ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Analysis of Some Online Newspapers Reportage of Anti-Open Grazing Law in Nigeria

JOHN DOGARA OGOSHI

Department of Mass Communication, Federal University of Lafia oteboh@gmail.com/ john.ogoshi@arts.fulafia.edu.ng

Abstract

The Nigerian media was saturated with the arguments for and against open grazing of cattle. To perform it surveillance roles, the online newspapers went viral with the reports of the anti-open grazing brouhaha. Using content analysis, the study aggregated the reports to unravel the various positions of the state governments. Agenda setting and development media theories provided the needed support for the study. The study confirmed that Nigerian online newspapers credibly played their agenda setting role by prioritising the issue of anti-open grazing law. The research also indicated that 18 states of the federation either enacted or are in the process of promulgating the law, while the same number of states do not favour the enactment of the law. The findings further revealed that the geography of the online newspapers influenced their editorial decisions in reporting the anti-open grazing law. In view of the above, the study concluded that the Nigerian media to a large extent succeeded in setting agenda by giving adequate coverage to the anti-open grazing brouhaha. The work further recommended that the Nigerian press should continue to set agenda on national issues, while states with anti-open grazing laws should ensure the rights of citizens to freedom of movement is respected.

Key words: Anti, Grazing, Law, Open, reportage, Nigeria.

Introduction

In Nigeria, newspapers have contributed to the growth and development of the society in terms of reporting security, political, economic, culture, education, agriculture and other societal issues. It is on this basis that Uche (1989) in Okorie and Oyedepo (2011) confirms that media has become an essential part of our life. Moreover, the media played most significant role towards promoting the political, social and economic aspirations of the nation. In the context of anti-open grazing bill, the newspapers remain the most vital instrument in the realisation or otherwise of the views or positions of the opponents and proponents of the anti-open grazing bill. Justifying the role of the media on the reportage of national issues like anti-open grazing bill, Adebayo (1985) as cited in Okorie and Oyedepo (2011) affirms that the media motivate and mobilise the people as well as ensure participation in the growth and developmental process apart from informing and educating members of the society. As part of her surveillance role in respect to information and news, the media being instrument to development is expected to inform, educate and mobilise members of the society on specific areas of development such as anti-open grazing issue. The nucleus behind the reportage of the brouhaha of the bill was due to the large number of people who are involved in the business of animal husbandry as well as the political and ethnic dimensions the issue has taken in Nigeria. Specifically, animal husbandry business has been and it is still the main stay of business activities of the Fulanis in Nigeria. According to Joda (2019, p.39), Nigeria is estimated to have among its ethnic population groups "some 20 million people on animal husbandry; rearing of cattle and sheep". He refers to report by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) which stated that there may be as many as 20 million cattle and about 40 million sheep in Nigeria. Most of these two categories of domestic animals are in the hands of the nomadic population, most of whom are of Fulani stock.

This submission by Joda (2019) provides the basis for the recurrent clashes between herders and farmers in Nigeria. In a report published by *The National* newspaper (January11, 2028) as cited by Keghku et al. (2019, p.45),

> the cause can be ascribed to control over

> land for grazing and farming, massive desertification of vegetative lands and droughts in Northern Nigeria which compel herders to migrate towards the middle belt region and some parts, of the south in search of greener pastures and water for their livestock. In the course of their movements, the nomadic herdsmen settle in farming communities where the environment is conducive for their livestock; like green vegetation and water which are in abundance within the Benue valley. Often times, farmers accuse the herdsmen of gatecrashing and destroying their farmlands and crops and contaminating their main source of water supply. The herdsmen on their part accuse the farmers of poisoning, killing or even stealing their livestock especially cattle. The herdsmen also accuse the farmers of blocking their grazing routes, alleged to have been established in the early 1960s. The herdsmen and farmers conflict has assumed a very dangerous dimension with the use of sophisticated weapons such as AK47 by the herdsmen who were known for the use of sticks and cutlasses while grazing. Regrettably, the conflict has even defied security measures by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Several farming communities in several States of Nigeria have suffered unrelenting attacks for quite some years.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended in Chapter II Section 14 Subsection 2 (b) clearly states that "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". And in the same Chapter, Section 22, the Constitution also declares that "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people".

