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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GEN-AI AND HUMAN ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIVE
MEANING IN MEDIA REPORTS ON HERDSMEN ATTACKS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Semantic analysis of texts, including news reports, involves various analytical approaches, such as examining evaluative language. Since journalists play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and understanding of events, the language used in news reporting deserves critical attention. In Nigeria, one recurring issue in newspaper coverage is the conflict between herders and farmers, particularly attacks on farmers and farmlands. Reports of these incidents are often presented from differing, and sometimes overlapping, perspectives. Recent advances in Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) have demonstrated their potential for language analysis, including interpretation and evaluation of texts. To examine this potential, the present study compares Gen-AI and human analyses of evaluative meaning in media reports on attacks of herdsmen in Nigeria. The study aims to assess how both Gen-AI chatbots and human analysts identify and interpret evaluative language and the stances conveyed in selected newspaper reports. The dataset comprised ten reports on attacks on herdsmen published in *The Guardian* and *The Punch* during the first half of 2021. These reports were analysed using the Appraisal Theory framework. The findings show that both Gen-AI and human analysts were effective in identifying evaluative meaning, although their analytical outputs differed. Gen-AI successfully detected recurring evaluative patterns and produced consistent analyses but was less effective in capturing nuanced meanings shaped by contextual, cultural, and ideological factors. Human analysis, by contrast, demonstrated greater contextual sensitivity, critical reasoning, and nuanced interpretation, reflecting a deeper understanding of Nigeria's socio-cultural realities. However, human interpretations were found to be more subjective and less systematic than those produced by Gen-AI. The study concludes that while Gen-AI is a powerful tool for textual analysis, human judgment remains essential for interpreting evaluative meaning. Therefore, a collaborative approach in which artificial intelligence complements, rather than replaces, human expertise is recommended to achieve the most robust analytical outcomes.

Keywords: Evaluative language, Appraisal framework, herdsmen attack, Gen-AI

Introduction

Language is a basic means of transmitting information (Coupé et al., 2019; Yoon et al., 2020) that is used to express ideas, experiences, emotions, and other attitudes. Apart from disseminating information, language can be used to evaluate people, events, and situations. This aspect of language use is important because it is employed in the interpretation of reports on sensitive social issues, due to the linguistic choices used to describe the news story. The conflict between herders and farmers has become one of the most persistent security and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria. Over the past decade, violent confrontations arising from disputes over land use, grazing routes, and access to natural resources have resulted in the loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of communities, and threats to food security. These incidents have attracted extensive media attention, making newspaper reports a significant source for the public to learn about and interpret the conflict. Consequently, the language employed in such reports plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of the actors, events, and underlying causes of the violence.

Mass media, particularly newspaper reports, play a vital role in communicating information about social events to the public (Happer and Philo, 2013). News reporting is not merely a neutral presentation of facts. Through lexical choices, descriptions, quotations, and framing strategies, journalists often communicate particular attitudes, evaluations, and ideological positions toward events and participants. Such linguistic choices reveal the stance adopted by news writers and institutions, whether consciously or unconsciously. Also, evaluative meaning reveals how language is used to express the speaker/writer's attitudes, emotions, judgments, commitments, and opinions (Martin & White 2005, p.1) towards a subject matter. It also plays an important role in crisis reportage because it reveals how language indexes approval, condemnation, fear, and sympathy. Studies have shown that such discourse carries ideological undertones (Makhmudovich & Kholmurod kizi, 2024, p.752).

One of the social issues that attract considerable media attention in Nigeria is the conflict over herders' attacks. These crises have been reported to involve loss of life, destruction of property, displacement, and disruption of agricultural activities. The reports of these attacks involve descriptions of violence, victimhood, destruction, and responsibility. Language use in such reportage is thus often marked and imbued with subtle and sometimes overt meanings to achieve the writer's communicative aim, which can include constructing particular attitudes towards the victims, alleged perpetrators, affected communities, and the actions associated with the attacks through evaluative language (Fer, 2018; Anwar, 2024).

Before the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), evaluative language analysis largely depended on human analysts. They examined the data within their textual and contextual environments and identified evaluative resources in the language. Human analysis could account for contextual information as well as the relationship between the different parts of the text. However, with the advancements in technology, Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) has provided an interrelated and mutually reinforcing approach for language analysis that makes it possible to process language in a human-like manner and can be prompted to identify, classify, and interpret linguistic patterns in texts. Gen-AI is a potentially resourceful means of analysing evaluative language given its ability to act on the prompts given, work within a considerably shorter period, process large data, and its capacity to harness perspectives from data available on the web to analyse the data it is provided with.

