



Newspaper Framing of Herdsmen and Farmers Crises in Benue and Plateau States

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Abstract

The study looked at how newspapers framed the herdsmen and farmer crises in Nigeria's Plateau and Benue states. It included discussion of how the media covered the situation. The theory adopted for the discourse of this study is the agenda setting, which states that media sets agenda for the audience, regarding contemporary developments in the society. The method of research used was content analysis. According to results, January was featured as the most prominent month in covering the crises, and the reports stated that the news reports were more framed towards criminality in Plateau and Benue States. According to the result, newspaper houses should pay more attention in making sure farmers and herders' crises in Benue and Plateau becomes more prominent.

Keywords: Herders, Farmers, Crises, Newspapers, Framing.

Introduction

Mass media are very vital in the progression of events in any society. Mass media are referred to as the various system of modern communication that makes information consumption possible. They are Newspapers, Magazines, Books (which are categorized as print media) while Television, Radio, Film or Cinema (are electronic media). The role played by the media in dissemination of news and information is of paramount influence on those communities at the receiving end. Therefore, it is particularly important to note that the mass media have a huge role to play in influencing these ongoing crises around the world especially in places like Nigeria (Remoortere & Vliegthart, 2023). In discussing the role media play in crisis, media is stated to be double edged this was in the context of media reportage and its influential role in the Kenya election coverage and the post crisis of the years 2007 and 2008 (Mougin, 2024). Community media played a crucial role in the escalation of the crisis, while the mainstream nation-wide media stations played the de-escalation role in the crisis. Nasser (2024) discussed that in recent times, revolutionary crisis had started in United States of America, over the killing of Blacks by police brutality, this was awakened by a live video coverage of a policeman kneeling on George Floyd's neck till he gave up the ghost saying, "I can't breathe". This video shared globally through the social media provoked the review against social injustice and became a global recognized crisis. The global village became influenced to protest police brutality and other social crimes such as rape, that had become increased during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This is a pointer that Marshall McLuhan's theory of a global village is almost actualized in this era and media with the powerful agenda setting function therefore cannot be disregarded, when managing a nationwide crisis. The crisis has not had sufficient prominence as a national crisis in the newspaper's reportage. This could infer that herders / farmers crisis keeps escalating because news stories on herders/ farmers crises have not been rightly represented as presently framed by newspapers. This is because mass media including newspaper reportage framing influences the meaning derived by the audience and policy makers which is proportionate to their reactions and eventually lead to the decisions the policy makers and audience take thereafter (Odunlami & Oyeranmi, 2020).

An Insight into the Concept of Newspaper Coverage

Idogun (2018) explained a medium as a route or channel through which information about any concerns which could be health, education, politics and so much more is passed to an audience. The audience may be just an individual through a phone call, a text message or e-mail. The audience may be more, large, or small group of people. In that case, the medium may be a micro-phone, radio television or a printing press. Media can be divided into two forms, the broadcast and print media. The print media can be listed to include newspapers, bulletin, books, tabloid, and magazines.



Furthermore, these prints can be used to reach a wide variety of audience despite cultural, philosophical, or psychological individual differences. This is because prints can be written in different contexts and reaches the needed audience. There are available prints in diverse languages all over the world they are also available prints designed for the need of specific individuals. A newspaper is described as a publication that contains information about current happenings recorded in the society. It is a printed publication that is periodical, produced at intervals of days, weeks, weekends or even monthly. Newspapers can be easily afforded by an average individual in the society. It is printed on a paper, known as newsprint (Idogun, 2018).

Theoretical Framework: Agenda Setting Theory

Babatunde (1998) refers to agenda setting theory as a theory that implies that the mass media “pre- determine what issues are important at what issues are important at given time in a given society. It does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we think; but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about. The media sets agenda using health campaigns, political campaigns and so on. In describing Agenda Setting theory, some elements involved in agenda – setting were listed to include the quantity or frequency of reporting, prominence given to news and programs, the degree of conflict generated in the reports and cumulative media-specific effects over time. Valdeon (2023) in discussing the initiation and history of agenda setting theory stated that most times the society does not directly deal with their environments as much as they respond to images in their heads. This is so, because the environment and the issues in it are too complex, to have a direct acquaintance. There are so many ideas and information in the society the role of the media is show in a way, which should be viewed as dominant. The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion, it also is more influential in determining what the readers think about. The theory in a vivid manner explains the role of media in setting agenda for the public. It reveals states that the behavior of the society to the crisis is not to the “environment as it actually exists but to the environment as they think it exists” (Valdeon, 2023). This theory states that though many times in our society issues arise and a couple of those issues maybe prevalent, the media plays a key role in prioritizing one over the others.

