

**NEWS FRAMING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BY THE NIGERIAN PRESS:
A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FARMERS/HERDSMEN CLASHES**

By

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ABSTRACT

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigerian media have served as a conduit for stimulating a myriad of social tensions. However, with the advent of democracy in 1999, these trends continue and metamorphose into religious and ethno-political upheavals which have been a challenge to leadership. Incidentally, in recent years, the persistent clashes between farmers and herdsmen dawdled. In this regard, exploring the patterns of news framing on this social tension is necessary for an effective conflict management strategy in Nigeria's frail political atmosphere. Therefore, this discourse analysis explores news headlines from the Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune, and the Sun newspapers to determine these patterns. Specifically, this paper, explores the relationships between use of language and socio-political contexts in which it occurs to interpret issues such as gender, ethnicity, cultural differences, ideology, identity and how these are both constructed and reflected in the texts. Hence, the analysis revealed that patterns of positive and negative stereotypes and favoritism characterized the news coverage during the periods 2015-2017 under review. It was further discovered that newspapers superficially embraced discussions and portrayals tantamount to show support for their regional affiliations on issues of national interest. By implication, this study will be of great influence to media establishments, and policy makers in peace building and policy making to effectively design new strategies of conflict management. Consequently, future studies should propose a model and enduring policy framework on conflict management in Nigeria.

Keywords: News Framing, Critical discourse analysis, Conflict Management, farmers/herdsmen, Policy Framework

1.1 Introduction

The malignant nature of conflicts in third world nations has insistently subverted the institutionalized politico-economic, socio-cultural and ethno-religious structures of many African states. In this regard, several studies have been conducted in response to conflict situations and foremost among these studies were the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) banditry (Ismail, 2016), as well as the globalized sarcasm for politico-economic empowerment such as ‘foreign direct investment’ though, a rhetoric of western impunity for developing countries (Kishi, Maggio, & Raleigh, 2017). In spite of this, sufficient attention has not been accorded at exploring the springboard of these conflicts mismanagement in relation to news framing.

Hence, according to Moy, Tewksbury, & Rinke (2016) the traditional news media have played essential role in our contemporary society, serving as the ‘conduits’ through which societal members learn of issues away from the horizon of their personal life. Furthermore, considering this ‘potent power’ of traditional news media in our modern civilization, the discourse of newspapers as the ‘melting pot’ has been, and continues to be recognized as the catalyst of these social tensions.

Scholars have established that in multi-ethnic countries, conflict conditions, remained adamant and resolution elusive (Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim, & Oba, 2017; Mohammed, & Dalib, 2017). Similarly, in culturally diverse nations such as Nigeria, since her independence, the traditional news media reports appear to exacerbate the politico-economic and ethno-religious conflicts situations and consequently paving ways to impending ones (Mohammed, & Dalib, 2017).

However, most recently, after the 2015 general elections, the delicate political atmosphere in Nigeria is witnessing an opposing rather than cohesive tribal and religious tolerance between both major and minor ethnic groups and the continues turbulence for unequal and lopsided political appointments and other problems of indigenization among ethnic groups living outside their home states (Joshua, 2014) has further intensify this hostile clashes. Consequently, there has been blames on the media organizations for being used as stimulant for advocating and publicizing hate speeches, as well as falsification of facts (Vanguard, 2015).

Corroborating this, (Ojo, 2013) further argued that the media is the ‘spot light’ that illuminate interethnic politics which threatens national integration. In the same way, Akpan, Olofu-Adeoye, and Ering (2013) acknowledged mass media in general as an influential means of communication both in the latitude of peace and conflict. Its application can unambiguously promote peace. While contrarily, media can also be used acrimoniously to create, amplify and preserve conflicts secretly and openly. In the light of the above, what could be the accurate patterns of news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria? because of multi-culturalism and regionalism, it is assumed that content of news reports are framed with inciteful issues in support of erratic political ideologies which is detrimental to Nigeria’s integration.

