

# Public Perception of Radio Coverage of Farmers/Fulani Herdsmen Conflict in Taraba State: Case Study of Taraba State Broadcasting Service, Jalingo, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Farmers and herdsmen conflict was one of the many challenges that have thwarted harmony in most parts of Nigeria. Based on this, radio was always expected to be seen promoting unity and mutual respect through its programs. Therefore, at all times, broadcast media (radio) was expected to adopt a position aimed at dowsing the conflict and promoting mutual understanding and harmony. This research therefore, examined public perception of radio coverage of farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflict in Taraba State. The research focused on Taraba State Broadcasting service, Jalingo. The study was anchored on two theories: Agenda-Setting and Social Responsibility. A survey research design was adopted for the research. The sample size adopted was 400 respondents. The research used a questionnaire to gather data; an in-depth interview complemented it. The method of data analysis adopted was descriptive analysis. Findings showed that the media did not allocate much attention to the conflict, hence the lack of frequent coverage. Findings also showed no detailed dissemination of information about the crises. The research concluded that the broadcast media under study were not conscious of their society by being unprofessional in their coverage of the conflict and not adequately informing people about it. Therefore, the research recommended that broadcast media in Nigeria go beyond their cardinal functions and fully imbibe the practice of conflict reporting and management practice.

**Keywords:** public perception, media coverage, conflict, herdsmen, fulani, farmers

## Introduction

Perception, no doubt, is an influential factor that determines the success or failure of an organization. According to Chiakaan (2016), it concerns the people's feelings and perceived views about an organization. Affirming to this, Yolanda (2017) attests that perception is an individual's way of recognizing and interpreting the information they have gathered through their senses. More so, the analysis and value attached to the information received determine how individuals perceive and react in the way he or she does. According to Beatrice (2015), these individuals analyze and interpret the received information based on their personal needs and interests. This means that in perception, individual expectations change based on their interests and needs. For example, the expectation could be to form an opinion about certain events or situations. Such situations could be conflict, diseases, corruption sagas and so on. How information about these issues is reported virtually determines how the public feels, interprets and reacts.

Perception is a tool of organizational success that hinges on feelings and emotions. As Yolanda (2017) explained, this feeling is the by-product of the brain perceiving and assigning meaning to the emotion. Apart from interpreting and analyzing information received, perception relies on feelings and emotions because they determine how an individual reacts or behaves. Emotion, as affirmed by Ramtin (2015), is a complicated state of emotion that causes bodily and psychological changes and impacts one's thinking and behavior. This could result in a mental reaction (anger or terror), a powerful feeling usually aimed at a single object and is often followed by psychological and behavioral

changes in the body (Beatrice, 2015). The changes can manifest in areas such as attitude, behavior, etc.

However, this means that the perception of media coverage of not only farmers and herdsmen conflict with the public could be progressive or retrogressive depending on how the public views the information disseminated by the media. Cultural bias or prejudice tends to influence one's perspective of a scenario. The most notable example of the media's potential negative role in violence is the case of Rwanda, where fake news aimed at creating fear and distrust was spread. This intensified negative perceptions and among the combatants. For example, the Tutsi people were called "cockroaches" by Radio Libre des Mille Collines and this intensified the negative perception of the Hutu's thereby contributing to the 1994 genocide. However, this is the opposite in the case of Kenya, where messages from the newspaper were used to propagate messages of peace and unity during the 2007/2008 post-election crisis. The mass media messages generated positive perceptions from the public, thereby uniting the people together to form a harmonious society. This research therefore, determines the public perception of Taraba State radio broadcasting service, Jalingo coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict in Taraba State.

## Review of the Related Literature

### Concept of Perception

There are many definitions of perception propounded by scholars. From the layman's perspective, perception is becoming aware of "one's environment through physical feeling, which

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reflects an individual's ability to understand" (Chambers Dictionary, 2012, p. 217). Perception, according to some researchers, is the process of perceiving (being aware of), organizing (collecting and storing), and interpreting (binding to knowledge) sensory data. Since perception embodies all of the above elements, it became necessary to say that perception concerns the human senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, which generate messages from the environment. This also means that the perception process is not possible when there is no transmission of information from the outside world into the minds of individuals for processing. According to Michener (2004), this is why perception is the process through which people understand the world around them and generate a mental image of the environment. To overcome the inherent ambiguity in all sensory data, the brain generates assumptions about the world in reaction to the task. Perception, however, involves the way one sees the world.

A cutting (1987) points out that perception is gathering knowledge about the world through the senses. The senses gathered, digested, and formed an opinion about the issue that has been perceived. Any issues can be perceived differently depending on how the senses see the situation. That's why Cantril (1968, p. 5) believed that perception is "the consciousness that arises as a result of a most sophisticated weighing process... taking into consideration a whole host of elements or clues." A lot of factors can affect perception. It could be economic, political, social, emotional, or otherwise. All these factors contribute to determining how one feels about a certain situation, group, or organization.

### **Concept of Conflict**

Conflict is omnipresent. It occurs virtually in all parts of the world. Different meanings have been accrued to conflict by scholars and even global leaders around the world. But the prevalent denominator or factor that binds their definitions is disputes' impact on individuals. In this regard, Pia and Diez (2007, p. 2) described the conflict as a "competition or struggle between individuals with conflicting requirements, thoughts, beliefs, values or objectives." This means that when the demands, objectives, etc., change, the conflict of interest also shifts to suit the conflicting parties' expectations.

