

Content Analysis of Nigerian Press Coverage of Banditry: A Study of Select Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses newspapers coverage of banditry in Nigeria. Hinged on the agenda setting theory, the study uses quantitative content analysis (QCA) to determine the frequency, prominence and depth accorded to the issue of banditry. The coding sheet was used as the primary instrument for data collection. The population of the study constitute 3,650 editions of The Nation, The Punch, Daily Trust, Leadership and the Sun newspapers published from January 1st, 2022 to December 31st, 2024. Using the multi-stage sampling procedures, 160 editions of select newspapers were systematically selected and analyzed. Simple percentage and frequency tables were used to analyze the data. Findings however, reveal amongst other things that, even though the issue of banditry was frequently reported by the select Nigerian newspapers 127, it was not given high prominence 90 and much depth as majority of the stories were reported using 2-columns spread 73. The study therefore concludes that, editors-in-chief, reporters, and desk editors of the select Nigerian newspapers should accord the issue of banditry the desired attention by making it prominent, treating it with depth and giving it priority through proper placements.

Keywords: Banditry, content analysis, Nigerian newspapers

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a country has been entrapped in a lot of security challenges especially in recent times. One of the major shades of these challenges is banditry. Banditry issues in Nigeria has become so rampant, endemic and devastating especially in the northern part of the country (Ojo et al., 2023). The fact that the northern part of Nigeria is the most hit by the activities of bandits does not mean that other geopolitical zones within the country are free from the scourge of banditry activities and other related crimes. Without being overly simplistic, it is quite unfortunate that at least every part of Nigeria has its own peculiar and fair share of one security problem or the other ranging from banditry, Boko Haram insurgency, terrorism, herders-farmers contestations, different political agitations, Niger Delta quest for emancipation, ethnic unrests and clashes, kidnapping and abductions for ransom to unknown gunmen attacks amongst others. Banditry can be conceptualized and defined as the tactical, strategic, purposeful and organised attacks on unsuspecting communities and villages which can either come in form of killings, maiming, raping, destructions, kidnapping and abduction, lootings etc., perpetrated by unscrupulous individuals who are held-bent on causing unnecessary pains and agony on others (Aliyu et al., 2024). According to Ayantayo and Akintola (2025) the security situation in Nigeria has deteriorated as a result of these unchecked banditry attacks, which seem to be beyond the capabilities of Nigerian security agencies.

Through a number of plenary sessions, debates, reports, and UN resolutions, including Resolution 59 of the General Assembly of 2005, the General Assembly Thematic Debate on Human Security of 2008/2010,

and Resolution 66/290 of the General Assembly of 2012, the global governing body has established institutional and collaborative mechanisms for the institutionalization of the concepts of human security. Accordingly, even though a large number of states such as Norway, Denmark, Australia, Switzerland, and others have focused on making human security agenda and goals a reality, according to recent data, most other states which Nigeria is not an exception, are still more inclined to state-centric security approach to address the high level of violence that defines the contemporary international order. Although different scholars have argued and attributed some of the causes of banditry to lack of adequate provision of basic social amenities and poor security architecture in Nigeria, the fact still remains that, the media also has a vital role to play in the fight against banditry through the way banditry activities are being reported. Through media choice of words and reporting styles on banditry activities, people can make meaning on what has happened, when it has happened, where it has happened and who were involved. Ayantayo (2020) corroborates that, the media can intensify or deescalate conflict by influencing readers' opinions through word choice and agenda-setting. The media consistently play a significant role in creating the social reality of conflicts and selectively portraying these realities through the news framing process (Chakraborty et al., 2015). Thus, the relevance of media in highlighting and bringing issues of national concern such as banditry to limelight while at the same time setting agenda for public discussions and debates becomes expedient.

Statement of the problem

With its huge and ever-increasing mortality toll of innocent people, banditry according to United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report of 1994, is one of Nigeria's worst challenges to human security and survival. Mohammed and Alimba (2016) observe that, banditry has not only resulted in the loss of lives and property, but it has also severely disrupted economic activity, shattered social cohesiveness, and caused a large-scale number of displaced persons in the country. Based on extant literature, the media not only in Nigeria but the world over are found to shape and redirect public discourse through the way issues are reported. Thus, without adequate media reportage of issues such as banditry which has been catastrophic and worrisome and which has continued to plunge Nigeria into nearly comatose state, the public and of course the government may not have the full understanding of the situation.

Unfortunately, the media in Nigeria seems not to be doing much in the area of adequate media representation of endangered beat such as banditry. This situation may be borne out of the fact that, the media in Nigeria are entrapped by varying challenges which ranges from social, economic, political and cultural factors. Ojo (2015, p. 187) laments that, media outlets in Nigeria that were once hailed as independent, bold, and vocal may now be viewed more ethno-political than protest-driven and adversarial. Hence, because of the increasing complexity of today's security challenges which banditry is one, and the enormous amount of information required to address them, fighting these issues requires intelligence gathering (Adelani, 2024). Although the preceding assertions underscore the

relevance of information gathering for intelligence by both the media and other stakeholders in order to stem the tide of banditry, terrorism, etc., sadly, the Nigerian media's effort in that regard seems not to be enough. This constitutes the problem which this study seeks to explore.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to assess how select Nigerian newspapers cover banditry issues and how such coverage sets agenda for public discussion and government action towards forestalling peace. Thus, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- Determine the frequency of coverage of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers;
- Assess the level of prominence given to the coverage of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers; and
- Examine the depth of coverage of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers.

Research Questions

RQ1. How frequently are issues of banditry covered by the select Nigerian newspapers?

