

Influence of geographical location of newspapers in media reportage of herdsmen-farmers clashes in Nigeria: A comparative study of *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* newspapers.

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Abstract

Herdsmen – farmers’ crisis is one of the major ongoing conflict situations in Nigeria. The media’s role in conflict situations have been subject of several studies. This paper looks at the factor of geographical location of media establishment and its effect in reporting conflict situations with the herdsmen – farmers’ clashes as focus of study. The Agenda-setting theory underpins the study while purposive sampling technique is used to select two national newspapers based on their geographical location – *The Daily Trust*, based in the North (Abuja city) and *The Nation*, located in the South (Lagos city) with 120 editions of each newspaper used for content analysis to generate relevant data. Data were analyzed with frequency count and simple percentages. Findings of the study show a correlation between the geographical location of the newspapers and the leanings in their reportage of the herdsmen- farmers’ conflict – *The Daily Trust*’s reportage being pro the herdsmen, who are northerners while *The Nation*’s news stories have slants supportive of farmers mainly in the South and who bear the brunt of herdsmen rampage, a positioning seen as being a major contributor to the escalating situation. The paper recommends that stakeholder groups in the media should be more proactive in ensuring adherence to fairness and accuracy doctrine in news reportage with a view to enhancing media credibility, believability and consequent survival and profitability.

Key Words: Herdsmen, Farmers, Conflict, Media reportage, Agenda-setting.

Introduction

Escalating conflicts between herders and farmers are among Nigeria’s most pressing security challenges. The , without dispute, represent a significant part of the Nigerian economy with regard to the livestock sector. They constitute the major breeders of cattle which is the main and most available source of animal protein consumed by Nigerians. Alhassan (2013) says that the own over 90% of the nation’s livestock population which accounts for one-third of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 3.2% of the nation’s GDP. Lamidi and Ogunkunle (2015) also point out that the contribute significantly to the local

food chain and the national food security of Nigeria. However, widespread desert encroachment over large expanse of land in the North has compelled the to look for greener pasture in the southern part of the country for the survival of their herd. It is as a result of this southward movement that conflicts between crop farmers and the itinerant herdsmen have become common occurrences across the nation, leaving in its wake killings, maiming, abductions and destruction of crop lands. These thus make the herdsmen-farmers clashes in Nigeria widespread and deadly.

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Adebayo (2015) citing Nwokefor and Okunoye (2013) notes that severally, the media have been accused of prejudice and bias in the reportage of conflicting issues in Nigeria, like elections. He points out that this has often made the public perceive the media as partisan in conflict situations. Journalism has sometimes been described as a profession that imposes biased and distorted points of view (Muhlman, 2010). Ado-Kurawa (2001) also points out that in Nigeria, the prevalence of southern based newspapers has made most newspaper reportage of social-political issues to be more about the south and less of the north, and being seen as pro-south and anti-north. This, according to him, is based on the notion of biased reportage of activities relating to Islam and the north, generally, in the southern press, the hub of the Nigerian media and whose ownership are mainly Christians. Adebayo (2015) further contends that journalistic reportage, therefore, either leads to conflicts or fuel existing conflicts, though, sometimes unconsciously. The herdsman-farmers' conflicts are part of persisting conflict situations in Nigeria, the most debilitating being the agitation of violent militants in the Niger Delta for resource control and the rampaging Boko haram Islamists seeking to impose Islamist rule in the country, with the Northeast Nigeria as lunch pad.

Notable case studies and Causal factors

Okoli and Atelhe (2014) and Adogi (2013) in their research on the herders-farmers clashes in Nasarawa state point out that the sparsely populated large expanse of land in the state which makes it conducive to farming and grazing, attracted migrations of herders, setting up conflicts with the mainly agrarian local population. (Ayih, 2003). Olabode and Ajibade (2010) in their research work on /farmers' conflict in Odo-owa, Oke-ero of Kwara State identify the struggle for the use of resources like land and water as basic factors which ignite herdsman-farmers clashes. Another of their observation is that farmers grow crops along the grazing paths of the cattle thereby making it unavoidable for cattle to eat up the crops. , especially where natural leaves have dried up or have been burnt in-preparation for the planting season. Earlier findings by Gefu and Gills (1990) have also established that the causative factors in herdsman-farmers clashes remain unchanged as resulting from pastoralists cattle's destruction of farmers' crops and farmers'

encroachment on cattle routes for farming and water sources.