Conflict or war cannot occur without a conflict of interest. Once a group or an individual feels cheated or marginalized over its interest, there is bound to be loggerheads or war. Fisher (2000) believed that war is an incompatibility of objectives or values in relationships between two or more sides, coupled with efforts to regulate one another and antagonistic emotions towards one another. This means that once there is a lack of tolerance and recognition by an individual or distinct group of one's ideals, misunderstanding of action surfaces, leading to malicious confrontations. From Martin and Nakayama's view (2013, p. 436), conflict "involves a perceived or actual incompatibility of objectives, values, expectations, procedures or results between two or more interdependent people or organizations." This can only happen when at least two parties attempt to obtain an accessible set of scarce resources simultaneously.

### **Radio and Conflict Coverage in Nigeria**

Radio coverage of all issues affecting mankind is important. It served as the bridge connecting the people and events around them. It also served as the conduit through which data reaches the audience about what is happening around them and beyond. Media outlets are always looking for incidents and activities that concern their audience because of their monitoring function. This situation between Nigeria's landowners and herdsmen was a boiling point for the citizens. As society's watchdog, reporting such skirmishes when they happen is the role of the media (Carlman & Svedlund, 2013). To report this socio-economic crisis efficiently, however, the press must know the root causes of such problems. Unfortunately, it's an issue that most media didn't take the time to study, and that's why the reportage has caused more damage than good in most cases, leaving people with negative thoughts and perceptions. Rwanda's situation is one of the typical instances of how radio reporting can negatively devastate a nation.

The media is the lens through which the public receives data about what is happening around them and beyond. The media outlets are the watchdogs of every civilized society and therefore perform the surveillance function. In their judgment and selection of what becomes news, journalists and other media professionals are governed by news values (Olomjobi, 2017). Among the numerous news values that the media considered very important was conflicted. Conflict is key news value-driving media coverage. A conflict scenario can attract media attention partly due to its consequent plot and probable outcome.

For example, the media can decide to present the herdsmen as the major contributor to the conflict, which in turn influences the public to see the herdsmen negatively and vice versa. This implied that the media portrayed the conflict as an ethnic/communal, religious, and regional due to inequality and favoritism. Moreover, the media can as well not even give attention to the herdsmen and farmers' conflict through the low frequency of coverage and episodic framing techniques. It can also concentrate on the government's support and intervention in curbing the herdsmen and farmers' conflict with less focus on the actual occurrences.

### **Radio as a Tool for Managing and Preventing Crises**

There is little doubt that the media plays an important role in conflict resolution, management, and peacebuilding on a local, national, and international level. According to Nwosu (2004), radio is particularly significant in dispute resolution since it is an information merchant, conduit, or carrier of numerous shades and colors of information. Adequate information is vital in the emergence, escalation, or decrease of tension at various levels in conflict or even war. Tensions can decide whether the conflict ends or continues depending on how they are managed. Neutral dissemination of information is vital in this regard.

The radio as a medium of information dissemination significantly impacts preventing, managing and resolving conflict effectively by assuming conflict-preventing functions. The conflict prevention modules could be deployed through effective message delivery and as a transducer during conflict or war. In recent times, the radio has emerged as an essential tool in combating conflicts, crises and acts of terrorism through information dissemination. Pate (2002, p. 5) maintains that:

Information is regarded as a critical factor in escalating or reducing tension in conflict. In conflict, it is often argued that abuse by the instrument of mass communication in times of crises, especially in complex and fragile societies like Nigeria, could have serious consequences.

Though radio as media of information delivery is cardinal to maintaining and sustaining peace in society, it can also serve as a destructive agent in the peace process. Interest is important here, either from the owners, government, political officers, etc. According to Jan (2011), they can opt to report adversely on the risks and perils of a compromise, bolstering the credibility of those opposed to concessions and reinforcing the enemy's unfavorable stereotype.

### **Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict: Nature and Causes in Nigeria**

The rivalry for natural resources was at the root of the conflict between nomadic herders and crop farmers in Nigeria. Herders and farmers battle over land and water, with the former looking for these resources to feed their cattle and the latter looking to use them to grow crops. Due to the rising scarcity of resources in recent decades, this competition has become more fierce, linked to climate change (Abugu & Onuba, 2015). According to Bakuh (2005), 45 percent of Africa's land mass is desertified. Due to the reduced amount of land accessible for cultivation and grazing, violent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in the search for space are common.

When disputes between herders and farmers evolved into violent clashes, the provocation would most likely have gone beyond a mere competition for scarce resources. That is to say and violence can be motivated between herders and farmers by other factors complementary or detached from the root cause. For one, feuds between the two groups are often predicated on

accusations of intentional deprivation or criminality against each other. For example, herders accused farmers or members of the host community of having stolen or poisoned their cattle. Farming communities also accused herders of abduction, rape, armed robbery, and murder. These accusations or actual deeds tend to stir violent attacks and reprisals. Ultimately, contestations between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria are often placed within ethnic and religious contexts. Blench (2003) adduces that in a case where the religious and cultural views of a pastoral group diverge from those of the agrarian community hosting them to the extent that they supersede all conceivable economic advantages, the outbreak of conflict becomes more likely. In their venture to other regions in Nigeria, Fulani herdsmen, who are predominantly Muslims, come in contact with diverse groups of people, not only of different ethnicity but equally of a different religion to their own.

Chiakaan *et al.* (2019) state that most parts of the country have tested and experienced insecurity, with the majority of the cases of insecurity recorded in the Middle Belt. In Nigeria, most herdsmen do not own land but graze their livestock in host communities, nor do they own houses or reside in those areas permanently. They would not ransack any community if they resided or owned properties in those areas. This shows that the marauding nature of herdsmen contributed to the ongoing assaults on the host societies.

