Public Perception of *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* Newspapers' Framing and Use of News Sources on Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract

The recurrence of farmers-herders' conflict in Nigeria with significant implications on security and socio-economic lives of the people had made it a center of attraction to the media. Meanwhile there were lots of media studies that employed content analysis method to examine how Nigerian newspapers employ conflict-escalating frames and exhibit partisan biases in their coverage. However, there is a dearth of research directly linking these journalistic practices to how the audience, particularly in the conflict zone states of Nigeria perceive how Nigerian dailies frame and use news sources on the conflict. The study anchored on framing and media indexing theories, employed survey method to examine how the public perceive the framing and use of news sources by four Nigerian dailies namely; *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *Leadership* and *Vanguard* newspapers. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques were used to sample hundred newspaper readers from ten conflict zone states in Nigeria. The key findings of the study revealed that the respondents rated the level of credibility and objectivity of the four newspapers a little above average with *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* in the lead position. This means that the respondents have a good level of trust and confidence in the contents of the newspapers. The newspapers mostly rely more on their own correspondents' narrations on the conflict to the detriment of key stakeholders in the conflict like the farmers, herders, eyewitness/victims and security personnel among others. The *Vanguard* among the four newspapers was in the lead position in giving issues on the conflict political colouration through its frames and also qualifying the conflict as acts of terrorism/militancy, while *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers paid more attention to preaching for peace and offering of recommendations. *The Guardian* newspaper did more of qualifying the conflict as militancy activities and inter-ethnic crisis. The study recommended that the newspapers should not politicize issues in the conflict or label any stakeholder in the conflict as criminal, killer, or murderer as doing so cannot only escalate the conflict but also threaten the conflict resolution efforts.

Keywords: Public Perception; Conflict zone states; Nigerian Newspapers; News framing; News sources;

Introduction

The persistent and often violent farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has become one of the most critical challenges to the nation's peace, security and socio-economic

stability. Originating from historical competition over land and water resources, the conflict has intensified over the past two decades, exacerbated by a confluence of factors including climate change, desertification, population growth, weak governance and the proliferation of small arms. What was once primarily an issue of ecological competition has increasingly taken on ethnic and religious dimensions, leading to a complex crisis that has resulted in a devastating loss of life, displacement of communities and disruption of food systems across the country.

In this volatile environment, the media play a pivotal role. As the primary source of information for the public, newspapers, in particular, hold immense power in shaping public perception, influencing public discourse and either escalating or de-escalating the conflict. The way a newspaper frames an issue—that is, how it selects and emphasizes certain aspects of a story while downplaying others—can significantly impact how its readership understands the problem, assigns blame and perceives potential solutions. In a country as diverse and polarized as Nigeria, with its distinct regional, ethnic and religious divides, the framing of a sensitive issue like the farmer-herder conflict is not a neutral act.

This study is premised on the understanding that the media, far from being a simple conduit for information, actively constructs the reality of the farmer-herder conflict for its audience. Specifically, it seeks to explore this phenomenon through the lens of four prominent Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *Vanguard* and *The Guardian*. These newspapers are strategically chosen for their geographical and historical backgrounds, which may influence their editorial perspectives. *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* have a strong Northern Nigerian base, while *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* are traditionally associated with the Southern part of the country. This regional dichotomy provides a valuable framework for investigating potential variations in framing, source selection and narrative construction.

This research delves into how these newspapers frame the conflict, what voices and perspectives they prioritize and ultimately, how their readers perceive the objectivity of their reporting. By analyzing the dominant frames, narratives and linguistic choices and examining the selection and utilization of news sources, this study will move beyond a simple content analysis. It will rather assess the audience's perception of objectivity, offering a comprehensive look at the intricate relationship between media production, media content and audience reception.

Previous studies on media coverage of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria have largely focused on content analysis, revealing that newspaper reports often employ conflict-escalating frames, rely on political and official sources and sometimes display a regional or ethnic bias. However, a significant gap remains in understanding the reception side of this equation. While we know what journalists are publishing, we have limited knowledge of how the readership, with their own diverse backgrounds and biases, actually perceives and processes this information. The ideal of journalistic objectivity is a cornerstone of professional media, yet its realization is often subjective and varies widely depending on the audience's perspective.

This research, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by examining reader perception. This will involve investigating the readerships of these newspapers to "ascertain the perceived level of objectivity" and "examine the perceived effects of bias in the selection and utilization of news sources" as outlined in the research objectives.

The study delineates its boundaries and the specific areas it will cover. Geographically, it primarily focused on ten farmer-herder conflict zone states in Nigeria which according to the reports of the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2019) and Ishaq (2018) are the hotspots of the conflict. These states are Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Adamawa, Borno, Zamfara and Katsina. The study specifically examined the public perception of four prominent Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *Vanguard* and *The Guardian*. These newspapers were selected due to their national reach, diverse regional influence (North and South) and their significant role in shaping public discourse on national issues.

The findings of this research will not only contribute to the academic discourse on media and conflict in Africa but also provide critical insights for journalists, policymakers and peace-building organizations on the role of responsible and conflict-sensitive reporting in a deeply divided society.

Statement of the Problem

The protracted farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria presents a complex and evolving challenge to national security, socioeconomic stability and inter-communal harmony (Tenuche & Ifatimehim, 2009; Gefu & Kolawale, 2005). As key purveyors of public information, *Daily Trust, Leadership, Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers play a significant role in shaping public discourse and

understanding of this conflict. While existing literature has explored aspects of media framing and reportage of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria (e.g., Utom et al., 2025; Odiegwu-Enwerem et al., 2022; Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017), a critical gap remains in comprehensively understanding the public's perception regarding the nature of this framing and the various of news source selected and used by the newspapers in the conflict news reports.