Appraisal Theory (2005) provides analytical tools for investigating how language is used to express attitudes, negotiate positions, and manage interpersonal relationships in texts. The framework consists of three interrelated systems: Attitude, which concerns the expression of emotions, ethics, and aesthetic evaluations; Engagement, which deals with the sourcing and negotiation of voices and viewpoints; and Graduation, which concerns the amplification or softening of evaluative meanings. The framework has been widely applied in studies of political, media, and conflict discourse because it reveals explicit and implicit patterns of evaluation. Appraisal theory is particularly well-suited for analysing media reports/ representations of herdsmen attacks, as these reports often involve contested narratives, competing interests, and diverse socio-political perspectives. Journalists may portray victims, perpetrators, government officials, security agencies, and community leaders in different ways, thereby influencing how readers assign responsibility, sympathy, or blame. These evaluative representations can contribute to the construction of social identities, reinforce ideological positions, and shape public responses to the conflict.

Although previous studies have investigated media coverage of farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria from different perspectives (Chalima et al., 2018; Jing & Lihuan, 2018; Hamed, 2020; & Jombadi, 2022), there is a paucity of studies that have conducted a comparative analysis of human and Chatbot (Generative AI) analyses of farmer-herdsmen reports. Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) is another tool that can be used to analyse evaluative language in texts because it can process data quickly, identify evaluative elements, and provide a detailed interpretation of the data. Therefore, this study is set to conduct a comparison of Gen-AI and human analysis by investigating evaluative meaning in Nigerian media reports on herdsmen attacks. By identifying similarities and differences in their analyses, the study aims to assess the strengths and limitations of each approach.

Literature Review

Both human and artificial intelligence deal with learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. Nevertheless, they are different in how each carries out these tasks. Human intelligence is the human ability to learn from experience, adapt to new environments, reason abstractly, and apply emotional and moral judgment in decision-making (Sternberg, 2012). On the other hand, Shormani (2024) states that artificial intelligence (AI) “is the development of computer models or machines that perform tasks like human intelligence” (p.2). This implies that AI is a model developed to imitate human intelligence. Research shows that there are numerous studies on AI (Yang & Kyun, 2022; Jiang & Chen, 2024; Ismayilova, 2025; & Yang, 2025), and language research and AI tools have been made capable of analysing at most levels of language, one of which is semantics. Semantics is a level of language that is concerned with the scientific study of meaning (Fromkin et al., 2018). Meaning can be analysed from various genres, and media reports are one of them.

Abu (2021) describes mass media as “all forms of information communicated to large groups of people” (p.1). He further explains that the different forms of mass media are newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet. The public mainly relied on mass media to provide information on political issues, social issues, entertainment, and other topics. Before the invention of other forms of mass media, the newspaper was the sole medium through which the public obtained information. For a long period of time, the public relied on writers and journalists at local newspapers to provide them with the latest news on current events (Tanikawa, 2017, p.3519). In recent times, however, the internet has become the most relevant

and current form of mass media and has become a major tool for news outlets. Since the evolution of the internet, the public has been able to access those same news outlets instantly with just a click of a mouse, instead of having to wait for a scheduled program on the radio, and television or go to a vendor's store for the day's news. (Sholikhah, 2019, p.56 & Bhuller et al., 2023, p. 4). One of the issues that has made the headlines in Nigerian media houses today is herdsmen attacks, which are due to the nomadic Fulani cattle grazing system. The result of this search for water and grass leads to the invasion of other people's farms. Therefore, the outcome has led to conflicts between Nigerian farmers and herders in many parts of the country (Odusina, 2019). Violence between Nigerian herders and farmers has escalated because more than 1,300 people were reported to have been killed in 2018 (Crisisgroup.org). The attacks of herdsmen on many communities have thus posed grave security challenges to Nigeria as a nation. In the Pangari community of Taraba State, there was a herders' attack where several people lost their lives (Guardian, May 30th, 2021). In the last two decades, many lives were also reported to have been lost due to the farmers and herdsmen crisis in the country, involving several communities in Plateau, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Abia, Enugu, Anambra, Delta, Edo, Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun states (Ademola, 2019). Herdsmen are rated the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world (Global Terrorist Index Special Report, 2017).

Research on farmer-herder conflict has substantially examined its socioeconomic implications. For instance, Iheanacho (2017) investigated the impact of herdsmen attacks on food security, livelihoods, and employment, demonstrating that the conflict contributes significantly to food shortages, loss of life, destruction of property, and rising unemployment. A major strength of the study lies in its broad sociological analysis of the social consequences of the conflict, which provides useful insight into the wider human costs of persistent violence. However, its focus on the socioeconomic dimensions of the conflict limits its contribution to understanding how the conflict is discursively constructed in the media. Consequently, the linguistic mechanisms through which public perceptions of the conflict are shaped remain unexplored.

Other studies have focused on the media representations of farmer-herder conflict. Faruq (2019), for example, examined newspaper coverage of the conflict in Southern Kaduna, paying particular attention to the frames employed by selected newspapers and the prominence accorded to conflict reports. Although the study contributes to understanding how media organisations structure and present conflict-related information, its emphasis on framing and prominence offers only a macro-level account of media representation. The study does not investigate the subjective and evaluative language choices through which journalists position themselves towards conflict actors and events. As a result, the ideological and attitudinal dimensions of news reporting remain insufficiently examined.