In discussing the role of media in crisis, another example is the media’s coverage of the abduction of 276 secondary school girls from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State and the “Bring Back Our Girls Campaign “which encouraged the campaigners to protest the government inadequate attempts in the release of the girls back to their parents (Jibril 2017; Okunna & Popoola, 2017). This demonstrates to a large extent how media coverage of a crisis in a community may have a significant impact. As a result, this study aims to explore the newspapers framing of the herdsmen and farmer crises in Nigeria's Plateau and Benue states.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the level of prominence given to the farmers/herder’s crisis in Benue and Plateau States by the selected newspapers?
2. Assess the context of selected newspapers reports on the farmers/herder’s crisis in Benue, and Plateau States?

Research Questions

3. What level of prominence is given to the farmers/herder’s crisis in Benue and Plateau States by the selected newspapers?
4. What is the context of selected newspapers reports on the farmers/herder’s crisis in Benue, and Plateau States?

Methodology

The multistage sampling technique will be adopted. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting, *Daily Trust* newspaper situated in the northern region of Nigeria, while *The Nation* and *The Punch* newspapers represent the south, these three newspapers were used in the study because they are nationally wide read newspapers. In the interval of six months, the stratified method was used in selecting the issues produced every day of every week which will represent the sample of the total 540 issues of the study. This study, 26 issues will be conveniently selected for the analysis from each of the newspapers, making a total of (78) issues for the sample of this study.

Results

Research Question 1

What level of prominence is given to the farmers/herder’s crisis in Benue and Plateau States by the selected newspapers?

Table 1: Content Analysis based on month of Newspaper reviewed

Variables	Punch (n = 74)		Nation (n = 71)		Daily Trust (n = 52)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
January	14	18.9	15	21.1	13	25.0
February	20	27.0	13	18.3	9	17.3
March	15	20.3	11	15.5	7	13.5
April	6	8.1	13	18.3	11	21.2
May	8	10.8	9	12.7	7	13.5
June	11	14.9	10	14.1	5	9.6