### Review of Empirical Studies

Many studies previously carried out by other scholars are related or relevant to this study. Some such studies have been selected and reviewed in this study. One such study was research conducted on the perception of conflict coverage by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) by the Nigerian public, which was carried out by Akpoghiran and Otite (2017). The study sampled 398 participants, which comprised 246 men and 152 women. The researcher used simple random sampling to select respondents. The study showed that many participants rated the NTA negatively in terms of the timeliness of news and adequacy of coverage of the conflict. The study revealed that the government-owned television stations reported conflicting news from the viewpoint of peace and domestic unity. However, the finding showed that the coverage of the conflict by NTA was done from the viewpoint of the Federal Government expansion agenda. It was recommended that NTA should adhere to the tenets of social responsibility by serving the public rather than the government itself. This study was relevant to this research study because it depicted or highlighted the deficiency of the media in the coverage of conflict-related issues in Nigeria.

Another study relevant to this research was conducted by Usigbe and Ilo (2019) titled: *Bias and Conflict Reportage in Nigerian Media: The Case of Tivs/Fulani Herdsmen*. The study draws a sample of 384 respondents. Of the total respondents, 192 were of Tiv origin, 150 were from Gwagwalada and 42 were from the Dauda IDP camp. The study tested whether group affiliation can cause the perception of bias in the news and checked the possible consequences for the media involved. Respondents were drawn from Gwagwalada, Abuja and the Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) camp in Dauda, Benue State. The respondents were requested to read and access a standardized news story published by ThisDAY newspaper on the killings attributed to Fulani herdsmen of two Catholic priests and many other killings in Benue state. The results showed that the people had low confidence in the media outlet and perceived its news stories as biased. Findings showed that the media was not objective and did not perceive the media as representative of the people. It was also identified that the media houses always covered government news stories, neglecting people's yearnings. It was recommended that the media do more in the de-escalation of crisis by refraining from using words and phrases like 'terrorist,' 'Fulani killers,' 'community killers,' and so on, which tend to stereotype parties in a conflict.

In an audience-based study, Chebii (2015) investigated the role of media in escalating violent conflicts during and after the 2007 Kenyan general election. The investigator drew from a target population of 12,975 inhabitants from three places in Uasin Gishu

County, Kenya, a sample of 373 participants. The researcher used random sampling to select respondents and a quantitative approach to collect data. The results from the study indicated that 69.8% of participants believed the media reports played an escalation role, while only 30.2% believed that the media played a de-escalating role. Another 61.3% of the participants agreed that the press encouraged hate speeches during the election, 38.7% disagreed. Also, 71% of participants identified that the press promoted propaganda during the election, and the remaining 29% thought otherwise. Based on the preceding, it was discovered that local (vernacular) media outlets in Kenya are more likely than domestic media outlets in the nation to contribute to the escalation of the conflict. This study is relevant to this research because it discussed perception and how media coverage affected people's thinking. It is also relevant to this study because it established that people perceived the media as a tool for escalating hate and conflict in their communities.

### Theoretical Framework

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw are credited with developing the agenda-setting idea in their seminal paper released in 1972. One of the media-impacted theories in mass communication was the agenda-setting theory. The agenda-setting theory's main premise was that the media sets the agenda for what the public considers important. Setting an agenda for an issue was one thing, but how people interpret and perceive the information reported is another. According to the hypothesis, there was a link between how the media presents news and information and how important such events concern the general people.

It is well recognized that the media, as agenda-setters, may influence what topics the public considers essential. However, the degree to which the media succeeds in this differs. That is to say, and certain conditions can limit the media's ability to set the agenda. For example, one important issue was the audience's attitude and the attention given to the media. In addition, individual characteristics can influence how people react to the media agenda.

Social Responsibility Theory was also relevant to this research. It is one of the normative theories of communication. Frederick Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm popularized the theory of social responsibility in 1956, along with authoritarian theory, soviet-communist theory, and libertarian theory. The major thrust of the theory was for the media to be controlled and free to ensure that the public interest is prioritized and pursued by the media for the benefit of society.

Media ownership was concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy individuals, and commercialism in the media was the norm, with little or no regard for public accountability. When Social Responsibility first emerged, media ownership was proposed "as a form of public trust or stewardship, rather than a limitless personal franchise" (McQuail, 2010, p. 171).

### Statement of the Problem

Perception, no doubt, is a powerful factor that determines the success or failure of an organization. Since broadcast stations exist to serve the public, they, no doubt, deserve a positive perception from members of the public. This was necessary as they were seen as a unity, peace and development tools. Based on this, radio was always expected to be seen as leading the path of unity and development. This implied that in a conflict situation, radio was expected to adopt a position that was aimed at dowsing conflict, promoting mutual understanding and harmony.

Undoubtedly, the performance of radio as a public utility in Nigeria, particularly in a crisis, left much to be desired. In this regard, many people seem to negatively perceive public broadcast stations in Nigeria. This negative perception further trailed radio's coverage of the farmers-herdsmen crisis, which seriously bedeviled Nigeria from 2010 to 2019. Some people appeared not to have been satisfied with the performance or role played by the radio during that conflict situation in the country. This study, therefore, determined the perception of people about the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict by Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS), Jalingo.

**Objectives**

1. Determined how often listeners of the selected radio station were exposed to farmers’/herders’ conflicts in the state.
2. Find out the frequency of the farmers/herders conflict coverage by the selected radio station in Taraba State.
3. Determined the feelings of people about the way and manner the selected radio station in Taraba State covered the farmers/herders conflict.
4. Find out whether the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict by Taraba State Broadcasting Service contributed to the management of the conflict or otherwise.