Within discourse studies, several scholars have employed Appraisal Theory to investigate evaluative language in media texts. Jing and Lihuan (2019) analysed the attitudinal subsystem of Appraisal Theory in *China Daily's* coverage of COVID-19, identifying the distribution of positive and negative evaluative resources in the reports. The study's systematic application of appraisal theory to reveal patterns of evaluation in media discourse enables a categorization of attitudinal resources. However, it is limited in how journalists' perspectives and ideological positioning are demonstrated through these evaluative choices. Similarly, Hamed (2020) explored the use of attitudinal resources in British newspaper representations of footballer Raheem Sterling. The study provides a detailed examination of evaluative language and demonstrates the usefulness of Appraisal Theory for uncovering media attitudes. Despite the

study's merits, its focus on sports reporting in a British context limits the transferability of its findings to conflict reporting in Nigeria, where sociopolitical realities differ considerably.

Cavasso and Taboada (2021) examined the distribution of appraisal resources in online comments associated with reports published in the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. A notable contribution of the study is its application of Appraisal Theory to audience-generated discourse, thereby extending appraisal analysis beyond journalistic texts to readers' evaluative responses. The study provides valuable insights into how members of the public employ attitudinal resources to negotiate meanings, express opinions, and engage with media content. The study is, however, limited by its primary focus on readers' comments rather than on the discourse of journalists themselves. Consequently, it offers little understanding of how news producers deploy appraisal resources to construct events, represent social actors, or project ideological positions. Furthermore, the Canadian socio-cultural context in which the study is situated differs considerably from the Nigerian context, thereby limiting the direct applicability of its findings. Another limitation is its lack of engagement with conflict-related discourse, since the study does not examine how evaluative resources are employed in the representation of violent conflicts or contentious social issues.

The foregoing review reveals that existing studies on farmer-herder conflict have primarily examined either the socioeconomic effects of the conflict or the structural framing of news reports. While these studies offer valuable insights into the nature and representation of the conflict, they neglect the linguistic resources through which journalists communicate attitudes and evaluations. Similarly, although appraisal-based studies have demonstrated the usefulness of Appraisal Theory in analysing media discourse, they have largely focused on health communication, sports reporting, and audience comments in non-Nigerian contexts. Little attention has been paid to how attitudinal resources are employed in Nigerian newspaper reports on farmer-herder conflict or to how such resources reveal reporters' stance towards conflict actors and events. Furthermore, the existing studies employed human analysts to interpret and analyse the data. None explored the use of AI chatbots in the analytical process. This gap necessitates a study that examines the deployment of attitudinal resources in reports on herdsman attacks in Nigeria with a view to uncovering the evaluative positions embedded in journalistic discourse and a comparison of human and AI-Chatbot analysis of the data.

Theoretical Framework: Appraisal Theory (Martin&White, 2005; White 2015)

Appraisal theory (White, 2015), "provides for analyses of those meanings by which texts convey positive or negative assessments, by which the intensity or directness of such attitudinal utterances is strengthened or weakened and by which speakers/writers engage dialogistically with prior speakers or potential respondents to the current proposition" (p.1). Appraisal theory makes use of three sub-systems that can be applied to analyse texts. These are attitude, engagement and graduation. Bednarek (2006) describes attitude as "values by which speakers pass judgments and associate emotional/affectual responses with participants and processes" (p.27). Attitude is further categorized into three sub-divisions which are affect, judgment and appreciation (Jin & Lihuan, 2021). Martin and White (2005) assert that "affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings: do we feel happy or sad, confidence or anxious, interest or bored?" (p.42). Also, Crosthwaite (2018) describes affect as "resources for construing emotional responses, which can be positive or negative" (p.11). White (2015) explains judgment as "positive or negative assessment of human behaviour and character by reference to ethics/morality and other systems of conventionalized or institutionalized norms"

(p.42). Martin and White (2005) posit that appreciation “involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to the ways in which they are valued or not valued in the given field” (p.43). In the words of Crosthwaite (2018) “appreciation is concerned with resources for construing value of things, including abstract phenomena and physical objects” (p.11).

Another appraisal domain is graduation. Pascual and Unger (2010) acclaim that graduation “is the strengthening or weakening of the degree of evaluation and the sharpening or softening of boundaries between categories in the context of non-gradable items” (p.266). It is divided into force and focus. Siyou and Zhongwen (2018) describe force as “the increase or decline of attitude which can be graded” (p.98). Focus functions to enhance or weaken the degree of positivity and negativity. It involves sharpening and softening of boundaries around meanings which are not scalable (Crosthwaite, 2018, p. 12).