RQ2. What is the level of prominence given to the reportage of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers?

RQ3. What is the depth given to the issue of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers?

Conceptual review

Banditry

The conceptualization of banditry requires placing its related activities in perspective so as to be able to establish its intents and purposes. In this regard, scholars maintain that the concept ‘bandits’ within the African context is a loose terminology for someone who is prone to committing crimes such as armed robbery, killing and destruction of properties of community members or business owners (Olapeju & Peter, 2021). The use or deployment of light and small arms by these criminals earned them the sobriquet ‘armed bandits’ or ‘weaponised bandits’ (Akinyetun & Bakare, 2022). Another perspective of bandits speaks to people who perpetuate violence along a country’s borderlines and rural interiors (Umaru, 2020).

Bandits, within the Nigerian context, are notorious for indulgence in organised criminal offences including but not limited to arson, kidnapping, rape, raids, extrajudicial killings, armed robbery, destruction of life and property, and cattle rustling (Akinyetun & Bakare, 2022). These characteristics make them become associated and synonymous with intimidation, threat, trepidation, horror, mayhem, and outright elimination. As the motives of bandits in Nigeria are often correlated with amassing material wealth or promoting hegemonistic and sinister ideologies, they have often been classified as armed robbers, kidnappers, armed militia, cattle rustlers, jihadist, and Fulani herdsmen whose motivation is pecuniary and ideologically-laden (Orjinmo, 2021). The motives and activities of bandits are what made scholars sometimes to refer to the issue

as either armed banditry or simply banditry. The belief is that, almost all the activities of bandits especially in Nigeria involves the deployment of arms in causing havoc and destruction with reckless abandon to the unsuspecting villages or victims either through killing, arson, rape and molestation.

Furthermore, while bandits denote persons involved in unleashing undue suffering on the people through killing, maiming, assaulting and even displacing unsuspecting victims, banditry is the act of carrying out such heinous activities. According to Ojo and Ojewale, (2024) the concept of ‘armed banditry’ as a socio-economic phenomenon re-emerged specifically in December of 2020, and surged as one of the most devastating security issues in Nigeria (Akinyetun & Bakare, 2022). The re-emergence and wanton popularisation of this socio-economic anomaly of criminal tendency has negatively impacted the socio-economic stability and public safety in Nigeria. Within Nigeria’s contemporary socio-political landscape, the endemic nature of this criminal activity which is characterised by organised crime, armed robberies, kidnappings, rapes, murder, cattle rustling, environmental resources exploitation, and violent attacks in rural areas (Akinyetun & Bakare, 2022; Okoli & Nwangwu, 2023; Quadri & Oladejo, 2021), have heightened tensions and traumatising effects among residents in local communities as well as overstressing government’s lean resources and military might in tackling its malfeasances (Ojo & Ojewale, 2024).

Scholars posit that the culmination of integrative inorganic factors such as poverty, unemployment, ungoverned spaces, bad governance, injustice

from government, hunger, illiteracy, informal security operatives such as the vigilante, primordial sentiments, unprotected borders, state complicity, traditional rulers' involvement, migration, paucity of basic amenities, and the proliferation of illegal arms engendered an environment which is conducive for banditry to thrive unabated (Brenner, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020; Mahmud & Maigari, 2024; Mustapha, 2019; Mustapha, 2020; Oyewole & Shola, 2022). These factors are considered as compelling forces that require the attention of local, state, regional, and national authorities and stakeholders in finding a lasting solution-based approaches in confronting the issue headlong.

Banditry Coverage

Currently, there is dearth of literature that provide substantial framework on the definition of the concept of banditry coverage. Due to lack of definitive framework on the concept, this study has offered some definitive framework in philosophising the concept. The concept 'banditry coverage' implicatively entails detailed journalistic processes or activities of gathering news data concerning the activities of bandits; collating or synthesising such data; processing the data into interpretive formats; and then disseminating such data in the free marketplace of ideas. The aims and objectives of covering and reporting banditry are to inform, educate, sensitise, build consensus, form opinion, set orders of priorities, as well as mobilise the public towards achieving collective social actions that are predetermined by the message source.

This definitive framework implies that banditry coverage is the prerogative of the mass media intuitions and their ground soldiers known

as journalists or reporters. The inputs gathered from social scope of reality in which banditry occur are what the media institution build their reports on with the intentions of saturating society with such inputs to increase knowledge on the subject matter that cause society to change.

So, banditry coverage specifically implies reporting on socio-economic crimes that are perpetuated by bandits with the aim of bringing their sinister activities to the public sphere. This involves but not limited to investigative attempts made in exposing perpetrators and their nefarious antics with a view to bringing a lasting solution to the issue by shaping public perception and influencing policy responses (Ishaku et al., 2025). It implies, to a great extent, how media instruments and operationalisation are geared towards presenting, portraying or curating narratives that critically analyse the devastating impacts of banditry in society. Such narratives are expected to be holistic in approach especially in portraying or reflecting varying dimensions of the social, economic, cultural, and political impacts of banditry in ways that not only exacerbate societal anxieties but also impacts state intervention and community resilience.

Hence, the holistic approach in covering banditry is expected to conform to Busy and Holbert's (2011) multi-dimensional paradigms of the mediatisation of social reality. The first dimension connoting the media and news makers as the most important channel of communication and source of information on banditry whose roles in the public sphere cannot be in contention (Sa'idu, 2024). The second dimension entails the independence of the media and news makers from ideological blocs and hegemonic interests whether cultural, political, economic, religious, and

otherwise (Sa'idu, 2024). The third dimension entails the degree to which news on banditry is governed by journalistic logic or political logic. The fourth dimension focuses on political institutions, political agencies, political actors and the degree to which they are influenced by media logic or political logic (Sa'idu, 2024).