Source: Field Survey, 2021

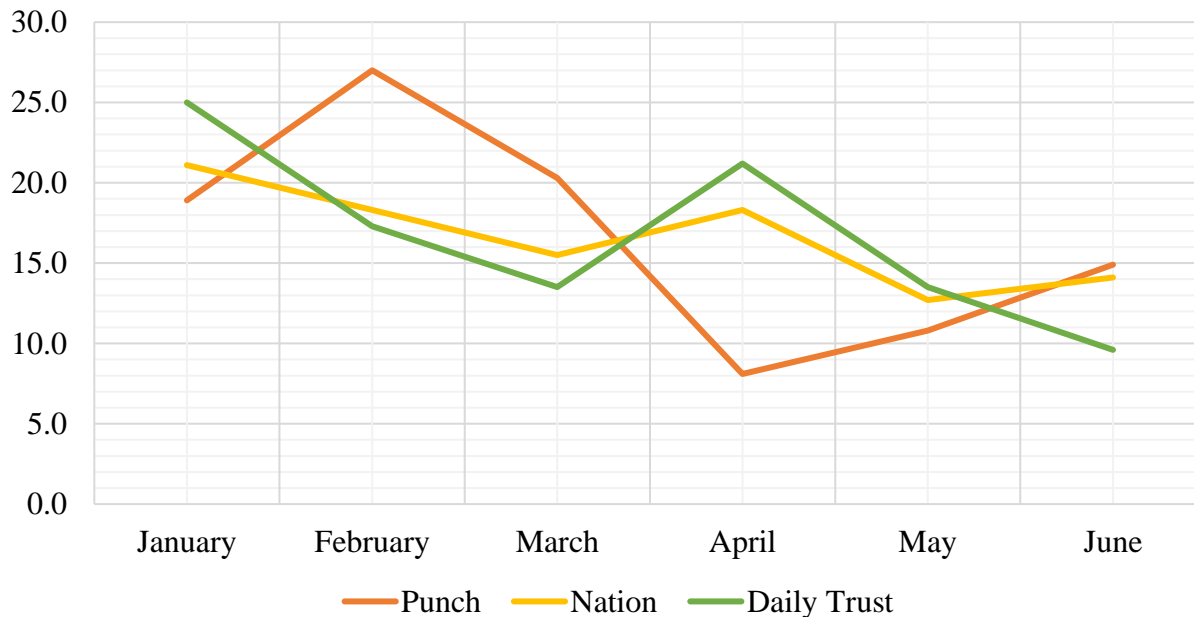


Figure 1: Coverage of the Herders-Farmers Crisis across the selected Months

Table 1 and Figure 1, respectively revealed the results of the three Newspapers reviewed for this study, namely: *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Daily Trust* from January 1, 2018 to June 30, 2018. Based on the trend of coverage, *The Punch* had the highest number of Newspaper’s contents reviewed on herders and farmers crisis in the month of February (n = 20, 27.0%), followed by month of March (n = 15, 20.3%) and month of January (n = 14, 18.9%). Also, *The Nation* had the highest number of Newspaper’s contents reviewed on herders and farmers crisis in the month of January (n = 15, 21.1%), followed by month of February and April (n = 13, 18.3%), while *Daily Trust* had the highest number of Newspaper’s contents reviewed on herders and farmers crisis in the month of January (n = 13, 25.0%), followed by month of April (n = 11, 21.2%) and month of February (n = 9, 17.3%).

Research Question 2

What is the context of selected newspapers reports on the farmers/herder’s crisis in Benue, and Plateau States?

Table 2: Content Analysis based on frame of Newspaper story

Variables	Punch (n = 74)		Nation (n = 71)		Daily Trust (n = 52)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Conflict frame	3	4.1	6	8.5	12	23.1
Criminality frame	28	37.8	25	35.2	14	26.9
Human interest frame	4	5.4	1	1.4	-	-
Religious frame	3	4.1	1	1.4	-	-
Ethnic frame	6	8.1	7	9.9	9	17.3
Political response frame	8	10.8	16	22.5	2	3.8
Economic consequence frame	3	4.1	1	1.4	1	1.9
Resolution frame	16	21.6	14	19.7	14	26.9
Not Applicable	3	4.1	-	-	-	-