Specifically, while studies have identified that Nigerian newspapers often employ conflict-escalating frames and may exhibit partisan biases in their coverage (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Utom et al., 2025) and that media ownership can shape reporting (Akinfeleye, 2011; Abati, 2000), there is a dearth of research directly linking these journalistic practices to how the audience, particularly in the conflict zone states of Nigeria perceive the fairness and balance of the reporting. Furthermore, although studies acknowledge the media's influence on public opinion (; Uroegbulam et al., 2024; Owolabi, 2019) and the importance of source credibility (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaona, 2017), the specific patterns of news source selection by these newspapers in farmer-herder conflict reporting and the perceived effects of any resulting bias on public trust and opinion formation, remain inadequately explored. The following research objectives will therefore guide this study:

1. To determine the public's perception of the level of objectivity in the framing of farmer-herder conflict by *Daily Trust, Leadership, Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers.
2. To identify public perception of the types and most cited news sources in the conflict reports by the newspapers.
3. To examine the public view of the most dominant narratives or frames employed by the newspapers in their reportage of the conflict.
4. To determine the perceived effects of bias in the selection and utilization of news sources in the conflict reports by the newspapers.

Literature Review

Public Perception of Newspapers' Framing of Conflict

Berelson and Steiner (1964) defined perception as a complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into meaningful and coherent picture of the world. This means that different people are likely to react to same message in very different ways. Thus, media should not always assume that a message will have the intended meaning for all receivers. In the context of this study, public perception connotes the people's attitudes, believes, knowledge,

opinion or views on newspapers use of news frames and news sources on farmers-herders' conflict reporters.

Newspaper as a channel through which information (for instance, conflict related issues) is passed to the public is considered as one of the key elements that conditioned public perceptions, others being the nature of the public and message. Public perception can be influenced by the way and manner which a newspaper package and report an information. This is because audience for instance, rely on the media to make informed decisions about issues on a conflict. The media have the power to influence audiences through agenda setting and framing. On one hand, agenda-setting postulates that the media can influence what the people think about through the editors and the journalists' choice of topics to cover and the aspects to emphasize on. On the other hand, framing is the other way in which media influence people.

Frames as noted by Entman (1993) are used by the media to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation. Otieno, Spade Renki (2013) discovered that framing draws attention to relevant aspects of information while distracting it away from other equally relevant aspects. Unlike agenda-setting which is about choosing what to tell the audience, framing is about how to tell that which has been chosen. The media mostly succeed by often presenting information that emphasizes what they believe their audiences want to hear. It means rather than reporting how the general public feels about certain issues, the media often consider reporting opinions along group lines.

Scheufele (1999) observed that studies on framing have shown that the way in which a conflict is framed can influence public opinion, believe, attitudes and behaviours. Patrick (2023) discovered that public perception and reaction to news is a product of the journalistic news frame. This therefore means studying public perception on the framing of farmers-herders' conflict is not only important but necessary as noted by Entman (1993) that it discloses how different stakeholders and audiences analyse, interpret and understand the conflict and issues around it.

Public perception of the framing of farmers-herders' conflict can have impact on policy decisions as well as conflict management and resolution efforts (Gamson, 1992). This was further corroborated by Katz (2009) who explains that by understanding the perception of the public on farmers-herders' conflict, policymakers and even stakeholders can develop effective communication

strategies to manage the conflict. Hall (1982) had earlier emphasized the significance of studying public perception of conflict framing in revealing power dynamics and ideological biases in media representation. The knowledge on public perception of conflict framing as noted by Hackett (2011), can promote fairness and more balanced reporting which is key to public enlightenment and conflict resolution. Furthermore, Ash (2017) reported that investigating public perception of conflict framing can help promote media literacy education and enhance critical thinking skills which is necessary for audience analysis and evaluation of media messages for informed decision making.

Public Perception of Newspapers' Use of News Sources

Studying what public perceived about newspapers' use of news sources on farmers-herders' conflict is equally important. As noted by Metzger (2007) that public perception of newspapers' use of news sources on conflict reports helps to reveal how audience perceive and evaluate the credibility and reliability of news sources. And the audiences' perceptions of news sources' credibility influence their attitudes and beliefs about the conflict (Kohring, 2004).

Moreso, the public perception of the use of news sources on conflict reports can have an impact on the audience level of trust, confidence and legitimacy of a new organization (Ladd, 2011). Kovach (2001) concluded that a good understanding of how the public perceive the use of news sources in conflict reports can help to improve a newspaper's reporting activities and improve their credibility. It can also help to reveal imbalances and biases in reporting and thereby promote the use of more diverse and inclusive representation of stakeholders (Hackett, 2011). Using more diverse and inclusive representation of stakeholders in conflict reports as observed by Galtung (1998), is important particularly in reports like that of farmers-herders' conflict.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on media framing theory and media indexing theory. Media framing theory was first used by Goffman in 1974. The argument of framing is that the use or choice of words, phrases, statements or rhetorical devices by the mass media to report particular events can go a long way in not only affecting the transformation of the event but also shaping the opinions of the audience. Zilman (1994) citing Lippman (1922) notes that it is the media that sketch most of the pictures people have in their heads. That is to say, the way we perceive events is as a result of the way the media present them to us. would perceive or view the conflict. Meanwhile, Bruggermann (2014) notes that news

framing does not only emanate from the media alone but also from news source. The framing theory therefore, is relevant to serve as the theoretical underpinning of this study as it will explain the public perception of how the selected newspapers frame issues on the conflict.

