Coverage of Forced Migration in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of Three National newspapers

Running Title: **Coverage of Forced Migration in Nigerian Dailies**

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Abstract

Forced migration has become a subject of serious concern in global discourses including Nigeria. An estimated over two million people have sought safe havens in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps located in parts of Nigeria, following the increased social dislocation engendered by Boko-Haram insurgency, Fulani herdsmen attacks, communal and ethno-religious clashes, disputes over land, boundary conflicts between indigenous people and settlers, natural disasters and environmental factors. Content analysis was used to examine reports on forced migration in three Nigerian newspapers, namely, Daily Sun, The Guardian and The Nation, using the agenda setting theory. Constructed week sample of articles published over an

11-month period in 2018 was utilized to arrive at the sample size. Results show that the volume of coverage on forced migration issues is low, unillustrated and negatively slanted. Conflicts constituted the main object of attention. It is recommended that Nigerian newspapers should set proper agenda by giving prominence to issues of forced migration and also cover all sides to the issue, including migrant voices and perspectives. What is new about this study is its effort to play up migrant voices and engage in interpretative journalism, in contradistinction to the usual reportage of negative happenstances.

Keywords: *Newspaper coverage, forced migration, conflicts, internally displaced persons (IDPs), content analysis*

Introduction

Generally, Africa is often seen as a continent of mass displacement and migration caused by poverty and violent conflict [1]. "Internal Displacement on the continent remains a consistent consequence of political violence, natural disasters such as flooding or drought, as well as intersecting factors, such as the growing famine…" [2]. It has beennoted that "migration in Africa is as a result of population pressure, communal, ethnic and criminal violence, poverty, political strife and corruption" [3]. Nevertheless, "the manifestation, the causes and the consequences of forced displacements in Africa are differently experienced in space and time across the continent. These forced movements of populations have been accompanied by untold sufferings and violations of human rights"[4].The number of people displaced annually across the globe has continued to increase through time. Global estimate put the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) resulting from conflict at 40.8 million by December 2015, three-quarter of which are in ten countries of the world, 50% of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa. This figure, according to The United Nations High Commission for Refugees [5], increased to 68.5 million individuals at the end of 2017. The above statistics show that forced migration or displacement is mostly caused by conflict [6][7][8][9]. Succinctly put wars, civil conflicts, or natural disasters…. are the catalytic factors that induce forced migration [6].

In Nigeria, forced migration has become a topical issue of discourse in recent times. This is manifest due mainly to human tragedy and security problems with which it is associated. It is estimated that 85% of IDPs in Nigeria were due to Boko Haram violence and farmer-herder clashes, 12.6% by communal clashes and 2.4% by natural disasters [10]. Forced migration is

used generally to refer to involuntary movement of persons dislocated by human, economic, natural or environmental factors. These include conflicts, famine, flood, religious extremism/insurgency and development projects. In these circumstances, people forcibly relocate to distant places or areas beyond their original place of abode. It can also be referred to asinvoluntary migration, and described thus- "migrants leave their places of abode by force, not out of their own will" [3]. It follows that forced migration is a movement that is necessitated by pressure, caused by either man or natural forces, which portends life and source of life support. Also, "the use of violence, the instrument of coercion, sometimes characterized by institutionalized racism (ethnicity), controlled by the state or individuals is often central to forced migration experience," [11].Persons who are forced to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, and whose movements are within a given geopolitical boundary or national border are referred to as IDPs. In other words, a forced migrant is an internally displaced person (IDP). Such persons are forced to leave their homes in order to avoid conflicts, violence of various types, human rights violations, natural or human induced disasters [12]. Among the many ills of forced migration is the separation of persons from their familiar environment, which is often characterized by loss of social ties and cleavages, access to economic opportunities and environmental resources (and sometimes cohesion in rural areas) 13]. Furthermore, "people impelled to move are more vulnerable because away from their support networks they are more exposed to violence, stigma and exclusion; women, children and the elderly are often the most vulnerable and will face more dangers than men" [14]. In the foregoing situation, migrant children may not have access to education, thereby negatively affecting their ability to lead productive, healthy and happy lives.