It is in the spirit of the constitution as mentioned above that some state governments in Nigeria enacted anti-open grazing law in line with the provisions of the Constitution as quoted above to protect lives and properties of the citizens. Also it is in the same spirit of the Constitution holding government accountable that newspapers in Nigeria are flooded with reports about the anti-open grazing bill brouhaha. This is because Dennis and Defleur (1994) submit that newspapers possess the capacity to do this better than most other media outfits.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The issue of anti-open grazing bill has pitched the North against the South to the extent that while the north through the Northern Governors' Forum (NGF) agreed that open grazing is no longer sustainable, they opted for National Livestock Transformation Plan. On the other hand, the Southern Governors' Forum (SGF) in their meetings agreed to outlaw the open grazing and went ahead to enact laws in their states to stop the outdated open grazing through the anti-open bill. The Southern Governors' Forum also embraced the National Livestock Transformation Plan. In response to the call of the NGF for an urgent meeting, the Nigeria Governors Forum held a virtual meeting on February 11, 2021. At the meeting the 36 state governors agreed by consensus to end nomadic cattle rearing in the country in order to end the incessant violent clashes between farmers and herders (Falana, 2021). On her part, the federal government through the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Abubakar Malami blasted those criticising his stance on southern governors' position on open grazing, saying whatever he said on the issue was not outside the scope of the nation's constitution. He said:

> Well, on the issue of farmers/ herders clashes, no position was taken by the Office of the Attorney-General outside the scope of constitutional provisions. The position of the Office of the Attorney General is about freedom and liberty of movement among others. And what the Office of the Attorney General has simply succeeded in

> doing is making a reference to relevant constitutional provisions and established a position that each and every Nigerian is entitled to freedom of movement simpliciter. So, the issue is whether that freedom of movement is constitutionally guaranteed, or is not. And my answer to it is, the freedom of movement is indeed, constitutionally guaranteed (Agbakwuru, 2021).

These controversies provide the basis for this quantitative study to unravel the amount of reports that have so far been reported by some online Nigerian newspapers on the positions of the proponents and opponents of the anti-open grazing bill. Also the study takes a critical look at whether the geography of these newspapers influences their reportage of the controversial bill. The scope of the study is from 1st February to October 31st 2021. The choice of the period is based on the fact that this is the period that most state governments are implementing the decisions reached in their various regional meetings either through the presentation of bills and signing of anti-open grazing laws or putting measures on ground for the take-off of National Livestock Transformation Plan.

Objective of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the number of anti-open grazing law reports on some online Nigerian newspapers from 1st February to October 31st, 2021.
2. To quantify state governments' stand on the anti-open grazing law between 1st February to October 31st 2021.
3. To find out whether the geography of these online newspapers influences the reportage of the anti-open grazing law between 1st February and October 31st 2021.

Theoretical Framework

The Agenda Setting Theory

The basic premise of the agenda setting theory examines how news media reports on particular issues influence or shape public awareness and debate (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, cited in Kayode & Adeniran, 2012). Editors act as gatekeepers of mass mediated messages. They promote a media agenda by prioritising certain issues. They can provide sustained and prominent coverage to an issue while others are deliberately ignored. Earlier propositions about the agenda setting theory suggested that while media do not tell us what to think, they may as well tell us what to think about. This suggests that mass media has the potential to draw people's attention to certain issues, and allows for conclusions already raised in the public agenda. Griffin (2011 as cited in Kayode & Adeniran, 2012) also notes that the agenda setting theory reaffirms the power of the press, while still maintaining the individual's freedom to choose. The theory assumes that individual members of society reflect on such issues already raised, and then make personal submissions based on their subjective reasoning.

Development Media Theory

The development media theory as propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987 is a normative theory of mass media designed to address the imbalance in development and information flow of third world countries and provide solutions to the technological problems facing them. McQuail (1983, p. 95 as cited in Kayode & Adeniran, 2012) highlights the main principles of this theory. The study limits itself to these three points that relate to the study:

Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy;

Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically;

Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

Based on the tenets of agenda setting and development media theories, the study sought to do a quantitative analysis of some online Nigerian newspapers' reportage of anti-open grazing bill brouhaha that practically divided the country into pro and anti-open grazing routes and to a great

extent South versus North.

