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Media Coverage of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria: A Comparison of Mainstream and Digital Platforms

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Abstract

Background: The disturbing escalation of farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria necessitates an understanding of whether mainstream and new media are effectively setting the agenda to inform the public. While traditional media have historically dominated the news cycle, online newspapers and blogs have emerged as critical factors in the flow of information, often competing with broadcast journalism in providing timely updates.

Objective: This study examined how online newspapers, television stations, and blogs report on the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The primary objective was to determine the frequency, prominence, duration, and tone of coverage devoted to the conflict across these selected media platforms.

Methodology: The research was underpinned by Agenda Setting Theory and employed content analysis. The sample consisted of 401 stories published between 10 November 2017 and 10 November 2018 from *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* online newspapers, NTA and Channels TV, and the blogs Naij.com and Nairaland. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA at a 0.05 level of statistical significance .

Results: The findings established that online newspapers recorded the highest coverage frequency (50.5%) and featured longer stories than both television and blogs. While most media outlets treated the conflict as very important, the government-owned NTA rated it as less important. Additionally, results showed that television stations predominantly used a positive tone, whereas online newspapers and blogs used a largely negative tone in reporting the conflict.

Conclusion: The study concludes that coverage of the farmers-herdsmen conflict differs significantly across media genres, with online newspapers generally performing better in frequency and depth of coverage. The findings underscore that ownership plays a significant role in determining conflict reporting, suggesting that government-owned media may use a positive tone to suppress the actual severity of occurrences.

Keywords: conflict, coverage, herdsmen, farmers, media, Nigeria

Introduction

There is evidence that conflict has been a recurring narrative in Nigeria since its independence in 1960. However, recent years have seen an intensification of conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers (Ciboh, 2015). The Fulani herdsmen are predominantly herders, making it easy for them to move their prized cows from one destination to another in search of food, water, and shelter. As a result of this search, they invade farmland, leading to conflicts with farmers (Beetseh et al., 2018). Recent reports suggest that the violent conflict between the nomadic herdsmen and farmers found in the northern, central, and some southern parts of Nigeria has not only taken human lives, but has also cost the nation more than $14 billion dollars between 2012 and 2015 (Beetseh et al., 2018).

How, then, do the international community, public and humanitarian organisations get to know the actual situation surrounding the herdsmen and farmers' conflict? The most effective way is through the media. The media play a role in conflicts and are responsible for monitoring society by gathering and disseminating vital information beneficial to the public (Gever, 2019). In this study, the media refers to channels for the dissemination of mass information. Examples of such channels include radio, television, newspapers, magazines, blogs, and the Internet. According to Simons (2016), the media have the potential to influence public perception during a conflict, and they do so through the frequency and depth of coverage (agenda-setting). The media could report on conflict to raise awareness, help avoid escalation, generate ideas to curtail conflict, expose perpetrators, de-escalate rising conflict, and attract humanitarian responses (Pate, 2002). However, findings have shown that mass media in Nigeria have not been timely in their reportage and have not effectively played a surveillance and social responsibility function (Gever, 2019; Ajaero et al., 2016). These situations have led many Nigerians to turn to alternative/new media and to hold the conviction that these media may cover the conflict's issues more than the mainstream media (Alphonsus, 2018). Alternative/new media here refers to channels of information dissemination that rely largely on technological devices such as mobile phones and laptop computers. These media are Internet-powered. A collective effort that involves citizen and online journalism has been suggested, since the penetration and functioning of the contemporary Nigerian media remain questionable (Omoera & Ogah, 2016).

Despite the prominence of the herdsmen and farmers' conflict across the Nigerian news cycle, most past studies have focused on newspaper coverage of the conflict as it concerns the use of land