2.1 Literature Review

Nigeria has had a plethora of issues on migration in the recent times. These include internal displacement resulting from "environmental degradation and natural disasters, inter and intra ethnic struggles and boundary clashes between native people and settlers, disagreements over land, electoral violence, and violent conflicts" [15]. The massive flooding of 2012 is notable for its weighty negative consequences in many states in the country, including the displacement of millions of people. Data collected by the National Emergency Management Agency [15] indicate that by October 2018, the population of IDPs resulting from conflict and flooding was 2,026,602

and 722,741 respectively. In the past ten years, civil conflicts in various parts of Nigeria have resulted in the displacement of thousands of men, women and children. Indeed, inter-ethnic conflicts, namely the Fulani herders and the native farmers, the Aguleri-Umuleri, Ijaw-Urhobo, Urhobo-Itsekiri, Tiv-Jukun and Ife-Modakeke crises have led to the wanton destruction of lives and property. Whole villages were burned down while many of the indigenes and survivors were forced to flee as a consequence of these conflicts. It is estimated that conflicts resulted in the displacement of 442,329 people in 17 out of the 36 states that make up the country [16]. Further still, the insurgency in the north-eastern zone of Nigeria has resulted in huge displacement of people, especially in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. As at the end of 2015, there were about 2,152,000 IDPs in Nigeria [10].This figure has risen appreciably as Boko-Haram crisis alone is implicated for the forced displacement of over two million people from their original homes [17].The foregoing impacts demand that preemptive measures be taken to curb the menace.

It has been observed that "…there is very little in the existing literature specifically regarding media coverage of migration, either from a quantitative or qualitative perspective" [18]. A study on migration and media reportage corroborated the above view, and pointed out "that the reportage of migration experiences in Nigeria is still in its infancy as there appears to be no direction among media owners and reporters on how to go about it" [19]. The media "do not place emphasis on stories relating to migration except the dramatic aspects as it relates to human trafficking and smuggling…Journalists reportage of migration issues are not well articulated due to lack of information on the subject matter…" [19]. Generally, the newspapers tended to report negative happenstances and sentimentalism to the near disregard of migrant voices and interpretative journalistic analyses. As aptly noted, "News on migration are gathered when something sensational and worth reporting happens" [20]. Given such a mindset, it was observed that, "migrant voices are almost totally unattended to, including the German and UK media. In the British sample, out of 13 published articles (only one of them on the Daily Mirror, and 3 on the Sun) were on migrant voices" [18]. There is also some evidence that the absence of migrant voices and perspectives contributes to negative public opinion, arousing feelings of prejudice that might otherwise have remained dormant or been challenged" [21]. Besides, "not giving space and airtime to their voices is unfair and therefore bad journalism" [22].

A complex and detailed understanding of migrant issues can be lost if migrant voices are absent in the media; if their affairs and points of view are not considered and integrated in media reportage and if their security and shared values are not protected [23]. That is why it is opinedthat negative portrayals of migrants in the press can be dehumanizing and can sow social crisis, even if there is not such a crisis [24]. Migrants' perspectives are therefore vital to enable them participate in debates about migration so as to bring balance to the coverage of their issue [22].Thus, the mass media is expected to provide timely information required to exploit available opportunities, raise consciousness about the possible negative effects of forced migration issues and help to highlight better and sustainable solutions.

The mass media creates awareness about particular issues to which members of the public easily become informed."They not only provide information but also represent events, issues and people in particular ways, influencing people's awareness of what is important and perceptions of who belongs in communities" [25]. Furthermore, mass media have the capacity to uplift the knowledge and change public behaviour by drawing their attention to particular issues [26][27]; pointing out that our main source of information tailors our world view [28]. This explains why the mass media majorly influences not only public discourse, but also our understanding and appreciation of "others" including forced migration issues. News media are seen as "cultural products," that shape our "social reality" and perceptions of events [29]. Apart from the fact that the media are responsible for the event they report, their portrayal or representation of such events, also define peoples' understanding and subsequent action [30]. The media determine what to report, influence our understanding and concern for our neighbours, which in turn influence how we relate with one another [29]. This depends on the countries, interests and events, which the media wishes to portray. Thus, how the media tells the story on societal issues like forced migration determines how people appreciate them. As has been observed, the problems that the viewing public regards as the nation's most important are those that are given priority on the national media [31]. It is also noted that the media serve as a link between the outside world and our conception of issues [32].