A study by Adebayo and Olaniyi (2008) on herders and farmers' clashes and the causal factors in Saki-west area of Oyo State note that the principal, noticeable causes of conflict are the crops damaged by the pastoralists and blockage of water points by the farmers. This corroborates a finding by Williams (1998) who observes that similar conflicts between farmers and pastoralists occur in much of Semi Arid Africa. Issah (2012) highlights the wide ranging implications of the violent conflicts between the pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria. For instance, he believes that the intensity, scope and frequency of the conflicts show that the unity of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is fragile, pointing out that the violent confrontations over resources have brought about mistrust and insecurity.

The Media and Conflict

The media has diverse roles in conflict situations, intensification, prevention and resolution. Akpan, Ering and Adeoye (2013) describe the mass media as a powerful tool of communication when conflicting situations arise as it can escalate and sustain conflicts. Awofadeju, Taiwo, Akinrosoye, Ewuola & Adeagbo (2015) say that the media in times of crisis is shouldered with the responsibility of satisfying the public with their demand for more news, information and analysis. They point out that the media has the capacity to influence debate and shape public opinion on issues such that information disseminated to the public can be a "potential hatchet, bullet or bomb" in the perception of the people. Terzis & Melone (2002) opine that the media is capable of creating divisions during conflict such that purposeful distortion of news coverage for particular interests easily exacerbates the tension between opposing parties hereby instigating violent conflicts.

As a follow-up on this, Vladimir & Schirch (2007) point out that to further Nazism's racism, people were incited towards violence via the media. Being aware of the power of the media, Hitler's minister of propaganda Goebbels used the media for effective persuasion. Access to radio increased from 4.5 million users to 16 million and through the medium, the Nazis mastered the use of slogans, bold-coloured visuals and town rallies to support Hitler's course against the Jews. In references to the

possible role the media plays in conflict situations, Zachary (2014) points to the Balkan conflict from 1992 to 1995 and asserts that the media, through slanted reporting, promoted ethnic conflict and hatred that led to violence.

In 1994, the Rwandan media was accused of initiating open call for the murder of the Tutsi population, a development considered as a major factor in the killing of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis during the Rwandan Massacre that lasted over a hundred days. The international media was criticized for not adequately covering the genocide conflict situation in Rwanda which many felt could have been prevented if there had been comprehensive and objective reportage (Zachary, 2014; Okumu, 1997).

Against this background, according to Akpan et.al (2013), the mass media is a powerful tool for communication in peace and conflict situations either to promote peace or to initiate, escalate and sustain conflicts. Nigeria has also had its fair share of conflict issues in which the media played one role or the other. In the Niger Delta conflict, violent militancy over resource control over oil and protest over environmental degradation that deprived the indigenes of their traditional farming and fishing sources of livelihood, attracted intense media coverage. Media reports on the area has centered more on the government and post-amnesty programmes and not on the continuing demands of the militants who insist that oil pollution in the Niger Delta has not subsided. The Boko Haram emerged in 2002 in Maiduguri and has spread to Yobe, Kano, Bauchi and other northern parts of Nigeria as a socio-political fundamentalists' group. The group operated at a low key till July 2009 when following clashes with security forces and the killing of their leader, Yusuf Mohammed, the followers continued to cause anarchy in the northern parts of Nigeria, especially in Borno and Bauchi states, claiming lives and destroying properties worth billions of Naira. According to Adamu & Ibrahim (2014), the mass media are blamed for inflaming the conflict through the nature of their reportage.

Ozohu-Suleiman (2013), notes that the mass media is an influential component of a nation. Lee (2007), states that media power is symbolic and persuasive with the capacity to influence and possibly control the minds of their audience. Anjum & Hajra (2015) identifies media professionals, media ownership, pressure

groups, political parties, religious leaders and policy makers as some of those who set the frames for the media. They contend that the media is expected to be one of the mediators that can put pressure on the government to resolve developing and existing conflicts but note that the media could only have better influence for positive change in conflict situations if it is fair and objective in its reportage. Awoshakin (2002) observes that in reporting conflicts, the issue of objectivity is usually an important ideal to aim for even if it is impossible to fully attain. Citing Das (2009), Awofadeju *et al.* (2015) consider objectivity as the hallmark of any media but that it is constantly tested.

