Perceived Source Credibility and Public Perception of Information on Herdsmen/Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract

The increasing conflict between farmers and herds in some parts of Nigeria has also reflected in media reports. This study investigated perceived source credibility and public perception of information on herdsmen farmers conflict in Nigeria. Three objectives were raised to guide the study. A total of 384 respondents from Enugu State, South-East Nigeria took part in the study. The respondents were selected through a multistage sampling technique. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Simple percentage and chi-square test of independence were used in the analysis of data for the study. The result showed that most of the respondents studied reported that their source of information on the conflict is the Internet. It was also found that most of the respondents perceived the conflict as attacks against certain parts of the country and not a clash between farmers and herdsmen. The result finally showed a significant relationship between perceived source credibility and perception about the herdsmen farmers conflict. Based on the result of this study, the researcher recommends, among others, that further studies should also examine be expanded to compare both the Southern and Northern Nigeria to give room for comparison.

Keywords: herdsmen, farmers, conflict, perception, source credibility, information,

Introduction

For some time now, conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have continued to resurface in Nigeria. Such conflicts have occurred in Benue, Kogi, Enugu, Cross River, Nasarawa, Kaduna, and Zamfara states. Information about such conflicts have spread to other states which do not even have cases of such attacks. Most of the attacks took place in Benue state where two separate mass burials were held for victims of the conflict in March 2018. Nasarawa state equally had a similar experience. Even people who are not from these areas are likely to have information about such attacks. Such information could come from different sources. It could come from the mass media, individuals, stakeholders, organizations, institutions, governments. It could spread through both mass media channels (radio, television, newspapers, magazines), social media or interpersonal communication.

The source is very essential in communication in that it could influence attitude to information received. Callcott and Phillips (1996) suggest that a likeable source creates increased attention to messages. Similarly, as the credibility of the source increases, people are more likely to be influenced by the message. The sources of information in conflict situations are essential because of the peculiarity of each media. It was in consideration of the power of the source in information dissemination that McLuhan came up with the concept of the medium is the message. The first thing to be said about
the medium is the message is that it is a warning to pay attention, for as McLuhan insists
the credibility of the source is essential because it is likely to influence attitudes.
O’Keefe, (1990, p. 130-131) define source credibility as ‘judgments made by a perceiver
concerning the believability of a communicator.’
Measuring source credibility is one of the critical issues in researches concerning source
credulity. Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953), who are known to pioneer source credibility
research revealed trustworthiness and expertise as two dimensions of source credibility.
While trustworthiness describes the extent people have confidence in the source,
expertise focuses on the ability of the source to deliver a particular message. Berlo,
Lemert, and Mertz (1969) hold that source credibility construct included three
dimensions in interpersonal communication. They are safety, qualification, and
dynamism. Safety explains the general personality traits as perceived by listeners.
Communicators who have a high safety rating can be characterized as being kind,
congenial, friendly, agreeable, ethical, warm, and sincere. On the other hand,
qualification describes the competence of the source while Dynamism describes the
degree to which a message recipient “admires and identifies with the source’s
attractiveness, power or forcefulness, and energy” (Larson, 1992, p. 226). McCroskey,
along with Teven (1999), brought ‘goodwill’ (intent toward receiver) into the measure
in the context of teaching communication.

One of the ingredients of source credibility is believability. Oyero (2013) says
that believability is a factor in the credibility of a source or medium. When people
perceive a source as credible, they are likely to believe the message. One of the
byproducts of perceived credibility and believability is perception of information received. Schacter (2011) says that
perception is
the interpretation attached to cognitions. It is the identification, arrangement and interpret
ation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment.

A study of perceived source credibility and public perception of information on herdsman/farmers’ conflict in Nigeria is essential because it will provide fresh perspective on how source credibility influences public perception of information on conflicts generally. In today’s world where conflict-related issues are continuously defining the existence of countries, such knowledge could shape conflict communication and research on the role of communication in times of conflict. When people believe a source they believe the message and this may have effect on their perception. However, this assumption has received little attention in literature. Therefore, this study examined how perceived source credibility influences public perception of information on herdsman-farmers’ conflict in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem
Although source credibility has been identified by previous studies (e.g. Larson, 1992, McCroskey & Teven 1999) as fundamental in predicting public attitudes and determining the effect of communication on the receivers, not many studies have examined this subject within the lenses of conflict, particularly the herdsman-farmers conflict. Nigerian authorities face the challenge of providing a lasting solution to the perennial conflict between farmers and herdsmen in parts of the country. Even though there is information on the conflict, it is not clear how perceived source credibility could significantly
predict public perception of such information. Understanding how measures of source credibility like trustworthiness, competence, believability, safety, dynamism, and authoritativeness significantly predict public attitudes to information on herdsmen-farmers could be useful in conflict communication as well as expand the scope of source credibility theory, hence the need for this study.

**Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to ascertain how source credibility influences public attitudes towards information on herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

1. To determine the sources through which residents of Enugu State receive information on herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the perception of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria among residents of Enugu State.
3. To ascertain the relationship between perceived source credibility and perception of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen.

**Research Questions**

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. Through what sources do residents of Enugu State receive information on herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria?
2. What is the perception of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria among residents of Enugu State?
3. What is the relationship between perceived source credibility and perception of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria?

**Literature Review**

**Overview of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria**

One of the conflicts confronting Nigeria today is that between herdsmen and farmers and herders. Nigerian laws (although some states like Ekiti, Benue, and Taraba now have anti-open grazing laws) permit open grazing. Such a legal leeway gives herdsmen the right to graze in any part of the country. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended) also empowers every Nigerian to reside in any part of the country. Chapter 4 Section 41 (1) notes: ‘Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom.’ Going by this constitutional provision, herdsmen have the right to reside in any part of Nigeria. However, their presence has recently led to clashes between them and the natives. In some instances, such clashes result to attacks which case suspected herdsmen attack villages and communities. In Benue State, for example, the herdsmen have allegedly killed many people and property worth billions of Naira destroyed. For example Governor Samuel Ortom while recounting the economic loss of herdsmen conflicts in Benue State notes: ‘In 2014 alone, the destruction recorded across 10 local governments in Benue State exceeded N95bn (Ameh, 2017).’ The excerpt from the Vanguard newspaper below provides further insights into the Fulani conflicts in Benue State:

...the Fulani herdsmen also left no fewer than 3,000 persons homeless after several houses and huts were razed in the affected villages. This recent attack is coming on the heels of the destruction that was meted on Agatu communities by suspected Fulani herdsmen. Mrs. Terungwa Torhembra, a
victim of the attack, who spoke through an interpreter in Makurdi, said the fully armed Fulani herdsmen had completely taken over Abiam Koya, Iordye, Nyakoo and Mkpikpa. She listed other affected villages to include Afom, Uzaagir, Ugbende Mue, Dam, Shaauus, Ukme, Chenbe, Anwen, Sebungen Ubosha, Chia, Asemngoroko and Inderkar (Duru, 2016).

Although the attacks in Benue State are most pronounced, at least one state in each of the geopolitical zones in Nigeria has experienced herdsmen-farmers conflict at one point of the other. The six geopolitical zones are North Central, North West, North East, South East, South-South and South West. Benue is from North Central and has been. Jannah (2018, para 1) in commenting on one of the attacks in Nasarawa State notes: ‘The Police Command in Nasarawa State has confirmed five persons dead in a fresh attack on Kadarko village and environs in Obi Local Government of the state.’ Other states in North central Nigeria like Kwara, Kogi, plateau and Niger have also had a feel of such conflict at one point or the other. In North West Nigeria, there have been cases of clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Kaduna. Nseyen (2018, para 1) says: ‘No fewer than ten persons were on Friday night killed as Fulani herdsmen attacked two villages in the Birnin-Gwari Local Government of Kaduna State.’ The story is the same in North-East Nigeria where states like Taraba and Yobe are confronted with the herdsmen-farmers conflict. Enugu State from South East Nigeria has also experienced herdsmen conflict. Godwin (2018, para 1) writes on attacks in Enugu State thus: ‘Suspected herdsmen, Monday, attacked Okpoku community in Aniri Local Government Area of Enugu State and injured a security guard.’ The South-South Nigeria has equally had its share of herdsmen attack. Uchehukwu (2017) writes in an attack in Cross River, South-South Nigeria thus: No fewer than 200 families have their homes Miabong Ito community in Ito South Clan Odukpani Local Government Area, Cross River State following the invasion of the community by herdsmen. The South West Nigeria also had its share of the conflict. This partly explains why Ayodele Fayose, the then Governor of Ekiti State enacted the anti-open grazing law. The conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has political, religious, ethnic and economic undertones. Adamu, (2016a; 2016b) corroborating this fact, included land tenure system and historical feuds as factors that have contributed largely to the notoriety of the herdsmen attacks across the country. These attacks are reported in the traditional media like radio, TV, newspapers and magazines as well as the Internet and through interpersonal communication channels.