Indeed, media scholars are of the opinion that the media set agenda by determining the issues that will be highlighted most, which in turn permeates the consciousness of the audience as the most valuable [33].Furthermore, our understanding and evaluation of issues and how to think about what is going on in the world are influenced by the way the media frames them. Therefore,

migration will be considered topical and very important, with increased public awareness, if there are many and sustained newspaper reports and broadcast programmes in the radio and television on it. Thus, public opinion on displacement and migration is influenced by the way it is framed by the media. In essence, public opinion of immigrants, policy debate and even immigration law are generally influenced by the way media represents them [34]. It, therefore, behooves the mass media to exercise its function of enabling her diverse publics understand and appreciate issues associated with forced migration in Nigeria with a view to finding the way forward.

Although radio and television are the two major media through which the mass media relates to a wide audience, newspapers have additional advantages of being in permanent form, carrying more information, and often being more authoritative [35]. The newspapers are used to enhance the dissemination and sharing of information to a wide audience within a short time. Newspapers are periodical publications containing informative articles, editorial views, analytical articles, advertisements, special reports, pictures and cartoons. Newspapers report regularly on topical issues of importance and therefore can induce the public to change attitudes, become more aware, increase knowledge, skills and aid learning on different topics, including those on migrations. Therefore, newspapers play a noteworthy role in disseminating developmental messages. Given the above scenario, this study sought to examine the nature of coverage accorded the issue of forced migration in Nigeria, as media representation constitute an important subject in contemporary debate. Specifically, it sets out to determine:

1. The prominence given to forced migration in the newspapers.
2. The volume of coverage.
3. The dominant story genre covered.
4. The direction of coverage.
5. The migration issues covered.

Research hypotheses

H_1: Newspapers in Nigeria do not give low priority to forced migration issues.

H_2: There is no difference in the contribution of Natural disaster, Conflict, Education and Job to forced migration issues in Nigerian newspapers.

Theoretical anchor

This study is guided by the theory of agenda setting, which posits that the issues considered as most significant in the society, are determined by the media. Agenda setting theory originated in 1922 following the argument of Walter Lippmann on agenda setting in his book titled: 'Public Opinion' [36]. It is on this foundation that Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw built the agenda setting theory [37]. It is stated that the media is a powerful tool for setting agenda on issues of national importance, while helping to draw public attention on major public issues [32]. This opinion has been well-documented by media scholars over the years. Undoubtedly, the media is invaluable in the acquisition of facts about social happenstances as well as the level of importance placed on them by the audience. Here the emphasis placed on such issue by the media is very vital. Thus at any given time in a society, the mass media determines level of importance given to development issues, including forced migration. It is also noted that, frequency of reporting, prominence given to the reports through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing on radio and television, are the major platforms through which the media actualizes the above stance [38].

Also noted is that "the more attention the media give to a topic, the greater is the importance attributed to it by the news audience" [39]. The Agenda setting theory of the media therefore, "is the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues" [40]. This is because the action of the media is towards influencing people's perception of what is important, acceptable, or desirable. Beyond being a purveyor of information and opinion, the media influences human thought processes including the contents and directions on issues under discourse. This simply means that if the media give much air time or space (in a repetitive form) to an issue or event it is seen by information consumers as very important [41].

This theory is important in this study because when newspapers, in their reports, lay emphasis on migration issues, they become important, and aspects that need to be addressed would be given due consideration by relevant authorities. Media coverage is therefore essential in influencing people's point of view on forced migration and its consequent IDPs in Nigeria. It has been proven that the way a news story is emphasized, written or placed in terms of prominence and/or commitment in coverage can affect the value or importance the readers place on it.