Factors affecting media reportage

Ojo (2013) considers the mass media as integral to Nigeria achieving national cohesion, integration and stability. He says media ownership in Nigeria is more of ethnic loyalist, inferring that the media needs to imbibe journalism ethics **of fairness and accuracy** to prevent being a resource for ethnic politics. Omenugha, Uzuegbunam, Omenugba (2013) define media ownership as the proprietorship rights which someone, a group of persons or an institution has and exercises over a media establishment. These rights entail weighty and encompassing power to determine the corporate policy, editorial slant, content and workforce of such media establishment. According to them, the owners of a media establishment have significant influence on the gate-keeping function of the organization. Okunna (2003) explains that the publisher of a newspaper can pressurize an editor to write an editorial in a specific manner as it so pleases him. Therefore, Ali (2015) claims that ownership has continually influenced editorial policies of media organizations. He states that journalism ethics has often been sacrificed in deference to the opinions and decisions of the proprietors of media organizations since they have ultimate power over content and can decide what they want as news content. Kizito & Ogbu (2017) therefore conclude that the media, as an institution, is controlled by their owners who could instigate societal conflicts through news and content framing to support their interests and biases.

Influence of Geographical Location of Media on Conflict Reportage

Media ownership and control as well as ethnic considerations in the Nigerian press remain controversial, even in the current democratic dispensation (Ezeah, 2005). However, a significant, enduring commonality impacting media reportage in Nigeria is the factor of geographical location of media establishments, under which ownership, ethnicity and religion are subsumed. The significance of geographical location of the media is highlighted by Oyewale (2010) with reference to the Lagos-Ibadan axis of the Southern press about whose bias he opines that no matter how hard the press tries to stay objective, ethnic affiliations, which are often coterminous with geographical locations, cannot be ignored in the reportage and analysis of situations. He says while the Southern press sometimes exaggerates reportage of negative happenings in the North, the Northern press similarly highlights negative reports about the South and that both try to project their regions positively. He believes that reportage in either geographical zone reflects the issue of North-South dichotomy of the Nigerian polity, generally reflected in the press, and which manifests in mistrust among the citizenry.

In a study on the reportage of the 2006 crisis in Maiduguri, Nigeria over a cartoon in a Danish newspaper which was claimed to have discredited Prophet Mohammed, Okunna and Omuenugha (2008) in an analysis of the *New Nigerian* newspaper belonging to the northern states and *Daily Champion* based in Lagos but owned by an Igbo of Southeast origin, found there were major differences in the reportage of the crisis by the two newspapers reflecting the geographical and ethnic divisions of the newspapers.

Another study by Omuenugha (2004), on the reportage of the Hausa-Yoruba clash in 2002 in the *New Nigerian* newspaper based in the North (owned by the Northern states) and the *Punch* newspaper based in the South (owned by a Yoruba Christian investor) reveals that the newspapers were more interested in reporting the conflict based on the geographical affinity with parties involved, rather than fair and accurate reporting of the events. From the above, while the *New Nigerian* newspaper, based in the North, consistently reflects pro-North sentiments in its reportage, the two South-based newspapers- The *Daily Champion* and *The Punch*, from two different geo-political

zones and ethnic groups in the South, have a common pro-South stance in the respective news coverage.

However, Adamu & Ibrahim (2014) believe this should not be so. They contend that in reporting events, even conflict outbreaks, the media is expected to display a real sense of objectivity regardless of the ownership patterns and geographical location of media houses. This, they state, could be done by adhering to the rule of balance and fairness in reporting, thus freeing them from obvious bias.

Agenda-Setting Theory

LittleJohn & Foss (2009) citing Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) posit that the Agenda-Setting theory is about the power of the media to set the agenda on what are considered the important issues of the day which, by repeated and prominent focus, get to be accepted as important by the audience. The agenda-setting theory posits that the media has power to set society's agenda by focusing public attention on few key public issues. This therefore means that whatever the media finds important will eventually be mirrored by what members of the society consider important (Okafor, 2014). Agenda-setting, according to Ngoa (2006), is when media audiences accept issues, events and people as important due to the fact that the media has accorded prominence to them, making them issues for people to think and talk about. This theory, according to Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2012), is founded on the assumptions that the media does not totally reflect social reality because news is filtered, chosen and shaped by media personnel. Also, the public get their news from limited sources because they don't pay attention to all outlets; and media focus lead people to perceive given issues as important. Anaeto *et al.* (2012) identify the number of times an issue is reported (frequency), the use of headline and picture display as strategies to play up a report (prominence), reports that give room for points and counter-points as factors responsible for agenda-setting. Kunczik (1988) holds that the opportunity for agenda-setting by the mass media becomes enhanced when the value structure of the society is in a state of unrest.