Engagement deals with resources of intersubjective positioning, introducing the authorial voice and engaging alternative voices and positions. Siyou and Zhongwen (2018) explain that it “studies the origin of attitude and considers that the language source of attitude is the subjective choice of monogloss or heterogloss” (p.99). Monogloss entails utterances that do not engage other voices or positions, whereas those that open space for alternatives are heterogloss. Heteroglossic resources are divided into two major categories: dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction (Martin & White, 2005, p.101). These appraisal features are used in the human analysis of the excerpts.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design. The data comprise ten excerpts from the selected news reports, and each of these excerpts constitutes a sample. Using purposive sampling, samples were gathered from two Nigerian newspapers, The Guardian and The Punch, within the first half of 2021. The selection from the two Nigerian Dailies is in equal proportion. The study used Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2015) to analyse the data. The same ten samples were given as prompts to ChatGPT, a generative AI Chatbot, for generative AI analysis, while the human analysis was conducted by the researchers. The prompt given to ChatGPT was “Give me the evaluative analysis of the expression”, which came before or after inputting the sentence to be evaluated for each example. The human and Gen-AI analyses were compared to check the differences and similarities in the evaluative meaning of the two approaches. The samples were presented in the appendix for replicability.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis presents the news excerpt (in bold), the human analysis, and the ChatGPT analysis. Each pair of the ten data samples is compared and analysed at the bottom of each set. The analysis is done using (Martin&White, 2005; White, 2015). At the end of all the analyses, a summary of the whole analysis is presented.

Sample 1. When the caller pleaded with the abductors, with a promise to pay something lesser than ten million Naira, the kidnappers switched off the phone and no further contact has been made. (The Guardian, 6th January, 2021)

Human Analysis

The evaluative word ‘pleaded’ (Judgment-esteem-capacity-weak) judges the ‘caller’s position. It presents them as weak, helpless, and at the mercy of the abductors. It further invokes a state

of fear, desperation, and anxiety on the part of the caller. The invoked affect positions the caller as vulnerable and distressed, thereby inviting readers to sympathise with the victim. Their call to the abductors was thus with the hope that they would reason with them (the caller), and reduce the ransom (10 million Naira) that had been demanded. This hope was, however, dashed as the report states that while they were yet pleading, “the kidnappers switched off the phone...” The use of ‘switch off the phone and no further contact has been made....’ (judgement-esteem-tenacity-reckless) is an attitudinal use of language to frame the abductors as mean and inconsiderate. The behaviour of the kidnappers is thus evaluated as callous, and their actions are intended to instil fear in the minds of the abductees’ relatives with the ultimate aim of making them pay the ransom in full without any negotiations. The semantic content of the attitudinal words shows that intensification of degree is obtainable for grading the participants’ attitude, and it points to the nature of the abductors.

Gen-AI Analysis

The expression presents the kidnappers as uncompromising, insensitive, and greedy because they refused to listen to the caller’s plea for a reduced ransom. The word “pleaded” shows the caller’s desperation and helplessness, suggesting that the situation was serious and emotionally distressing. The action “switched off the phone” evaluates the kidnappers as ruthless and unwilling to negotiate, while “no further contact has been made” creates a sense of uncertainty, fear, and tension about the victim’s fate. The statement portrays the kidnappers as harsh and unyielding, while highlighting the desperation of the caller.

Sample 2. Olayiwola who recounted his ordeal to a journalist, said he spent six days in the kidnapper’s den, adding that the experience was bitter (The Guardian, 30th January, 2021)

Human Analysis

A victim who was just released narrates his experience in the hands of the abductors. To show his bitter experience, he describes the kidnappers’ abode as a ‘den’ (Appreciation-reaction-quality-nasty). This lexical choice gives insight into what the victim’s experience was, as kidnappers’ dens are typically in abysmal conditions - poor, unsafe, and hostile environments. It further reveals the unkind nature of the kidnappers’ treatment of their captives. The affective word ‘bitter’ (Appreciation-reaction-quality-nasty) in the clause ‘the experience was bitter’ shows the emotional state of the victim as a result of how the abductors mercilessly handled their captives. The number of days spent with the kidnappers in their hideout prompts the readers to imagine the condition in which the captive may be while in captivity. The journalist’s perspective on the attack is revealed through his choice of words. The attitudinal words in the Sample reflect the intensity of the captive’s emotional response towards the event.

Gen-AI Analysis

The evaluative meaning of this expression shows the speaker’s judgment and emotional assessment of the situation rather than just stating facts. The phrase “recounted his ordeal” evaluates the event as serious, painful, and traumatic, suggesting that what he experienced was not ordinary but deeply distressing. The term “kidnappers’ den” portrays the kidnappers’ location as dangerous and threatening, emphasising the severity of the crime and the fear associated with it. The statement “the experience was bitter” explicitly expresses negative emotional evaluation, indicating suffering, hardship, and emotional pain. The sentence

conveys that Olayiwola's kidnapping was a traumatic and unpleasant experience, highlighting suffering, danger, and emotional distress. The evaluative language encourages the reader to sympathise with the victim and view the incident as serious and harmful.

Sample 3. The gunmen who were six in number allegedly stormed the farmer settlement in the early hours of yesterday and viciously attacked their victims making them sustain life-threatening injuries. (The Guardian, 7th April, 2021)

Human Analysis

In Sample 3, the writer describes the manner in which the gunmen perpetrate attacks against their victims. The reporter uses the adverb 'viciously' (Judgment-sanction propriety-immoral) to convey the attackers' violent and immoral conduct and their physical advantage over the victims. This also indicates the extent of the destruction perpetuated by the gunmen. The effect of the attack on the lives of the victims for a very long time is appraised with the lexical item 'life-threatening' (Appreciation-reaction-quality-bad). With the process 'stormed' (Judgment-Esteem-capacity-powerful), the behaviour of the attackers is negatively judged. They are presented as very powerful to the readers, their number (six) notwithstanding.