Media indexing theory explains the norms used by news media organizations to select news sources and frame. Bennett (2015) notes that journalists in various national press systems rely on established norms that implicitly filter or "index" the sources and viewpoints in the news according to perceived power balances among factions in the society. This definition follows from the first appearance of the term in a study by Bennett (1990). The theory argues that the media reflect and index the dominant views or narratives and those in power position. It also argues that the media, by concentrating on one-sided sources may deny the public the opportunity to weigh the claims and argument of those arguing both for and against a controversial issue. This by implications means the voices of a group may tend to be marginalized and that of others overemphasized by the media. In the context of this study, the theory is adopted to explain public perception on how the newspapers select the news sources they quote in their reports on farmers/herdsmen conflict.

Research Method

Quantitative survey method was specifically adopted for the study which Fowler (2009) describes as a method that provides quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population using a questionnaire or a structured interview for data collection. More specifically, cross-sectional survey was adopted in conducting the study to elicit the views, opinion and attitude of the public in the selected conflict zone states. The study engaged the population of newspaper readers in the conflict zone states.

Purposive sampling was used to select ten conflict zone states, namely: Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Adamawa, Borno, Zamfara and Katsina states. Cluster sampling technique was used to locate newspaper readers in radio and television stations, newspaper newsstands/vendors as well as public or institutional libraries all within the identified conflict zone states. This sampling technique is suitable because groups of newspaper readers are usually found in the identified locations.

Purposive sampling was also used to select ten newspaper readers from each of the states. Among the qualities considered in selecting the newspaper readers who served as the participants in the survey include whether the potential respondents

read the chosen newspapers, particularly the news sections of the newspapers. This type of technique involves the deliberate selection of respondents non-randomly. Ten newspaper readers were selected from each of the ten identified conflict zone states. Thus, a total of one hundred (100) respondents were used for the survey. Questionnaire was used as the study instrument.

To test the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted. A test-retest method of measuring reliability was used. The responses were then collated, scored and computed using the Pearson product moment. The reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained which implies a high level of consistency and reliability.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

A total of one-hundred copies of questionnaire were administered in which ninety-seven (97) copies which is equivalent to 97% were returned valid.

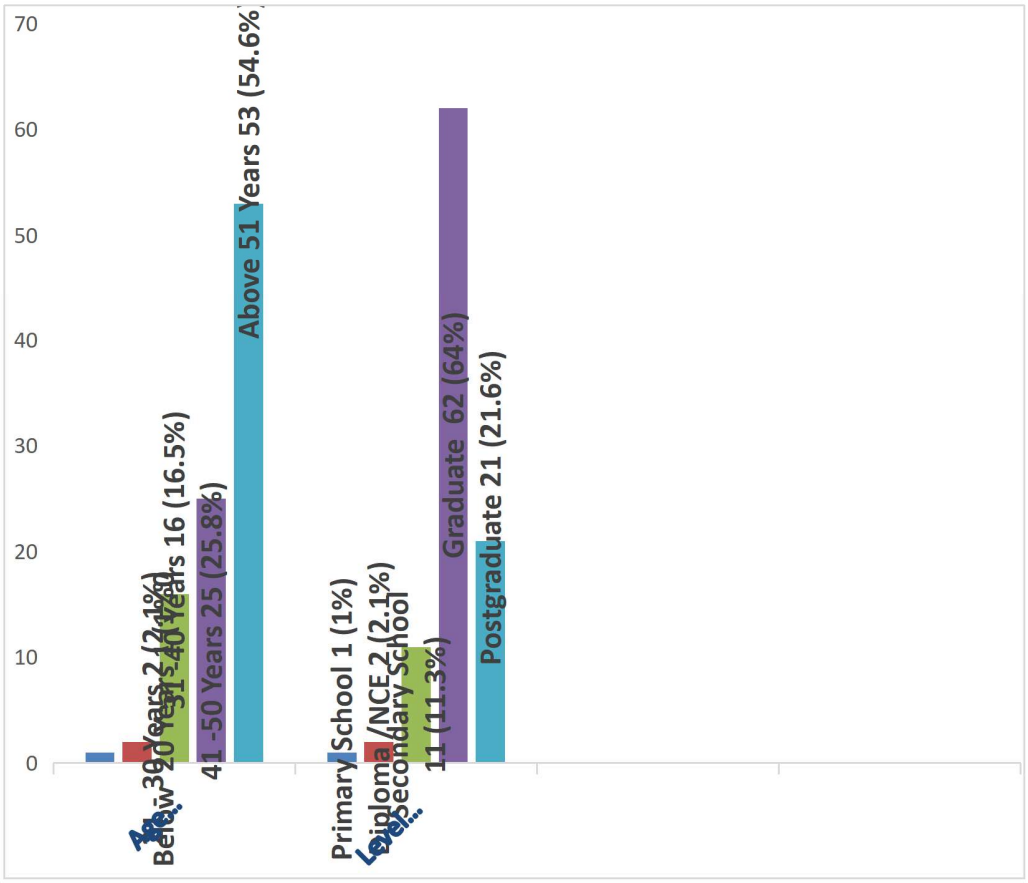

Figure 1: Demographic Data of the Respondents

The data presented in figure.1 shows that some percentages of the respondents represented by 54% and 25.8% are above the ages of 51 years and from the ages of 40 – 50 years respectively. This means that majority of the respondents are within the age category of matured adults and coincidentally they all have a degree qualification. This therefore implies that the respondents are matured, educated and responsible enough to understand and make reasoned decisions on issues happening in the society.