(Okeke et al., 2018; Ciboh, 2015). Further, these studies gave little attention to the role of online media in covering farmers-herdsmen conflicts, neglecting that online media have now emerged as critical factors in information flow (Gever & Essien, 2019). Not much has been done to establish the contribution of online media to the coverage of farmers-herdsmen conflict in developing nations, especially now that most online media outlets keep tabs on the mainstream media in reporting issues of national importance, such as the farmers-herdsmen conflict over land in Nigeria. However, a study compared Twitter and mainstream media coverage of Boko Haram in Nigeria (Ette & Joe, 208). Even though the online media conflict coverage was emphasised in a number of studies (Bennett, 2013; Gabore & Xiujun 2918; Sacco & Bossio, 2015; Yang & Lee, 2022), the role of online media and online journalism in the coverage of herdsmen and farmers' conflict in Nigeria is still highly neglected. This is contrary to evidence showing that online newspapers and blogs are now competing with broadcast journalism by breaking news more quickly (Graber & Dunaway, 2017). In the context of this study, an online newspaper is defined as a publication of news items that still adheres to the principles of news writing and reporting and is available online, in addition to its physical version, and can be accessed via the internet. While a blog is an online information platform where news of recent happenings is posted, it is not set up as a traditional online newspaper. They are both online media. On the other hand, in the context of this study, online media is a platform where news items on farmers-herdsmen conflicts are published electronically on websites, regardless of whether they appear in conventional media, and can be accessed through internet-connected devices.

It is imperative to conduct research that demonstrates the contribution of this online media compared to mainstream media. Exploring the difference between mainstream and online media can unearth different versions of reality. Ette and Joe (2018) suggest that it is important to recognise the growing relevance of online media in shaping and influencing public opinion.

Aim and objectives
The overall research agenda is to know how online media in Nigeria compare with traditional mainstream media in covering conflict, using the specific case study of the herdsmen/farmers conflict. The research is guided by the following objectives:

1. To find out the frequency of coverage of the herdsmen and farmers' conflict in the online newspapers, blogs and television stations in Nigeria.
2. To realise the level of prominence and depth of coverage devoted to the issues of herdsmen and farmers in the selected online newspapers, blogs and television stations.
3. To examine the duration of coverage devoted to the issues of herdsmen and farmers in the selected online newspapers, blogs and television Stations.
4. To ascertain the tone/slant of the coverage of the herdsmen and farmers' conflict in the media studied.

Background to the conflict
Historically, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers began due to land scarcity for both crop cultivation and cattle grazing (Beetseh et al., 2018). The Fulani herdsmen started migrating into Northern Nigeria from Senegambia in the fourteenth century, and they became integrated into the Hausa culture of Northern Nigeria after the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804. During the dry season, the herdsmen travel with their cattle towards the middle belt dominated by non-Hausa and while driving their cattle, grazing on farmlands occurs, leading to conflict (Gever & Essien, 2019). Shettima and Tar (2008) noted that cattle herdsmen, in search of food, operate across a large

geographical area. They move within the savannah (northern and central states of Nigeria) in the rainy season and some parts of the south in the dry season. During this movement, they often clash with farmers, and these conflicts mostly affect the country's security, becoming a national issue (Ebenso, 2013).

Ndubuisi (2018) stated that the Fulani herdsmen attack on the citizens of Nigeria has taken on a different dimension and it is now difficult for a week to pass without a rumour of attack in one part of the country or the other, destroying property worth millions of Naira as well as lives. These conflicts, although felt in all of Nigeria, have been more frequent in the North central and North eastern part, resulting in loss of property, cattle, and a high level of displacement. Reports showed that in February of 2018, about 40 people were slain, and roughly 2,000 displaced with not less than 100 sustaining gruesome injury. In one attack, about 92 Nigerians were killed by the suspected Herdsmen in Benue State (Beetseh et al, 2018), signifying the intensification of these conflicts in Nigeria (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017). It is essential to add here that those displaced were farmers.

Drawing from these situations, Ede concludes that the herdsmen "have left their footprints in virtually every part of the country and have been very merciless on the communities they attack" (Ede, 2016). This conflict has displaced more than 100,000 people in Benue and Enugu states. The bursts of violence have also displaced about 400,000 people in the last five years (Idowu, 2017). Thus, the general implication of the conflict is critical and negative for Nigeria's growth and its citizens (Gever & Essien, 2019), and as such, the media has a significant role to play in shaping Nigerians' perceptions. One important point to note here is the characteristics of farmers and herders. In most cases, herders migrate in search of grazing areas, where they clash with farmers. This means that the farmers own the land. The question of whether the farmers and herders are rich or not is determined by their farm size/ number of cattle.