Gen-AI Analysis

The sentence carries a strong negative evaluation of the gunmen and the attack. Several words express judgment and emotional intensity: "Gunmen" – already frames the actors as dangerous criminals. "Stormed" – suggests a sudden, aggressive, forceful invasion, not just arrival. "Viciously attacked" – shows cruelty, brutality, and deliberate harm. "Victims" – positions the farmers as innocent and wronged. "Life-threatening injuries" – emphasises the seriousness and severity of the harm. "Allegedly" – indicates uncertainty or legal caution, showing the report avoids fully asserting guilt. The sentence condemns the attackers and highlights the brutality and seriousness of the incident, while maintaining journalistic caution through the word "allegedly." It portrays the gunmen as violent aggressors and the farmers as innocent victims suffering severe harm. The evaluative meaning expresses a strong negative judgment of the attackers, sympathy for the victims, and emphasis on the gravity of the violence.

Sample 4. The herdsmen had demanded money from their victims but were furious after the women failed to give them. (The Guardian, 7th April, 2021)

Human Analysis

The journalist reports the reaction of the herdsmen to the readers following the failure/ inability of the victims to pay the ransom demanded. The herdsmen's dissatisfaction with the situation brought about their 'angered state' described by the reporter as 'furious' (Affect-dissatisfaction-angry). This reaction represents their emotions as a negative affect with a high intensity of force. This observed affect is not the writer's feeling but an emotion of the 'other' expressed by the reporter. The herdsmen are thus presented in a negative light based on their action of anger and lack of sympathy for the plight of the victims and their families.

Gen-AI Analysis

The sentence expresses negative judgment toward the herdsmen and sympathy for the women. The evaluative meaning comes from certain words: “Demanded” – suggests forceful or threatening behaviour, implying coercion rather than a polite request. “Victims” – portrays the women as innocent people who are being wronged. “Furious” – shows the anger and aggressive reaction of the herdsmen when their demand was not met. The statement presents the herdsmen as aggressive and unreasonable, while the women are portrayed as helpless victims. The evaluative language emphasises criminal intent, intimidation, and hostility. The evaluative meaning conveys condemnation of the herdsmen’s behaviour and sympathy for the victims who could not meet their demand for money.

Sample 5. The person suspected to be killer herdsmen on Friday night killed eight people working at the miner’s site. (The Guardian, 11th April, 2021)

Human Analysis

The journalist's attitude is evident in his use of language. The words he employs to describe herdsmen reveal his emotional response to the attack. The reporter uses the appraisal element ‘suspected’ (Appreciation-reaction-quality-bad) to show that there is no evidence that directly links the event to herdsmen. It suggests that even though it is not certain, the victims believe that the attack was carried out by a herdsman. The item ‘killer’ (Appreciation-reaction-quality-nasty), which is used to qualify the herders, indicates the emotional reaction of the reporter towards the perpetrator of the act of killing and the situation as a whole. It also suggests the extent of the attack.

Gen-AI Analysis

The sentence contains a negative evaluation of the suspected attackers and highlights the seriousness of the act. Key evaluative elements include: “Suspected” – shows uncertainty or caution, suggesting the claim has not been fully confirmed. “Killer herdsmen” – strongly condemns the group, portraying them as violent criminals. “Killed eight people” – emphasises the severity and tragic scale of the incident. “People working at the miner’s site” – presents the victims as ordinary workers, which increases sympathy for them. The statement conveys a strong negative judgment of the attackers, portrays the victims as innocent workers, and highlights the gravity and tragedy of the violence, while the word “suspected” introduces reporting caution. The evaluative meaning reflects condemnation of the suspected killers, sympathy for the victims, and emphasis on the seriousness of the violent act.

Sample 6. The community had been forced to pay N50 million in ransoms for different cases of kidnapping. (The Punch, 25th January, 2021)

Human Analysis

The reporter presents the power of the attackers and a negative appraisal of them; they are portrayed as being capable of influencing a whole community to grant their request without a choice. This is done through the appraisal element ‘forced’ (Judgment-esteem-capacity-compulsion). With the use of this appraisal item, the community is rendered weak and powerless against the abductors. Whether the people have the amount they are charged or not, they are compelled to provide it for the survival and release of their captured relatives. The fifty million Naira demanded by the abductors is a huge amount of money even for a community, especially in the country’s economy. This shows the calibre of the people involved

in the attacks and the level of operation of the herdsmen. Ultimately, the report highlights the scale of insecurity in the country.