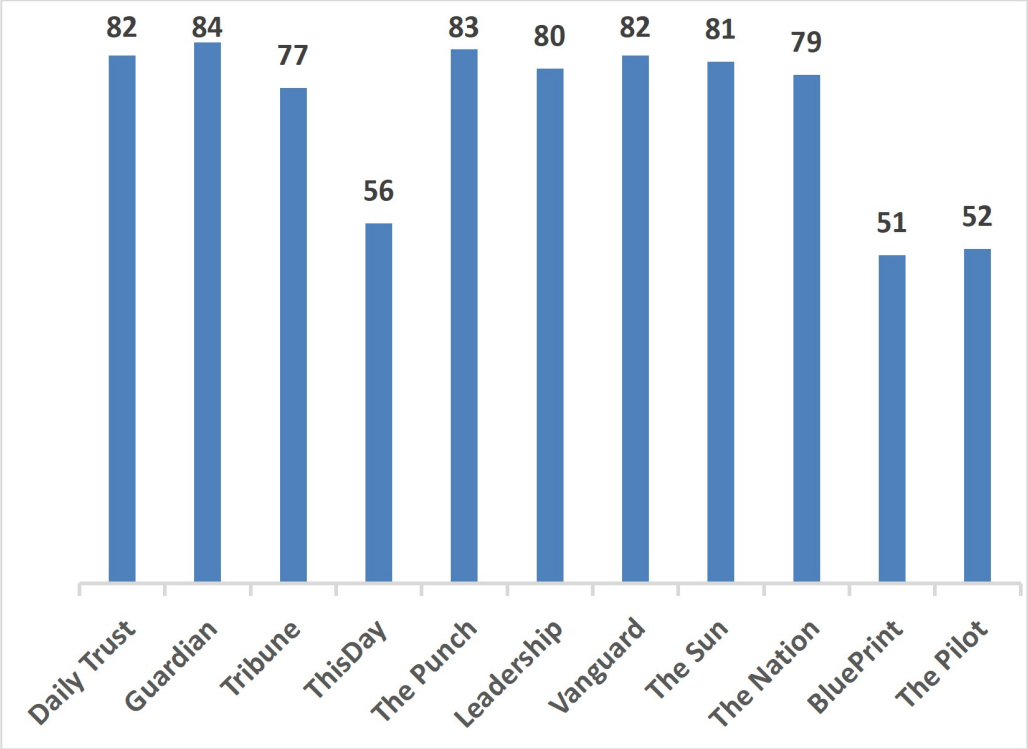

Figure 2: List of National Newspapers the Respondents have interest in

The data in figure 2. shows that all the respondents had at least a minimum of above 50% level of interest in the majority of Nigerian national dailies. For instance, 84% of the respondents said they had interest in *The Guardian* newspaper, 83% had interest in *The Punch*, 82% had interest in *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers respectively. Similarly, 81% had interest in *The Sun,* 80% had interest in *Leadership*, 79% in *The Nation*, 77% in *Tribune,* 56% in *ThisDay*,

52% in *Pilot* and 51% *Blueprint*. It can therefore be inferred from the data that the sample of newspapers used in this study fall within the category of newspapers with the highest percentage of interest.

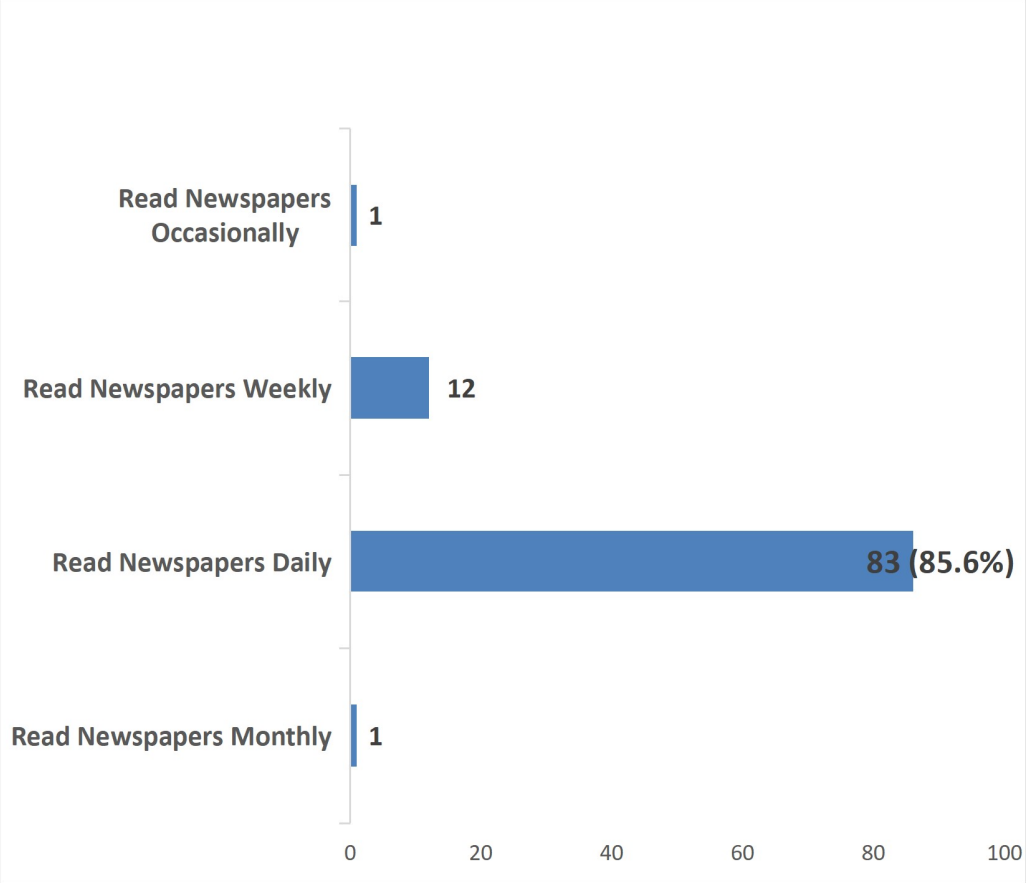

Figure 3: Frequency of Reading Newspapers by the Respondents

Figure 3 shows that majority of the respondents represented by 83 (85.6%) read newspapers on daily bases, 12 (12.4%) read on weekly bases and only 1 (1%) said they read newspapers monthly or occasionally. This means that almost all the respondents read newspapers every day and this makes them up to date on issues reported by newspapers.