Regardless of the extant studies on these contentious problems, a critical discourse analysis on the patterns of news framing as the catalyst of conflict mismanagement on farmers/herdsmen clashes seem to be imperative. Therefore, this inadequacy of a plausible and great paucity of methodological research approach to address the interminable problem on patterns of news framing on farmer/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria call for further research. In line with this, Adisa, Mohammed, and Ahmad (2015a, 2015b) have suggested further researches on effects of news framing on snags of ethno-political discourses in a cultural diverse nation such as Nigeria.

This is because, tactful news framing has a tendency to harmonize peacefully and unify different ethnic groups alike during periods of problems or misconceptions (Adisa et al., 2015a). Thus, this study explores further through discourse analysis of major regional daily newspapers in Nigeria (Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune and the Sun newspapers) and examines the patterns of news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes.

In addition, after Nigeria’s independence in 1960, among the over 250 ethnic inhabitants in Nigeria, resource control and separatist discourse continues to gain grounds in the media space (both print and electronic) between the major ethnic groups in the country. More so, for decades since the aftermath of the 1970 civil war, there is dearth of meaningful legislation to provide a reasonable decision and clear direction in response to these ethno-religious and politico-economic agitations.

At the same time, discourse analysis is applicable to any form of written materials or text based contents and ethno-politically impelled situations (Parker, 2002; Rasaq, et. al., 2017) Thus, in line with this study objective, the discourse analysis is based on the sampled headlines of newspapers generated texts in Nigeria. Consequently, the discourse investigates the different patterns in which news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes are composed in the particular headlines of the selected newspapers.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives are:

1. To investigate the patterns of news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigerian newspapers.
2. To examine if the patterns of news framing mismanage discourses on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Media and conflicts mismanagement

The analyses of the media being contentious or unifying societies on politico-economic and socio-cultural conflicts issues have continued to spawn more attention in divergent scholarly point of views globally (Arnold & Schneider, 2007; Kira, 2000; Plaisance, 2002). According to Durham and Carpenter (2014) the press emerged in societies as means of disseminating information at the same time, engaged in contentious framing of issues on national relevance and ethnic pluralism, though concurrently championing their own powers as the vanguards of national unity.

The empirical literature on media effects on audiences is diverse and overwhelmingly questionable (Kellner, 2004). Nevertheless, in Nigeria, the patterns of news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes have been identified to be swelling the plague of this social tension. This evidence is recognized by Ayoola (2010) who maintained that patterns of news framing aggravated the patronage and endorsement of readership by the predominant interethnic groups and regional devotion most ethnic groups pay regarding the areas they hail from. Thus, these

different ethnic groups mostly subscribed to newspapers that always empathetically framed their socio-cultural as well as political preferences.

In support of this argument, Kur, Agudusy, and Orhewere (2015) observed how different newspaper publishers in Nigeria, embellished the contents of news reports tantamount to instigate unsound rivalry and create division between different interethnic groups in the country. Similarly, in newsframing and escalation of ethno-political antipathies issues in general, Mohammed and Dalib (2017) presented a quantitative analysis of results that indicated frequencies of ferocious elements in the patterns of newsframing on ethno-political antipathies issues in Nigerian media and however, not within the reference to any particular conflict.

Based on the above statements, (Sundel 1999; Adisa, et. al., 2015a, 2015b, 2017c; Mohammed & Dalib, 2017) posited that prevailing issues and agitations on interethnic harmonious coexistence for decades has rapidly emerged as a challenge to political leadership, religion, education, civil liberation as well as industry regulation. In this regard, Kellner (2004) affirmed that the media presents the reception that builds up social tensions for heterogeneous audiences globally, and the media equally heighten such social problems with respect to news framing on national issues.

With regards to the aforementioned, news media organizations in multicultural societies such as Nigeria, more than any other social services agencies have more obligations to uphold the integrity of their social responsibilities as well as exhibiting the commitment to protect the unity and integration of the Nigerian state.