Nigerian Newspapers and the Fight against Banditry

Newspapers' robust role in the fight against banditry in Nigeria can only be achieved where there is free and responsible press devoid of any form of control and ideological dependence. However, as much as the press is expected to be free in society, such freedom should come with concomitant responsibilities. This means that, the press needs to function while taking societal demands and ambitions into consideration. In line with the free press principle, there should be an open flow of unbiased information that will enable the populace to make wise and informed decisions that would influence their lives. Oso (2012, p.59) stresses that "liberal democracy expects the channels of public communication to be open and inclusive enough to accommodate the full range of voices available in the polity." Buttressing this viewpoint, Okoro and Emmanuel (2019, p.1) affirm that "a lasting democracy is anchored on a strong information base and media are seen as one of the most important allies of the democratic process." These underlying assumptions give this study its present impetus as it sheds light on the political, socio-cultural, and economic factors (contextual variables) that confine the Nigerian press, reducing their total contribution to the process of building a peaceful and

sustainable nation which can only be achieved in societies that are free from the shackles of insecurity and terrorism such as armed banditry.

Available literature suggest that the Nigerian newspapers are significantly influenced by profound political, socio-cultural, economic, and ethno-regional dynamics, which shape how they address topics of public interest (Oso, 2012; Udoakah, 2016; Yusha'u, 2015). Investigating how the media performed throughout the extended military regime, Ojo (2015, p.187) submits that media organisations that were hitherto celebrated as “independent, fearless, and outspoken... could, in retrospect, be thought of differently: more ethno-political than protest.” His research also shows that under the lengthy and intermittent military administrations, which lasted from the late 1960s to 1999, the press “represented more, the aspirations of individual gladiators than any public endeavour” in their coverage of topics. According to Sa'idu (2024), the manner in which media, politicians, and political institutions compete and race over coverage of security challenges like banditry is enough evidence to buttress the status of the media in the formation of opinion about the ability or inability of the authorities to address the menace.

Despite strong scholarly advocacy for media institutions to serve as agents of maintaining peace or mechanisms of managing and resolving conflicts (Pate, 2018), media's alignment with vested interests has often led to the escalation of conflicts despite their potential to de-escalate tensions and contribute to conflict resolution and peace building (Mohammed, 2021). Although the Nigerian state prides itself as a democratic society, its media landscape continues to grapple with issues of control and ownership as

well as varying interests - political, socio-cultural and economic factors especially while reporting security issues such as armed banditry. Consequently, aside from involving some of the key actors in the fight against armed banditry – herdsmen and farmers, community members, security operatives and vigilantes, government officials and rare cases, religious leaders; the press in Nigeria through the collaborative and institutional mechanism suggested by the United Nation, can be employed to serve as one of the key partners towards the fight against armed banditry in Nigeria which poses a serious problem towards the actualisation of the UN global human security agenda.

Although the mass media in Nigeria can be used as one of the tools in promoting enduring peace and fighting armed banditry in North-Western Nigeria (NWN), their level of engagement has been constrained by diverse political, social, economic and ethno-regional factors. These factors may be seen in the unjustified torture of journalists, the seizure of their tools, the removal of copies of printed materials for distribution, and the ongoing murder of journalists who cover crises and insecure circumstances. While it is the responsibility of the press to keep track of and report on security concerns such as armed banditry that has continued to ravage the Nigerian state, the ability of the press to do so is restricted due to the aforementioned factors. In the light of this circumstance, Ajayi and Oyebade (2021) stress that, information gathering for intelligence and counter-intelligence has been liberalised and removed from the exclusive domain of formalised state and security architectures as a result of the growing complexity of today's security challenges and the vast amount of information needed to

address them. This makes the media's role in contributing to the security of the Nigerian state by fighting armed banditry and entrenching peace as well as ensuring the emotional and psychological stability of journalists very crucial but evasive

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following are the reviews of empirical works that have been conducted in relation to the present study:

Sa'idu (2024) sought to examine the politics of insecurity reporting in Northern Nigeria, focusing on how the media's coverage of security challenges either exacerbated or tamed the situation. Some of the major findings of the study were that media outlets in Nigeria engaged in unethical practices exacerbating security challenges; the coverage of insecurity was influenced by politics, religion, market interests, ideology, ethnicity, regionalism, and ownership; biased reportage for political and economic reasons were found to have compromised media ethics and harmony; dissemination of fake news, promotion of primordial sentiments, and compromising integrity for personal gains were common in media reportage of insecurity; financial inducement and bribery were found to impede press professionalism, affecting reporting the issue with accuracy and integrity; and that framing of insecurity issue with irresponsible language use exacerbates conflict situations and insecurity, influencing audience understanding.

In a study conducted by Omolabi (2023a) where the researcher aimed to identify the various forms of media biases, stances, and ideological

imports used by newspaper reporters in reporting insecurity, it was found that news writers often resort to bias and framing techniques in reporting insurgent related news some of which include biased nominal, biased adjective, naming bias, and bias adverbs. The study further revealed that the presupposition of the ideologies found in the newspaper reports was to increase the information deliveries and acceptance in the written reports of insurgent actions of the various insurgent groups in Nigeria. With the similarities and differences, notwithstanding, the reviewed study is relevant to the current study as it adds empirical evidence and contextual justifications to how Nigeria press cover and present stories related to national security, insurgency, and socio-economic crimes.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Innocent et al., (2021), the researchers interrogate perceived imbalances in North/South media reportage on the issue of banditry where it was found that, the Nigerian media reports the same incidences in different parts of Nigeria in different tones. Other findings in the study revealed that when violent crimes occur in the North it was simply framed as banditry but when they occur in the South, they were called other less derogatory names that do not qualify the extent of the crimes committed. It was also found that newspapers in the North reported banditry issues more frequently than their Southern counterparts. But in consideration of thematic variable of inquiry, methodology, and sampling procedures deployed in data gathering, both studies share a common ground. However, with the similarities and differences, notwithstanding, the reviewed study is relevant to the current study as it adds empirical evidence and contextual justifications to how Nigerian

press cover and present stories of socio-economic crimes, particularly, banditry.