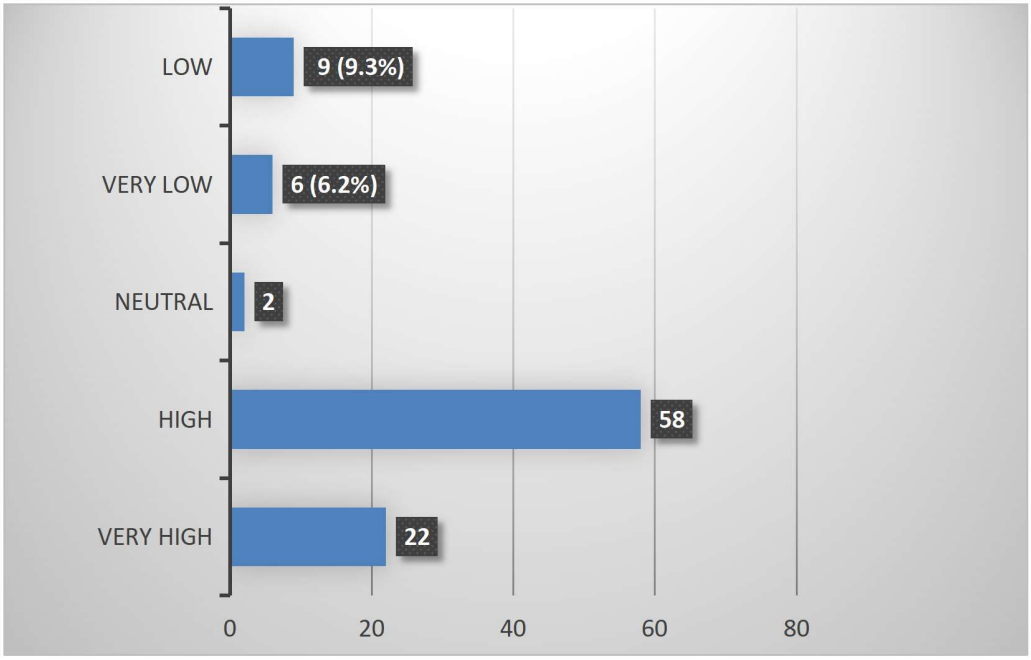

Figure 4: Respondents' Level of interest on Farmers-herders Conflict News stories

Figure 4 shows the respondents reaction on their level of interest in news stories on farmers-herders' conflict. The data revealed a varying level of interest in news stories on farmers-herders' conflict. It shows that almost all the respondents have interest in news stories on the conflict except 2 (2%) respondents who sat on the fence. Those who have very high and high level of interest were represented by 59.8% and 22.7%, while those with very low and low levels of interest were represented by only 6.2% and 9.3% respectively. This means a larger majority of the respondents had interest in news stories on the conflict and therefore they will be able to share their views on issues related to the media reportage of the conflict.

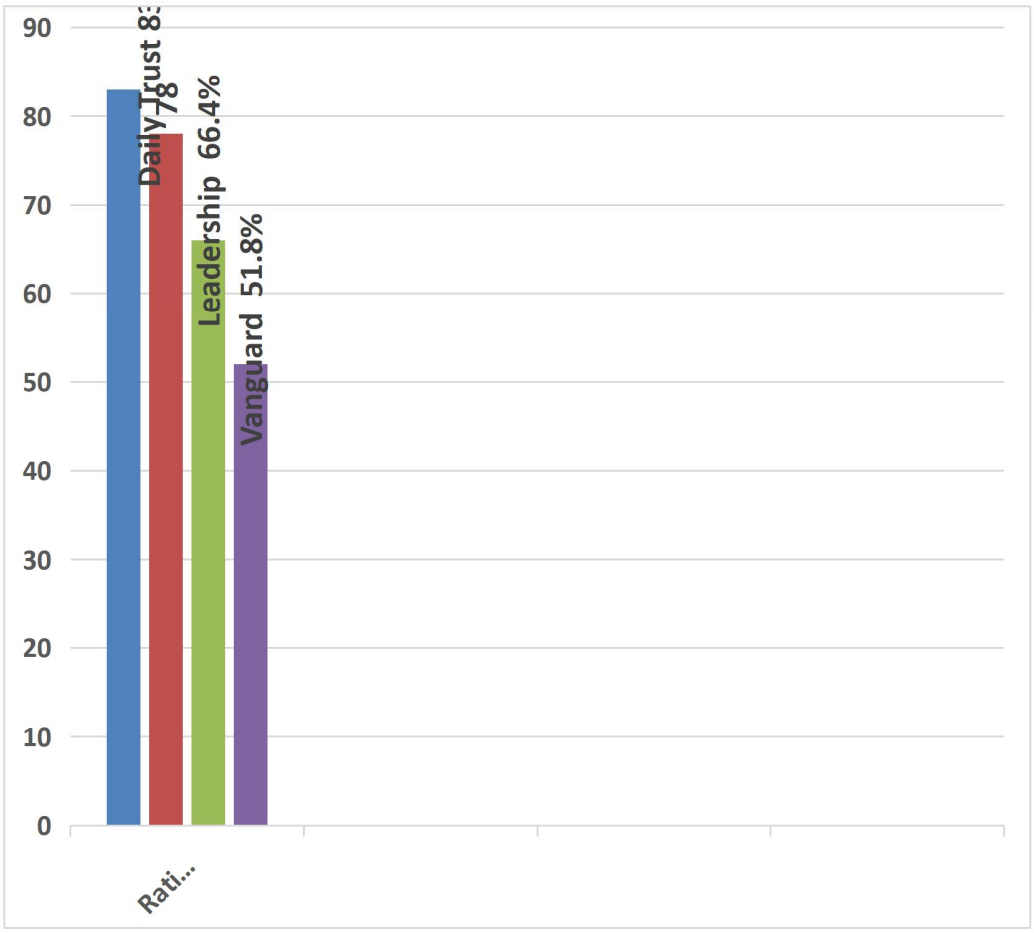

Figure 5: Respondents' Rating of Level of Objectivity in the Framing of the Conflict by the Newspapers