This theory further highlights that the audiences make clear to the media (through ratings, audience studies, market research, and consumption patterns) what they want to watch and read about, and the media simply responds.

In other words, the media is market driven and thus gives its audiences what they know will sell. Wilson (2004) notes that the media uses agenda-setting to control the public's access to news, information and entertainment. Writing on Agenda setting theory, Awofadeju *et al.* (2015) argue that the news media is considered to have large influence on audiences based on the stories they consider news worthy and how much prominence and space are given to them. It is therefore concluded that the issues that receive prominent attention on the national news become the topics that the reading, listening and viewing public considers to be most important. However, critics of the theory still question the concept of agenda-setting as to who really sets the agenda in the media. This poses the question: Whose agenda is the media agenda? (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1990).

The Problem

Adamu (2017) states that reporting on herdsmen and farmers clashes by the Nigerian mass media has provided more opportunities for credibility and objectivity in news reportage over the years. She further highlights from her study in Plateau State, Nigeria that in spite of these opportunities, the Nigerian mass media still fall short in being objective in the coverage and reportage of conflicts, with reference to the herdsmen and farmers clashes. This then stands as a limiting factor for the media to be deployed as a conflict resolution management tool. This lack of objectivity and non-factual reportage have been seen as projecting the media as a contributory force in igniting and aggravating the conflict state of affairs in Nigeria.

In another study by Gever and Essien (2017) in Benue State on newspaper coverage of the conflict between farmers and herders in central Tiv land, their overall conclusions were that the media reportage of these clashes were based on coverage of the incidences only with almost no attention on the victims of the conflict. They also noted the need for the Nigerian media to refrain from episodic reportage of these clashes and conflicts in general and setting proper agenda for the Nigerian public on conflicts.

Based on the understanding that the media sets the agenda for public discussion and determines what people think and talk about, it is suggestive that the patterns of media location spread have effects on the reportage of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers. Other

studies highlighted above on media coverage of the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers were, overall, more concerned with the media's stance and interest while reporting the clashes with no attention on the possible impact of geographical location of media houses as a causal factor in the slant adopted by the newspapers. Previous studies have established the problematic nature of conflict reporting by the Nigerian media. Reporting conflict has remained problematic and causal factors need further interrogation. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap in knowledge by establishing, empirically, the influence, if any, of the contiguity factor of geographical location of a media house head office in relation to parties in conflict, in the reportage of the herdsmen-farmers conflicts by Nigerian newspapers.

The two newspapers purposively selected for content analysis for this study, *The Daily Trust*, is geographically located in the North – Abuja- which is indigenous to the herdsmen, while the other, *The Nation*, located in the geographical south – Lagos- has contiguity to the South whose farmers suffer devastation in the herders-farmers clashes. For the purpose of this study, the Middle Belt is incorporated in the South on the basis of being a farming belt that bears the brunt of violent trespass by herders It is significant to also establish that the two newspapers are owned by indigenes of the respective geographical areas.

The main objective of the study is to establish, empirical, if there is relationship between the affinity fostered by geographical location of a newspaper head office in the slant of reportage of conflict situations between parties in different geographical zones, the herdsmen-farmers conflict being the situation of study.

Research Questions

1. What is the influence, if any, of the geographical location of newspapers in reporting the herdsmen-farmers clashes in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does affinity of geographical location influence frequency of news stories, the prominence and slant given in the selected two Nigerian newspapers?