Methodology

To determine how forced migration issues were covered by newspapers in Nigeria, content analysis was adopted to execute this study. "Content analysis seems to provide a device that enables researchers to get "a better understanding of the impact of the media on society…" [18]. Data were gathered from newspaper issues published between January 1, 2018 and November 30, 2018, a year adjudged as the most challenging year in Nigeria's history insofar as security threats such as terrorism, herdsmen/farmers clashes, communal conflicts and flooding etc. are concerned [42]. Three national dailies –*The Guardian, Daily Sun* and *The Nation* were sampled for this study. The newspapers were selected from the list of ten most popular newspapers in Nigeria [43][44][45][46][47], to represent other newspapers in the country. The sample size for the study was determined via constructed week selection technique. The "constructed week sampling is more efficient than simple random sampling or consecutive day sampling" [48]. This is because within six constructed weeks, much of the information about an issue under discourse would have been captured in contradistinction to simple random sampling or consecutive day sampling that may gloss over some of the issues. Other scholars' recommendation informed our decision to sample 6 constructed weeks (which yielded 42 days) from the months of the year 2018 [49]. Their study found that sampling a minimum of six constructed weeks was most efficient since after six constructed weeks, additional weeks add only minimal improvements. A week in the study was constructed choosing the Monday of week 1, Tuesday of week 2, Wednesday of week 3, Thursday of week 4, Friday of week 5, and Saturday of week 6. The weeks were constructed from the months of year 2018, which yielded 42 days or six (6) constructed weeks. The newspapers' issues were examined and stories on forced migration and displacement were used to execute the study. A total 171 stories were selected and analysed. The reports were coded into five categories: (1) volume, (2) prominence, (3) story genre, (4) direction of coverage, and (5) migration issues. Chi-square test of significance was used to analyse the hypotheses and discuss the findings.

Results

A total of 171 stories were studied, 46% of which were published in *The Guardian,* while *The Sun* (33%) and *The Nation* (21%) followed in descending order (See Table). Findings showed that almost all the stories (98%), appeared on the inside pages of the newspapers, majority (81%)

of which were not illustrated. Straight news (93%) was the main story genre used. The Table also revealed that most of the stories, (81%), took a negative slant, reporting such challenges as poor living conditions and security threats faced by the IDPs. The Table also showed that conflict (53%) and natural disaster (32%) were the main causative factors for migration.

Some examples of such headlines were: *Terrorists kill 12 in attacks on Borno villages, IDPs' camp; UN condemns Boko Haram IDP attack; Over 160,000 bags of rice donated to IDPs by China 'rots away in NEMA stores'; Kogi flood: Victims lament dearth of basic amenities at IDPs camps; IDPs in Abuja raise alarm over abandoned projects by NGOs;* and*Enyaharo Isoko raises fund for flood victims in IDP camps,* all from *The Guardian.* The headlines found in *Daily Sun* during the study period included: *Boko haram Devastation: Aftermath of WHO, UN, battle cholera, malaria in Northeast's 'war zones'; Nearly 60,000 people displaced in Northeast Nigeria since November – UN; Over 32,000 IDPs now in Cross River – SEMA;* while those of *The Nation* newspaper were: *Humanitarian catastrophe in IDP camps; Ortom: Federal agencies have failed Benue; Tackling bandits', kidnappers';* and *Floods hit Anambra again, etc.*

Table: Presenting newspaper coverage **of forced migration in Nigeria**

Volume of Coverage		
Newspaper	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
The Guardian	78	46
Daily Sun	57	33
The Nation	36	21
Total	171	100

Placement of stories	**The Guardian**	**Daily Sun**	**The Nation**	**Total (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Front Page	3	-	-	3	2
Inside Page	75	57	36	168	98
Centre Page	-	-	-	-	-
Back Page	-	-	-	-	-
Total	78	57	36	171	100

