed that there had been “312 incidents of attacks and reprisal attacks in 22 states and Abuja between January 2016 and October 2018. As a result of these attacks, Amnesty International estimates that at least 3,641 people may have been killed, 406 injured, 5,000 houses burnt down and 182,530 people displaced,” (Amnesty International, 2018). Accordingly, Genyi (2017: p.138) believes that “this is one of the main reasons that the traditional negotiations mechanism would not work anymore. The armed attacks leave no room for peaceful talks and agreements”. Thus, Gusoy (2020: p.14) asserts that “thousands of deaths, the total number of casualties is unknown as often many bodies were found in the bushes.”

Both the farmers and herders have been viewed as victims of the conflict, demanding for justice (Crisi Group, 2022) with many casualties on the farmers (Nwankwo, Ayadiuno, Ali & Madu, 2020). This corroborates the narrative of victimhood being found by Tade and Yikwabs (2019) who explored the narrative of victimhood production from both farmers and herders and argued that farmers lost their member to herders' attacks and that herders also see themselves as victims as well. The study by Nwankwo, Ayadiuno, Ali & Madu, (2020) considered articulation of discourse cluster on the victims and assailants of the conflict were presented in the newspapers. The authors argued that “the predicates and practices linked with the subjects (the herders-farmers conflict) are conspicuous in the news headlines of newspapers most often rendered in apocalyptic tone,” (Nwankwo, Ayadiuno, Ali & Madu, 2020: p. 203).

The role of media in the conflicts is indispensable. Thus, Olumojobi and Ajilore (2018) argue that the current dimension of the conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria have become amplified and persistent and have thus attracted media attention in the recent times. Arguing that media are major players in conflict situation, these authors posit that the media possess influential power in the direction of a conflict as well as impacting the public perception of the issues in conflict. Duan and Takahashi (2016) contend that the media presentations and commentaries on conflicts could engender both positive and negative impressions in mind of the people. This can determine the attitude of the people towards a conflict situation. In conflict reportage therefore, the media can play both positive and negative roles. They can act as “an instigator or enhancer of the conflict status quo” on one hand according to Olumojobi and Ajilore (2018: p. 38). On the other, the media through their coverage and reportage, can incite or escalate conflict and can as well facilitate the mitigation or even the resolution of a conflict situation.

The North-South dichotomy in the Nigerian political sphere further permeates the country's media space as most issues are primarily reported from a regional

perspective to reflect the opinions of specific sections of the country rather than to achieve objective reportage of issues. Shinar (2013) recognizes that conflict coverage may be a source of prestige in mainstream media culture and observes that journalists are often encouraged to represent realities of a conflict in clear-cut polarities and with primordial sentiments, because of the “openness to discourse that enhances the news-value of war,” (Lynch, 2005).

Counsel has been given that the media should support in de-escalation of the conflict through the use of temperate language/tone, objective and balance reportage of the conflict bereft of political and ethno-religious sentiments. The reason is that the Nigerian press is more of an active participant in disputes (Ekeanyanwu 2017) and should be an impartial judge in conflict situations (Nwankwo, Ayadiuno, Ali & Madu, 2020). Operation within the norm of objectivity, fairness, accuracy and balance reportage is crucial for the media to exert constructive impacts in a conflict situation (Puddephatt, 2006). However, Shinar (2013) has noted that media reportage is at best a reductionist production when the contexts and culture of conflict are sparsely, or not at all considered. Likewise, Machin and Niblock (2006: p. 98) emphasis that “good reporting and news analysis should go beyond merely stating positions but should show the conflict in its historical and social perspectives.”

It has however been observed that regulations and controls of the media notwithstanding, distorted messages and emotion-laden content, positive or negative still exist in the media space – and most of these are mostly driven by the need to sell the newspapers (Skorup 2017 & 2018; McQuail 2010 & Odiegwe-Enwerem, Oso & Amodu 2020). Accordingly, scholars such as Odunlami (2017); Isola (2015), Albert (2015); Omenugha, Uzuegbunam and Omenugha (2013), Ahmed (2008) among others have also blamed the media for instigating and escalating conflicts and sustaining violence through sensationalism, promoting prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals and other provocative presentations. Nnabuhe (2015) and Sonwalkar (2004) assert that “socio-cultural binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘we’ and ‘they’ is very much a reality” in the media coverage of conflict. News coverage thus tends toward ethnocentrism, contributing to the exacerbation of conflict situations (Olomjobi & Ajilore 2020).