Methodology

The study employed content analysis as a study design. *Webster's Dictionary* of the English Language included the term in its 1961 edition, defining it as " analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect" (Krippendorff, p. XV I I, 2004). According to Okorie and Oyedepo (2011), communication research content analysis is regarded a formal system which is systematic and objective for extracting all forms of communication contents. For Kerlinger (2000 as cited in Okorie & Oyedepo, 2011), content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. In the same vein, Berelson (1952) submits that content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic description of manifest content of communication. Therefore, content analysis was used in this study as a tool to extract data from the content of some online newspapers. This was done by quantitatively analysing the number of news reports and the geography of the newspapers on the anti-open grazing bill as content categories.

The study used available sample to collect data for analysis. As the name suggests available sample is the collection of readily accessible subject for study such as the groups of newspapers that reported particular issue of national interest. Although available sample can be helpful in collecting exploratory data and may produce useful information in some cases, the sample may be problematic because it contains unknown quantity of errors. Hence, Ojebode (2005) opines that available sample is a subject of heated debate in many research fields as critics argue that regardless of what result it may generate, available sample cannot represent the population. Therefore, it has no external validity. But on the other hand, proponents of available sample claim that if a phenomenon, characteristic or trait does in fact exist, it should exist in any sample. It is on this strength that the study adopted available sample to generate data for the study of this magnitude for easy analysis in a quantitative manner.

On unit of measurement/analysis, the parameters for this study's unit of analysis in collecting data included news, stories, features articles, editorials, special reports and news sources, etc. on anti-open grazing bill. In addition, in terms of content(s) of the units of analysis, the number of reports by some online newspapers and the geography of these newspapers were tested.

In the case of frequency, it was determined or tested based on the volume of reports on issues about anti-open grazing bill. On the other hand, slant of the reports was determined by the stand of the state government, that is, favorable and unfavourable categories. Unlike slant/direction, the geography was also determined to know whether it influences the reportage of each item of anti-open grazing bill issues essentially on pages of the online newspapers. It is necessary to clarify that the unit of analysis in terms of news placement, front, inside or back page was not considered in this study because the work centred on online newspapers.

From the above submissions, the data was quantitatively collected, presented, analysed and the findings quantitatively discussed in line with the objectives of the study.

Clarification of Concepts

Development: The term ``Development`` means different things to many people including the lay man on the street. It is a concept that is generating much debates both theoretically, economically, socially and politically among scholars and that is why it is inherently both complex and ambiguous. For Rogers (1989), ``development as a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about social and material advancement for the majority of the people through gaining control over their environment."

Similarly, Ogai cited in Uwakwe (2003) viewed development as ``a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society intended to bring about social and material advancement including

greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of people through their gaining greater control over environment." Rogers and Ogai stressed the endogenous dimension of development. They viewed development as a process whereby the people whom this development is for participated in the decision that affects their lives and environment. But development agencies have difficulty in implementing effective participatory programs, for reasons ranging from inadequate socio-political knowledge and influence to inflexible bureaucratic structures. But there are nevertheless many possibilities for improved practice—through more realistic assessments of local contexts and prospects for reform, and more emphasis within aid bureaucracies on opening space for adaptive implementation.

However, Yushau (2014) stated that participation is not a simple technical input that can unleash linear progress. It involves navigating through local power relations and pushing for sometimes uncomfortable changes. Successful programs tend to be those led by individuals who know the local context, work in an incremental and flexible way, listen to citizens, seize opportunities, and shift approaches along the way.

According to Chambers (2004), the notion of 'good change' raises all sorts of questions about what is 'good' and what sort of 'change' matters. Chambers (2004) showed concern about the role of values, and whether 'bad change' is also viewed as a form of development. A common theme within most definitions is that 'development' encompasses change' in a variety of aspects of human condition. Although the theme of 'change' may be overriding, what constitutes 'good change' is bound to be contested as Kanbur (2006) as cited in Yushau (2014) stated, because *'there is no uniform or unique answer'*. So the views that may be prevalent in one part of the development community are not necessarily shared by other parts of that community, or in society more widely. Whatever it is, when change is expected, it means a good change, a better one. It could be referred to as the 'post-development'. This third perspective emerged as a reaction to the deliberate efforts at progress made in the name of development since World War11. However, from the above submissions, development is not defined as synonymous with 'modernity' which is presented in the discourse as a superior condition. Development is a process of change that involves people's participation and commitment aimed at improving their standard of living, skills and environment for a better future.