Illustration					
Photograph	21	3	9	33	19
Cartoon	-	-	-	-	-
Chart	-	-	-	-	-
Not Illustrated	57	54	27	138	81
Total	78	57	36	171	100
Story Genre					
News	69	54	36	159	93
Feature	9	-	-	9	5
Editorial	-	-	-	-	-
Investigative stories	-	-	-	-	-
Others	-	3	-	3	2
Total	78	57	36	171	100
Direction of coverage					
Positive	21	-	3	24	14
Neutral	6	3	-	9	5
Negative	51	54	33	138	81
Total	78	57	36	171	100
Migration Issues					
Natural Disaster	18	27	9	54	32
Conflict	45	26	20	91	53
Education	6	1	2	9	5
Holiday	-	-	-	-	-
Business	-	-	-	-	-
Job	9	3	5	17	10

Good Climate	-	-	-	-	-
Total	78	57	36	171	100

Source: Content analysis, 2018

Test of the hypotheses

The result of the Chi-square analyses on the level of prominence given to forced migration, by the newspapers studied yielded Chi-square p-value of 0.001 at 3df. Since the p-value is less than 0.005, the first null hypothesis – newspapers in Nigeria do not give low prominence in their coverage of migration issues – was rejected, meaning that the *Guardian*, *Daily Sun* and *Nation* newspapers give low prominence to forced migration issues in Nigeria. The second Chi–square result that presents issues that cause forced migration, yielded a p–value of 0.001 at 3df. In other words, the second null hypothesis – there is no difference in the contribution of Natural disaster, Conflict, Education and Job to forced migration issues in Nigerian newspapers - was rejected because the p-value is less than 0.005. The study concludes that there are differences in the contribution of Natural disaster, Conflict, Education and Job to forced migration issues reported in Nigerian newspapers. As shown in the Table, Conflict is the highest cause of forced migration, followed by Natural disaster, Job and Education.

Discussion

It must also be reiterated that 171 reports on forced migration in Nigeria appeared in the three newspapers during the period under study. This is relatively low when compared with political stories and, therefore, has obvious implications. This is because there is a close correlation between the quantity of a news report and the level of importance attached to it [50]. Indeed, the frequency of news report influences the views held by the audience regarding the event. Agenda setting theory has been seen by scholars [50], as playing a catalytic role in drawing public attention and influencing them towards a particular issue. Thus, a life-threatening issue like forced migration and its attendant consequences ought to be given more attention (coverage).

Findings also revealed that most of the stories were placed on the inside pages of the newspapers, majority of which were not illustrated. Prominence, as a variable in content analysis, finds its expression in the illustration and "placement of stories according to the importance of events. The front page, inside page, centre and back pages, portray the scale of importance amongst stories" [51]. Illustrating stories with pictures helps to draw the attention

and arouse the curiosity of readers to the stories. The placement of stories on migration issues majorly on the inside pages and their non-illustration are indicative of the low level of importance attached to them by the media and the usual desire of many people to remain anonymous while fleeing from their homes to safe havens. Indeed, the low media attention, as exemplified by the Chi-square p-value of 0.001, runs counter with the tenets of agenda setting theory, given the enormity of issues associated with forced migration in Nigeria and the need to place them on the front burner for national attention.

Further analysis indicates that news stories were the dominant story genre in the selected newspapers, with little or no attention given to opinion articles, editorials and feature stories. Impliedly, the newspapers did not present their individual interpretations to the stories, despite the fact that such articles or stories help to give different angles to the issues, while portraying their effect in different areas of people's and ultimately enabling them to take the right decisions. A study on *How the Media Report Migration on both Sides of the Mediterranean* corroborated this finding when it noted that media coverage of migration issues … lack detailed reporting on the context and complexities of migration, or reflection on wider social and political issues [52].This is worrisome since newspapers are agenda setters. Of course, sound journalistic analyses or interpretative reporting, and not mere news report, is required in handling forced migration. The aim is to elicit necessary information that would help proffer encompassing sustainable solutions to the issues. The newspapers ought to set agenda, and story genre is an important indicator of agenda setting.