Literature review

Mainstream media and conflict reporting

In this study, mainstream media refers to traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. They are called mainstream because they are the ones registered with relevant government agencies. These media are duly regulated by government agencies. It is noteworthy to highlight the ownership structure of the Nigerian media (Nigerian media here means traditional media like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) since this research is premised on the premise that the Nigerian media have not done their job appropriately as agenda setters for society. There are two main types of media ownership in Nigeria: private and government. Government media are those entirely set up, financed, and owned by the Nigerian government (Gever, 2016). In contrast, the private media are media houses owned, financed, and controlled by private individuals, groups of persons or organisations (Apuke, 2016).

Chuckwu (2015) noted that the government ownership and control of the media in Nigeria reflect a political agenda. This implies that media content serves the interests of the government and the party in power. As such, ownership in Nigeria largely determines how the media will report issues, making media owners, not editors, the ultimate gatekeepers (Omenugha et al., 2013). Tobechukwu (2007) stated that the Nigerian media have been found wanting due to their active association with partisan politics. The media are used to achieve political ends at the expense of agenda-setting and factual reporting, and, as such, editorial independence is most often based on ownership influence, with less contribution from the public.

The media play an important role in conflict situations, and the way they report these conflicts can help resolve them or exacerbate them. In this regard, media accounts have been shown to be an important source of information for the public, contributing to the societal construction of reality (Ross and Nightingale). This means that media content goes beyond providing the unknown to the audience and extends to shaping reality as regards what is already known and witnessed (Campbell et al., 2011). Accordingly, media reports that conflict to create awareness, avoid escalation, generate ideas for curbing conflict, expose perpetrators, de-escalate the conflict, and attract humanitarian responses (Pate, 2002). Therefore, the public gains awareness about conflict breakouts predominantly from the media.

The Nigerian media have been found wanting in their coverage of conflict (Ciboh, 2015). Gever and Essien (2019) found that Nigerian media (Newspapers) mostly covered the herdsmen-farmers conflict when it occurred, with little attention to the conflict when it subsided. This suggests that the Nigerian mainstream media have little or no concern towards the ravaging herdsmen and farmers conflict. A similar study also found that newspapers in Nigeria framed the Fulani Herdsmen in a demonising manner, suggesting that Fulani herdsmen are portrayed as stubborn and unforgiving. No doubt the demonisation of the Fulani as a tribe may not help in extenuating the conflict, but rather will spread the hatred of the tribe to all parts of Nigeria, thereby escalating the conflict (Shehu, 2017).

Likewise, Olomojobi (2017) examined newspapers '*The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard's coverage of herdsmen and farmers between January 2015 and* August 2016. The results of the study suggest that the sampled newspapers were episodic in their coverage, with little interpretation and analysis. The newspapers accorded the conflict low prominence by placing most of the conflict stories on the inside pages and sparingly on the front pages. Results also showed that the newspapers were critical (newspapers castigated the government for not doing enough to address the conflict) in their criticism of the government's intervention in the herdsmen and farmers' conflict. A possible explanation for these findings could be associated with media ownership and control. Most media outlets are owned by either the government or individuals, prompting them to promote their owners' interests. Although we still do not know the contribution of blogs and online newspapers to the coverage of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria, this research seeks to bring this to the fore.

New media and conflict coverage
Readers' access to numerous information sources is now the main advantage of online news over traditional media. Omar argues that online media is altering the nature of news consumption by enabling the audience to actively engage with media sources in various ways (Omar, 2017). This implies that the new media culture allows more individual members of the public to shape the content (Cacciatore et al., 2012). Burggraaff and Trilling (2020) observed that digital journalism "harnesses a plurality of truth," allowing multiple viewpoints to be accessed and disseminated (Boczkowski, 2004; Tewksbury & Rittenburg, 2012). The use of blogs for online communication has led to what is now called the blogosphere, which encompasses blogs and those who engage with them.

Nevertheless, other scholars maintained that as the move of news stories to online platform is becoming a trend, online news content continues to reproduce and produces its capacity to surpass the mainstream news content, through constant news updates and breaking news stories, thereby adding more features such as local contents, opinionated piece and user generated content

ingenuity (Tewsbury & Rittenberg, 2012). Therefore, the need for constant updates to news stories and features in online media could increase content creation. With regard to the blogosphere and journalism, Sacco and Bossio (2015) stated that blogs can be seen as a form of journalism due to their "narrative style of news," characterised by personalisation, thereby transforming journalism into a more conversational and decentralised form. This medium has become an integral part of many societies today, used in breaking news. It permits readers and journalists to express opinions on certain issues and provides a forum for debate and discussion, unlike the mainstream media (Himma-Kadakas & Kõuts, 2015).