Gen-AI Analysis

The evaluative meaning shows the speaker's negative judgment of the situation and sympathy for the community. This is expressed through certain words: "Forced" – indicates coercion, oppression, and lack of choice, suggesting the community was compelled under threat. "Ransom" implies a criminal act, such as kidnapping or extortion, and carries a strong negative connotation. "N50 million" – highlights the large amount of money, emphasising the seriousness and burden placed on the community. The sentence portrays the situation as unjust and criminal, showing that the community suffered intimidation and financial loss due to violence or threats. The evaluative meaning expresses condemnation of the criminals' actions and sympathy for the community that was compelled to pay a large ransom.

Sample 7. Residents also stormed the venue of the meeting with photographs of those who were killed and those who suffered in the hands of criminal herdsmen. (The Punch, 25th January, 2021)

Human Analysis

The report reveals the residents' emotional state following the attack. Their decision to present the photographs can be interpreted as a demand for justice in light of the evidence. The evaluative item used to show this is 'stormed' (Attitude-affect-dissatisfaction-aggression). This presents the residents as expressing an emotion born out of the situation caused by the actions of the attackers. Their show of dissatisfaction is thus not judged as a negative affect but used to solicit the sympathy of the readers. Also, the lexical word selected to describe herdsmen reflects the public's perception of them – they are criminals. They could have been described as herdsmen, but the qualifying evaluative item 'criminal' (Appreciation-reaction-quality-bad) further shows how the public sees them. This establishes the journalist's perception of herdsmen and the attack. Also, the lexical choices in the clause "*who suffered in the hands of criminal herdsmen*" signals a deployment of attitudinal resources of both Affect and Judgement. The verb *suffered* inscribes a negative Affect of security and well-being, portraying the victims as experiencing hardship and harm. Simultaneously, the epithet *criminal* encodes negative Judgement of propriety, condemning the herdsmen's actions as unlawful and morally reprehensible. Collectively, these resources position readers to sympathise with the victims while censuring the perpetrators. This evaluative framing reveals the reporter's alignment with the victims' plight and constructs the herdsmen as socially and morally deviant actors.

Gen-AI Analysis

The evaluative meaning reflects strong emotions, condemnation of the attackers, and sympathy for the victims. This meaning is conveyed through some key words: "Stormed" – suggests anger, urgency, and an intense reaction by the residents. "Killed" – highlights the severity and tragic outcome of the violence. "Suffered" – shows that the victims experienced pain, hardship, or injury, evoking sympathy. "Criminal herdsmen" expresses clear negative judgment, portraying the attackers as lawbreakers and violent offenders. The sentence portrays the residents as emotionally affected and protesting the violence, while the herdsmen are strongly condemned as criminals responsible for harm and deaths. The evaluative meaning shows public anger, sympathy for victims, and strong condemnation of the attackers' actions.

Sample 8. Ajibade said that the herders had repeatedly inflicted harm to indigenes of the area, describing how they invaded their farmland to feed their cows. (The Punch, 2nd February, 2021)

Human Analysis:

A member of the attacked community gave this statement to describe the extent of damage done to the farms of the indigenes of the area. Starting with 'repeatedly', it shows the frequency of the activities of herdsmen, and the phrase 'inflicted harm' (judgment- sanction-wickedness) indicates the malicious nature of the perpetrators. The expression 'invaded' to 'feed their cow' (Judgment-sanction-propriety-immoral) indicates the herders' attitude toward other people's property. It presents the herdsmen as reckless and unconcerned about the well-being of others, as well as shows that they are not law-abiding. Their invasion of the farmlands to feed their cows further positions the herdsmen as being selfish and insensitive to the efforts the owners of the farmland had put into tending their farms. It also signifies a deeper level of judgement - where is the law that is meant to protect citizens from such unlawful invasion? The impunity with which the herdsmen act thus brings the level of insecurity in the country to the fore in this example.

Gen-AI Analysis:

The evaluative meaning in this sentence shows a negative judgment of the action of "they" and sympathy for the owners of the farmland. Key evaluative words include: "repeatedly" — suggests that the incidents were not isolated but occurred several times. "Inflicted harm" — evaluates the herders negatively by portraying their actions as harmful and injurious to the indigenous people. "Invaded" — suggests forceful or unlawful entry, giving the action a negative and aggressive tone. "Their farmland" — emphasises ownership, implying that the land belongs to someone else and should not be entered without permission. "Feed their cow" suggests that the invasion was done for personal benefit, even though it harms the farmland owners. The sentence condemns the actions of the people who entered the farmland, portraying them as trespassers who disregarded the landowners' rights, while the farmers are implied to be victims of the intrusion. The evaluative meaning expresses disapproval of the invasion of farmland and sympathy for the rightful owners of the land.