Newspapers Reportage of Development Issues

In a study conducted by Agbaje (1992) as cited in Yushau (2014) on a content analysis of Nigerian Newspapers, the result of the findings revealed that 49% of stories sampled focused on the central governments, 41.3% on state governments, while a mere 5.9% focused on local governments. Furthermore, it was also found that 873 stories collated on national affairs, constituting 97.6%, were sourced from urban areas while a mere 2. 4% were sourced from rural areas. The study revealed that the situation is made worse by the fact that most newspapers in Nigeria do not have reporters in rural areas. Those who maintain a national presence have reporters in state capitals and other urban centres gathering news but in these areas, you only find reporters who are interested in reporting what happens at the National Assembly or the Presidency. It also revealed that the Nigerian newspapers did not give sufficient press coverage in terms of prominence in its reportage to agriculture compared to other issues. Also, the press did not give sufficient attention to certain areas of agricultural sub-sector in its report as observed in the study. The study revealed that the Nigerian press as an institution or organ is expected to report all or every sector of the Nigerian economy with sufficient attention on each sector. This becomes necessary because each sector of the economy is of equal importance to the development of the Nigerian society.

In another study by Okorie and Oyedepo (2010) which examined the coverage of agriculture as an aspect of development between January and December 2007, three newspapers were selected and content-analysed: *The Guardian, Nigerian*

Tribune and The Punch. Consequently, the findings revealed that the Nigerian press did not give sufficient coverage to issues on agriculture in comparison to other sectors of the Nigerian economy. Furthermore, it observed that issues on agriculture did not receive favourable coverage by the newspapers.

Also a study conducted by Adeniran and Kayode (2012) on media coverage of development issues in Nigeria using the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with two Nigerian national newspapers, *The Punch* and *The Guardian* showed that the Nigerian media did not give equal coverage to the development issues they covered. They reported some issues frequently, while other equally pressing developmental challenges in the country were neglected.

Furthermore, they revealed that Nigerian media did not do much to educate, enlighten or motivate the public towards the need to achieve the developmental issues reported. It said the Nigerian press did not adequately report on the economic reform programme, and urged the press to rise to its responsibility. They stressed the need for an enabling environment that would aid effective performance and media contribution to economic development, crucial for transforming a situation of conflict to coordination. They also advocated for qualitative media that guarantee good media management.

According to Yushau (2014), the mass media play a critical role in the society. The media provide us with the information we need to satisfy most of our basic needs in life, which are food, shelter, physical well-being, spiritual, psychological, social well-being, pleasure and procreation. The media inform, educate, socialise and entertain, among other important roles. The media also mobilise the populace towards the realisation of certain national goals and help to preserve cultural values in some instances from one generation to the other. This is why the framers of the Nigerian Constitution specifically charged the media in section 22 of the 1999 constitution to serve as the watchdog of the society and to hold the government accountable to the people.

Charging the media, Yushau (2014) further submitted that this is a sacred responsibility that goes beyond merely chronicling everyday events. The constitution tasks the media to point the way forward to be the pathfinder. It empowers the media to set agenda for a stable, peaceful and prosperous future and to work with other institutions to transform our country from its perennial under-achievement to becoming a more hopeful place to live. The media is critical to national development. A free flow of information leads to knowledge, the sort of knowledge that changes destiny. A free flow of information brings development that transforms lives. Information empowers people to be actively involved in the affairs of their country, to make informed decisions in life, to rediscover themselves and realise their full potentials in life, and to hold their leaders accountable.

However, Yushau (2014) cited example of a study conducted in 2008, by the International Press Centre on media coverage of three important issues: governance, democratic institutions and development. The study selected four national newspapers, *The Guardian, Nigerian Tribune, The Champion and Daily Trust*, and analysed their coverage of these four issues in the month of November 2008. The result was very revealing. The study concluded that most newspapers in the country devote more coverage to governance and democratic institutions than they do to development matters. The four newspapers devoted 52% of their coverage to governance, 20% to democratic institutions and 28% to development issues. In terms of the prominence given to the stories, governance and democratic institutions were often on the front pages of the four newspapers than development stories. In terms of the space allocated to these issues, governance and democratic institutions got a whopping 86% compared to 14% for development. The report thus confirmed what is already well known that the Nigerian media under-report development issues. This is not good enough. It is not what should be expected from the media in a country that faces so many development challenges. The Nigerian media would have to do more to address this lopsidedness between their coverage of

government, politics and development. They have to focus more on the things that really matter. They should devote more attention on those things that can move a nation forward.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table-1. Number of news report by some online newspapers