Moreover, Omolabi's (2023b) critical discourse analysis of selected print media reports on insurgency in Nigerian newspapers which sought to examine insurgency coverage in the Nigerian media through the Critical Discourse Approach with a view to identifying the various ideological roles present in the coverage. The study found that linguistics strategies were utilized in news reports to construct polarity as well as social inequality and bias. Findings also revealed that the presupposition of the ideologies found in the reports was to increase the information deliveries and acceptance in the written reports of the insurgent actions in Nigeria. Based on the scope, methodology, and sampling procedures of the reviewed study, there is a marked difference with the current study. But in consideration of thematic variable of inquiry and deployment of qualitative approach to data gathering, both studies share a common ground. Another similarity shared by both studies is in terms of investigating certain socio-political, professional, and ideological challenges to objective news coverage and presentation of social realities. However, with the similarities and differences, notwithstanding, the reviewed study is relevant to the current study as it adds empirical evidence and contextual justifications to how Nigerian press cover and present stories related to national security, insurgency, and socio-economic crimes.

In Shuaibu's (2023) comparative content analysis of the coverage of banditry in Niger state by *The Guardian* and *The Daily Trust* newspapers,

the researcher set out to comparatively examine the different contents in which *The Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* newspaper cover the issues pertaining to banditry in the state. The major finding of the study was that within the study period, *The Daily Trust* newspaper covered more stories on banditry compared to *The Guardian* newspaper. Further findings suggested that *The Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* newspapers did not accord high prominence to banditry stories. The researcher recommended that the print media should give prominence to the reportage of cases of banditry and kidnapping and should organize debates on the issue as well as enlighten the public about the incidents. Although there is a marked difference based on the scope of the reviewed study with the current study, both studies share a common ground in the aspect of their thematic variable of inquiry, methodology and sampling procedures. Thus the reviewed study is relevant to the current study as it adds empirical evidence and contextual justifications on how Nigerian press cover and present stories related to national security, insurgency, and socio-economic crimes.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study is hinged on the agenda setting theory. The agenda setting theory, although credited to Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, followed different levels of conception and refinement. With or without the label, the agenda-setting idea has been with us since the days of the Penny press. Walter Lippman, in *Public Opinion* (1922), argued that the people do not deal directly with their environments as much as they respond to “pictures” in their heads (Baran & Davis, 2007,p.279). It is

against this backdrop, that scholars such as Baran and Davis (2007) credited the initial conception of the agenda setting idea to Walter Lippman. Although Walter Lippman did not specifically use the term “agenda setting” itself, Bernard Cohen is generally credited with refining Lippman’s ideas into the theory of agenda-setting. According to Cohen (1963, p.13):

The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling the people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read.

Cohen’s writing became the basis for what is now called the agenda-setting function of the mass media. This perspective might have lingered in obscurity had it not been empirically confirmed by research conducted by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (Baran & Davis, 2009, p.279). Thus McCombs and Shaw (1972, p.176) posit that:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. The mass media may well

determine the important issues - that is, the media may set the “agenda” of the campaign.

Folarin (2005, p.95) also corroborates that:

The media has the power to predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given point in time in a society... this is inherent in four interdependent elements which include the amount or regularity of reporting, the status given to the reports through the positioning of stories, headline display, picture exhibition and page layout in newspapers and magazines; as well as the timing on radio and television; the extent of argument generated in the reports and the aggregate of media specific effects overtime.

Central to the principles of the agenda setting theory is that, the media make us to think about certain issues, they make us to think or feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society (Anaeto, 2008). The agenda-setting theory is important in this study, since the study seeks to look at how media reports on banditry can set the agenda for peace and prevent further occurrences. The rationale for choosing agenda setting theory is the belief that the mass media can set agenda for the public by highlighting topical issues such as banditry. However, two basic assumptions underlie most researches on agenda setting. Firstly, the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it and that the media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. Secondly, the most critical aspects of the agenda setting role of the mass media is the

time frame given to a particular issue and different mass media seems to have different agenda setting potentials.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted the Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA) research design. Employing the QCA research design enabled the researcher to quantitatively analyse the contents of *The Nation*, *The Punch*, *The Daily Trust*, *The Leadership* and *The Sun* newspapers in order to find out patterned relationship with the objectives of the study. This research design was used because of its primacy in an objective, systematic, and replicable examination of newspaper contents that are manifest (and latent) in order to draw inference(s) regarding the meanings, contexts, and intentions contained in the newspaper contents (Prasad, 2008; Rose et al., 2015). By deploying this research design, the researchers were able to quantitatively analyse banditry stories reported by the select newspapers in order to find out the prominence, frequency, frames, and depth accorded the stories in the newspapers. The population of the study comprised all the editions of the select newspapers published from January 1st, 2022 to December 31st, 2024. The study period was 24 months. The total number of publications of the five (5) newspapers for a period of 24 months is three thousand six hundred and fifty (3,650) editions. Thus, the population for the study is three thousand six hundred and fifty (3,650) editions of the select newspapers.