A notable use of blogs was in the September 11, 2001, attack on America. Blogs were used to report on the event as it occurred (Bennett, 2013). This suggests that, through online media, news spreads like a wild Harmattan fire in split seconds, giving the public the chance to respond instantly (Bennett, 2013). This could be helpful in reporting on Boko Haram activities and the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria (Okoro et al., 2013). Seip-Nuño (2018) reported that some sections of Nigerian society are now using various online media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to highlight the nuances of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. In line with this view, a survey conducted by Alphonsus (2018) found that most respondents reported receiving information about the herdsmen-farmers' conflict via the internet. This is not surprising given the revolution in information and communication technologies enabled by the internet. Seip-Nuño (2018) asserted that despite the high potential of viral misinformation, using online media to express an opinion can promote a healthy exchange of information in any given society. The same author adds that in Nigeria, there are sites that are attempting to demonstrate the multiple sides of the herdsmen and farmers conflict, for instance, the Sahara reporters and WikiLeaks, unlike most mainstream media that have widely reported the issue using "unknown gunmen" instead of investigating the attackers or those behind it. Despite the advantages of online media, Witschge and Nygren (2009) argued that citizen journalism (blogs) and online journalism (online newspapers) promote loosening of standards due to increased emphasis on speed, in turn changing the fundamental values of journalism. Though online news media have some downsides, their effectiveness is worth considering.

Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework for the current study was Agenda Setting. We adopted the Agenda Setting Theory to explain our study. Based on this theory, the media are believed to influence the public by creating vivid images in their minds (Chyi & McCombs, 2004), implying that the topic then becomes part of the public agenda, requiring action and responses. Hence, this theory does not merely make the audience aware of a particular issue but also addresses the appropriate priority to be accorded to it. Primarily, this is achieved by the amount of information that is disseminated in a news story, including the position allocated. For instance, the headline positions in broadcast and the number of seconds allocated, as well as the story placements, whether in front, centre, or the back pages of print.

Freeland (2012) opined that, under the agenda-setting premise, the media do not merely reflect realism but also filter and shape it. Thus, when the media focuses on only selected issues, the public perceives those issues as more important than others. In other words, the importance of an issue (i.e. content, treatment, and regularity) in society depends on the prominence the media devotes to it. The more time and attention the media devote to an issue, the more likely the public is to perceive it as relevant. The importance of the Agenda Setting Theory to this study hinges on

the assumption that the media (new and mainstream) set the agenda for issues the public views as relevant. This, in turn, implies that the media (be it print newspapers, television, blogs, online newspapers, or radio) could set the stage for public discussion by creating images in people's minds. Therefore, the higher the prominence accorded to the issue of herdsmen and farmers' conflict in Nigeria by the media, which this study seeks to address, the more likely the public, humanitarian agencies and policymakers will perceive it as relevant and needing prompt intervention.

Materials and Methods

The research strategy

A content analysis was adopted in this work to examine how farmers and herdsmen conflicts were covered on blogs, online newspapers, and television stations in Nigeria. Regarding online newspapers, the focus was on Daily Trust and The Punch. The television stations were Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Channels Television (Channels TV), while the blogs were Naij.com and Nairaland. We selected these online newspapers because of their national coverage, high readership, perceived popularity, and accessibility (Gever, 2019). The blogs were selected because they are news blogs that report on national issues in Nigeria more often, and one of the most popular blogs in Nigeria with a high readership rate (Nairaland.com, n.d.; Nigerianfinder.com, n.d.). The television stations were selected due to their high level of National news coverage and wide reach. For instance, Channels TV is renowned for upholding the highest standards of news reporting with objectivity and fairness, and for ensuring individuals' access to information. It has a broad reach across nearly all of Nigeria's states and is a leading private brand in the country's broadcast media sector. Channels TV has established a fantastic reputation across the nation due to its dedication to professionalism in the media scene. Meanwhile, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) is Nigeria's largest TV network; its main duty is to provide independent and impartial television broadcasting for general consumption in the interest of Nigeria. NTA is also saddled with the social responsibility of public interest broadcasting (Alphonsus et al., 2022). Additionally, the television stations were selected to represent privately owned media (Channels) and government media, NTA. The choice of two media types for each category was based on the researchers' desire to understand how these media in each category address farmers-herders crises in their reports, especially now that mainstream and new media are competing for the same audiences. Again, there are no studies that have compared how these media outlets in each category report issues related to farmers-herders crises, as empirical evidence has shown. Therefore, the choice was also made to fill this gap. The audience for these selected media outlets spans different social statuses in Nigeria, though they share the same goal of getting informed through these outlets. The coverage period was from 10th November 2017 to 10th November 2018. This period was chosen because the conflicts escalated within these dates. That is, the conflict intensified, claiming more lives and properties worth millions of US Dollars (Okeke et al., 2018).

