



## Public Perception on Media Reportage of Farmers and Herders Clashes in Enugu State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Nigeria as a multi-ethnic nation with groups of people of diverse interests has a long history of internal conflicts. Recently the media (conventional and social media) are awash with reports of various clashes between herdsmen and farmers in different parts of the nation resulting to loss of lives and properties, as well as destruction of peoples' means of livelihood. Public perception of media reportage of these clashes may influence their attitude and behavior which may either escalate or de-escalate the reoccurrence of such clashes. This study therefore sought to examine publics' perception of media reportage of farmers and herders clashes in Enugu State and its implication on national security. The study was hinged on social responsibility theories. Survey method was adopted for the study; 400 residents were drawn from Enugu State using multi-stage sampling procedure. Questionnaire was used as instrument in eliciting data for the study. The researchers found out that exposure to media reports on farmers and herdsmen clashes was significant among residents in Enugu State especially through the social media. Further analysis revealed that residents perceive media reportage of these clashes as not contributing to the de-escalation of the conflict. Analysis also revealed that Enugu residents were of the view that clashes between herdsmen and farmers threatened security of the society.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Public Perception, Media Reportage, Farmers and Herders

### Introduction

Conflict has become an integral part of human life. It occurs as a result of clash between two or more people, states or nations. Ikezie and Ezeah (2017) noted that right from independence, Nigeria has been bedeviled by series of crisis of which farmers and herders' crisis is part of. Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017) affirmed that farmers and herders' conflict in Nigeria has a long history leading to the destruction of lives and properties. In Nigeria, as posited by Eyekpimi (2016) from Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Enugu, Nassarawa, Kaduna, Taraba, Kebbi, Kaduna, Delta, Ekiti, Oyo and Niger States among others have their pockets of ordeals to tell on herdsmen/farmers conflicts.

Recently the media space (conventional and social media) is awash with reports of various clashes between herdsmen and farmers in different parts of the nation resulting to loss of lives and properties as well as destruction of peoples' means of livelihood, thereby impacting negatively on national economy and security. The media as the fourth estate of the realm plays a major role in keeping the audience informed on happening in the area of conflicts in the society.

Report by Vanguard (2021) stated that Nigeria has lost no fewer than 8,343 persons to the conflict since 2005 to date based on the findings of Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Similarly Premium Times (2020) noted that over the last decade, more than 8,000 people have been killed with over 200,000 internally displaced and about 60,000 fleeing into Niger Republic. VOA (2016), The Guardian (2021) and Vanguard (2022) reported on similarly attack in Obie Aku farm camp, Eha-Amufu and Nimbo of Enugu State.

Accordingly, Shehu (2017) affirmed that the media have a considerable influence over citizens' perceptions, opinions and behaviour. Puddephatt (2006) believes the media often play a key role in today's conflict which can take either escalating or de-escalating form. This raises the question as whether the media can play the role of an umpire in conflict reporting. It is believed that the media reportage through framing of this conflict can result to the rise or reduction of the crises (Howard, 2003; Popoola, 2015 & Ozhu-Sulaiman, 2013). This implies that media coverage of conflict might have perceived effect on people. Abdulbaqi & Ariemu (2017) insist that the media should be responsible in the reportage of conflict.

### **Statement of Problem**

Farmers and herders clashes are no longer news in Nigeria. The clashes seem to have assumed the status of reoccurring challenge in agriculture business in the country. Both sides in the conflict are stakeholders in the agriculture industry. While the farmers raise alarm about the destruction of their farm produce; herders complain of the killing of their cows. This situation of conflict by stakeholders in the agriculture industry leads to economic, social and security setbacks in the country.

Akpan, Ering and Olofu-Adeoye (2013) affirm that the mass media can be used to promote peace, to initiate, escalate, de-escalate and sustain conflict. Scholars have paid attention to study how the media have reported these clashes, as well as how the reports were framed. Studies like Okocha and Okejiri (2021) established that newspapers accord much importance to issues on farmers-herders conflict and play a part in reducing the conflict. Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017), Onyebuchi, Obayi and Nwagu (2019) and Iyorza and Ackar (2022) among other studies says otherwise.

The scholars did not come across studies that considered how the public perceive such reports from the media (conventional and social media). The media as an important source of information about conflicts have a considerable influence over citizens' perceptions, opinions and behaviour (Shehu, 2017). Is the media up and doing in their report? Is their report channeled towards escalating, reducing or stopping the clashes? What is the perception of the public towards such media reports? On the background of these pertinent questions, the researchers were prompted to study how the public perceive media reportage on farmers and herders' clashes and the implication of such report on national security.