It is safe to say therefore, that the media possess the power to influence the public understanding and perception in conflict situations. Therefore, the media can impact the understanding of the members of the public about herders-farmers conflicts which can further help to escalate or de-escalate the conflict fueled by public perception of the farmers, who are most often considered basically as the victims of the conflicts.

Nigerian Media Coverage of Conflicts

Information is fundamental to the healthy society and/or democracy because, “it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Information serves a “checking function” by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them” (Amadu, Usaini & Ige, 2022: p. 8). Different conflicts have distinctive characteristics that determine both the communication channels employed and the response to information communicated through the channels (Coombs, 1998). So, the role of the media as the mirror of the society, the conciliator, or the shapers of issues and events in the society is well understood (Edeani 2021). As an important institution in every society, the media perform these functions from time to time, depending on the prevailing situation.

Without the news media, members of the public will be uninformed, because without the efforts of the journalists who professionally nose for information, process and disseminate the information for the public consumption and judgement, members of the public will not have access to information. Having established the potency of the mass media as instruments of mass persuasion, shaping of public opinion and influence on public perception and behavior, Oso (2017: p. 27) argues that “the struggle for media space by antagonists and protagonists in a conflict is mainly to influence public opinion and ultimately public policy”. As a result, the role of the media in any conflict cannot be overemphasized. This is well understood in Nigeria’s context as the media in Nigeria has been making efforts to manage the various crises effectively by playing mediating roles, though most of the newspapers relied on foreign sources for information (Edeani 2021 & Obiano, 2021). The type of presence or absence that the media exhibit in a conflict situation usually influences the perception that the public have. As a result, parties in war, and other forms of conflicts strive to control media narratives of such conflicts by owning mass media outfits and spending heavily on media placements.

The media do not only present news about issues being reported, but the way such issues are reported can influence the way the members of the public will think about those issues (Oso, 2017). Where the media influence the public opinion positively, especially in conflict situation, they can help reduction or de-escalation of the conflicts. This is well captured by Obiano (2021) who observes the conciliatory function of the media and argues that since the birth of Nigeria as a nation, the Nigerian press has been immersed in the twin struggle of maintaining Nigeria’s corporate existence and building an integrated nation by playing mediating role in political conflict. It is safe to say therefore that the media play significant roles in peace building and conflict negotiation, considering their importance in information dissemination (Anyadike 2009). In reporting conflict, timely and sensitive coverage of victims will be a helpful approach, especially as

members of the public are desirous of knowing the outcome of ongoing attacks or violent activities by non-state actors.

The media do not always give equal focus to conflict situations. While some conflicts may enjoy adequate media attention, some others may be sparsely reported or even ignored, by “promoting selective reporting, prejudicial stereotypes about individuals” (Pete & Oso, 2017: p. 2). Therefore, the media tend to be selective in their coverage of conflicts even though conflict is pervasive. For a conflict situation to be newsworthy, the media first consider the status of the personalities involved, the magnitude of the damage incurred in the conflict, or importance of issues at hand in relation to what the audience care about (Reuben, 2009). As a result, Odunlami (2017) alleges that despite 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, suggesting that the media do not give adequate coverage to the crises. The media audience is a factor in the process of conflict coverage and reportage primarily because the media plan and execute news coverage “against the background of a cost benefit analysis,” (Olomjobi & Ajilore, 2019) quoting Udoakah (2006). Therefore, certain conflicts are over blotted in the media while some become invisible. For its dramatic appeal, “conflict more or less assumes a form of entertainment in the media, which invariably act as a vehicle for stories to hold their own in the media markets and sell” (Blasi, 2004). In the words of Apuke and Omar (2021) low prominence, lack of objectivity, use of negative language and framing are often deployed in the media coverage of conflicts.