**Research Questions**

The following questions are framed to guide the study:

1. How often were listeners of the selected radio station in Taraba State exposed to farmers’/herders’ conflict in the state?
2. How frequent were the selected radio stations in Taraba State in the coverage of the conflicts between farmers and herders?
3. What was the feeling of the people about the way and manner the selected radio station in Taraba State covered the farmers/herders?
4. To what extent did coverage of the farmers and herders conflict by TSBS, Jalingo contribute to managing the conflict or otherwise?

**Methodology**

The research adopted a quantitative design. According to Levine (2009), quantifying a study allows an investigator to easily measure the phenomenon under examination.

The target population for this study encompassed radio listeners of TSBS, Jalingo. However, the population for this study was derived from the selected conflict-ridden local government areas from Taraba state. Therefore, the population used in the study was sampled from Lau and Sardauna, which formed the study area. The grand total of 593,708 for the two Local Government Areas was obtained from National Population Commission in 2016.

However, the research employed the purposive sampling technique. First, purposive sampling was employed to select two local governments each from Taraba State. The rationale for selecting the local governments was based on the intensity of violence that occurred in the Lau and Sardauna, Local

Government Areas of Taraba State. For the interview session, simple random sampling was employed to select 4 respondents from each of the two selected local government areas. Only those who were willing to participate in the research were selected. This implied that the names and identities of the participants were not to be divulged during the analysis. Instead, they were represented with a code name, for example, interviewee 1 ...8.

The research instruments used for this study were a questionnaire and an in-depth interview. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data gathered. The data collection method was a questionnaire complemented by an in-depth interview. However, the data collected was analyzed descriptively and thematically.

**Results**

**Table 1**

*How often did you use to be exposed to News and other Programmes on Taraba State Broadcasting Service, Jalingo, on the Farmers/Herders Conflict?*

Options	No. of responses	Percentage
Very often	17	4.4%
Often	173	44.4%
Partially	197	50.5%
Rarely	3	.8%
Not at all	00	00
Total	390	100%

*Note.* Data collected by the author in 2022.

Table 1 presented respondents’ views about their exposure to news and other Taraba State Broadcasting Service programs, Jalingo, on the farmers/herders conflict. Data have shown that 17 (4.4%) respondents were very often exposed to news and other programs that covered the farmers/herders conflict; additionally, 173 (44.4%) and 197 (50.5%) respondents identified that they were often and partially exposed to news and other programs on farmers/herders conflict. At the same time, 3 (.8%) and 0 respondents stated that they rarely and not at all were exposed to news and other programs on farmers’/herders’ conflict. Results from this table established that most respondents are partially exposed to news and other programs of Taraba State Broadcasting Service that cover the farmers/herders conflict.

**Table 2**

*What is your opinion about the Frequency of Coverage of the Farmers/Herders Conflict by Taraba State Broadcasting Service, Jalingo?*

Views	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)	M	Remark
It used to cover the conflict very frequently	59 (15.1%)	17 (4.4%)	106 (27.2%)	137 (35.1%)	11 (2.8%)	390 (100%)	2.82*	Disagree
It used to cover the conflict frequently	72 (18.5%)	76 (19.5%)	120 (30.8%)	113 (29%)	9 (2.3%)	390 (100%)	2.75*	Disagree
It was not covering the conflict frequently	158 (40.5%)	109 (27.9%)	67 (17.2%)	54 (13.8%)	13 (3.3%)	390 (100%)	3.72*	Agree
It was not covering the conflict at all	80 (20.5%)	79 (20.3%)	104 (26.7%)	112 (28.7%)	5 (1.3%)	390 (100%)	2.56*	Disagree

*Note.* Data collected by the author in 2022.

SA = strong agree; A = agree; D = disagree; SD = strong disagree. \* is the mean of acceptance or not. The theoretical mean for accepting the mean is 3.0 remark and above.

Table 2 presented respondents’ opinions about the frequency of the farmers’/herders’ conflict coverage by TSBS, Jalingo. From Table 2, it has disagreed (M = 2.82 < 3.0) with the majority that TSBS used to cover the conflict frequently. The data shows that 59 (15.1%) and 17 (4.4%) strongly agreed and agreed that TSBS used to cover the conflict very frequently; 106 (27.2%) and 137 (35.1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that TSBS used to cover the conflict very frequently. At the same time, 11 (2.8%) were undecided. Explicating whether TSBS used to cover the conflict frequently, the respondents disagreed (M = 2.75 < 3.0) with that

notion and established that 72 (18.5%) and 76 (19.5%) strongly agreed and agreed TSBS covered the conflict frequently; 120 (30.8%) and 113 (29%) disagreed and strongly disagreed TSBS covered the conflict frequently. In comparison, 9 (2.3%) were undecided.

The only area where the respondents agreed (M = 3.72 > 3.0) was that Taraba State Broadcasting Service was not covering the conflict frequently. Data indicated that 158 (40.5%) and 109 (27.9%) strongly agreed and agreed that the conflict received minimal coverage; 67 (17.2%) and 54 (13.8%) disagreed and

strongly disagreed TSBS was not covering the conflict frequently. At the same time, 13 (3.3%) were undecided.

Another issue was whether Taraba State Broadcasting Service was not covering the conflict at all. Data indicated that 80 (20.5%) and 79 (20.3%) respondents identified that TSBS was not covering the conflict. From Table 4 as disagreed ( $M = 2.56 < 3.0$ ) by the majority, data shows that 112 (28.7%) and 104 (26.7%) strongly disagreed and disagreed TSBS was not covering the conflict at all, while 5 (1.3%) undecided. This

indicated that the coverage of the conflict was done at intervals/minimal. Therefore, the data from Table 4 identified that broadcast media practitioners' frequency and manner of coverage of any issue must not be taken lightly. This indicated that broadcast media, as the conduit through which messages are received, should go beyond lackadaisical coverage because they are gaged by the information they disseminate to the community. This kind of delivery must be done frequently and objectively in order to keep the public abreast of conflict issues.