Source Credibility and Public Perception
Source credibility has received significant attention in literature. One of the critical aspects of source credibility is how to measure it. Early researchers (e.g., Berlo 1969; McCroskey 1966; Meyer 1988) have come up with different scales of measuring source credibility. It is important to add here that the scales of Berlo and McCroskey were developed based on individual speakers as sources and within a framework of persuasion. However, Meyer’s (1988) scale was developed based on individual newspapers as sources, and so necessitates a theoretical framework that includes functions other than persuasion, such as to inform. Oyer (2013) says the dimensions included in each scale are different, even between the two scales developed based on individual speakers. Whatever the dimensions used in measuring source credibility, the
Source credibility

fundamental point is that the characteristics of the source plays a role in communication process.

Before a source is said to be credible, the person passing judgment must have been exposed to different other sources. This suggests that the sources through which people receive information on herdsmen-farmers conflict are essential. Oyero (2013) adopted source credibility theory to examine the use and believability of social networks news among Nigerian youths and found that the social networks have become a major source of news among young people because of the networks” interactivity, connectivity, immediacy and speed of dissemination.

In most cases, there are more sources of information during conflict than any other time. This may be because people need information on latest happenings so that they could take critical decisions like what to do, where to go and places to avoid. Choi, Watt and Lynch (2006) investigated cross-media credibility perception with respect to news coverage about the Iraq War. An online survey was conducted to which 481 people responded (71% war supporters, 19% opponents, 10% neutrals). Results showed that opponents of the war perceived the Internet as less aligned with a pro-government position and as more credible than did neutrals or supporters. It was also found that the Internet was perceived as more credible than traditional media like radio, TV, newspaper and magazine. The study of Choi, et al provide empirical evidence for understanding public perception of media contents on war. Rainie, Fox, and Fallows, (2003) reported that the Internet was judged a more believable medium by a considerable margin when users were asked to compare traditional news sources with their online counterparts, such as CNN with CNN.com. Wanta and Hu (1994) in a study suggested a model in which high credibility perception results to reliance on a certain medium for news, and strong reliance, in turn, increases exposure to the medium. Johnson and Kaye, (2000, 2002) say reliance is an attitudinal value towards media on which audiences depend for gaining information. Scholars (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther, 1992; Gunther & Chia, 2001; Gunther & Christen, 2002) argue that hostile media is likely to affect public perception of media credibility. Choi et al (2006) say hostile media effect refers to the process by which some news audiences, when they are highly involved in an issue, tend to perceive balanced and neutral news coverage as biased against their own point of view and judge the news content as less credible (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther, 1992; Gunther & Chia, 2001; Gunther & Christen, 2002).

Concerning the herdsmen—farmers conflict, public perception could be influenced by ethnic and political affiliation or support to the government. Adamu (2016) examined public perception of media coverage of the herdsmen-farmers conflict and reported that the majority of the respondents felt that most media reports of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers were lopsided, as reports of the conflict ignored the principle of factuality in giving details of causality, and media report on the conflict did not corroborate information given by security agencies on the conflict.

Theoretical framework

This study found expression on the source credibility theory. The Source Credibility theory states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. The theory was propounded by Hovland, and Janis Kelley in
Source credibility

1953 (S. Anaeto, & M. Anaeto, 2010). The theory is categorized into three models. These are the factor model, functional model and the constructivists’ model. The factor model, according to Anaeto, and Anaeto, helps to determine the extent to which the receiver judges the source as credible, the functional model views credibility as the degree to which a source satisfies a receiver’s individual needs and the constructivists’ model analyses what the receiver does with the source proposal. Hu (2015) says that source credibility research focuses on how people perceive the characteristics of a source regarding expertise, trustworthiness, and other aspects. Hu adds that in addition to source credibility, other source factors, such as the liking, similarity, and attractiveness of a source have also been studied as possible influences on persuasive effects. The source credibility theory was considered useful for this study because it provides the framework for examining how perceived source credibility influences public perception of information on herdsmen-farmers’ conflict in Nigeria.

Methodology

The survey research design was used for this study. The study was conducted in Enugu State Nigeria. The target population of this study was all the residents of Enugu State. The total number of residents of Enugu State which the National Bureau of Statistics (2012) forecast up to 2016 is 4,411,119. The sample size for this study was made up of 384 residents of Enugu State, Nigeria. The researcher made use of the Cochran formula to derive the sample size. Multistage sampling technique was used for this study. In the first phase the, three senatorial zones in Enugu State were regarded as clusters. That is Enugu North, Enugu West and Enugu East. In the second stage, the researcher randomly (using a balloting system) selected one local government area from each of the senatorial zones. Therefore, Nsukka was selected from Enugu North, Isi-Uzo from Enugu East and Udi from Enugu West. In the third stage, the researcher purposively selected local government headquarters of the sampled areas. This is because people from such areas are more likely to be educated to respond to the questionnaire than those from interior villages. To sample the individual respondents, the researcher adopted purposive sampling to select only respondents who admitted knowledge of the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria.