Method of Study

The method adopted for this study is content analysis with news stories on the herdsman-farmers conflict as manifest items of coding. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the two newspapers for the study based on their geographical locations – *The Daily Trust*, the most widely circulating newspaper based in the North (Abuja) and *The Nation*, based in the South (Lagos). This reflects the country’s North-South divide. The *Nation* newspaper was purposively chosen for this study as a national newspaper being adjudged the widest circulating newspaper in Nigeria and having won industry merit award as ‘Newspaper of the Year ‘ on several occasions while the *Daily Trust* newspaper was purposively chosen since it is the most widely read newspaper in the Northern part of Nigeria. The reportorial perspectives of the two newspapers on the herdsman-farmers clashes are therefore considered germane for this study. Data were generated at the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper library in Ibadan for past editions of *The Nation* newspaper analyzed and the *Daily Trust* Library.

The research instrument for the study is the coding sheet with content categories derived

from the research questions. For each of the two newspapers, 120 editions spanning 7-day week for the four months were sampled. There are four categories on the coding sheet namely the frequency of the news stories, prominence of the news stories in terms of stories on the front and inside pages, while slant of the news stories is inferred from the headlines cast, tone of the stories and the sources quoted. Stories with herdsman or their surrogates as sources which are defensive of them are categorised as pro-herdsman while stories highlighting the human and crop losses of farmers are counted as pro-farmers. The fourth category - the influence of geographical location of the two newspapers content analyzed on reportage of the herdsman-farmers conflict - is inferred by establishing correlation of the slant of stories with the location of each newspaper and that of the parties in the conflict. The media geographical location influence is, therefore, determined based on the news reports that either lean in favour of the North-associated herdsman or lean in favour of farmers who are mostly South based. .

Results

Table 1: Frequency of reports by *Daily Trust* newspaper and *The Nation* newspaper (Jan. – April, 2018).

Newspaper	Frequency of Reports				Total
	January	February	March	April	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	29 (46.0%)	17 (27.0%)	10 (15.9%)	07 (11.1%)	63 (100%)
<i>The Nation</i>	26 (38.8%)	17 (25.4%)	08 (11.9%)	16 (23.9%)	67 (100%)

Table 2: Prominence devoted to herdsmen and farmers clashes in *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* newspapers (Jan. – April, 2018).

Month	<i>The Nation</i>		<i>Daily Trust</i>	
	Front Page	Total	Front Page	Total
January	11 (45.8%)	26 (40.0%)	09 (75.0%)	29 (46.9%)
February	5 (20.8%)	17 (26.2%)	0 (0%)	17 (26.6%)
March	2 (8.4%)	8 (12.3%)	2 (16.7%)	10 (15.6%)
April	6 (25.0%)	16 (21.5%)	1 (8.3%)	7 (10.9%)
Total	24 (100%)	67 (100%)	12 (100%)	63 (100%)

Table 3: Monthly distribution of slants given to stories on herdsmen-Farmers clashes in *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* newspapers (Jan. – April, 2018).

Month	Slant					
	Pro-herdsmen (<i>The Nation</i>)	Pro-herdsmen (<i>Daily Trust</i>)	Pro-farmers (<i>The Nation</i>)	Pro-farmers (<i>Daily Trust</i>)	Neutral (<i>The Nation</i>)	Neutral (<i>Daily Trust</i>)
January	02 (66.7%)	18 (54.6%)	17 (37.0%)	03 (30.0%)	07 (39.0%)	08 (40.0%)
February	0 (0%)	08 (24.3%)	12 (26.1%)	02 (20.0%)	05 (28.0%)	07 (35.0%)
March	01 (33.3%)	04 (12.1%)	06 (13.0%)	03 (30.0%)	01 (5.0%)	03 (15.0%)
April	0 (0%)	03 (9.0%)	11 (23.9%)	02 (20.0%)	05 (28.0%)	02 (10.0%)
Total	03 (100%)	33 (100%)	46 (100%)	10 (100%)	18 (100%)	20 (100%)

Table 4: Overall slant of stories on herdsmen-farmers clashes in *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* newspapers (Jan. – April, 2018).