Figure 5 shows the respondents' rating of objectivity in the framing of the conflict by the newspapers. The respondents rated *Daily Trust* newspaper higher with 83.5% *The Guardian* was rated 78%, *Leadership* was rated 66.4% and *Vanguard* was rated 51.8%. This means that the respondents have more trust and confidence in the *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* newspapers then followed by *Leadership* and then *Vanguard* newspaper

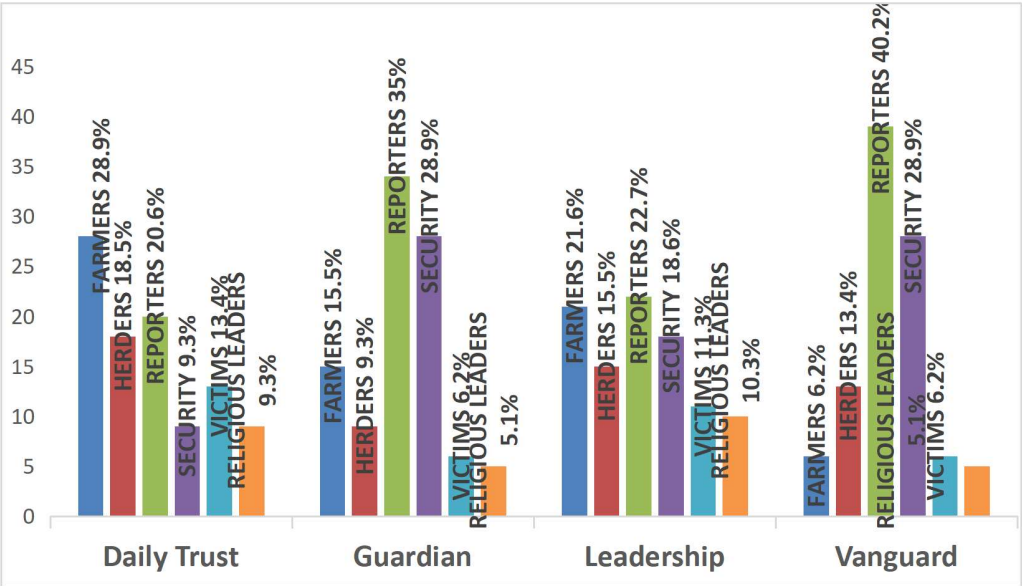

Figure 6 Respondents' Views on the types and most quoted News Sources in the Conflict Reports

Figure 6 shows that the respondents felt that, farmers were the most cited news sources by *Daily Trust* newspaper represented by 28 (28.9%) followed by the newspaper's reporters/correspondents with 20 (20.6%), the herdsmen with 18 (18.5%), witnesses/victims 13 (13.4%), security personnel and religious leaders with 9 (9.3%) respectively.

The respondents observed that the newspaper reporters/correspondents with 34 (35%) were the most cited news sources by *The Guardian* newspaper followed by the security personnel with 28 (28.9%), the farmers with 15 (15.5%), the herders with 9(9.3%), the witnesses/victims 6 (6.2%) and the religious leaders with 5 (5.1%).

Also, the respondents said the newspaper reporters/correspondents with 22 (22.7%) were the most cited news sources by the *Leadership* newspaper. Followed by the farmers with 21 (21.6%), security personnel with 18 (18.6%), herders with 15 (15.5%), the witnesses/victims 11 (11.3%) and the religious leaders with 10 (10.3%).

Newspaper reporters/correspondents with 39 (40.2%) were the most cited news sources by *Vanguard* newspaper followed by the security personnel with 28

(28.9%), the herders with 13 (13.4%), the farmers and witnesses/victims with 6 (6.2%) respectively and the religious leaders with the least figures of 5 (5.1%).

This generally implies that the respondent observed that *Vanguard, The Guardian* and *Leadership* newspapers mostly used their reporters/correspondents as sources of their news stories on farmers-herders' conflict. It means that they mostly quote or rely on their reporters to give them the narrations on the conflict for first-hand information.