There are evidences of political and electoral violence, ethno-religious crises, herders-farmers conflicts, terrorism and banditry among others in Nigeria and the roles of media in the escalation or de-escalation of the conflicts are also evident (Odiegwe-Enwerem, Oso & Amodu 2020; Amenaghawon, 2016; Ishola, 2015; Albert 2015; Akpoghiran & Otite, 2012; Adedayo & Agbaje, 2011; Jibo, 2003). Most authors have found the local media to be engaged in sensational, inflammatory, misleading presentations and side-taking, thereby heating up the polity. This is said to have polarized the Nigeria press along ethnic and religious lines (Jibo, 2003; Onwuneli & Olimma, 2016). Ishola (2010) has also argued that the history of Nigerian press is intertwined with conflict, and that irresponsible journalism partly contributed to the circumstances that led to the failure of the first and second republics in Nigeria. Akpoghiran and Otite (2012) note that media audience do not consider news reportage on conflicts to be of any significance to national unity.

However, some authors have averred that media in Nigeria are not all the time guilty of contribution to violence in Nigeria (Crises Group, 2022; Edeani, 2021; Obiano 2021; Onwuneli & Olimma 2015). For Edeani (2021), the media in

Nigeria have fairly contributed to managing conflict situations in West Africa. He maintained that “Nigerian mass media handling of conflict situation in the West African has shown good efforts made to report on the conflicts, and that they gave relatively appropriate emphases to conflict stories, and exhibited such other professional standards as balance, constructiveness, and responsibility in story writing and presentation,” (p.25). Onwuneli and Olimma (2015) also argue that Nigeria newspapers are neither over blotted nor explosive in their coverage of conflicts as found in some studies. Edeani (2021, p. 25) concludes that “Nigerian conflicts took a large majority of the media's attention in terms of absolute coverage and balance and responsibility in story writing and presentation, as against conflicts in the 15 other West African nations.”

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories of the media. In Agenda Setting theory, the mass media tell the public what to think about by the prominence, frequency and slant that they attach to news reports. The basic assumption of the theory is that the ability of the media to influence the visibility of events in the mind of public has been a part of our culture for almost half a century (Spring, 2006). Scholars such as Semiu (2015); Ishola (2010); McQuail (2010); Wanta and Ghanem 2006; Lang and Lang (1966) view mass media as a powerful institution that force attention to certain issues by creating an image of an object or event, suggesting what the people should think about, know about and have feeling about.

The theory was empirically advanced by McComb and Shaw (1972) in a study on the 1968 American presidential election which found strong support for the Agenda-Setting hypothesis. The thesis of the theory is that if a story is covered frequently and prominently in the media, the audience will regard the issue as more important. This is buttressed by Griffin's study of the *Washington post* report of 'Watergate scandal'. The editor and reporters of the newspaper gave prominence and continual coverage even though the story was initially perceived as trivial. The story later got the public attention as a result of the continuous coverage. Griffin (2000) explains that by the time television gave consistent coverage of the senate hearings of the matter, almost all adults in the US knew what 'Watergate scandal' was all about. The president was as a result forced to resign because majority of the US citizens and their representatives had come to the conclusion that he was scandalous. Therefore, through this process, even obscure points can become prominent national issues (Suraj, 2014).

The salience of issues in news content will determine the public perceptions of the most important issue, and then analyse the extent of influence by guidance of the media. The perspective in which members of the public employ to think about each object is therefore, central to the news agenda and its daily set of objects-issues, personalities and events. The public at large is supposedly able to

scrutinize the information given to them through the medium of mass media. As a result, the public perception of farmers in herders-farmers' conflicts can be substantially impacted by the media presentation of the conflict.

Also, Framing is related to the Agenda-Setting theory. It could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) have also suggested that framing could be seen as second level of agenda-setting in relation to the effect of salience of media coverage on audience interpretation of news stories. It is the way a communication source defines and constructs any piece of information that is communicated in the mass media. McQuail (2005, p.555) describes it as the way "in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists within reference, and according to some latent structure of meaning". Citing Nelson, et al (1997), Aina (2004) posits that framing is the process by which communication source such as a news organization defines and construct political issues or public controversies. Aina, (2004) explains that the theory suggests that the way mass media frame an issue and code words to describe the issue can have an impact and that the role of well known individuals commenting on it can be an important one.