Newspapers	Slants			
	Pro-herdsmen	Pro-farmers	Neutral	Total
<i>Daily Trust</i>	33	10	20	63
<i>The Nation</i>	03	46	18	67

Discussion

Findings of the study, as indicated in Tables 1 to 4, show that there is no significant difference in

the number of news reports in relation to the herdsmen-farmers clashes in both *The Nation* newspaper (67 news stories) and *Daily Trust* newspaper (63 news stories) in the four-month

period covered by this study (January through April, 2018). A plausible explanation for this is that the news stories are based on spot news breaking events common to the media and reactions to them. However, there are significant differences in the slant and prominence given to the stories which validate the influence of geographical location of a newspaper in the reportage of the herdsmen-farmers' clashes. On slant, 46 (68.6 %) of the total 67 stories by *The Nation* are pro-farmers as against three pro herdsmen, with 18 being neutral while for *Daily Trust*, 33 (52.4 %) of the total 63 stories are pro-herdsmen and 10 pro farmers and 20 neutral. *The Nation* gave more prominence to the clashes with 24 front page stories as against 12 by *Daily Trust*. Many of the reports were on the actual scenes of the physical clashes which most times result in deaths, displacement of families from their homes and communities, loss of properties, destruction of farmlands and farm produce. The reports also included statements by governments of affected states, the federal government and stakeholder groups.

The frequency of the reports in the two newspapers shows that the herdsmen- farmers' clashes in Nigeria are not under reported. The four months selected, January to April 2018 recorded the most recent violence in the herdsmen-farmers' clashes (as at the time of the study) which led to the loss of many lives, properties and the displacement of individuals and families from their homes. Comparatively, *Daily Trust* newspaper stories of the clashes did not appear to have been passionately reported as in *The Nation's* reports of the incidences. While both newspapers show affinity to their geographical location in the slant of their news reports, the *Daily Trust* is less avid than *The Nation* in terms of the stridency of tone in the news reports as well as prominence given the incidences where *The Nation* had 24 front page stories on the herdsmen-farmers clashes as against 12 by *Daily Trust*. First, from the front pages of the two newspapers, a difference can be spotted from the headlines allocated to the individual reports. For instance, on January 3rd 2018, *The Nation* reports on Benue state killings at the center-spread of the front page in large captions: "Governor sheds tears as gunmen kill 20, injure 30. Villagers flee in droves'. Killings reprehensible, says Buhari". Supporting this are pictures of villagers fleeing and a little baby wounded on his back together

with a 13 paragraph story that continues on the inside page. That same January 3rd, *Daily Trust* has this (report in its) front page headline: "20 killed in fresh Benue attack". There was no supporting front page story or picture. Although it could be said that *The Nation* newspaper was not directly victims-focused on the incidence of January 3, 2018 but the headline focus on the tears of the governor conveyed the depth of anguish for the trauma of the direct victims. Also from the use of language and construct of words, *The Nation* newspaper was quick to attribute the killings and the general loss to "suspected herdsmen". The report says "No fewer than 20 people were killed and 30 others, including children injured, by gunmen suspected to be herdsmen"; from later reports they were referred to in plain terms as herdsmen.

Daily Trust reported it differently to *The Nation* with reports like "*Daily Trust* gathered that the people (who) died in the six villages of the affected local government areas of Logo and Guma in the wake of the invasion by the gunmen on Monday and yesterday"; also after more reports, the newspaper confirmed that the gunmen were herdsmen but all through the four month span of this study, it never referred to them as herdsmen. Another finding was that *Daily Trust* newspaper was more pro-herdsmen in its reports than pro-farmers though most of the recent killings were in the Middle-Belt and Northern States of the country. *Daily Trust* reported more from the angle of the herdsmen, projecting their losses. There were very few reports which explained the cause of the clashes between farmers and herders.

Some of the news titles in the two content analyzed newspapers in a way projected the positions of the newspapers concerning the farmer-herder conflict. In *Daily Trust*, some titles projected that the newspaper was actually on the side of the herdsmen and was aiming at maintaining a good image for them. Some of the titles are "January 13, - how other Nigerians see us, by herders"; "January 15 – we lost 1000 members, 2 million cattle- pastoralist"; "January 17 – We've become target of attacks, leaders cry out"; "January 20 – Lives of real herders of Nigeria", "January 23 – Herders deserve FG's attention, subsidy"; "February 5 – Hostile media reports on herders fuel crisis- MACBAN"; "February 9 – Herder, 5 cows killed by militia in Nasarawa"; "February 12 – Don't associate with killer herdsmen – Okorocho"; "February 13 – Not all herders are killers – Edo governor";

“February 14 – 12 herdsmen killed, 14 missing in Oyo”; “February 25 – herdsmen have no grudges against South-East, says Miyetti Allah”; “February 28 – Benue crisis: set conditions for peace”. Although the content of the report may not reflect that the newspaper is actually vouching for the innocence of the Fualni herdsmen, analysis revealed that from 63 reports, *Daily Trust* leaned pro-North for nineteen times (19) and pro-herdsmen for twenty-five (25) times, making a total of 44 reports.