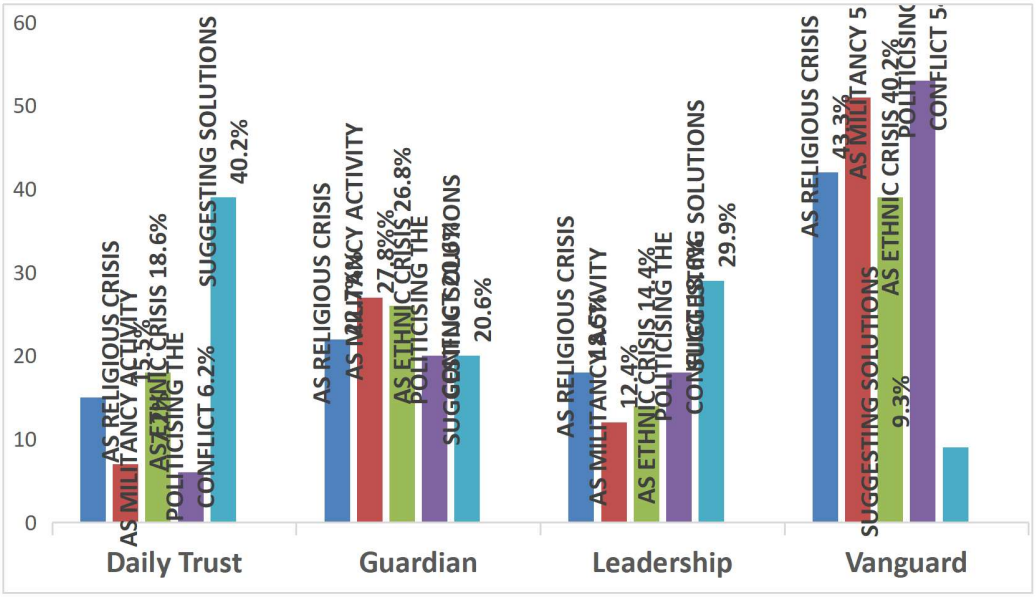

Figure 7: Respondents Views on Dominant Narratives/Frames on the conflict used by the Newspapers

Figure 7 shows the respondents perception on how the newspapers frame their news stories on farmers-herders' conflict. The respondents noted that *Daily Trust* mostly preach for peace or suggest for solutions in their news stories on the conflict 39 (40.2%), describe the conflict as ethnic/tribal crisis 18 (18.6%), as religious crisis 15 (15.5%), as acts of terrorism/militancy 7 (7.2%) and also gave political coloration to issues related to the conflict.

The Guardian newspaper in its news stories on the conflict, mostly describe the conflict as acts of terrorism/militancy 27 (27.8%), as ethnic/tribal crisis 26 (26.8%), as religious crisis 22 (22.7%), sometimes preach peace/suggest solutions 20 (20.6%), or politicize issues related to the conflict 20 (20.6%).

Leadership newspaper according to the respondents' perception, construct their news stories on the conflict to preach for peace 29 (28.9%), to politicize issues on the conflict 18 (18.6%), to describe it as religious crisis 18 (18.6) or as inter-ethnic/tribal conflict 14 (14.4%) and as acts of terrorism/militancy 12 (12.4%). *Vanguard* newspaper according to the respondents, gave issues on the conflict political coloration 53 (54.6%), qualified the conflict as militancy acts 51 (52.6%), as religious crisis 42 (43.3%), as inter-ethnic crisis 39 (40.2%) and to preach for peace/suggest a solution 9 (9.3%).

It implies that on one hand, the respondents noted that some of the newspapers paid more attention to politicizing issues on the conflict, describing the conflict as acts of terrorism, religious or inter-ethnic conflict which is contrary to the advocate of peace-journalism. On the other hand, they recognized how some of the newspapers were advocating for peace-journalism role.

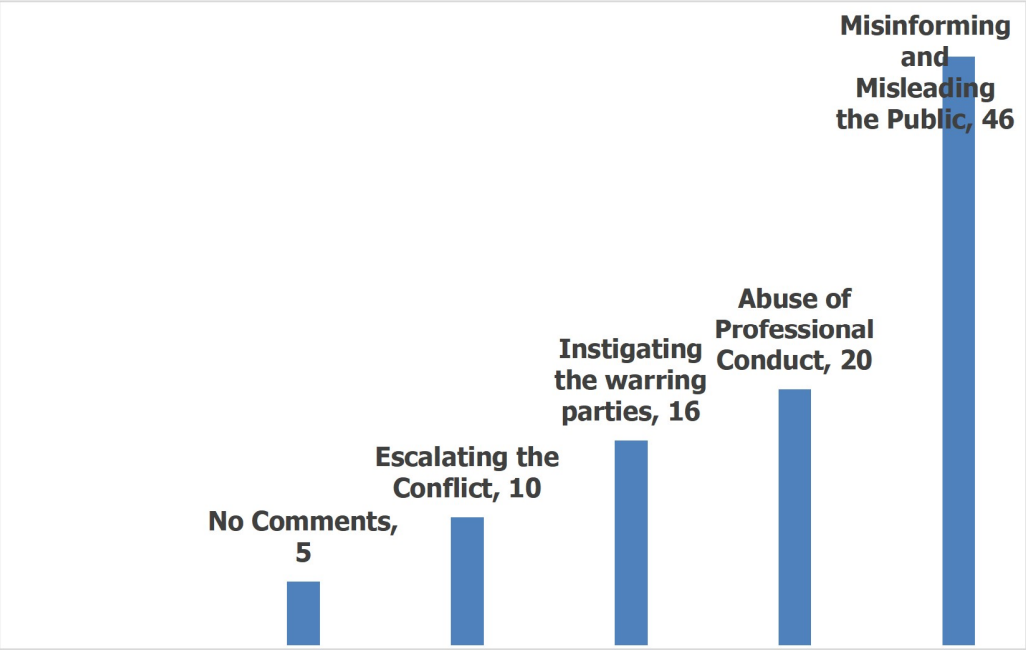

Figure 8: Effects of Bias in selection and usage of News Sources on the Conflict Reports

Figure 8 shows the reactions of the respondents on the effects of newspapers' bias in selection and usage of news sources on farmers-herders' conflict reports. The larger majority of the respondents represented by 46 (47.4%) agreed that bias in

the selection and usage of news sources on farmers-herders' conflict report misinforms and misleads the public. This was followed by 20 (20.6%) who said that the act is an abuse of professional conduct, 16 (16.5%) said doing that instigates the warring parties (farmers and herders), 10 (10.3%) said it aggravates or escalates the crisis and 5 (5.2%%) of the respondents were silent on the question.

This means that almost all the respondents agreed that bias in the selection and usage of news sources in the conflict reports has numerous effects on, the general public, the parties involved and even the practice of journalism.