### **Research Question**

The following research questions were designed to guide the study:

1. To what extent are residents of Enugu State exposed to media reports on farmers and herders' clashes?
2. What is the perception of Enugu residents of media reportage of clashes between farmers and herders?

3. What is the view of Enugu residents on the implications of media coverage of farmers and herders clashes on national security?

### **The Media, Famers/Herders' Conflict and National Security**

The media serves as an avenue through which people get to receive information especially the ones pertaining to the farmers and herders clashes. This is the reason why Shehu (2017) opined that the media are the most important source of information about conflicts for most people, which grants them a considerable influence over citizens' perception, opinion and behavior. Howard (2003), Popoola (2015) and Ozuhu-Sulaiman (2013) questioned the supposed umpire role of the media in conflict reporting. It is believed that the media reportage of through it framing of conflicts such as the farmers/ herdsman clash can result to the rise and reduction of the crises.

The Guardian (2021) reported on the attack which occurred on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021 in Obie Aku farm camp in Uzo-Uwani Local Government (LG) Council, Enugu State resulting to the death of many and injury to others. This comes five years after the attack on Ukpabi Nimbo community in the same LG. Apparently on April 25, 2016 Nimbo was under attack leaving 15 persons dead and a house burned down (VOA, 2016). Nigeria has lost no fewer than 8,343 persons to the conflict since 2005 to date based on the findings of Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (Vanguard 2021).

Similarly Premium Times (2020) noted that over the last decade, more than 8,000 people have been killed with over 200,000 internally displaced and about 60,000 fleeing into Niger Republic. The Sun (2018) stated that six communities were attacked in Logo and Guma Local Government Areas of Benue State on January 1, 2018 resulting to the death of more than 50 people. Vanguard (2022) reported that farmers in Mgbuji, Ngele Aguiyi and Abo communities all in Eha-Amufu community in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State were also under attacks resulting in the death of many farmers and destruction of farms. During the period, farmers go to their farm in the company of soliders but persist to go immediately the soliders left.

Various studies have been carried out to examine farmers and herders clashes influence on the society. Apuke and Omar (2020) and Iyorza and Ackar (2022) noted that the media do not actually report narratives of conflict victims and information they provide is capable of escalating the crises. The scholars affirmed that media lack objectivity and often combine politics of sensationalism, blame, rhetoric and provocation in their report. On a similar note, Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017) indicated that newspapers framing of farmers/herdsman conflicts in Nigeria aligned more towards war-oriented journalism other than peace-oriented journalism. Onyebuchi, Obayi and Nwagu (2019) indicated that newspapers do not accord much importance to report on the attacks. In contrast, Okocha and Okejiri (2021) affirmed that newspaper attach importance to issues on farmers-herders conflict and play a role in reducing its reoccurrence.

Taking into cognizance the implication of these clashes towards national security; Okoli and Addo (2018) and Kwaghga (2018) indicated that the clash threaten food insufficiency and cause the increase in the price of farm produce as a result of the destruction of crops by cattle. In relation to the above, the Food and Agricultural Organization (2004) stated that communal violence costs Nigeria over \$12 billion worth of agricultural production during the last third of the 20th century. Marietu and Olarewaju (2019) also added that clash has caused Nigeria over 14 billion dollars between 2012 and 2015. A study from Agyemang (2017) in Ghana revealed that the clash result loss of properties, unemployment, debt, loss of revenue, forced migration, poverty and social problems.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was anchored on the social responsibility which according to Apuke and Omar (2020) was proposed in 1947 by the Hutchins Commission of Inquiry. This theory assumes that the media perform

certain essential functions in the society hence; obligations should be met by setting high professional standards in formativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. Ndolo (2005) noted that the theory ensures that the press are open to the audience, controlled by opinion and action as well as curtail them from publishing information that might be harmful to the society and incite violence. In relation to the study, the media owe its responsibilities in adequate reporting of news event especially the one pertaining to the farmers and herders clashes. By so doing, they would contribute to resolving the conflicts other than escalating it.

### Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research method because it will help the researchers to clearly understand how the public perceive media report. The population comprises of residents in Enugu State which according to Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2016) is 4,411,119. Sample size of 400 was drawn using the Wimmer and Dominick online calculator while the multi stage sampling procedure was used in the selection of respondents from the three senatorial zones in Enugu which include Enugu-North, Enugu-East and Enugu-West. The researchers randomly selected two Local Governments and two communities from each of the LG. They include Nsukka (Ihe n' Owere & Nsukka town), Udenu (Obollo & Orba), Awgu (Agbogugu & Awgu), Udi (Ngwo & Nineth Mile), Enugu-East (Abakpa & Trans-Ekulu) and Enugu-North (GRA & Independence Layout). The questionnaire was deployed as an instrument for data collection and was face validated by an expert. A pilot study was used to test the reliability of the instrument. The method of data analysis employed was frequency distribution and mean analysis to either accept or reject a response.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered to 400 respondents however 380 were later retrieved and analyzed. This analyzes was done in a tabular form using frequency distribution and mean analysis for clear understanding.