From *The Nation* newspaper, it can be inferred that it leaned more in support of farmers and is more into seeking the right “justice” for the victims of herdsmen rampage. From the analysis, *The Nation* newspaper had only 3 reports which can be categorized as being pro-herdsmen from its 67 reports on the conflicts in the four-month period. Just like *Daily Trust* newspaper, *The Nation* newspaper was also able to project its position from the titles of the news reports such as: “January 4 – Herdsmen have killed 24 persons in Ogun since 2000”; “January 8 – Suspected herdsmen cut farmer’s hand in Edo”; “January 11- Why herdsmen are killing our people, by governor. 55 die, 200 houses burnt in Taraba”; “January 13 – Tiv community wants killer herdsmen declared as terrorists”; “January 14 - Benue killings: we warned Buhari about looming crisis – leaders”; “January 18 – Herdsmen burn ex-naval chief’s farms in Abia community”; “January 21 – We lost 500 to herdsmen attacks in three months”; “January 23 – Herdsmen attack my farm every year”; “January 24 – Herdsmen set 150 –acre palm plantation ablaze in Oyo”; “February 6 – We have lost 32 persons to herdsmen attacks”; “February 12 - Suspected herdsmen kill farmer in Ekiti”; “February 26 – Herdsmen still destroying our crops and houses”; “March 21 – Middle Belt Forum seeks declaration of herdsmen as terrorist group”.

Beyond the title of the news reports, the contents of the reports also reveal to some extent the side each newspaper leans. Some of *The Nation*’s news contents which are suggestive of its pro-farmers’ leaning include the following: “January 4th - Suspected herdsmen have killed 24 persons, injured scores of others and destroyed crops estimated at millions of naira in series of attacks on 13 communities in Ogun...”; “January 8 – Jerome was said to have been attacked at his farm after he refused to give food to five herdsmen”;

“January 11 – Killer-herdsmen have extended their bloody campaign to Taraba State killing 55 people... About 200 homes and huge piles of food stuff were destroyed. Many people are missing in the attacks...”; “January 20 – the killings by herdsmen in some parts of the country is more than the feud between farmers and cattle pastoralists”; “February 5 - ... the herdsmen have proved to be deadly and incapable of co-habiting with their host community amid shortage of farmlands...”; “February 26 – We hope our hospitality will not be abused by the herdsmen. They complain that people tamper with their cows...”; “March 7 - ...the entire Oke-Ogun region has threatened to abandon farming since/ the authorities have failed to stop the activities of the herdsmen who destroy their produce”; “April 3 – communities... have been deserted after herdsmen invaded the area. The herdsmen allegedly came with their cattle and grazed them on the farms”

Daily Trust newspaper also have reports that can be interpreted as being defensive of the herdsmen and justification of their actions. On January 15; *Daily Trust* reports on herdsmen also lamenting about their losses. It reports: “Pastoralists, under the aegis of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), said they have lost over 1000 people including children, women and the aged and over two million cattle. The National Secretary of MACBAN, Alhaji Baba Ngelzarma, who spoke on behalf of the pastoralists, also appealed to the Federal Government to pay compensation to their members affected by the crisis”. On January 17, it also reports that “...Salihu has alleged attacks on herders in his domain, saying their cows are being killed on a daily basis. Salihu said in an interview with *Daily Trust* that herders had become targets of attacks in view of recent killings attributed to herders in some parts of the country. Salihu said, “People now see us as enemies. We are being stigmatized as if we are common criminals.” He said cattle breeders in his domain were losing their cows every day from poisonous substances dumped on grazing areas”. Also on February 5, *Daily Trust* reports that “Nasarawa State branch of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) has blamed the media for hostile reports against herders, saying these are some of the factors fuelling the crisis. He said the style of biased and demonic media reportage of

the current farmers, herders' conflict by tagging all herders as criminals is responsible for the escalation of the crisis. Hussaini said some of these media reports expose herders to hatred because the media has now painted herders as criminals". In addition to this is its February 28 report on the setting conditions for peace – "Members of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, a socio-cultural association yesterday gave three conditions for peace in Benue State... It was gathered that the group told the panel that only a repeal of the anti-grazing law enacted by the Benue State House of Assembly would restore peace to the state".