Discussion of Finding

In an attempt to address the research objectives, the data in the figures were used. The data revealed that the maturity age of the large majority of the respondents, their level of educational attainment, interest in not only reading newspapers but also on issues related to the conflict gave them an upper hand to reason, analyse and pass judgment on issues related to the newspaper coverage of the conflict.

The respondents read newspapers daily and rated the level of credibility and objectivity of the four newspapers a little above average with *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* in the lead position. This means the respondents have a good level of trust and confidence in the contents of the newspapers. They also indicated a significant interest in news stories on the conflict and by inference it means they can interestingly share their perception on the newspapers' coverage of the conflict.

The respondents perceived that the newspapers' own correspondents/reporters were the most cited news sources on the conflict especially used by *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers. This implies that the newspapers mostly rely more on their own correspondents/reporters' narrations on the conflict to the detriment of key stakeholders in the conflict like the farmers, herders, eyewitness/victims and security personnel among others. This survey finding correlates with the content analysis findings which revealed that the newspapers' own correspondents/reporters were the most used news sources in the conflict reports. This is also in support of the findings of Odiegwu-Enwerem (2020) who discovered that newspapers relied more on their reporters as news sources,

Similarly, the respondents perceived that *Vanguard* among the four newspapers was in the lead position in giving issues on the conflict political colouration

(using the reports on the conflict to praise actions or policies of the government, to attack political opponents, to score political goal or gain political sympathy), qualifying the conflict as acts of terrorism/militancy and describing the conflict as religious crisis between Muslim and Christians. *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers according to the respondents' views, paid more attention to preaching for peace and offering of recommendations. This disagreed with the finding of Abimbola (2020) who noted that political frame is the most dominant frame used by *Daily Trust* newspapers. The respondents however opined that *The Guardian* newspaper do more of qualifying the conflict as militancy activities and inter-ethnic crisis. This is in agreement with the finding of Aja, et al (2022) which corroborated that *The Guardian* gives more attention to framing the conflict as militancy or criminal activity.

The respondents submitted that newspapers bias in the selection and usage of news sources on farmers/herders' conflict reports can misinform and mislead the general public. This act of course is an abuse of media professional conduct which can instigate the warring groups and thereby continuously escalate the conflict.

The assumption of the framing theory which claims that the way the public perceive an issue is as a result of the way the media present it to them. It further emphasizes that framing is centred on the idea that the way an issue is presented in the media can have an influence on the audience perception of it. This implies that the responses provided by the public on newspaper framing and use of news sources on farmers/herders' conflict is as a result of the way the media shaped their perception of the conflict. Similarly, the survey findings which confirmed that the newspapers construct and use different type of news frames on the conflict is in consonance with the assumption of the framing theory which explains that the media construct frames by selecting, highlighting and emphasizing on certain issues through deliberate choice of words, phrases or statements to construct. Furthermore, the survey results which reveals that the newspapers' own correspondents/reporters were the most cited news sources on the conflict, agrees with the thesis of the media indexing theory which suggest that the media filter news sources and sometimes concentrate on one-sided sources which by implication can marginalize a group and deny the public the opportunity to weigh claim for and against an issue.

Summary of Key Findings and Conclusion

The survey respondents revealed that *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers' own correspondents/reporters were the most cited news sources on the conflict

when compared with the other newspapers. This implies that the newspapers relied on the narratives about the conflict given by their correspondent/reporters to the detriment of first-hand information from the key stakeholders in the conflict like the farmers, herders, security personnel, etc. The implication of this as earlier noted is that, it can affect the balance, credibility and objectivity of the news reports on the conflict and thereby mislead the public and the policymakers.

The survey finding also disclosed that *Vanguard* newspaper used the highest number of political, militancy, religious and inter-ethnic news frames on the conflict. By inference, it means the newspaper was in the lead position of giving issues on the conflict political colouration (using news to praise or condemn actions or policies of the government, to attack political opponents, to score political goal or gain political sympathy) and qualifying the conflict as acts of terrorism/militancy (describing a group as violent killers, murderers involved in the killing of innocent citizens), describing the conflict as religious or inter-ethnic crisis between Muslim herders and Christians farmers. This implies that the public perceived *Vanguard* newspaper to be in the fore-front of escalating the conflict through its manner of news presentation. The consequences of this action pose a threat not only to the warring groups, but also to the security situation and the socio-economic lives of people in the country at large.

Daily Trust and *Leadership* newspapers, according to the survey respondents, paid more attention to positive framing of issues on the conflict to preach for peace and offer recommendations. This act by implication, signified the role the two newspapers played in the conflict management efforts of government and non-governmental organizations within and outside the country.

Majority of the participants in the survey agreed that bias by some newspapers in the selection and usage of news sources in conflict news reports misinform and mislead the public. And that the act is an abuse of professional conduct which can instigate the warring groups and thereby escalate the conflict. By implication, the finding indicates the severe consequences of the conscious and unconscious action of the newspapers.

Recommendations

The following key recommendations were offered based on the findings and or conclusion of the study:

i. *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers should emphasize more on the practice of solution or peace-oriented journalism while *Vanguard* and *The*

Guardian newspapers should de-emphasize politicizing and criminalizing issues on the conflict

ii. The newspapers should desist from heavy reliance on government official news sources and their own reporters/correspondents' narratives alone to avoid giving room for politicizing or criminalizing issues on the conflict.

iii. All newspaper correspondents/reporters should be trained and retrained on ethics of conflict reporting and be equipped with peace-journalism skills for conflict prevention or resolution.

iv. Policy makers should recognize the importance and impact of media framing in shaping public perception on farmers-herders' conflict and consider it in their conflict management plans.

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