2.2 Framing and critical theory

Exploring the traditional news media specifically newspapers reportage of politico-economic and religious conflicts situations in Nigeria is indispensable and considerably needed due to the fact that patterns of news framing plays important role in diffusing socio-cultural and politico-economic matters. Hence, the critical instrument advance in this process is the utilization of news frames to transmit meaning because news framing basically includes selection and salience.

To frame is to choose any angle of a perceived reality and compose them to be salient in a text or piece, to such a degree as to develop a specific problem definition, causal understanding, moral

judgment, and or treatment recommendation for the piece described (Entman, 1993). Over the years, several researches have revealed that framing has the ability to disclose the obscurities, multiplicities and conflicts deeply imbedded or absent from content of news narratives (Durham & Carpenter, 2014) along with the polysemic measurements of news contents and the patterns of domination and subordination that may perhaps constrain polysemy (Carragee, 2003).

Frame analysis is essential for exploration and examining persuasive and evaluative news pointed toward the process and practice of mass media established ideologies (Eilders & Albrecht, 2000; Tankard, 2001). According to Cissel, (2012) framing is the process through which information is tailored and disclosed to the audiences. Therefore, framing as a concept, is a method by which individuals develop a specific notion and perception of an issue or construct their cognition about an issue or phenomena (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

In a similar vein, Nisbet (2009) spell out that “Frames are interpretive storylines that set a specific train of thought in motion, communicating why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible for it, and what should be done about it” (p.15). Adding credence to news framing, Cissel (2012) asserts that composition of words used in a news piece constructs a means of influence which has the advantage to form patterns and judgments within mindsets of its readers.

Consequently, coherent with the above mentioned views, through critical theory, framing words with the notion that an elusive change in the language of depiction for a given situation might disrupt how audience understands this situation. This indicates that news framing can aid and influence how we think about matters such as political situations. Accordingly, priming these issues may assign negative cognition and inferred judgments. This means that news frames may call more attention to some facets of our political life at the expense of other social issues (Rasaq, A. Udende, P., Ibrahim, A., & Oba, 2017).

The social segregation and discourse of issues in the society underscored the concept of critical theory, which is also germane to this study. According to (Ogbor, 2001) who draws from the shared philosophy/social theory of the Frankfurt scholar’s views and the works of (Habermas, 2006) also discusses the significance of critical theory in corporate culture, which can also apply

to popular culture. The core of critical theory is to assist us inquire or contest the foundation upon which contemporary ideology and practices rest (Ogbor, 2001) On the other hand, critical theory helps us with the opportunity to examine and comprehend the ways as well as the conditions of social, economic, and political domination limits distort and depreciate discourse regarding contested public issues (McClure, 1996).

In relating the context of critical theory to farmers/herdsmen clashes, it is apparent to note that any negative media depiction of farmers/herdsmen clashes is complete and pertinent with the ideals of an ablest multi-cultural society. Consequently, news framing of farmers/herdsmen clashes has the ability to either make or mar the political ideologies and social identities of these parties involved.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Critical discourse analysis

In line with the views of Macnamara (2005), who has agreed that the reliability for analysis of any media content drawing on conclusions or descriptions of mediated discourses, and specifically making presumptions having to do with prone effects of these communicated discourses depends largely on the methodology. Therefore, this paper dwell on critical discourse analysis approach of (newspaper published headlines) to interpret the patterns of news framing and conflict management on farmers/herdmen clashes in Nigeria.

In a comparative analysis of newspapers conducted by Bleich, Stonebraker, Nisar, & Abdelhamid (2015) on depictions of minorities in the British newspapers, “headlines about Muslims to that of headlines about Jews and Christians” findings suggests that the procedure can be applied to variety of other issues including religion, ethnicity, race and or social groups. Rasaq, et. al., (2017) explained that critical discourse analysis as an instructive inquiry attracts attention to the presence of ‘stereotyped’ labeling in texts, elites and every day discourse. As such, this made critical discourse analysis appropriate to explore and reveal the patterns of news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria’s fragile political process.