Selecting the stories and units of analysis

A motif search approach was used to search for "Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in Nigeria," "Farmers conflict in Nigeria", "herdsmen conflict in Nigeria", and "conflict" in Nigeria, on the webpage archives of the blogs and online newspapers, as well as the television news archives. Internally displaced persons were also searched. The reason for including "Internally displaced persons" as a search term is that some stories may use that term. So, this search confirmed whether there are

stories related to the conflict. After the search results were generated, we evaluated the stories to confirm if they really captured the conflict between herdsmen and farmers published between 10th November 2017 and 10th November 2018. The unit of investigation is the 'news stories/posts pertaining to the Herdsmen and farmers conflict in the media studied. Past research defined motif search as a strategy for selecting information from a media organisation's website using keywords (Gever, 2019).

Coding of the news report

The categories are operationalised as follows:

Media type: This refers to the type of media, which could be Naij.com, Naira land, Daily Trust, The Punch online newspapers, Nigerian Television Authority and Channels TV.

The regularity of coverage: This refers to the frequency of reports on the herdsmen and farmers' conflict across media outlets.

The appearance of stories: To determine the prominence of the posted/published stories on the blogs and the online newspapers, the following criteria were used: very important, important, and less important. Very important implies stories/post that was placed on the front page and were seen by the moderators of the media outlets as having high value or significance, important stories were tagged as stories that have a considerable amount of pages/words despite not entirely appearing on the front page. Such stories often had headlines that appear on the front page, but the details appeared on the primary pages other than the first page of the media outlets, while less important stories included the conflict stories that neither appeared on the front page nor had any significant amount of pages/words allocated them across the four media outlets. These reports were primarily found along the secondary pages and frequently appeared as links to unobtrusive sections of the web pages.

With regard to the television news reports, the appearance of the herdsmen and farmers' conflict in the headline was judged. Stories that appeared in the headline precisely in the first or the second headline were coded as very important, those that appeared in the third and subsequent headlines were refereed as important, while those that were just part of the general telecast were adjudicated as less important. These are just stories that casually appear on the Television stations. It is important to clarify that television headlines summarise a television newscast on an issue. These headlines were retrieved from the website of the selected TV stations.

Duration of the stories: This refers to the length of the stories found in the sampled blogs, online newspapers, and television stations. Stories are measured based on long, medium, or short. For instance, posts/news stories that were between 1-299 words were tagged as short, 300-499 as medium, and 500-800 as long. The rationale for using this scale is that, across media outlets, stories mostly do not exceed 1000 words. For the television stations, the time in seconds allocated to herdsmen and farmers' stories was also examined. Stories that were telecasted between 0-39 seconds were regarded as short, 40-59 seconds medium and 60 seconds above were regarded as long.

The tones/slant: The tone refers to the stance of the media outlets, as well as the manner in which the conflicts are described, which could be in a positive, negative, or neutral manner. In this study, negative tone stories say the conflict is on an escalating/increasing rate; "terrifying", " barbaric ", " gruesome ", tense" and "severe", which is damaging to society, lives, and properties. A positive

tone describes the conflict as de-escalating, not too severe or gruesome, suggesting less panic and worry. The tone will be considered neutral when there is no clear distinction as to whether the reportage is favourable or unfavourable. In other words, it is just straightforward news. That is when it maintains a middle-of-the-road position.