Sample 9. Our breadwinner was killed in a cruel manner. We need help with the education of our children. (The Punch, 30th March, 2023)

Human Analysis:

The speaker describes the victim's family's situation. The herdsmen's behaviour is described to the news audience using the evaluative item 'cruel' (judgment-sanction-propriety-immoral). Also, the lexical item 'cruel' is employed as a negative judgement of attitude: it explicitly condemns the actions of the herdsmen as deliberately causing pain to their victims, hence querying their moral judgement. The herdsmen's behaviour is evaluated as morally unacceptable and thus condemned. They are constructed as unethical and inhumane. The report is thus an invitation to the readers to adopt a similar stance of condemnation

The attitudinal word 'help' (Judgment-tenacity-capacity-weak) signifies the effect on the murdered farmers in the family - they have been rendered helpless and are now relying on the help of other people to secure something as basic as education for their children. This

portion of the news item suggests condemnation of the herdsmen's actions and their impact on the victims. It further reveals the victims' current state and their call for help.

Gen-AI Analysis

The evaluative meaning shows deep sorrow, condemnation of the killing, and a plea for sympathy and assistance. Key evaluative elements include: "Breadwinner" – emphasises that the person was the main provider for the family, highlighting the seriousness of the loss. "Killed in a cruel manner" expresses strong negative judgment, portraying the act as brutal, inhumane, and unjust. "We need help" – conveys distress and vulnerability, showing that the family is struggling after the loss. "Education of our children" – appeals to sympathy and support, stressing the future of the children. The statement expresses grief and condemnation of the violent act, while also appealing for compassion and assistance from others because the family has lost their main source of support. The evaluative meaning communicates pain, injustice, and a strong emotional appeal for help to support the children's education after the loss of their family provider.

Sample 10. It was sad that we lost two of our farmers, they were shot dead. The development angered the youth, and we protested. What becomes of the families of the two murdered farmers now? (The Punch, 30th March, 2021)

Human Analysis

This excerpt reports a protest against the killing of two farmers, following which the secretary of the Isaba Ekiti Youth Forum, Taiwo Ajayi, explains what triggered the people's emotional response. He points out that the cruel conduct in which the farmers were killed, along with the activities of the herders on the land, led to the grievance of the people to stage the 'protest' (Affect-dissatisfaction). The evaluative elements used to indicate the emotional reaction of the people are 'sad' (Affect-sadness) and 'angered' (Affect-dissatisfaction). While both 'sad' and 'angered' are both resources of affect as they explicitly describe an emotional state, they represent different types of negative emotion. The lexical item 'sad' functions as an inscribed negative Affect of unhappiness, explicitly construing the emotional suffering and grief experienced by the residents. It positions readers to sympathise with the affected individuals and recognise the adverse emotional consequences of the event. 'Angered', on the other hand, encodes a negative affect of dissatisfaction, which highlights the community's emotional response of frustration and discontentment with the situation. It also foregrounds the emotional impact of the loss of the two farmers and encourages reader alignment with their experiences.

The attitudinal item 'murdered' (Judgment-sanction propriety-immoral) points to the wicked act of the herdsmen. The severity of the attack is reflected in the semantic content of the evaluative elements in this extract. Evaluative affect is also reflected in the question "What becomes of the families of the two murdered farmers now?" This question not only arouses concern for the victim's families but also draws attention to the activities of the herdsmen and the repercussions of such activities.

Gen-AI Analysis

The evaluative meaning in this statement expresses grief, condemnation of the killing, anger from the community, and concern for the victims' families. Key evaluative elements include: "Sad" – directly expresses sorrow and emotional pain over the loss of the farmers. "Shot dead" – emphasises the violent and tragic nature of the deaths. "Angered the youth" – shows the strong emotional reaction of the community, especially young people. "We protest" – indicates disapproval and resistance against the incident or injustice. "Murdered farmers" – the word "murdered" strongly condemns the act as intentional and criminal. "What becomes of the families...?" expresses concern and sympathy for the dependants of the victims. The statement conveys deep sadness over the deaths, strong condemnation of the violent act, anger within the community, and worry about the welfare of the families left behind. The evaluative meaning reflects grief, outrage, and concern for justice and support for the victims' families.

Comparison of Human and AI Chatbot Analyses

In sample 1, human analysis is wordier compared to Gen-AI analysis. The Gen-AI analysis also does a more comprehensive analysis of the evaluative words used compared to the human analysis. In sample 2, the evaluative element "recount his ordeal" is not captured in the human analysis, while the number of days spent in the kidnapper's hideout, which is included in the human analysis, is not presented in AI analysis. Also, the Gen AI analysis uses more adjectives in the description of the herdsmen and their activities. This makes the AI analysis more detailed than the human analysis. In sample 3, more evaluative items are used in the analysis of AI evaluation than in the human analysis. This includes items such as "gunmen", "victims", and "allegedly". Also, the attitudinal words in both analyses are interpreted differently. For sample 4, the AI analysis analyses more attitudinal elements than the human analysis. Also, the words "demanded" and "victims" which are present in the Gen-AI analysis, are not present in the human analysis. The AI analysis also analyses attitude in relation to the victims and the herdsmen, while the human analysis focuses only on the attitude toward the herdsmen. In sample 5, the different interpretations of the appraisal element "suspected" by human analysts and AI perception of the data show the strengths and limitations of the two approaches. While the human analysis accounts for just two evaluative items in the excerpt, Gen AI accounts for four and emphasises the evaluation as negative. Ultimately, the AI analysis is more in-depth and more robust than the human analysis.