**Table 3**

*What do you feel about the Way and Manner Taraba State Broadcasting Service, Jalingo, Covering the Farmers/Herders Conflict in the State?*

Views	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)	M	Remark
It was fair in the coverage of the conflict	45 (11.5%)	51 (13.1%)	109 (27.9%)	173 (44.4%)	13 (3.3%)	390 (100)	2.75*	Disagree
It was objective in the coverage of the conflict	60 (15.4%)	51 (13.1%)	173 (44.4%)	98 (25.1%)	8 (2.1%)	390 (100)	2.71*	Disagree
It was neutral in the coverage of the conflict	63 (16.2%)	68 (17.4%)	97 (24.9%)	142 (36.4%)	20 (5.1%)	390 (100)	2.56*	Disagree
It was biased in the coverage of the conflict	106 (27.2%)	134 (34.4%)	87 (22.3%)	49 (12.6%)	14 (3.6%)	390 (100)	3.62*	Agree
I was very honest, truthful, and accurate in the coverage of the conflict	29 (7.4%)	45 (11.5%)	180 (46.2%)	131 (33.6%)	5 (1.3%)	390 (100)	2.25*	Disagree

Note. Data collected by the author in 2022.

SA = strong agree; A = agree; D = disagree; SD = strong disagree. \* is the mean of acceptance or not. The theoretical mean for accepting the mean is 3.0 remark and above.

Table 3 evaluated respondents feeling about how TSBS, Jalingo covered the farmers/herders conflict in the state. In Table 3, the first question was to find out whether TSBS was fair in the coverage of the conflict. This so far was disagreed ( $M = 2.75 < 3.0$ ) by the majority of the respondents. Their responses depicted that 45 (11.5%) and 51 (13.1%) strongly agreed and agreed TSBS was fair in the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict. In comparison, 173 (44.4%) and 109 (27.9%) strongly disagreed and disagreed TSBS was fair in the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict, and 13 (3.3%) were undecided.

Similarly, the majority of respondents disagreed ( $M = 2.71 < 3.0$ ) that TSBS was objective in the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict. Hence evidence showed that 60 (15.4%) and 51 (13.1%) respondents strongly agreed and agreed that radio coverage of the conflict was objective. Thus, 98 (25.1%) and 173 (44.4%) strongly disagreed and disagreed TSBS was objective in the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict. In comparison, 8 (2.1%) were undecided.

In Table 3, most respondents disagreed ( $M = 2.56 < 3.0$ ) that TSBS was neutral in the coverage of the conflict. However, the evidence further shows that 63 (16.2%) and 68 (17.4%) strongly agreed and agreed that radio coverage of the conflict was neutral. While 142 (36.4%) and 97 (24.9%) strongly disagreed and disagreed, TSBS coverage of the conflict was neutral in the state, and 20 (5.1%) respondents were undecided. On whether TSBS was biased in the coverage of the conflict, the respondents identified that radio coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict was biased, indicating that it only carried one side of the story. This was agreed ( $M = 3.49 > 3.0$ ) by most respondents. Thus, 106 (27.2%) and 134 (34.4%) strongly agreed and agreed that the coverage of the conflict was usually biased and one-sided, which ultimately affected how the public felt about radio broadcasts. While 49 (12.6%) and 87 (22.3%) strongly disagreed and disagreed, and 14 (3.6%) were undecided.

Another area where the respondents disagreed ( $M = 2.48 < 3.0$ ) was whether TSBS was honest, truthful, and accurate in the coverage of the conflict. Results have shown that 29 (7.4%) and 45 (11.5%) strongly agreed and agreed TSBS was very honest, truthful, and accurate in the coverage of the conflict. Thus, 180 (46.2%) and 131 (33.6%) strongly disagreed and disagreed TSBS was very honest, truthful, and accurate in the coverage of the conflict. At the same time, 5 (1.3%) were undecided. From the data presented, it was observed that one of the cardinal practices of the media is the fairness of news reporting, writing and dissemination. Once the truth about an issue that was covered is

altered, results indicate that it will trigger some kind of negative feelings from the people affected by the conflict.

Table 4 above was to find out whether the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict by the Taraba State Broadcasting Service contributed to the management of the conflict. From Table 4, respondents disagreed ( $M = 2.92 < 3.0$ ) that TSBS coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict contributed to the conflict's management. However, data shows that 30 (7.7%) and 34 (8.1%) strongly agreed and agreed that the coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict by TSBS contributed to managing the conflict. In comparison, 170 (43.6%) and 137 (35.1%) strongly disagreed and disagreed TSBS coverage of the conflict contributed to its management. At the same time, 19 (4.9%) were undecided.

On the question of whether TSBS coverage of the conflict educated the people about the dangers of the conflict, the data presented in Table 4 shows that the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict so far agreed ( $M = 3.57 < 3.0$ ) that the radio educated the people about the dangers of the conflict. Evidence shows that 183 (22.1%) and 86 (22.1%) respondents strongly agreed and agreed that radio coverage of the conflict educated the people about the dangers of the conflict; 65 (16.7%) and 39 (10%) respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed, while 17 (4.4%) respondents were undecided. This means that a lack of proper sensitization and education tends to fan the flames of any conflict, thereby making the people perceive that radio does aid the escalation of the conflict.