#### Research Question One: To what extent are residents of Enugu States exposed to media reports on farmers and herders clashes?

Presented below is table one which shows the respondents view on the extent of their exposure to report on the farmers and herder' clashes

**Table 1: Respondents' response on their exposure to media report on farmers and herders clashes**

Option	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
I am sufficiently aware of farmers and herders clashes in Nigeria	180	200	-	-	380	3.4	Accepted
I am sufficiently exposed to media reportage on farmers and herders' clashes	136	244	-	-	380	3.3	Accepted
I receive most of the information about the clashes on the radio	67	85	108	120	380	2.2	Rejected

I receive most of the information about the clashes on the television	47	63	160	110	380	2.1	Rejected
I receive most of the information about the clashes on the newspaper	90	97	100	93	380	2.4	Rejected
I receive most of the information about the clashes on social media	175	100	65	40	380	3.0	Accepted
						2.7	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2022

**Decision Rule:** If the calculated mean is equal or greater than the criterion mean (2.5), then the decision is accepted but if the calculated mean is lower than the criterion mean (2.5), the decision is rejected. Also, let 1-1.6 (very low extent), 1.7-2.4 (low extent), 2.5-3.2 (high extent) and 3.3-4.0 (very high extent).

The table above indicates that at a mean value of 2.7, respondents accept the idea that they are aware of the farmers and herders' clashes and are sufficiently exposed to media report on these clashes. Further analysis revealed that social media among other media was found to be the medium where respondents receive most information of such crisis from.

#### Research Question Two: How do residents of Enugu States perceive media reportage of clashes between farmers and herders?

The table below shows the perception of residents of Enugu State towards media report on farmers and herders' clashes.

**Table 2: Response of respondents on their perception of media reportage of farmers and herders' clashes**

Option	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
The media adequately report news on farmers and herders' clashes	88	95	103	94	380	2.4	Rejected
Social media reports give more detailed reports of clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria	97	120	85	78	380	2.6	Accepted
Nigeria mass media give fair reports on farmers and herders' clashes	75	90	115	100	380	2.3	Rejected
The masses are satisfied with mass media report on farmers and herders' clashes	80	87	92	121	380	2.3	Rejected

The way mass media report on farmers and herders' clashes can contribute to stopping the clashes	84	96	110	90	380	2.4	Rejected
The way the mass media report news stories on farmers and herders' clashes can be blamed as part of the reasons for the continual clashes	125	143	65	47	380	2.9	Accepted
Mass media has a role to play in stopping or reducing clashes between farmers and herders	170	116	59	35	380	3.1	Accepted
						2.5	Accepted

*Source: Field Survey, 2022*

**Decision Rule:** If the calculated mean is equal or greater than the criterion mean (2.5), then the decision is accepted but if the calculated mean is lower than the criterion mean (2.5), the decision is rejected. Also, let 1-1.6 (very low extent), 1.7-2.4 (low extent), 2.5-3.2 (high extent) and 3.3-4.0 (very high extent).

Result from the data analysis in the table established that the mass media do not engage in adequate and fair reporting of the clash. Social media was found to give more detailed report on the clash. Further analysis indicated that though media has a role to play in stopping or reducing the clash; the media have not contributed much in de-escalating the clash and such blamed for the continuous rise of the clash.

### **Research Question Three: How do residents of Enugu States view the implications of farmers and herders clashes to national security?**

To answer this research question, the table below presented views of respondents on the extent of farmers and herders' clash implication on national security.

**Table 3: Response of respondents on the extent of farmers and herders' clash implication on national security**

Option	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
Respondents' response that clashes between farmers and herders have strong negative implications to national security	243	121	6	10	380	3.5	Accepted
Respondents' response that media reportage of clashes between farmers and herders is reducing possibilities of further national security concerns	35	68	172	105	380	2.0	Rejected
Respondents' response that social media reportage of clashes between farmers and herders is more likely to	123	146	44	67	380	2.8	Accepted

trigger further national security  
concerns

2.7

Accepted

*Source: Field Survey, 2022*

**Decision Rule:** *If the calculated mean is equal or greater than the criterion mean (2.5), then the decision is accepted but if the calculated mean is lower than the criterion mean (2.5), the decision is rejected. Also, let 1-1.6 (very low extent), 1.7-2.4 (low extent), 2.5-3.2 (high extent) and 3.3-4.0 (very high extent).*

In examining the implications of farmers and herders clashes to national security alongside the role the media play either in de-escalating or escalating the clashes; analysis showed that the clash have a strong negative implications towards national security. The media according to the respondent have not adequately reported the clash so as to reduce possibilities of further security challenges. The analysis found out that social media will likely trigger further national security concerns in the society.