Establishing coding reliability
To ensure coding reliability, two coders were tutored over a period of two weeks on the coding procedures. Using the coding instruction, they coded 20% of the sampled stories. We used percentage agreement to assess inter-coder reliability, which yielded 82% for prominence, 81% for duration, and 77% for tone, respectively. This suggests that the inter-coder reliability was high.

Procedure for data analysis
The data collected were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) version 22 and analysed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations. A comparison between the media outlets was carried out using ANOVA, with statistical significance set at 0.05. The results were presented in tables.

Results
The motif search across the media outlets' web pages examined during the study period yielded 401 stories on the subject matter within the study period. This figure was derived after an eligibility screening of the stories. The result of the study is presented based on the objectives of the study as shown below:

Table 1: Frequency of Coverage.

	Newspapers		TV Stations		Blogs		Total
	Daily Trust	*Punch*	NTA	Channels	Naij.com	Naira land	6
Frequency	120	83	28	70	56	44	401
Percentages	29.9%	20.6%	7%	17.5%	14%	11.0%	100%

In Table 1 above, the researchers sought to ascertain the frequency of coverage of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers across media outlets. The study found that newspapers accounted for more than half of the stories (50.5%). While TV stations and blogs shared the remaining 49.5% of the stories. Even so, blogs had the second-highest share of stories at 25%, and TV had the lowest at 24.5%. A close look at the data suggests that the NTA, which is a government-owned station, had the fewest stories on the conflict.

Table 2: Prominence of Coverage of the Conflict.

			Prominence			
			Very important	Important	Less important	Total
Media	Daily Trust	Count	67	42	11	120
		% of Total	16.7%	10.5%	2.7%	29.9%
	Punch	Count	39	35	9	83
		% of Total	9.7%	8.7%	2.2%	20.7%
	Naira land	Count	26	11	7	44
		% of Total	6.5%	2.7%	1.7%	11.0%
	Channels	Count	18	30	22	70
		% of Total	4.5%	7.5%	5.5%	17.5%
	Naij.com	Count	19	18	19	56
		% of Total	4.7%	4.5%	4.7%	14.0%
	NTA	Count	6	8	14	28
		% of Total	1.5%	2.0%	3.5%	7.0%
Total		Count	175	144	82	401
		% of Total	43.6%	35.9%	20.4%	100.0%

In Table 2 above, we sought to ascertain the prominence accorded to the conflict based on the various media outlets examined. The result showed that generally, all the media outlets examined treated the issue as very important. However, NTA, which is a government-owned TV station, treated it as less important. We further subjected the result to a Chi-Square analysis, and the result showed $\chi^2 = 52.930$ with 10 df, p-value = .001 at the 0.005 level of significance. This implies that a significant association exists between the media examined and the prominence accorded to the conflict. That is to say, the prominence given to the conflict was based on the media outlet in Nigeria, indicating the absence of uniformity in prominence across the media outlets investigated.

Table 3: The duration of coverage devoted to the issues of herdsmen and farmers.

			Duration			
			Long	Medium	Short	Total
Media	Daily Trust	Count	62	29	29	120
		% of Total	15.5%	7.2%	7.2%	29.9%
	Punch	Count	67	9	7	83
		% of Total	16.7%	2.2%	1.7%	20.7%
	Naira land	Count	24	12	8	44
		% of Total	6.0%	3.0%	2.0%	11.0%
	Channels	Count	8	14	48	70
		% of Total	2.0%	3.5%	12.0%	17.5%
	Naij.com	Count	21	26	9	56
		% of Total	5.2%	6.5%	2.2%	14.0%
	NTA	Count	7	11	10	28
		% of Total	1.7%	2.7%	2.5%	7.0%
Total		Count	189	101	111	401
		% of Total	47.1%	25.2%	27.7%	100.0%

The essence of computing Table 3 was to ascertain the length of media stories on the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. The results showed that newspapers reported longer stories across all media genres examined. Television stations had shorter stories. The result of the Chi-square analysis also showed a value of 119.977 with 10 df and a p-value of 0.001 at the 0.005 level of significance. This result implies that a significant relationship exists between the media studied and the duration of stories on the conflict examined. In other words, the distribution of stories on the duration of coverage among the media studied significantly differed. Finally, the researchers examined the tone of coverage of the conflict, and the results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The tone/slant of the coverage.