Results from research question four indicate that the tonal directions of majority of the stories were negative (81%). Most of the stories revolved round the tale of woes or narratives on IDPs, who suffer hunger yet cannot farm their fields due to insurgency or flooding or the Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes. The stories chided the government and its agencies for the general neglect and poor conditions of the IDPs. Among the many problems faced by IDPs in Nigeria are insecurity, poverty and hunger, diseases, neglects and feelings of alienations. Positive portrayals of forced migration, namely stories on hope, resettlement, support and solution etc. account for only 14%, while 5% took a neutral stance. The preponderance of negative stories on forced migration corroborates available literature, which posits that [forced] migration issues are

fraught with stories of lack of adequate care, lack of freedom, financial problem, family disintegration and poor education.

The issues covered by the newspapers, as shown in research question five, were mainly conflict, natural disaster, education, and economic hardship of which the most pronounced was conflict. The second Chi–square result which yielded a p–value of 0.001 attests to this claim. Thus, the above factors are reported as the main causes of forced migration in Nigeria. It has been severally observed that conflict is a strong causative factor for forced migration [8][9] in Nigeria. Examples of such conflict include, inter-ethnic crisis in parts of the middle belt, the Fulani herdsmen and farmers' crisis, and Boko Haram insurgency, which has been implicated as the highest cause of forced migration in Nigeria [15][10]. It was also observed that unsafe conditions, drought, hunger, flooding, earthquakes, war and conflict are causes of forced migration [53]. People also migrate elsewhere in search of job and education, due to unsafe conditions created by conflict and natural disaster (see Table).

The highlights of the research reveal that the newspapers studied did not attach great importance to migration issues in Nigeria. This is reflected in almost all facets of the research objectives addressed. For instance, the number of news items covered by the newspapers during the study period was poor; there were also no editorials, neither were there interpretative stories that would have portrayed the opinions of the newspapers to influence public agenda/decision. Furthermore, the stories were not illustrated neither were they placed in front nor back pages. Given the sensitive and critical nature of forced migration and its bearing on national question, the stories on its implications should have been accorded great importance so as to set an agenda that will make the government wake up to its responsibilities. As earlier noted, the very significance of agenda setting theory in national development agenda [32]. The audience acquire basic facts of public affairs from the media, and on the basis of the emphasis attached to them by the media, decide the level of importance to attach to them. Furthermore, "by building the discourse on them, the media define the issues a society debates [18]. Everything that isn't included in the discourse is virtually nonexistent; it doesn't have a "right of citizenship". When it comes to migration issues, societies are wrapped into information cocoons, in which we hear only what we choose and only what comforts and pleases us.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper analyzed newspaper reports on migration issues in Nigeria using *The Guardian, Daily Sun* and *The Nation*. The agenda setting theory was used in the study. Data generated from the study showed that the volume of coverage on migration issues was low. The stories were mainly placed on the inside pages and most of them were not illustrated. News is the dominant story genre and the coverage took a negative dimension and were mostly based on conflict/crisis. Furthermore, little or no effort was made to portray migrant voices and/or engage in interpretative reporting that would provide the required background and cover major dimensions and perspectives of forced migration. As portrayed in the literature section, their affairs, shared values and security need to be duly considered in media reportage [23]. These could be in the form of proper resettlement, economic support, security and general well-being.

Consequently, the following recommendations will suffice:

1. Newspapers should endeavor to cover all dimensions of forced migration including migrant voices and their perspectives.

2. Newspaper editors should strive to place stories on forced migration in the front pages and also illustrate them with pictures to ensure prominence;

3. Newspaper editors should ensure that feature stories, editorials and opinion articles are written on forced migration so as to give their individual interpretation and viewpoints;

4. Newspapers should strive to portray how to improve societal development in their coverage of forced migration in Nigeria using their situations as against the conflicts' orientation. In essence, development issues like skills acquisition, education for the young, attitudinal change and life style management should be incorporated in their interpretative reports on forced migration.

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