In the words of (Paltridge, 2013 pp.89-90) “Critical discourse analysis explores the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs. It explores

issues such as gender, ethnicity, cultural difference, ideology and identity and how these are both constructed and reflected in texts. It also investigates ways in which language constructs may include a detailed textual analysis and move from there to an explanation and interpretation of the analysis. It might proceed from there to deconstruct and challenge the texts being examined. This may include tracing underlining ideologies from the linguistic features of a text, unpacking particular biases and ideological presuppositions underlining the text, and relating the text to other texts and to people's experiences and beliefs". It is therefore crucial, in line with this study objective to unveil these latent meanings concealed in the newspapers content that instigate conflict mismanagement and accelerate hostile relationship threatening the unity of Nigeria.

Prior to determining the sample, it is worthy to note that most of the methodologies to critical discourse analysis do not overtly explicate or endorse any specified 'data-gathering' processes (Wodak & Meyer, 2009 pp. 28), nevertheless, it is important to categorize the material that formed the data for analysis in this paper otherwise known as the population or sphere of discourse (Mautner, 2008). In line with the size of the population, which constitutes the total number of newspapers and articles on news framing and conflicts management on farmers/herdsmen clashes may be unspecified (Bauer, & Aarts, 2000) in this case, it is suggested to use cyclical process. Consequently, sampling was set through choosing small but appropriate and reliable articles on news framing and conflicts management through online newspapers to examine them with the soul aim of finding to select again. In support of Bauer and Aarts (2000) and (Mautner, 2008), who affirmed that in cyclical sampling procedure more material is added up to saturation point when, new data no longer provide new representations.

Drawing on this process and critical discourse analysis to reveal the patterns of news framing and conflicts management on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria, the researchers, sets a time-frame between 1st January 2015 and 30th December, 2017 to collect samples of stories from the online versions of Nigerian daily newspapers for analysis as the nation prepared for general elections and the subsequent political appointments which serve as the beehive of political activities characterized by issues such as agitations, sentiments, rivalry and clashes etc. Likewise, the periods were appropriate for this study, in line with these several scholars' ideation (Carment,

James, & Taydas, 2009; Okoli, & Iortyer, 2014) that political process and campaign periods are the likely stimulant of social tensions particularly in culturally diverse nations.

3.2 Perspective of Ruth Wodak critical discourse analysis

The areas of critical discourse analysis were dominated by Van Dijk, Fairclough and Wodak's critical discourse analysis approach. For instance, Van Dijk and Faircloughs' discursive style tries to link the micro-structures of language to macro-structures of society (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978). Nevertheless, Van Dijk's analytical parentheses explicate the texts macro-structures to symbolizes power, dominance and inequities between social groups, however, micro-structures involves language usage, discourse, oral interaction as well as communication (Mautner, 2008). On the other hand, other critical discourse analysts are usually interested in the way discourse (re)produces social control, illuminating the preference in, or exclusion of one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively repel such exploitation (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). These scholars, Wodak and Mayer (2009) further argued that the uniting afterthoughts of critical discourse analysis are to some extent on 'specifics of the research questions than the theoretical positioning'.

Accordingly, Baker et al., (2008) in analysis of 140-million-word corpus in British newspapers on refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, it revealed the categories on which identifies common collocation and concordance in representation of racism. Therefore, in relation to this procedure, this study adapted and modifies the discursive categories in Baker et al., (2008) to underscore and divulge the patterns of farmers/herdsmen conflict management as well as triangulate between news farming and political rhetoric in Nigeria's feeble political process.

4.1 Analysis of findings and discussions

The aims of this paper, which the findings answered, are: (1) To investigate the patterns of news framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria and (2) To examine if this patterns of news framing mismanages discourses on farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria during the period under review. These findings discussed in details how the patterns of the respective newspapers framed farmers/herdsmen clashes as presented and explained in the table below.