Online Newspaper	Frequency	Percentage
Vanguard	14	26%
Punch	13	24%
ThisDaylive	6	11%
Leadership	1	2%
Guardian	4	7%
PremiumTimes	4	7%
The Nation	2	4%
The Sun	1	2%
Gazette	1	2%
Business AM	1	2%
Nairametrics	1	2%
The Cable	1	2%
DailyTrust	5	9%
Total-	54	100

Source: Manifest content, 2021

The table indicates that *Vanguard* published more stories (26%) and *Punch* followed closely with 24% of the stories. On the other hand, the likes of *Thisdaylive*, *Daily Trust* and *Guardian* published 11%, 9% and 7% of the stories respectively. *Premium Times* and *The Nation* got 7% and 4% of the stories, while *The Leadership*, *The Sun*, *Gazette*, *Business AM* as well as *Nairametrics* published 2% each of the stories respectively.

Table-2. States that favour Anti-Open Grazing law

Benue	Rivers	Lagos
Oyo	Ondo	Ekiti
Delta	Abia	Ebonyi
Osun	Enugu	Akwa-Ibom
Ogun	Bayelsa	Edo
Anambra	Imo	Cross-River
Total-18		

Source: Manifest content, 2021

The data above shows that 18 states out of 36 enacted anti-open grazing law. This represents 50% of the entire states of the federation.

Table-3. States that do not favour anti-open grazing law

Nasarawa	Kaduna	Kano
Sokoto	Kebbi	Jigawa
Katsina	Borno	Adamawa
Bauchi	Yobe	Kogi
Taraba	Gombe	Niger
Plateau	Zamfara	Kwara
Total-18		

The data above shows that 18 states out of 36 do not favour anti-open grazing law. This represents 50% of the entire states of the federation.

Source: Manifest content, 2021

Table-4. Geography of the Online Newspaper

Newspaper	Geography
Vanguard	Lagos
Punch	Ogun
Guardian	Lagos
Premium Times	Abuja
Leadership	Abuja
ThisDaylive	Lagos
Nairametrics	Lagos
The Nation	Lagos
Gazette	Abuja
Business AM	Lagos
TheSun	Lagos
SUMMARY	
Lagos-7 -64%	Ogun-1-9% Abuja-3-27%
Total -11-100	

Source: Manifest content, 2021

The data above reveals that 64% of the online newspapers have their head office in Lagos; those in Abuja have 27%, while one newspaper constituting 9% has its headquarters in Ogun State.

Discussion of Findings

The number of anti-open grazing law reports on some online Nigerian newspapers Following the incessant killings of farmers by herders, the Southern Governors Forum met in May, 2021 in Asaba, Delta State to discuss the rising insecurity in the country. It was at that meeting that the governors agreed to ban open grazing in their member states because of the incursion of armed herders, criminals and bandits into the southern part of the country which has created a severe security challenge, such that citizens are not able to live their normal lives, including pursuing various productive activities, leading to threats to food supply and general security. Consequently, the meeting resolved that open grazing of cattle be banned across southern Nigeria. Therefore, various state governments in the southern part of Nigeria commenced the process of enacting anti-open grazing law. As such since it is the responsibility of the media to mirror society some Nigeria online newspapers went to streets on daily basis with the news of anti-open grazing bill.

As a result, the study revealed that as at the end of October, 2021, a total number of 54 reports were published by thesampled newspapers. The data presented in table one indicated that *Vanguard* newspaper published the highest number of news on anti-open grazing law with 26 percent, while *Punch* followed closely with 24 percent of the stories on anti-open grazing law. Other newspapers like *Thisdaylive, Daily Trust*, and *The Nation* published 11, 9, 4 percents respectively. While *Premium Times*, and *Guardian* had 7percent each of the published stories, other newspapers had 2 percent each. These statistics revealed that online newspapers in Nigeria played their agenda setting role to the best of their professional ability by prioritising the issue of anti-open grazing law and accepting and carrying out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy as the media practitioners exercised their freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks without any hindrance as far as reporting anti-open grazing law is concerned in Nigeria. This outcome justified the choice of the agenda setting and development media theories that provided the theoretical basis to the study.