The researchers employed the multi-stage sampling procedures in arriving at the QCA sample. At the first stage, the systematic and composite week

sampling techniques were adopted to select one hundred and sixty (160) editions of the five (5) Nigerian national newspapers which represent the sample size of the study. The techniques were used because studying all the editions of the five newspapers for a two-year period was impracticable. As Babbie (2011) suggests, deploying systematic sampling technique enabled the researcher to select every k th unit in a list for inclusion in the sample. By using the systematic approach, the researcher arranged the months of publication of the five newspapers in a chronological order and assign table of random numbers (TRN) from one (1) to twenty-four (24). Starting with the first item in the list (that is, number 1), a skip interval of two (2) was decided. This implies that after picking number one (1) in the list, the researcher had to skip two subsequent numbers (that is 2 and 3) in the list in order to pick the next number (that is, 4) till the items in the list are exhausted. After the exercise, numbers 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 22 were chosen which represented eight (8) editions of the five newspapers each. The codes the researcher assigned to the TRN were as follows: numbers 1 and 13 represented January; 4 and 16 represented April; 7 and 19 represented July; while 10 and 22 represented October editions of the five newspapers respectively. Hence, January, April, July, and October editions of the five newspapers were systematically chosen while excluding their February, March, May, June, August, September, November, and December editions for the study period. At the second stage which entails arriving at the one hundred and sixty (160) editions of the select newspapers, the researcher employed the purposive and composite week sampling procedures to select four

composite editions of each of the five newspapers per month which carry stories of banditry.

The measuring instrument for this study is the coding sheet. The coding sheet was used to code data pertaining coverage of banditry which is in line with the units of analysis and coding parameters formulated in this study. Hence, the content categories for the study were cattle rustling by bandits, arson, violent killings, rape and sexual molestation, kidnapping, armed robbery, human trafficking, genocide and community attack, political agitations and religious agitations all by the bandits. The unit of analysis of the study comprises straight news report, letters-to-the-editor, feature articles, editorials, cartoons, supplements, infographics, advertorials, advocacy advertisements and interviews. Consequently, the parameters for coding content were delineated as thus; prominence accorded to banditry coverage which is categorised into high prominence (stories placed on the front pages of the select newspapers; medium prominence (stories placed on the back and editorial pages) and low prominence (stories placed on the inside pages); depth of coverage of banditry which refers to the weight of treatment given to stories on banditry. It gauged the length of a story, detail background provided, and the use of illustrations or statistical data to buttress the stories. The depth of coverage is further categorized into story length by number of words (50 to 250 words were considered as shallow, 251 to 500 words were considered as semi-shallow, 501 to 750 words were considered as minimally deep, 751 to 1000 words were considered as deep and 1001 to 1250 words and above were considered as very deep respectively); story

length by column spread (one column-spread-stories on banditry was considered shallow, two columns-spread-stories were considered semi-shallow, three columns-spread-stories were considered minimally deep, four columns-spread-stories were considered deep and five column-spread-stories on banditry were considered very deep); and use of illustrations (which comprises pictures, images, sketches, infographics, cartoons, histograms, frequency polygons, charts and maps); frequency of reportage (which refers to the number of time(s) each of the select newspapers covered, reported or published banditry stories within the study period).

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Out of the one hundred and sixty (160) editions of *The Nation*, *The Punch*, *The Daily Trust*, *The Leadership* and *The Sun* newspapers sampled in this study, one hundred and twenty-seven (127) editions of the newspapers were found to contain issues related to banditry. This represents 79.4% of the sampled newspapers' content which were analysed on coverage of banditry within the period of the study. The data presented and analysed in this section is therefore a reflection of the contents of the 127 editions of the select Nigerian national newspapers.

Table 1:

Frequency of Coverage of Banditry by the Select Newspapers based on Units of Analysis

Frequency of Coverage by Units	<i>The Nation</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Punch</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Daily Trust</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Leadership</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Sun</i>	Valid Percent	Total
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of Analysis			<i>nc</i>	<i>cent</i>	<i>Trust</i>						
Straight News	7	5.5	8	6.2	13	10.2	9	7	4	3.1	41 (32%)
Features	6	4.7	9	7	8	6.2	7	5.5	8	6.2	38 (29.6%)
Letters-to-the – editor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Editorials	3	2.4	2	1.6	4	3.1	5	3.9	2	1.6	16 (12.6%)
Cartoons	1	0.8	0	0	6	4.7	2	1.6	0	0	9 (7.1%)
Supplements	0	0	0	0	3	2.4	4	3.1	0	0	7 (5.5%)
Infographics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Advertorials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Advocacy Advertisements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Interviews	3	2.4	0	0	9	7	4	3.1	0	0	16 (12.5%)
Total	20	15.8	19	14.8	43	33.6	31	24.2	14	11	127 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The data presented in Table 1 suggests that, out of the five national newspapers that were content-analysed, *The Daily Trust* newspaper covered issues of banditry more frequently at 43(33.6%) than the other four newspapers. The data presented also indicates that stories on banditry

were frequently published in the form of straight news stories at 41(32%) compared to other journalistic formats that made up the units of analysis for this study.