For sample 6, there is the use of an attitudinal item "ransom" in Gen-AI evaluation, which is not mentioned in the human analysis but is referred to. Both human and AI analyses identify the appraisal item 'forced' as being consequential to the analysis of attitude in the report. However, the AI analysis presents a broader analysis by analysing the words 'forced', 'ransomed', and '50 million' as key items in the report. In Sample 7: Gen-AI analyses some appraisal elements that are not captured in the human analysis, and the evaluative meaning of these items, "killed" and "suffer" reflects a clear scene of the situation in the news story. The evaluative meaning indicates the level of violence and hardship the victims endured and expresses a more negative attitude towards the herdsmen than the human analysis does. In sample 8, the Human analysis lumps 'invaded' and 'feed their cows' in the analysis of the attitude. The AI analysis, however, treats them separately and also accounts for other affect items, such as 'they' and 'farmland', in its analysis. Also, while the AI analysis suggests sympathy for the victims, the human AI is silent on this aspect of the report. For sample 9, the evaluative

element “breadwinner” is not mentioned by the human analyst, but a reference is made to ‘the victim’, while the Gen-AI analysis refers to it as an evaluative element and analyses it as such. The human analysis uses only the keywords ‘cruel’ and ‘help’ in its evaluation, whereas the Gen-AI analysis picks up more items as phrases, which helps establish the full meaning of each element. For instance, in the human analysis, the appraisal item is used as “help”, the appraisal item is used as “help”, while in Gen-AI analysis, it is captured as “ we need help”. In example 10, there is a more extensive identification of the attitudinal items used in the Gen-AI analysis than those employed in human analysis. Elements like “shot dead”, “we protest”, and “what becomes of the families” appear only in Gen-AI analysis and this makes Gen-AI analysis to be, making it more detailed than human analysis. The human analysis, on the other hand, accounts for the background of the story and then analyses and identifies key words (‘protest’, ‘sad’, ‘angered’, and ‘murdered’).

Overall, the main differences between the human analysis and Gen- AI analysis are that human analysis applies the use of appraisal resources (attitude, engagement and graduation resources) to interrogate the data, while Gen-AI analysis identifies the lexical items as ‘general appraisal elements’ without accounting for the type of appraisal resource that it is. However, the AI analysis gives more details about the elements analysed, using more adjectives in their description than that of the human analysis. This leads to some differences in the interpretation between the human and AI analysis, given that the AI engages with more items in the reports than the human analyst.

Discussion of findings

The findings indicate that both Gen-AI and human analysis possess significant strengths in identifying evaluative language and meaning in media texts, although their performance differs in important respects. Gen-AI demonstrated considerable efficiency in processing text, identifying recurring evaluative patterns, and producing consistent analytical outputs. Its capacity to rapidly categorise linguistic features makes it a valuable tool for large-scale discourse studies. However, the study also revealed limitations in the AI’s ability to fully capture the contextual, cultural, ideological, and socio-political nuances that shape the meaning of media reports on sensitive issues such as attacks on herders.

Human analysts, on the other hand, exhibited stronger interpretive capabilities, particularly in recognising implicit meanings, contextual references, ideological positioning, and subtle evaluative strategies employed by journalists. The human analyses reflected a deeper understanding of Nigeria’s complex socio-cultural realities and conflict dynamics. Nevertheless, human interpretation/ analysis was deficient in accounting for all the evaluative elements and giving in-depth analysis of the ones analysed. It was also sometimes affected by subjectivity and variation in analytical judgments, which may reduce consistency across different analysts.

The comparative results suggest that neither Gen-AI nor human analysis should be viewed as a complete replacement for the other. Rather, the strengths of one complement the limitations of the other. Gen-AI offers speed, consistency, and scalability, while human analysts provide critical reasoning, contextual sensitivity, and nuanced interpretation. Consequently, an integrated approach that combines AI-assisted analysis with human reasoning should be adopted as a complementary tool for examining evaluative meaning in media discourse.

Conclusion

This study is a comparative analysis of Gen-AI and human interpretations of evaluative meaning in media reports on herdsmen attacks in Nigeria. This study examined and compared the ability of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) and human analysts to identify and interpret evaluative meaning in Nigerian media reports on attacks on herders. Drawing on appraisal theory and discourse analytical principles, the research explored how both approaches recognise attitudes, judgments, appreciation, and other evaluative resources embedded in news discourse. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on artificial intelligence, discourse analysis, and media studies by demonstrating the potential and limitations of Gen-AI within linguistic research. Future research may extend this investigation to other forms of conflict reporting, larger media datasets, and different AI models to further assess the evolving role of artificial intelligence in discourse analysis. The study concludes that while Gen-AI has emerged as a powerful analytical tool, human judgment remains indispensable for interpreting evaluative meaning, particularly in complex and socially sensitive media narratives, such as reports on herdsmen attacks in Nigeria. Both Gen-AI and human analysis should be used as complementary approaches in examining evaluative meaning in media reports.

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