The outcome also corroborated the positon of Uche (1989) in Okorie and Oyedepo (2010) who confirmed in his study that media has become an essential part of our life as the media played most significant role towards promoting the political, social and economic aspirations of the nation.

State governments' stand on the anti-open grazing law States that favour Anti-Open Grazing law:

The data presented in table two indicated that 18 states out of the total number of 36 enacted the anti-open grazing law. This represented 50 percent of the states of the federation. The statistics showed that almost all the 17 states in southern part of Nigeria either enacted the law or are in process by sending the bill to their state houses of assembly. From the data presented, the only northern state that enacted anti-open grazing law is Benue State. This revelation is in line with the position of the Southern Governors' Forum (SGF) in their meetings in which they agreed to outlaw the open grazing and went ahead to enact laws in their states to stop the outdated open grazing through the anti-open bill. Also the position of Benue State government is also in line with the decision of the Northern Governors' Forum that agreed that open grazing is no longer sustainable and they opted for National Livestock Transformation Plan of the federal government as espoused by Falana (2021).

States that do not favour anti-open grazing law:

For the states that do not favour anti-open grazing law, the data presented in table 3 confirmed that 18 states of the federation did not enact the anti-open grazing law. The statistics showed that 50% of the states of the federation do not favour the enactment of anti-open grazing law in their states and all the 18 states are from the northern part of the country. This result is in agreement with the position of the

Northern Governors' Forum's decision to embrace the National Livestock Transformation Plan of the federal government as expoused by Falana (2021) and the position of the Attorney General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, who opined that the anti-open grazing law violates the freedom of movement of the people as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution as amended.

Interestingly, from the data presented in table 2 and 3, it clearly revealed that there is equal number of states that favour and those that do not favour anti-open grazing law in Nigeria.

Geography of the online newspapers

The data presented in table 4 showed that 64 percent of the sampled online newspapers have their head office in Lagos, 27 percent operate from Abuja, while 9 percent has its headquarters in Ogun State. This clearly shows that 73 percent of the online newspapers are from the southern part of Nigeria, while only 27 percent operate from the northern part of the country. The statistics revealed that the location of these online newspaper influenced their editorial decisions to give anti-open grazing brouhaha such massive coverage in line with their responsibility as watch dogs of the society as espoused by the agenda setting and development media theories which the study relied on to provide the necessary support for this study.

This outcome also brings to the fore the need for media to promote and protect the interests of their immediate environment (in this case the southern part). The position of the online newspapers has its support from the development media theory which says "media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically" (McQuail, 1983, p. 95 as cited in Kayode & Adeniran, 2012). Also agenda setting theory as revealed by Kayode and Adeniran (2012) stands for the promotion of a media agenda by prioritising certain issues as they provide sustained and prominent coverage to an issue while others are deliberately ignored.

Conclusion

The Nigeria socio-political landscape was agog with the perennial conflicts between farmers and herders for decades. To stem the tide of the recurrent conflicts, the Nigeria Governors' forum in one of her meetings declared that open grazing is outdated and is no longer sustainable or practicable in Nigeria. To put legal backing to the declaration, the Governors' Forum was divided along regional lines of South versus North. The Northern Governors' Forum embraced federal government's National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), the Southern Governors' Forum on the other hand adopted the NLTP and also enacted or are in the process of enacting anti-open grazing laws to tame the cycle of violence associated with open grazing between farmers and herders.

In the midst of this anti-open grazing brouhaha between the Federal Government, Northern Governors' Forum and the Southern Governors' Forum, the Nigerian online newspapers credibly performed their surveillance roles as watch dogs of Nigeria society in line with their geographical locations by reporting issues relating to the anti-open grazing laws. In view of the above therefore, this study concludes that the Nigerian press to a large extent succeeded in setting the agenda by giving adequate coverage to the national development issue like the anti-open grazing law.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. The Nigerian media should continue to set agenda in line with the national development aspirations.
2. States with anti-open grazing laws should ensure that the rights of citizens to freedom of movement is not violated.
3. Federal Government should support states with anti-open grazing laws to minimise the frequent clashes between farmers and herders.
4. Federal Government should not discriminate against states with anti-open grazing laws.

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