Similarly, most respondents ( $M = 2.99 > 3.0$ ) disagreed that radio made people appreciate the value of peaceful coexistence. Their responses showed that 30 (7.7%) and 39 (10%) strongly agreed and agreed that radio made people appreciate the value of peaceful coexistence; 185 (47.4%) and 107 (27.4%) strongly disagreed and disagreed. In contrast, 19 (4.9%) were completely undecided. Respondents expressed that radio coverage of the conflict did not help them appreciate the value of peaceful coexistence due largely to the infrequent and biased nature of coverage. Most respondents ( $M = 3.92 > 3.0$ ) agreed that radio reports on the conflict are used to trigger reprisal attacks. The evidence showed that 160 (41%) and 125 (32%) strongly agreed and agreed that radio reports on the conflict used to trigger reprisal attacks; 30 (7.7%) and 44 (11.3%) strongly disagreed and disagreed. In contrast, 17 (4.4%) of the respondents were undecided. Evidence indicated how the conflict was covered exacerbated the farmers' and herdsmen's clashes.

Finally, in Table 4, most respondents ( $M = 3.31 > 3.0$ ) agreed that the conflict's radio coverage promoted more hatred against herdsmen. Data showed that 100 (25.6%) and 130 (33.3%) strongly agreed and agreed that the radio coverage of the conflict contributed to promoting more hatred against herdsmen. This indicated that how the media covered the conflict tends to compound further the already precarious

security situation emanating from the conflict; 68 (17.4%) and 43 (11%) strongly disagreed and disagreed. In contrast, 49 (12.6%) were completely undecided. The data drastically showed that the kind of approach given to the coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict so far, as perceived by the respondents, would lead to more hatred and the reoccurrence of the conflict in the state.

**Table 4**

To find out whether the Coverage of the Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict by Taraba State Broadcasting Service Contributed to the Management of the Conflict or Otherwise

Views	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Undecided (%)	Total (%)	M	Remark
Radio coverage of the conflict contributed to its management	30 (7.7%)	34 (8.1%)	137 (35.1)	170 (43.6)	19 (4.9)	390 (100)	2.92*	Disagree
Radio coverage of the conflict educated the people about the dangers of the conflict	183 (46.9)	86 (22.1)	30 (10%)	65 (16%)	17 (4.4)	390 (100)	3.57*	Agree
It made the people appreciate the value of peaceful coexistence	30 (7.7%)	39 (39%)	107 (27.4%)	185 (47.4%)	19 (4.9%)	390 (100)	2.99*	Disagree
Radio coverage of the conflict used to trigger reprisal attacks	160 (41%)	125 (32%)	44 (11.3%)	30 (7.7%)	17 (4.4%)	390 (100)	3.92*	Agree
Radio coverage of the conflict contributed to promoting more hatred against herdsmen	100 (25.6%)	130 (33.3)	43 (11%)	68 (17.4%)	49 (12.6%)	390 (100)	3.31*	Agree

Note. Data collected by the author in 2022.

SA = strong agree; A = agree; D = disagree; SD = strong disagree. \* is the mean of acceptance or not. The theoretical mean for accepting the mean is 3.0 remark and above.

**Thematic Interview Analysis of Respondents from the State**

For the thematic analysis, the researcher interviewed eight ( $n = 8$ ) respondents from the conflict areas randomly selected from the 2 local governments from Taraba. This was done to understand how they perceive the radio coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict. The thematic analysis focused on public perception of radio coverage of farmers and herdsmen conflict on three key issues: frequency of the coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict, public perception of the coverage of farmers/herdsmen conflict, and coverage of the farmers and herders conflict contributed to the management of the conflict or otherwise.

The following themes emerged during the interview and were discussed based on the data received from the interview session:

**Frequency of Coverage of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict**

Interviewees were asked to comment on the frequency of the coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflicts by TSBS, Jalingo. The result indicated that the media was not doing its work of covering the farmers and herdsmen conflict in the state daily. Respondents showed that the conflict was not frequently covered in line with the tenets of the social responsibility premise. They explained that the coverage of the conflict was minimal, which affected the way they saw or perceived the media. Respondents also indicated that conflicts frequently occurred in their communities with no media to cover such conflict, and where the coverage was done, it was sparingly aired in the media. This interviewee highlighted that:

I have always listened to my radio. I don't miss updates either on conflicts or general issues. However, I noticed over the few years that most of the updates you hear on the radio are basically about what is happening in the government. Why is that? You hardly get 2-4 updates on a single conflict situation in a week. This is baffling. Does that mean nobody cares about what is happening or affecting the common people? To be this conflict is not given proper attention and there is no detailed dissemination of information about the clashes (Interviewee 8).

The respondents interviewed also commented on the rate of frequency of coverage given to the farmers and herdsmen conflict.

They identified that despite radio covering the conflict, the coverage was never done frequently. One of the interviewees commented:

The media coverage that the media gave this conflict ravaging us is very poor. The media is not properly adhering to the needs of relating the people with details and facts of this conflict. This is why we are doomed. Had the media frequently talked about this conflict, creating a forum for debate would have put the government on its toes to create a way out of this problem? The government is relaxed because nobody bothers them to do the right thing or hold them accountable. Honestly, it is expected that the media should represent the people and their mouthpiece, but that is not so in our situation (Interviewee 3).