It expands the concept of Agenda-Setting by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. For instance, while agenda-setting deals with salience of issues, framing deals in how the issues are presented. The basis of framing theory is that the media focus attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. According to Entman (2004), to frame is to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". Taking the argument further, Semiu (2015, p.84) postulates that "framing is more concerned with *how* issues and other objects (people, groups, organization and country) are depicted in mass media than with which issues or objects are more prominently reported." It is therefore safe to say that framing is significantly different from accessibility-based model of agenda-setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing is therefore very important in the media presentation of conflict as it will affect the opinions of the members of the public on the conflict (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). For example, the way the media frame the herders or pastoralists' conflicts can to a large extent, influence the perception that the public would have of the herders or farmers.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was survey. Questionnaire was the instrument used. A total of 327 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents purposively in Oyo State of Nigeria.

The population for the study included the users of radio, television, newspapers and social media such as twitter, instagram, telegram, facebook and whatsapp. These were members of the public who were neither farmers nor herdsmen but who were adequately informed of the herders-farmers' conflicts and have formed opinions based on the information they received from the media about the conflicts. The data generated were analyzed using percentages and frequency counts.

Presentation of Data

The findings to the study are presented according to the research questions in the Tables below.

Research question 1: To what extent are the members of the public aware of herders-famers conflicts?

Table 1:Frequency table showing the extent of awareness of herders attacks on farmers among members of the public

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very great extent	65	19.9	20.0	20.0
	Great extent	148	45.3	45.5	65.5
	Little extent	94	28.7	28.9	94.5
	Very little extent	14	4.3	4.3	98.8
	No extent	4	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	325	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.6		
Total		327	100.0		

Result on the Table 1 above revealed that the respondents were much aware of the herder-farmers attacks as majority of the respondents, 45.3% indicated that they were aware of the conflicts between herders and farmers to a great extent; 28.7% to a little extent; 19.9% to a very great extent; 4.3% to a very little extent and 1.2% to no extent. The implication of the findings is that the level of awareness of the conflicts or attacks and how it is framed in the media could impact the perception of the people about the parties to the herders-farmers attacks.

Research question 2: What are the respondents' main sources of information about herders-famers conflicts?

Table 2: Frequency table showing the main sources of information on the herders-farmers attacks

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Interpersonal Communication	44	13.5	13.5	13.5
	Social Media	145	44.3	44.6	58.2
	Mass Media	104	31.8	32.0	90.2
	Religious Group	25	7.6	7.7	97.8
	International Media	7	2.1	2.2	100.0
	Total	325	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.6		
Total		327	100.0		

Result on Table 2 above indicates that majority of the respondents 44.3% got to know about the herders-farmers conflicts mainly through the social media, followed by mass media 31.8%, interpersonal communication, 13.5%; religious group, 2.1% and international media, 7%. Therefore, the way these platforms present the various occurrences of attacks can go a long to determine the perception of the people about either the herders or the farmers.

Research question 3: How have media presentations affected the perception of the members of the public about farmers?

Table 3: Frequency table showing the influence of the media representation of herders-farmers attacks on the public perception of farmers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	149	45.6	48.2	76.4
	No	87	26.6	28.2	28.2
	Undecided	73	22.3	23.6	100.0
	Total	309	94.5	100.0	
Missing	System	18	5.5		
Total		327	100.0		

From the Table 3 above, it is evident that the media presentation of the herders-farmers attacks really influenced the perception of the respondents as majority of them, 45.6% responded in the affirmative, while 26.6% of the respondents were not influenced by the media reportage of the attacks and could not decide whether their perceptions were influenced by the media presentations or not.