Table 2:

Frequency of Coverage of Banditry by the Select Newspapers based on Content Categories

Frequen cy of Coverag e by Content Categor ies	<i>The Nati on</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>Th e Pun ch</i>	Val id Per cent	<i>The Dail y Tru st</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>The Leade rship</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>T he Sun</i>	Vali d Per cent	Total
Cattle rustling by bandits	4	3.1	4	3.1	9	7	4	3.1	4	3.1	25 (19.4%)
Arson by bandits	0	0	2	1.6	8	6.2	1	0.8	0	0	11 (8.6%)
Violent killings by bandits	3	2.4	5	3.9	9	7	5	3.9	5	3.9	27 (21.1%)
Rape and sexual molestation by bandits	2	1.6	2	1.6	0	0	5	3.9	2	1.6	11 (8.7%)
Armed robbery	5	3.9	0	0	6	4.7	5	3.9	0	0	16 (12.5%)

by bandits												
Kidnapping by bandits	3	2.4	3	2.4	3	2.4	4	3.1	0	0	13 (10.3%)	
Human trafficking by bandits	0	0	0	0	4	3.1	0	0	0	0	4 (3.1%)	
Genocide and community attacks by bandits	3	2.4	3	2.4	4	3.1	7	5.5	3	2.4	20 (15.8%)	
Political agitation by bandits	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)	
Religious agitation by bandits	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)	
Total	20	15.8	19	14.8	43	33.6	31	24.2	14	11	127 (100%)	

Source: Field data, 2025

The presentation of data in Table 2 indicates that stories on banditry that depicted violent killings by bandits were frequently published by the select Nigerian newspapers compared to stories that fall under other content categories at 27(21.1%). This finding was closely followed by stories on

cattle rustling at 25(19.4%) and genocide and community attacks at 20(15.8%). The implication of the data is that banditry stories involving the gruesome and violent killings of victims preoccupied the attention and priority of the select newspapers due to their impact and scale.

Table 3:

Prominence given to Banditry Stories by the Select Newspapers

Page Place ment	<i>The Nati on</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>Th e Pu nch</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>The Dai ly Tru st</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>The Leade rship</i>	Vali d Per cent	<i>T he S un</i>	Vali d Per cent	Total
Front page	6	4.7	5	3.9	12	9.4	2	1.6	1	0.8	26 (20.4%)
Inside page	13	10.2	14	11	29	22.8	23	18.1	11	8.6	90 (70.7%)
Back page	1	0.8	0	0	2	1.6	6	4.7	2	1.6	11 (8.7%)
Total	20	15.7	19	14.9	43	33.8	31	24.4	14	11	127 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The presentation of data in Table 3 reveals that majority of stories on banditry were placed in the inside pages of the select Nigerian newspapers at 90(70.7%). Thus, implying low prominence of coverage of issue of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers.

Table 4:
Depth of Coverage by Length of Words accorded Banditry Stories
by the Select Newspapers

Story Length by Number of Words	<i>The Nation</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Punch</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Daily Trust</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Leadership</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Sun</i>	Valid Percent	Total
50 to 250	10	7.8	7	5.5	9	7	4	3.1	7	5.5	37 (28.9%)
251 to 500	6	4.7	7	5.5	12	9.4	13	10.2	5	3.9	43 (33.7%)
501 to 750	3	2.4	5	3.9	9	7	10	7.9	2	1.6	29 (22.8%)
751 to 1000	1	0.8	0	0	7	5.5	4	3.1	0	0	12 (9.4%)
1001 to 1250	0	0	0	0	6	4.7	0	0	0	0	6 (4.7%)
Total	20	15.7	19	14.9	43	33.6	31	24.3	14	11	127 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The presentation of data in Table 4 shows that majority of stories on banditry that were covered and published by the select Nigerian newspapers were between 251 and 500 words long at 43(33.7%).

Table 5:

Depth of Coverage by Column Spread accorded to Banditry Stories by the Select Newspapers

Story Length by Column Spread	<i>The Nation</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Punch</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Daily Trust</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Leadership</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Sun</i>	Valid Percent	Total
1 column spread	3	2.4	5	3.9	0	0	0	0	2	1.6	10 (7.9%)
2 columns spread	16	12.5	14	11	14	11	17	13.4	12	9.4	73 (57.3%)
3 columns spread	1	0.8	0	0	20	15.7	11	8.7	0	0	32 (25.2%)
4 columns spread	0	0	0	0	5	3.9	3	2.4	0	0	8 (6.3%)
5 columns spread	0	0	0	0	4	3.1	0	0	0	0	4 (3.1%)
Total	20	15.7	19	14.9	43	33.7	31	24.5	14	11	127 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The presentation of data in Table 5 shows that majority of stories on banditry that were covered and published by the select Nigerian newspapers were 2-columns spread at 73(57.3%).

Table 6:

Select Newspapers' Depth of Coverage of Banditry Stories by their Use of Illustrations

Use of Illustrations	<i>The Nation</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Punch</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Daily Trust</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Leadership</i>	Valid Percent	<i>The Sun</i>	Valid Percent	Total
Use of computer-generated graphics	4	3.1	0	0	2	1.6	2	1.6	7	5.5	15 (11.8%)
Use of statistical pictograms	7	5.5	8	6.2	17	13.3	5	3.9	5	3.9	42 (32.8%)
Use of still photographs and images	9	7	11	8.7	24	18.9	24	18.9	2	1.6	70 (55.1%)
Total	20	15.6	19	14.9	43	33.8	31	24.4	14	11	127 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The data presented in Table 6 reveals that majority of stories on banditry covered by the select Nigerian newspapers were accompanied by still photographs and images at 70 (55.1%).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are discussed thematically in the following paragraphs by using the research questions as the guideposts:

Research Question One: How frequently are issues of banditry covered by the select Nigerian newspapers?