In another vein, an area where the interviewees deferred was the minimal coverage given to the conflict when it had subsided. Most respondents recognized that the conflict was never featured in the media again once the clashes had subsided. They emphasized that even when the clashes had abated, there was a need for the media to keep reminding the public of the devastation resulting from any conflict. They indicated that the media should not turn a blind eye to conflict cases even when they have subsided. In line with the above claim, one of the interviewees stated:

I have often observed that the media don't bother to report on conflicts once they have subsided. All they do is turn their attention, as they usually do, to political matters. There is no follow-up on the conflict case to investigate the real cause of the issue. I am always surprised to see the media generalizing the cause of all conflicts as the same. Let them come and ask questions to get the reality on the ground. They should do a follow-up even after the conflict has subsided. It is important to keep enlightening the public about the negative effects of engaging in conflict and encourage the conflict victims to embrace mutual respect and peace-building towards one another (Interviewee 5).

Another interviewee explained the rate of frequency of coverage and how it affected public perception of the media. The interviewee submitted that:

The number of times this conflict is aired or appeared in the media is just not encouraging. Most of the time, the media reported about the conflict in just 50 seconds or 1 minute and that is all. This will never be sufficient to tell the audience details of the conflict. The cause of the conflict should be clearly spelled out and the way forward should be proffered by the media as well, whether it is cattle rustling, farm encroachment, who sponsored the conflict and for what motive, and who did what for the conflict to break out, they should be exposed. We should not be left in the dark by this kind of one-way reporting that is sparsely done (Interviewee 1).

#### **Coverage of the Farmers/Herders Conflict Contributed to the Management of the Conflict or Otherwise**

Regarding whether the coverage given to the farmers and herdsman conflict by the broadcast media in Taraba state contributed to the management of the conflict or otherwise, this respondent emphasized that:

I have seen the media cause problems for us in this community on several occasions. When the herdsman attacked and killed 11 people on their farms, the report in the media indicated otherwise. They said they were bandits who went to steal cows from the herdsman. That was their caption. In this kind of situation, how would you expect the people in the area to keep quiet? They will do something, too, to avenge their compatriots. Most of the time, the conflict and suffering of the people are downplayed. They do that probably thinking they will please one of the parties in conflict, but it complicates things, making the situation worse (Interviewee 2).

The majority of the respondents also identified that one way the media contributed to mismanaging the conflict was through the way headlines of news stories were written. They acknowledged that the headlines and stories cast tended to fan the flames of the conflict thereby making the people perceive that radio does aid the escalation of the conflict. Data showed that the conflict would continue to linger with this kind of coverage, denying the media it is bragging right as the pathway for bridging gaps where there was disharmony. The respondents, during the interview, stated that the use of religious or sectional coloration in the headlines or newscasts contributed to the mismanagement of the conflict. Explicating further, one of the respondents highlighted that:

In all honesty, the way headlines of newscasts were said concerning this conflict is baffling. Most of the time, they were said in a way that they do not reflect what the victims are going through. Let the truth be told so the world will know the suffering of the communities bedeviled with this conflict. Why won't there be escalation when the media mess things up by mismanaging the conflict through unfair coverage? This is opposite to what the media should be doing (Interviewee 5).

This implied that the media practiced a bandwagon style of reporting conflict. However, when the researcher asked the respondents about the consequences of provocative radio coverage, they responded that such representation would continue to cause disharmony and trigger reprisal attacks, thereby escalating the conflict. This has affected how the public perceives or views the media. The respondents added that the media was full of blame games and played a significant role in mismanaging conflict rather than de-escalating it. In this regard, one of the respondents expressed that:

How the media report any conflict in any state matters a lot. But that is not the case here. I can tell you that a sufficient percentage of conflict reporting brought a backlash or escalated the conflict worse than the initial one because it was not managed well. Check the history of this country. You

will understand what I am saying. Look at what happened in my community, where the conflict erupted between farmers and herders. Several people from the community lost their lives, with few casualties from the side of the herders. However, to my dismay, I heard from the media that shooters attacked us. I thought the media was supposed to be the mouthpiece of the oppressed (Interviewee 4).

#### **Discussion**

This study examined the public perception of radio coverage of farmers and herdsman conflict in Taraba State as carried out by TSBS, Jalingo. The research used four objectives to answer the aim of the study. The first objective was to determine how often listeners of the selected radio station were exposed to farmers'/herder's conflicts in the state. The first objective is covered in Table 1. It was discovered that the respondents were partially exposed to news and other programs that covered the farmers/herders' conflict. Findings established that despite people having radios to listen to updates on what was affecting them, the media has failed to frequently supply them with the right content on the farmers/herders conflict. This agreed with a study conducted by Abdulbaqi & Ariemu (2017). They explicated that the farmers-herders conflict has a negative implication on peace and the economic growth of Nigeria. Thus, press coverage has been described as the amount of media attention given to a particular issue and how such issues are reported is essential. This necessitated that the amount of exposure the community has to specific situations invariably affected their views or thoughts toward the source of information. When the conflict victims are starved of the right information about issues directly affecting them, they tend to generate mixed feelings towards the media, which by mandate were obligated to serve as a watchdog of the society. Another study by Shehu (2017) stressed that media are the most important source of information about conflict for most people, which grants them considerable influence over citizens' perceptions, opinions, and behavior. However, by merely reporting on some aspects of the conflict, the victims lacked the right exposure to garner information that would have helped them objectively assess the conflict. These empirical studies have hammered into the issue of exposure, which was very relevant to this research.