Table 4:Explanation on how representation of herdsmen-farmers conflict affected perception of farmers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Victims	83	25.4	25.5	25.5
	Helpless	103	31.5	31.7	57.2
	Unprotected/Neglected	30	9.2	9.2	66.5
	Cheated	23	7.0	7.1	73.5
	Fighters/Terrorists	14	4.3	4.3	77.8
	Others	72	22.0	22.2	100.0
	Total	325	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.6		
Total		327	100.0		

As shown in Table 4, the presentation of the farmers in the media have made them to be seen by the media audience as helpless, victims, neglected, cheated and unnecessary/insignificant among other sympathetic expressions.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One

Findings from research question one revealed that members of the public were fully aware of herders/farmers' conflicts as a result of adequate coverage of the conflicts in the media. The implication is that the level of awareness of the conflicts and how they are framed in the media could impact the perception of the people about the parties to the conflicts. This has direct correlation to the view of Pete and Oso (2017, p.1) that "the media and other means of information dissemination and exchange occupy a central position in the process of decision making, opinion formation and behavior manifestation.

Research Question Two

From the findings to research question two, most of the information about the conflicts was accessed through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Tweeter and Whatsapp. As a result, it can be said that in the advancement in technology, the emergence of new types of media facilitates flow of information. To this effect, it could said that there is an increased dependence of the public on social media platforms for news on local and international matters. This buttresses the fact that social media phenomenon is one of the most remarkable in the 21st century (Dauda, Abubakar & Lawan, 2017), for interaction among the people in which they create, share and exchange ideas in virtual communities and networks, (Tufts University cited in Dauda et al, 2017). However, the major problem posed by this is that vast majority of the people do

not have the device for checking fake news and as a result, may not be able to distinguish between fake news, misinformation, facts and infodemics. Also, the preference for social media ahead of mainstream media such as newspapers, radio and television as sources of information on the herders-farmers conflict has myriad implications.

It reflects the dwindling influence of traditional media on public perception, an increase in the channels through which the public receive news and other contents about other citizens in the country.

Research Question Three

The media presentation of the conflicts, based on the findings to the research question three, revealed sympathetic feelings on the public perception of the farmers. The farmers are presented as helpless victims, neglected, cheated and insignificant among other sympathetic expressions. It has also been suggested that there is a kind of conspiracy and/or compromise by security agencies and among some government functionaries. This implies that Nigerian government does not show any serious commitment to curbing the attacks (Nwankwo et al, 2020, Olumojobi & Ajilore, 2018; Tade & Yikwabs, 2019) and that the weak security mechanism in Nigeria is not able to prevent attacks between conflicting groups. Usually, police or military are very late to respond to attacks and cannot stop armed groups before they burn down villages or kill each other, (Gursoy, 2020) who noted that impunity is one of the biggest issues of security and justice system in the country. As a result of the media presentation, the farmers enjoy the public sympathy against that of Fulani herders. This finding is however detrimental to the image of the herders.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings to this study, it can be inferred that the media were able to perform the tripartite functions of information, education and public surveillance thereby fulfilling the social responsibility function of the media. The media were therefore being able to set the agenda for the audience which influenced the perception of the members of the public about herders-farmers' conflicts. Therefore, it is safe to say that the media impacted the perception of the members of the public about farmers on the herders-farmers' conflicts. The findings further showed that the social media have risen to prominence as platforms that can be employed in shaping public opinions on issues more than the mainstream media platforms such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines.

Apart from providing empirical data on the effect of the media presentation of herders'-farmers' conflicts on public perception of farmers, this study will serve as a precursor for further studies on the herders-farmers conflicts and the aggressive and unhindered attacks on farmers and farms by those basically referred by the media as Fulani herders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and security agencies should be more pro-active in their response to the attacks and other security issues in the country. Security agencies should scale up their response mechanism in order to stem the deadly conflicts and also address other security issues in the country. Government should strengthen law enforcement and support of local conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms in Nigeria;
2. Researchers should try to interrogate the factors of prejudice, ethnic or regional subjectivity and frames selected by newspapers in the coverage of the pastoralists and farmers conflicts in the country;
3. Journalists should be trained on the ethics of journalism such as balance, truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity and conflict-sensitive reporting on issues such as the herders-farmers conflicts which will further aid them in providing early warning signs of conflict and how to de-escalate conflicts through their reportage.

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