Table 1 Results of findings, analysis and discussions of articles by newspaper and framing

Strategies/Categories	Objectives	Sampled headlines analysis and discussions
Referential/Nomination	Construction of in-group or out-group	Findings: “ <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen conquer Abuja” (The Sun, Dec 9, 2015. www.sunnewsonline.com). “Over 100 feared killed many houses burnt in Benue <i>Fulani</i> attack,” (The Sun, May 15, 2015. www.sunnewsonline.com). “ <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen plan mayhem, genocide in Benue – Groups” (30 th October, 2017. www.sunnewsonline.com) “Compulsory registration of <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen in South-West underway” (Nigerian Tribune, Oct 20, 2015. www.tribuneonlineng.com). “Restrict <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen to the North, cleric advises FG” (Nigerian Tribune, October 26, 2016. www.tribuneonlineng.com). “Many feared dead as <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen attack villages” (Dailytrust, December 4, 2017. www.dailitrust.com.ng) “Herdsmen menace tearing Anambra community apart” (Dailytrust, December 21, 2017. www.dailitrust.com.ng)
Prediction	Labeling social actors more or less positively or negatively. Deprecatorily or appreciatively	Analysis of Labeling and discussion: Based on the above headlines’ grammatical compositions such as “restrict” “conquer”, “compulsory” “genocide” “tearing” and “mayhem” it is glaring that the reporters are insensitive to diversity and multicultural nature of Nigeria, by instantly attributing the heinous act to <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen. This is a clear construction of <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen as defector out-group and blood thirsty humans.
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	Analysis and justification of attributions and discussion: From the sampled news headlines, it is evident that the newspapers reports were conveying negative intercultural rhetoric based on ‘alleged’ allegations as stated in the stories’ lead, for instance, “conquer”, “compulsory” “restrict” and “mayhem” in depiction and representation of “ <i>Fulani</i> herdsmen” as vindictive groups among the Nigerian society.
Perspective, framing or discourse	Expressing involvement and	Analysis of involvement and positioning of speakers and discussion: Farmer’s views: “We

representation	positioning speakers point of views	were reliably informed that already, there is a mass gathering of cattle and militia men at Kungwa in Awe Local Government Area of Nasarawa state to attack Benue. And herdsmen express their views to refute the claim as follows “Meanwhile, the leadership of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore has described as untrue, claims, that Fulani pastoralists have concluded plans to invade the state, in demonstration of their discontent with the anti-open grazing law”.
Intensification, Mitigation	Clarifying the epistemic status of a proposition	Analysis of proportion and discussion: Based on the above claims, both warring parties are anxious to attack or respond to any insinuation targeted at each other without due consideration for security side of the story to and infer negative portrayals. As such, no regards for any security reports from the institutions i.e. Police and Department of State Security (DSS) who are saddled with the responsibility of providing first hand security information for the citizenry.

Adapted and modified for this study from Baker et al., (2008).

5.1 Conclusion and recommendations for Future Research

This research has discreetly discussed its purposes; therefore the following recommendations are being made for future researches. This research focused only on newspapers, therefore, it is being recommended for future researchers to explore the framing of farmers/herdsmen clashes in the other genre of mass media like radio. The necessity to focus on these genres is because radio is the medium for the masses and most victims of conflicts situations are the masses.

Similarly, looking at the devastating effects of farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria’s integration and consolidation, the spate of these clashes seem to pervade domestic security as well as foreign policy. The result of this discourse analysis however indicates that while there are violent tendencies as patterns of news framing of farmers/herdsmen clashes, this discourse has

expounded the causes and consequences of negative framing on farmers/herdsmen clashes in the Nigerian context.

As this paper focuses its discussion within framing theory, it contributes to theoretical application that brings forth the significance of how labeling and nepotism build the understanding of the patterns of news framing. It is expected that this research will encourage more efforts in emergent farmers/herdsmen clashes in Nigeria's fallible political institutions. In addition to proposed reviews of existing media laws, however, stringent measures in the application of these laws be considered against any news media organization promoting ethnic chauvinism in order to checkmate the unwarranted activities and regulate news content of mass media in Nigeria.

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