A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. In the analysis of data for this study, the researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Among the descriptive statistics, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation were used while among the inferential statistics, multiple regression analysis was used.

Result

The researcher administered 384 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents, but only 339 copies representing 88% were returned. The demographics of the respondents showed that the sample was 52% male and 48% female. The mean age of the respondents was 30 (range 23 and 37 years). The result on the research questions is presented thus:
The results from the table above revealed that most of the respondents reported that they received information about the conflict through the Internet followed by the radio. The outcome of this study is not surprising because of the revolution in ICTs powered by the Internet. Information now spreads in seconds with visual evidence. To determine public perception of the conflict, the following table was computed:

### Table 2: Public perception of herdsmen-farmers conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Attacks on farmers</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ethnic cleansing</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conflict between famers and herdsmen</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result from the table above showed that most of the respondents perceived the conflict as attacks on famers and not a clash between farmers and herdsmen. This result could be because in most cases where the conflict incidence takes place, the herders will ambush the villages and communities and unleash terror on them. The table below showed the relationship between perceived source credibility and perception about the conflict.
Table III: perceived source credibility and perception about the conflict

The result from the table above revealed a significant relationship between perceived source credibility and perception about the conflict. The result yielded p-value of 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance. This result implies that the perception people hold about the herdsmen-farmers conflict is largely dependent on their perception about the credibility of their source of information about the conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived source credibility</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Attacks on farmers</th>
<th>Conflict between farmers and herdsmen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considerably credible</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately credible</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not credible</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>152</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the perceived source credibility and public perception of information on herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Enugu State. The result showed that most of the respondents studied reported that their source of information on the conflict is the Internet. This result could be as a result of the pervasiveness of the Internet as a source of information. The result of this study is consistent with that of Choi, Watt and Lynch (2006) who investigated cross-media credibility perception with respect to news coverage about the Iraq War and found that most of the respondents considered the Internet as a trustworthy source of information. The result of the current study is also consistent with that of Wanta and Hu (1994) who reported that respondents preferred the Internet-powered CNN content (CNN.com) than its traditional version CNN. The result of this study also revealed that most of the respondents perceived the conflict as attacks against certain parts of the country and not a clash between farmers and herdsmen. Such a perception is likely to lead to hostile media which Scholars (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther, 1992; Gunther & Chia, 2001; Gunther & Christen, 2002) argue is likely to affect public perception of media credibility.
Such perception about the conflict may also be responsible for the preferred choice of information on the conflict. The result of this study also showed a significant relationship between perceived source credibility and perception about the herdsmen farmers conflict. The result revealed that most of the respondents who perceived the information as considerably credible also perceived the conflict as ethnic cleansing. Most of the respondents who perceived the information as moderately credible perceived the conflict as attacks on farmers while most of them who perceived the information as not credible perceived the conflict as attacks on farmers. Overall, the respondents considered information they receive on the conflict as considerably credible. This result may have a relationship with the source of information as most of the respondents perceived the Internet as most credible source of information.

The result of this study has implications on the source credibility theory because it has shown that when people perceive certain media outfit as not credible, they may not seek information from such outfit. This aspect of the current study has expanded the source credibility theory by providing evidence to show that when people do not have confidence in certain media outfits to provide credible information about conflict, they avoid such media. Finally, there was an open ended question which allowed the respondents to list the characteristics that make them consider a medium as credible. The outcome showed that most of the respondents mentioned features like trustworthiness, believability and factual presentation of information. Overall, their responses were similar to the source credibility scale of early researchers (Berlo 1969; McCroskey 1966; Meyer 1988).

**Conclusion/Recommendations**

Based on the result of this study, the researcher concludes that perceived source credibility significantly predicts source of information on the herdsmen-farmers conflict. Also, the researcher concludes that perceived source credibility significantly determines perception about herdsmen-farmers conflict. The basic contribution of this study is that it has provided evidence for understanding how perceived source credibility influences audience choice of media in times of conflict. The study has also provided fresh perspectives concerning the source credibility theory by not just explaining how the credibility of the source influences attitude to media messages but how perceived credibility can even influence the choice of media for information. The researcher recommends that further studies should be expanded to compare both the Southern and Northern Nigeria to give room for comparison. Also, the researcher recommends that other researchers should adopt other designs apart from survey to offer fresh perspectives. Finally, the researcher recommends that ownership should be considered in examining public perception of media credibility.
References


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