			Tone			
			Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Media	Daily Trust	Count	33	34	53	120
		% of Total	8.2%	8.5%	13.2%	29.9%
	Punch	Count	19	26	38	83
		% of Total	4.7%	6.5%	9.5%	20.7%
	Naira land	Count	5	17	22	44
		% of Total	1.2%	4.2%	5.5%	11.0%
	Channels	Count	8	21	41	70
		% of Total	2.0%	5.2%	10.2%	17.5%
	Naij.com	Count	19	9	28	56
		% of Total	4.7%	2.2%	7.0%	14.0%
	NTA	Count	16	8	4	28
		% of Total	4.0%	2.0%	1.0%	7.0%
Total		Count	100	115	186	401
		% of Total	24.9%	28.7%	46.4%	100.0%

Table 4 sought to determine the tone of media coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. The result showed an overall dominance of a negative tone. However, the TV stations used a positive tone. Between the two TV stations examined, NTA used a more positive tone than Channels Television, whose stories were mostly negative. The result of the Chi-Square test was: $\chi2 = 61.357$; df = 10; p = 0.001 (at 0.005). This implies that a significant relationship exists between the media examined and the tone used in the coverage of the conflict. That is to say, all the media investigated significantly differed in their coverage of the conflict. The researchers further explored differences in the coverage of the conflict across the media examined. This was achieved using analysis of variance (ANOVA) as shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5: ANOVA analysis of media coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen.

Groups	Mean	SD	Sig
Newspapers	22.31	.78	
TV	17.23	.18	
Blogs	18.54	.65	.01

Result in Table 5 showed a significant statistical difference in the coverage of the conflict by the three media groups examined: $F_{(2,532)} = 4.7$, $= p < .01$. The Post-hoc comparison using the Turkey HSD test revealed that the mean scores of newspapers (group 1) ($M=22.31$, $SD.78$) were significantly different from TV stations (group 2) ($M=17.23$, $SD. 81$) and blogs (group 3) ($M=18.54$, $SD=. 65$). Therefore, the researchers conclude that the media options examined

significantly differ in their coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen with newspapers scoring higher than both TV and blogs.

Discussion

In this study, we examined media coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. An attempt was made to compare three broad media categories. These are online newspapers, television and blogs. In doing so, we paid attention to the frequency of coverage, prominence, story length, and tone. We found a significant difference in the frequency of coverage of the conflict between the media examined. In particular, we found that online newspapers recorded a higher frequency of coverage than TV and blogs put together. This result is similar to that of Gever et al. (2018), who examined media coverage of Nigeria's restructuring agitations and found that online newspapers reported more stories on the issue than TV. However, there is a striking fact about our result. It negates past studies, which found that newspapers mostly covered the herdsmen and farmers' conflict when it happened, with little attention given to the conflict when it subsided, suggesting that the newspapers had little or no concern for the ravaging herdsmen and farmers' conflict (Gever & Essien, 2019; Olomojobi, 2017).

Some scholars argue that conventional and online newspapers will not differ in content because they assume it is merely a reflection of the stories in mainstream media (Boczkowski, 2004; Tewksbury & Rittenburg, 2012). We argue here that online news content may surpass mainstream news content due to constant news updates and breaking news, thereby adding features such as local content, opinionated pieces, and user-generated content (Tewksbury & Rittenburg, 2012). Therefore, the dominance of online newspaper reports on the conflict may shape how people understand it, given that coverage frequency is an important variable in media agenda setting, as postulated by agenda-setting theory (Odii, 2013; Freeland, 2012). What this means is that the general public is likely to understand the conflict from the perspective of online newspaper stories.

Furthermore, we found a significant statistical association between the media examined and the prominence accorded to stories about the conflict between farmers and herdsmen during the time frame. Precisely, we found that while the overall stories across the media were rated as very important, online newspapers had more of their stories rated as very important, with NTA (TV) stories largely rated as less important and Channels TV stories rated as important. This result supports that of Gever et al. (2018), who noted that ownership significantly influences media reportage of conflict situations. For example, while the NTA, a government-owned station, gave less prominence to the stories, Channels Television and the online newspapers gave more prominence. The same was true of the blogs examined.