The answer to this research question can be found in the presentation and analysis of QCA data in Table 1. The data analysis in the table was hinged on establishing the frequency at which the select Nigerian newspapers cover issues of banditry. The results of analysis in the table revealed out of the one hundred and sixty 160(100%) editions of *The Nation*, *The Punch*, *The Daily Trust*, *The Leadership* and *The Sun* newspapers sampled, issues of banditry appeared in the newspapers for one hundred and twenty-seven 127 times within the study period.

Results of the analysis of data in Table 1 revealed that out of the five select Nigerian newspapers, *The Daily Trust* newspaper cover issues of banditry more frequently 43(33.6%) than the other four newspapers. This was followed by *The Leadership* 31(24.2%), *The Nation* 20(15.8%), *The Punch* 19(14.8%), and *The Sun* 14(11%) newspapers. Results of the data analysed in the table also indicated that stories on banditry were frequently published in the form of straight news stories 41(32%) compared to other journalistic formats such as features 38(29.6%), editorials 16(12.5%),

interviews 16(12.5%), cartoons 9(7.1%), and supplements 7(5.5%) which made up the units of analysis for this study.

From the results of analysis of data in the table, it can be inferred that the issue of banditry was frequently reported by Northern-based newspapers such as *The Daily Trust* 43(33.6%) and *The Leadership* 31(24.2%) newspapers for the period under study while the Southern-based newspapers such as *The Nation* 20(15.8%), *The Punch* 19(14.8%), and *The Sun* 14(11%) newspapers tagged along. Inferences from the data analysis in the table also show that the straight news format 41(32%) was the most frequently used journalistic format by the select Nigerian newspapers in reporting stories on banditry. Deeper inference from the table analysis revealed that *The Daily Trust* newspaper frequently used the straight news format 13(10.2) in telling stories of banditry while *The Punch* newspaper frequently used the feature 9(7%) format in telling similar stories.

In Table 2, available results show that *The Daily Trust* newspaper 43(33.6%) led the other select Nigerian newspapers with recourse to their frequency of covering banditry based on content categories. Analysis in the table revealed that stories portraying violent killings by bandits 27(21.1%) were the most frequently reported among other content categories. This was followed by banditry stories depicting cattle rustling by bandits 25(19.4%), genocide and community attacks by bandits 20(15.8%), armed robbery by bandits 16(12.5%), kidnapping by bandits 13(10.3%), arson by bandits 11(8.6%), rape and sexual molestations by bandits 11(8.6%), and human trafficking by bandits 4(3.1%). The import in the analysis of data in the table is that banditry was frequently reported

by the select Nigerian newspapers as a violent criminal activity that involves the gruesome killings of innocent victims at its onslaught. This infer that bandits were frequently framed by the select newspapers as armed, bloody, daredevil, merciless, brutal and violent criminal gangs that always left scores of innocent victims dead anytime and anywhere they struck.

The finding that the *Daily Trust* newspaper reported or covered banditry more frequently than the other four newspapers is corroborated by the findings made in Shuaibu's (2023) comparative study where it was similarly revealed the newspaper covered more stories on banditry compared to *The Guardian* newspaper. In Innocent, Mohammed, and Eikojonwa's (2021) study, it was also found that newspapers domiciled in the North reported banditry issues more frequently than their Southern counterparts. Although, this result reveal the level of regional disparity and dichotomy in the frequency of coverage accorded to issue of banditry by newspapers which are supposed to put national interest about regional interests, they do conform to the position established by extant literature that the Nigerian newspapers are significantly influenced by profound socio-cultural and ethno-regional dynamics which shape the frequency at which they address topics of national interest (Oso, 2012; Udoakah, 2016; Yushau, 2018). The findings in Sa'idu's (2024) study which sought to examine the politics of insecurity reporting in Nigeria revealed that the perceived imbalances in the coverage of insecurity by newspapers in Nigeria was heavily influenced by politics, ethnicity, and regionalism.

Research Question Two: What is the level of prominence given to the reportage of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers?

In answering this research question, the results of the analysis of data in Table 3 were invaluable. The results of the analysis of data in the table revealed that out of the 127(100%) editions of the newspapers that carried banditry stories, 90(70.7%) of the stories were tucked in the inside pages of the newspapers. This inferentially suggests that the prominence the select newspapers accorded banditry stories was low. Further analysis of data in the table revealed that only 26(20.4%) out of 127(100%) of the stories on banditry were placed on the front pages while 11(8.7%) were published on the back pages of the select Nigerian newspapers. This reveals a statistical differential margin of 50.3% between the low and the high-prominence index and 62% between the low and the medium-prominence index respectively. It is implicative that a cumulative percentage of the high and medium-prominence indices which is 29.1% did not even get close to the low-prominence index of 70.7%. This strongly inferred that the select Nigerian newspapers did not give high prominence to the issue of banditry on the pages of their newspapers.

This finding corroborated with the findings in Shuaibu's (2023) comparative study where it was found that *The Daily Trust* and *The Guardian Newspapers* did not accord high prominence to banditry stories. Scholars believe that political, socio-cultural, economic, ethno-regional dynamics, and other contextual factors shape account for media's lack of interest in giving prominence to pressing social realities (Oso, 2012; Udoakah, 2016; Yushau, 2018). Thus, the select Nigerian newspapers

must have downplayed the prominence of banditry stories against ideological, cultural, economic or political inclinations of the newspapers. This is because, in Sa'idu's (2024) study which sought to examine the politics of insecurity reporting in Northern Nigeria, it was found that the coverage of insecurity was influenced by politics, religion, market interests, ideology, ethnicity, regionalism, and ownership. Biased reportage of security issues for political and economic reasons were found to have compromised media ethics and harmony (Sa'idu, 2024). Hence, dissemination of fake news, promotion of primordial sentiments, and compromising integrity for personal gains were common in media reportage of insecurity (Sa'idu, 2024). Financial inducement and bribery were found to impede press professionalism, affecting reporting the issue with accuracy and integrity (Sa'idu, 2024). These factors may have also played out in the context of banditry coverage by the select Nigerian newspapers.