The second objective found out the respondents' opinion about the frequency of the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict by TSBS, Jalingo. The data analyzed in Table 2 established that frequency and manner of coverage were shabby and taken lightly. It indicated that the coverage was never done frequently. Respondents' opinions indicated that since radio is the conduit through which messages are received, they have to frequent whatever situation is happening in a community to the people on a daily basis without bias. Findings explicitly indicated that lack of frequent coverage of the conflict affected their feelings towards the media. It was found out that the people rarely heard about the conflict 3-4 times a week. This established that the conflict was not adequately covered to restore maximum harmony. This is validated by a study conducted on newspaper coverage of herdsman and farmers' conflict in Benue State by Gever and Essien (2017). They identified that newspapers mostly reported straight news and only covered the conflict when it happened, with little attention given to it when it subsided. This finding relates to this research because they both hammer on the lack of frequency of the coverage of the farmers-herders conflict. However, it was deduced that the Nigerian media are yet to give prominence and frequency of coverage to the issue of farmers-herders conflict. This result validated the claim, suggesting that the mass media in Nigeria have not been timely reporting conflicts and insurgencies (Afolabi, 2010). In addition, this finding extends prior studies that have mostly examined the issues of farmers-herders conflict through newspaper coverage, as it demonstrates that radio as stated by the respondents, plays a huge role in the reportage of the conflict in Nigeria. Drawing from the agenda-setting premise, if the news media cover an issue frequently and with prominence, the public will view that issue as important (Apuke, 2017). Amazingly, the comments above also pointed out that the new media, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter,

etc., which has given rise to citizen journalism, seem to cover the issues of the conflict more than the conventional media in Nigeria (Apuke & Omar, 2020).

The third objective found out how respondents felt about the way and manner TSBS, Jalingo covered the farmers/herders conflict in the state. Findings indicated that the broadcast media (radio) was not fair in the coverage and reportage of the farmers/herdsmen conflict in Taraba State. Findings also indicated that messages were usually tinkered with to favor one side of the parties involved in a conflict. Similarly, it was discovered that TSBS was not objective and neutral in the coverage of the conflict. It was indicated that the coverage was usually biased and one-sided. Supporting this view, Zeng et al. (2014) stated that media programs rarely cover conflicts with neutrality and rarely allocate sufficient time for detailed information about the conflict. This greatly influenced the feelings of the people and the kind of patronage the media received from the public. Since 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 (Shehu, 2017), then programs that cover such events must be thoroughly checked by ensuring that they do not instigate the conflict. The programs that are designed or packaged by the media should be the ones that cover issues that affect the audience in a study conducted by Barde (2016) on reporting ethnoreligious conflict in Nigeria. The researcher believed that such coverage was a delicate and sensitive area in journalism, which requires professionalism, objectivity and patriotism. He outlined that without objectivity, neutrality and professionalism, there is the assurance that the conflict will continue to linger for a long time. Hence there was the need for the media, especially radio, in Nigeria to always adopt a position that would see the furtherance of peace and ending farmers-herders attacks in Nigeria. More so, how the conflict is reported goes a long way in either assuaging or provoking the parties involved (Adamu, 2017). These works relate to this research study because they advocated for neutrality, fairness and objective reporting as the pillar for mitigating conflict occurrences.

The fourth objective determined the extent to the coverage of the farmers/herders conflict by TSBS, Jalingo contributed to managing the conflict or otherwise. Findings indicated that the radio coverage of the farmers-herdsmen conflict was catastrophic and contributed to the mismanagement of the conflict. This affected the way the public felt and perceived the media. This agrees with what Vladislavjević (2015) established by reporting on some conflicts while ignoring others and representing conflicts in particular ways. The media strongly influence the dynamics and outcomes of conflicts. It was also discovered that how the conflict was covered and reported was not by the tenets of social responsibility theory. Another study by Odunlami (2017) indicated that the conflict had displaced more than 100,000 people and several persons in Benue and Enugu states. He stressed that all of these atrocities were committed despite media coverage of the conflict, which indicated that media coverage did not contribute to managing the conflict. This was supported by Shehu (2017) that media coverage of the conflict has done more harm than good to this nation. He added that most people in the conflict-ridden communities did not regard media as the mouthpiece of the downtrodden. As such, the content of media not only provides unknown to the audiences but extends to confirmation or disconfirmation of reality about what is already known and witnessed (Dauda & Omar, 2015).

### Conclusion

The results obtained from this research showed a greater connection to public perception of the radio coverage of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Taraba state. The results showed that the lack of coverage frequency had affected the public and media symbiosis, which in turn affected how the people perceived the media. Lack of objectivity was another contending issue on which the respondents defaulted to the media. Accordingly, results established that the media lacked proper representation of the conflict victims in distorting the truth of events and escalation of

the conflict. This also meant how the conflict was covered and represented in media programs mattered greatly.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Media in Nigeria must go beyond its cardinal function and imbibe the practice of conflict, peace, and conflict management journalism, whereby the media is obligated to convey all necessary information about the conflict daily to give the public a positive perception of the broadcast media.
2. The traditional policy of objective coverage and reportage should be the norm for all media and reporters in Nigeria and beyond. Coverage must be perceived as a factual representation of events in the face of protecting the sensitivity of events to not generate tension in society.
3. The issue of farmers and herdsmen conflict is one that, if not carefully covered and reported with factual representation, has the potential of becoming an inferno that would eventually consume the already fragile state of coexistence and peace in the country. Therefore, media practitioners should guard against over sensational and sentimental coverage of any conflict in the country.

### Suggestions for Further Research

1. Since the focus of this study was on public perception of radio coverage of the farmers and herdsmen conflict, therefore, it is suggested that researchers should go further to examine the effect of radio coverage of conflicts on peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.
2. The study also suggested that researchers should examine the role of objective coverage concerning the public perception of radio in Nigeria.
3. Researchers should also examine the frequency of broadcast media coverage of the conflict in Nigeria.
4. A similar study should be carried out in other states to better understand the subject.

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