Source: Field Survey, 2021

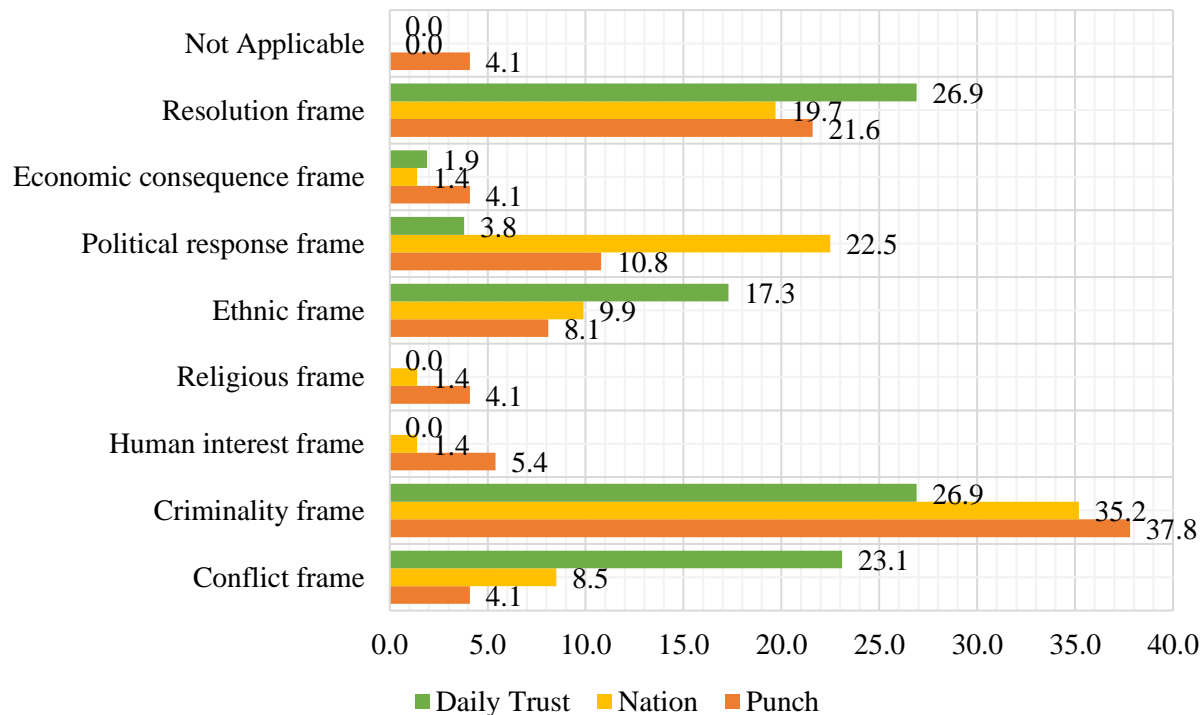


Figure 2: Frame of newspaper on herders-farmers crisis

Table 2 and Figure 2.1 revealed the frame of news reports on the herders-farmers crisis across the selected newspapers. Criminality frame of reporting herders – farmers crisis is ranked topmost as indicated by *The Punch* (n = 28, 37.8%), *The Nation* (n = 25, 35.2%) and *Daily Trust* (n = 14, 26.9%). This perspective of reporting herders –

farmers crisis such as killings, attacks, abductions, rapes, robberies and other criminal acts committed by any of the conflict parties could be one-sided and it is more prominence with *The Punch* as compared to other newspapers. The second frame of reporting herders – farmers crisis is the *Resolution frame* as indicated by *The Punch* (n = 16, 21.6%), *The Nation* (n = 14, 19.7%) and *Daily Trust* (n = 14, 26.9%). On the other hand, *Resolution frame* is another perspective of reporting herder – farmers crisis that resolution focus on peace efforts or advocacy for a resolution of the herder-farmer conflict and it is prominence with *Daily Trust* as compared to other newspapers. More so, *Political response* frame was used in reporting herder – farmers crisis as indicated by *The Punch* (n = 8, 10.8%), *The Nation* (n = 16, 22.5%) and *Daily Trust* (n = 2, 3.8%) which is prominence with *The Nation* newspaper. This is followed by *Ethnic frame* as indicated by *The Punch* (n = 6, 8.1%), *The Nation* (n = 7, 9.9%) and *Daily Trust* (n = 9, 17.3%) but prominence with *Daily Trust*. Another important frame is the conflict frame of reporting as indicated by *The Punch* (n = 3, 4.1%), *The Nation* (n = 6, 8.5%) and *Daily Trust* (n = 12, 23.1%) which is prominence with *Daily Trust*.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question which sought to examine the level of prominence given to the farmers and herders crisis in Benue, Plateau States by selected newspapers reveals that the month of January and February had ranked in the 25% as reported in *Punch* Newspaper, while the *Daily Trust* ranked 25% in the reports that were published. That shows January as the most prevalent in terms with the farmers/ herders' crisis in Benue and Plateau States. In studying the trends of the farmers/herders crises in Nigeria, especially in Benue and Plateau states, in the year 2015, prominence was higher between September and October, while in 2016, it was between March and June (Olomjobi & Ajilore, 2021).

The second research question, which assessed the context of selected newspapers reports on the crisis in Benue and Plateau States found that, at 37.8 % news stories were reported with elements of killings, rapes, robberies and so forth, which made the criminality frame ranked highest as stated by the *Punch* Newspaper, this was in line with the results from researchers such as Olomjobi and Ajilore (2021) where the *Guardian* Newspaper reported the criminality frame as the highest.

Conclusion

The study recommends that newspaper reportage of the farmers and herders' crisis in both Benue and Plateau States need to become more prominent as it was discovered in the findings that the most prominent month was January. This is because the agenda setting function theory of which the study is theorized upon, states that media provides the topic of discourse in any society, even in crises. The media's role to report more frequently can therefore determine the agenda it sets for the society at any time. Since the criminality frame was featured most, it is important to note that the trend of discussing the crises said to be earlier caused by loss of food crops and cattle might have changed, as killings of individuals and other criminal elements are now being featured. The study concludes that media reportage on farmers' and herders' crises in Benue and Plateau States needs more prominence and also government needs to take up law with the perpetrators which could further put an end to the crises.

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