Some of the reports actually project the herdsman-farmers clashes as having to do with ethnic cleansing, religious or even political agenda. As an example, on March 21, 2018, herdsman were asked to be declared as terrorist group by the Middle Belt Forum in *The Nation* newspaper saying "... willful program by the way of ethnic cleaning by the "foreign" herdsman just to enable them wipe off all nationalities from their ancestral land. For if it is not ethnic cleansing, what do we make of unprovoked night marauders attacking our sleeping villagers at midnight by setting their houses ablaze. Shooting down occupants, whether male, women and children fleeing for dear life..." Also April 12, President Buhari said "irresponsible politics have been brought into the farmers/herders crisis".

The reports on the Federal Government intervention generally fall under the category of neutral reports indicating that the government apparently wanted to avoid a situation of being seen as obviously biased in favour of one group in the conflict. Even in the reports by the two newspapers, minimal focus was given to the stance of the federal government with more reports on the masses calling out to the government to help solve the issue of looming anarchy and unrest in the country.

Relating the above discussion to the Agenda-setting theory adopted for this research, geographical location of a newspaper house within the home territory of a party in a conflict, coupled with ownership of such media being native to that geographical zone seem to apparently engender affinity and empathy that affect news selection judgement and treatment in favour of the local-ethnic group. By such partisan, slanted reporting, the two newspapers are trying to set agenda for the public on what to think about the parties in the conflict, with a

view to engendering a favourable public perception for their respective local groups. *Daily Trust* newspaper and *The Nation* newspapers' reports focused on whatever they find important. Whatever information they disseminate is a reflection of what members of the public will eventually consider as important and credible. *Daily Trust* leaning in favour of the North's herdsman and *The Nation* in favour of farmers, largely Southern-based highlight the geographical dichotomy in reportage of the contentious issue of the herdsman-farmers clashes. Geographical location of a newspaper is linked to the audience factor which is a critical factor in news selection, treatment and slant. Contiguity and convergence of a newspaper geographical location and its primary audience establishes proximity, a major factor in news determinant, and engender a correlation of interests that predisposes a media establishment to a party within its audience frame. This can be deduced as explaining the positions of the *Daily Trust* being pro Herdsman and by extension The North, given that its primary audience and circulation catchment area are in the North, while pro-farmers *The Nation* newspaper, south-based, though regarded as a national newspaper has its subscriber base mainly in the South. Following on these factors of geographical location and audience affinity for both newspapers, *The Nation* newspaper, understandably seeks to set a pro-farmers, pro-South agenda in its reportage of the farmers- herders clashes, portraying the farmers as victims, while the *Daily Trust* newspaper set a pro-herdsman agenda, projecting the herdsman as misunderstood and misrepresented victims who have suffered huge losses.

As noted by Adebayo (2015), it could be somewhat inferred that truly the media sometime stands as a profession that imposes biased and distorted points of view, considering that the two newspapers reported the same events but from different perspectives. The findings of this study corroborates the position of Ado-Kurawa (2001) who notes that the Southern Nigeria based newspapers are seen as pro-south and anti-north as the slants from this study reveal that *The Nation* newspaper had only 3 reports out of 67 news reports that could be-projected as pro-herdsman, and by extension anti-North . However, the findings do not support his assertion that Southern media's reportage is not only anti North, but anti Islam,

considering that *The Nation* newspaper is owned by a southern Muslim.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that *The Nation* newspaper gave more attention to the herdsmen-farmers conflict with more stories published (67 reports) than the *Daily Trust* (63 reports). Table 4 on the slants in the two newspapers' reports reveal that *The Nation*, with 46 pro-farmers' stories, leans more heavily in favour of the Southern farmers as they are usually portrayed as the victims in the conflicts, while *Daily Trust* newspaper, with 33 pro-herdsmen stories, leans more in favour of the herdsmen who it tries to project as victims of propaganda by a perceived hostile southern press. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is the pre-eminence of a geographical North-South divide as a significant factor in the position of the two newspapers in their reportage of and leanings on the herdsmen-farmers' conflict as other causal factors like ethnicity, religion and politics are geographically delineated.

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