Beyond these factors which point to the pecuniary or ideological interests of the select Nigerian newspapers, it is also pertinent to appraise the issue of prominence from a socio-political context. In such contexts, it is likely for some socio-political challenges besetting banditry coverage such as cultural dynamics (Akpojivi & Fosu, 2024; Shahzad & Yousaf, 2019), sociological (Ferrante, 2011; Obasi, 2015; Shaefer, 2012), ownership structure and interest amidst declining public trust in the press (Bahrooz, 2022; Fink, 2019; Trust in Media, 2022), government's complacency (Adegboyega, 2020; Soola, 2011), socio-economic factors (Buheji, 2020; Raievnjeva & Brovko, 2022; Singh, 2022), government-media relation (Ukpabio & Obong, 2022), Politicisation of Banditry News (Ishaku &

Asicus, 2022; Senam & Edor, 2022), public apathy to banditry news (Morton & Aroney, 2016; Majithia & Resnic, 2017; McLuskie, 2023) among others.

Research Question Three: What is the depth given to the issue of banditry by the select Nigerian newspapers?

The answer to this research question can be found in the results of the analysis of data in Tables 4 to 6 which were concerned with the depth in which the select Nigerian newspapers treated banditry stories. The analysis of data in Table 4 was primarily concerned with the depth of coverage by length of words accorded banditry stories by the select Nigerian newspapers. Results of the analysis in the table revealed that out of the 127(100%) stories on banditry published by the select Nigerian newspapers within the period of study, majority of the stories 43(33.7%) on banditry were within the length of 251 to 500 words. Further analysis revealed that this trend was followed by banditry stories of 50 to 250 words 37(28.9%), banditry stories of 501 to 750 words 29(22.8%), banditry stories of 751 to 1000 words 12(9.4%), and then banditry stories of 1001 to 1250 words 6(4.7%). The inferences that can be drawn from the analysis of data in the table is that banditry stories were not treated with much depth. Hence, going by sparse words used in telling stories of banditry, it can be concluded that the select Nigerian newspapers treated banditry stories with semi-shalowness.

From the inferences drawn from the analysis of data in Table 4, it was pertinent to assess if such was the case for the columns the select Nigerian newspapers allotted to banditry stories on their pages. This inferential

adventure made the data presentation invaluable. In the table 5, analysis of data revealed that majority 73(57.3%) of the stories on banditry were limited to only two columns on the pages of the select Nigerian newspapers. On the flipside, only four of the stories on banditry were dedicated five columns 4(3.1%). Deeper analysis revealed that only *The Daily Trust* newspaper dedicated the five columns 4(3.1%) to banditry stories within the period of study. The inference that can be drawn from the analysis of data in the table is that the select Nigerian newspapers did treat majority of stories on banditry with depth. Hence, going by the limited columns dedicated banditry stories, it can be concluded that the select Nigerian newspapers treated banditry stories with semi-shallowness.

Table 6 was concerned the depth of coverage accorded banditry stories by the select Nigerian newspapers' use of illustrations. The analysis in the table revealed that majority of stories on banditry were accompanied by the use of still photographs and images 701 (55.1%). Going by the coding parameters designed for this category of data, the use of photographs and images taken on the scene of banditry onslaught to buttress the stories implies that the stories' illustrations were very deep. Inferentially, the select Nigerian newspapers treated banditry stories with depth by their use of real-time images of victims and situational circumstances to buttress their points of narrative.

Consequently, insights from the three levels of depth that were analysed in this study, it was only in the aspect of illustrations used in telling the stories of banditry that the select Nigerian newspapers treated the issue

with depth. Other parameters designed to measure depth showed that the newspapers treated the issue of banditry with shallowness. This portends that the issue did not benefit from detailed scrutiny, focus, and mediatisation among the newspapers. It also portends that the issues were considered trite, inconsequential, and irrelevant when weighed against the ideological, cultural, political, and economic inclinations of the newspapers. Omolabi's (2023b) critical discourse analysis of select Nigerian newspaper found that the treatment that newspapers accorded banditry stories over other kinds of stories was ideologically driven. So, mediatisation of issues on the pages of newspapers depends on factors such as the news economy of the stories and the overall interests of the newspapers to treat the stories the way they to present them. In most cases, the manner the stories are treated and presented are to support the interest of the newspaper owners.

CONCLUSION

Banditry in Nigeria has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation. This is because hardly does a day passes in Nigeria without an act of banditry being perpetuated in either one part of the country or the other. From the foregoing perspectives, banditry involves an array of illicit and criminally-induced activities that involves raiding, arson, armed robbery, killing, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and maiming for primitive accumulation of material wealth or to propagate an ideology (Akinyetun & Bakare, 2022). This suggests that there are perspectives to conceptualising banditry that espouses the various contexts within which banditry takes place. Hence, newspapers' robust role in the fight against

banditry in Nigeria can only be achieved where there is free and responsible press devoid of any form of control and ideological dependence. However, as much as the press is expected to be free in society, such freedom should come with concomitant responsibilities.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendation was made that:

The editors-in-chief, reporters, and desk editors of the select newspapers should accord the issue of banditry the attention that it deserves by making it prominent, treating it with depth, and giving it priority through proper placement.

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