## Discussions of Findings

### Exposure to media reports on farmers and herders clashes

With regards to the extent of the residents of Enugu State exposure on farmers and herders' clash; respondents accepted that they are sufficiently exposed to such clash on the media. They further revealed that social media among other media was found to be the medium where most of them receive information pertaining to the crisis.

This finds it relation to the study of Shehu (2017) who affirmed that the media are by far the most important source of information about conflicts for most people, which grants them a considerable influence over citizens' perceptions, opinions and behavior. Abdulbaqi & Ariemu (2017) stated that the media as a major source of information, center for the process of knowledge formation, especially, as it relates to daily societal happenings across climes.

### Public perception on media reportage of clashes between farmers and herders

The mass media was found not to engage in adequate and fair reporting of the farmers and herders' clash while social media gave more detailed report on the clash. Though the media has a role to play in stopping or reducing the clash; they however have not contributed much in de-escalating the clash and such blamed for the continuous rise of the clash. It can be deduced that the mass media in Nigeria has not imbibe their functionality in their activities. As the fourth estate of the realm charged with the responsibility of adequately informing the people and a tool for the promotion of peace and unity have not actualize their task appropriately. They have failed to channel positivity in their report into seeking for solution and ways to prevent further clash.

The results find its relation with the studies of Iyorza and Ackar (2022), Apuke & Omar (2020) Onyebuchi et al (2019), Abdullahi (2019) and Abdulbaqi & Ariemu (2017) who found out that Nigerian media do not adequately cover and report actual narratives of conflict between the farmers and herders. The researchers affirmed that the media should be blamed for further crisis because of the excessive use of negative language, which often indicates blame game, contributes to the escalation of the conflict. In contrast, Okocha and Okejiri (2021) established that the newspaper accords much importance to issues on farmers-herders conflict and play their part in the reducing the conflict.

### **Implications of farmers and herders clashes to national security**

In examining the implications of farmers and herders clashes to national security alongside the role the media play either in de-escalating or escalating the clashes; analysis showed that the clash have a strong negative implications towards national security. The media according to the respondent have not adequately reported the clash so as to reduce possibilities of further security challenges. The analysis found out that social media will likely trigger further national security concerns in the society.

This clearly explains that the national security is at stake. The clash has constituted to be a threat to the safety of lives and property, low productivity in farm produce, poverty, unemployment, draining of economic growth and increase in the price of goods and services among others. The media on their part have been blamed for the continuous rise of the clash which is a threat to national security.

The finding is in conformity with the studies of Kwaghga (2018), Okoli & Addo (2018) and Agyemang (2017) stating that farmers/herdsmen crises have demonstrated high potential to intensify the insecurity in the society. It has generated negative effect on humanitarian, economic, social, security and natural effects on the socioeconomic development of the community. Food Agricultural Organization (2004) and Marietu and Olarewaju (2019) agreed that communal crisis has caused Nigeria to loss a fortune. This is as the clash has costs the country over \$12 billion worth of agricultural production during the last third of the 20th century and 14 billion dollars between 2012 and 2015.

### **Conclusion**

The media as the fourth of the realm has being charged with the responsibility of serving as the watchdog to the society; the media has a great role to play in the de-escalation of farmers/herders clashes in Nigeria. The manner in which the public perceive media report is important as this will either change their attitude, behavior, perception and opinion of the media.

Based on the findings, it could be deduced that the public were sufficiently exposed to media reportage of farmers and herders clashes. Social media among other media proved to be the major source of information about the clashes. The media has not adequately reported news about the clashes and has been blamed as part of the reasons for the continual clashes which has negative implications in the society. The way in which the media report about the clashes may trigger more attacks.

### **Recommendations**

To this end, the study recommends that:

1. The media should engage more in developmental news other than concentrating on negative news which instill fears in the mind of the people and incite more violence.
2. They should engage in-depth reporting of the news story as this will help authorities find the root cause of the clashes and work towards curbing the menace of the clashes and its implication on national security.
3. Media report should be based on call for peace; propagating the message of dialogue, negotiation and diplomacy.

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