Also, our results showed a significant difference in the length of coverage accorded to the conflict across the newspapers examined. In particular, the study revealed that online newspapers published longer stories on the conflict than TV and blogs. On the other hand, blogs had longer stories than TV stations. This implies that online newspapers and blogs performed better than TV stations. We argue that, though the online news media have some downsides, their effectiveness is worth considering. Online media here means Internet-based media. Such media are now effective in behaviour change because they are among the sources of information for media users. For example, Sacco and Bossio (2015) observed that blogs have become an integral part of many societies today, used in breaking news. It permits readers and journalists to be opinionated about certain issues and provides a forum for debate and discussion, unlike the mainstream media

(Himma-Kadakas & Kõuts, 2015). The result of the current study runs contrary to that of previous scholars (Okeke et al., 2018; Gever & Essien, 2019; Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Ciboh, 2015), who reported a short duration of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. The difference between the current study and those of previous scholars may be that these studies examined only newspapers, whereas the current study combined newspapers, TV, and blogs.

Finally, the result of this study showed that the tone of media coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria was largely negative. We also found that a significant difference exists between the media options examined and the tone of coverage. This is because we found that TV stations used a positive tone, unlike newspapers and blogs, which use a largely negative tone when reporting the conflict. Negative tones signified stories that demonstrate that the conflict is on an escalating/increasing rate, terrifying, barbaric, gruesome, tense and severe, which is damaging to society, lives and properties. A positive tone describes the conflict as de-escalating, not too severe or gruesome, suggesting less panic and worry. It is possible that the TV station, most especially the government, is covering up certain things to suppress the actual occurrence of the conflict. We argue that demonstrating the actual events might inform the public of the current government's incompetence in handling the conflict. This supports the idea that most government media are sceptical of criticising the government due to its active association with partisan politics, consequently sacrificing the agenda-setting role (Gever, 2017; Tobechukwu, 2007). However, evidence from this study suggests that online media has exposed certain aspects of the conflict. Ate observed that most traditional Nigerian media channels do not report actual occurrences of events, and they do not give adequate prominence to issues beyond politics (Ate, 2011). Therefore, a collective effort that led to citizen and online journalism was suggested (Omoera & Ogah, 2016). Our result is consistent with that of Apuke and Tunca (2019), who found that Nigerian online media (blogs) cover and represent the aspirations and yearnings of internally displaced persons more than conventional media. Taken together, we noticed that newspapers and blogs had similar dimensions in their coverage, unlike TV. We also observed that ownership played a role in the manner of coverage, as even the two TV stations examined did not completely have the same direction of coverage. The ANOVA analysis also revealed a significant difference in the mean scores across the media examined.

Conclusion
We conclude that the coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in different media significantly differs. Specifically, our conclusion is that online newspapers generally performed better in terms of frequency of coverage, prominence, story length, and tone of coverage. Nonetheless, blogs also did fairly well, as they appeared to have reported the conflict significantly. We also conclude that ownership plays a significant role in determining the extent of conflict reporting. We have brought to the fore the relevance of online media platforms in covering the herdsmen and farmers' conflict. We contend that while conventional media have continued to dominate the media space, it is important to acknowledge the growing relevance of online media in shaping and influencing public opinion. Exploring the difference between mainstream and online media has unearthed different versions of reality. Our results make theoretical, practical and scholarly contributions. Regarding theory, our result has contributed to our understanding of agenda-setting theory by revealing how different media genres set the agenda for conflict situations. This is particularly so because we have shown that media agenda-setting in times of conflict may also differ by media genre.

Regarding scholarship, our results have extended existing literature on media coverage of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen by examining sources beyond conventional newspapers. This may be beneficial to other scholars interested in understanding how different media platforms report conflict in general and the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in particular. Finally, the result of this study has implications for conflict reporting, making a strong case for journalists, especially those in TV stations, to pay greater attention to the frequency, prominence, length, and tone of coverage. This is essential because our current study found that TV stations paid little attention to reporting the conflict. We recommend that further studies should be expanded to include the experiences of journalists who report the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. Further studies are also recommended to examine how international media report the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. This is important because the conflict has currently attracted global attention. Further studies should interview editors to determine their motivations for covering the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria.

Conflict of interest
None declared.

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