

Full length Research Paper

Newspaper reportage and its effect towards promoting agricultural development in Nigeria

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This study examined the coverage of agriculture between January and December (2007) in the Nigerian press. The method adopted was content analysis and 288 issues of 3 selected newspapers were analyzed; Guardian, Tribune and Punch. 5 research questions were raised and adequately substantiated on newspapers coverage of agricultural programs and development in Nigeria. The findings of the study however, revealed that the Nigerian press did not give sufficient coverage to issues on agriculture in comparison to other sectors of the Nigerian economy. Furthermore, the paper observed that issues on agriculture did not receive favorable coverage by the newspapers. The paper therefore suggests that the press should endeavor to give adequate attention to various issues on agriculture as well as its developmental programs in its reportage so as to facilitate sustainable development in agriculture.

Key words: Agriculture, development, newspaper reportage and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The press has contributed to the growth and development of the society in terms of political, economic, culture, education, agriculture and social system, etc. Fundamentally, media has become an essential part of our life. Moreover, the media played most significant role towards promoting the political, social and economic aspirations of the nation (Uche, 1989). In the context of sustainable development, the press or mass media remains a vital instrument in the realization of nations' goals. It is believed that the media motivate the people as well as ensure participation in the growth and developmental process apart from informing and educating members of the society (Adebayo, 1985).

As part of her surveillance role in respect to information and news, the media being instrument to development is expected to inform and educate members of the society on specific areas of development such as agricultural activities. The reason for media reportage on agriculture programmes and policies in developing societies, such as

Nigeria was due to the large number of people who were involved. Specifically, agriculture has provided employment platform for majority particularly people living in the rural areas. Agriculture by estimation, account for over 80% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) prior to the discovery of crude oil (Kuye, 2004). By 2005, the percentage has reduced to 41% (Odunlami, 2007).

In addition, agriculture has been considered as the backbone for rural, social and economic development. Rural development is a direct function of agricultural development without which the later becomes a mirage (Kuye, 2004). However, beyond information and transmission role of the media, the newspaper provides to a large extent background details relevant to the news, explanations of related events, analysis of their importance and implication. The newspapers possess the capacity to do this better than most other media (Dennis and Defleur, 1994). Importantly, in a true agrarian or agriculture society, the role of the media is largely insignificant (Black et al., 1995).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Against the background of this study, the researcher

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seeks to find out what role the Nigerian newspapers play in reporting agricultural activities, policies and programmes and how they perform such role in terms of the slant and prominence or importance given to issues on agriculture. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine if the newspaper reports on agricultural sector as an arm of Nigeria economy were adequately represented or whether all the sub-sector of agriculture attracts press coverage.

Research questions

1. What is the volume of coverage given to agricultural activities programmes by the Nigerian newspapers?
2. What is the volume of reportage given to each sub-sector of agriculture by the Nigerian newspapers?
3. What is the volume of coverage given to other areas of economic activities by the Nigerian newspapers?
4. What is the degree of prominence given to issues reported about agriculture?
5. What is the slant (direction) of the news report on the agricultural activities by the newspapers?

Scope or delimitation of the study

Considering the scope of the study, this research focuses its strength on the contents of 3 newspapers with national coverage published between January – December (2007). Today, Nigeria in this democratic dispensation has over 50 daily newspapers and several weekly newspapers, and that makes it impracticable to study all the newspapers. Therefore, the study put its searchlight on the issues published by the 3 newspapers from the month of January to December 2007, and a total number of 288 issues would be examined in the study.

METHODS

To this end, the study design used in the research work for data collection was content analysis. Importantly, communication research content analysis is regarded a formal system which is systematic and objective for extracting all forms of communication contents. According to Berelson (1952), content analysis is a research technique for the objective systematic description of manifest content of communication. Similarly, Kerlinger (2000) defines content analysis as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003). Therefore, content analysis was used in this study as a tool to extract data from the content of the selected newspapers. This was done by analyzing the frequency and prominence or importance as well as direction/slant of news on agricultural activities as content categories. More so, the unit of measurement and news analysis included features, news stories, editorials, special reports and sources of news, etc.

Sample size

In the context of this study, there is no doubt that it is impracticable to study over 50 daily newspapers considering the time frame, constraint and most especially unavailability of some of the members of the population to the researcher is another reason. Therefore, only 3 newspapers were selected for the study. They are namely; Punch, Guardian and Tribune. By statistical calculation, 8 issues were selected per month for each of the newspapers under study. Using simple random sampling, the 8 issues were arrived at by selecting 2 issues for the study and then the 2 issues were multiplied by the 4 weeks in a month.

Thus, a sample size of 288 issues was used for the study. As mentioned earlier, 2 issues were selected per week and then multiplied by 4 weeks to arrive at eight issues each month. The 8 issues in each month were now multiplied by the 12 calendar months of study to arrive at 96 issues for each newspaper. However, the 12 calendar months in this context were months in the year 2007, that is, month of January to December. Furthermore, the 96 issues were multiplied by the 3 newspapers, that is, Punch, Guardian and Tribune under study to arrive at a sample size of 288.

Sampling technique

The 3 newspapers; Punch, Guardian and Tribune were selected using purposive sampling technique. The reasons for the selection of these newspapers were based on their national coverage popularity readership rating and large extent of specific positions on national issues. More so, a simple random sampling technique was adopted for the selection of the 2 issues to be studied each week for all the 3 newspapers. This is because the sampling technique allows every unit of the population an equal chance of being selected from the sample.

For the purpose of emphasis, the days selected were arrived at using the format. Essentially, all the days in a week from Sunday to Saturday were assigned identical cards, for the selection of the sample. The identical cards were placed in an enclosed container with a lid whenever the cards were reshuffled. As the container was opened after been reshuffled, the first card that was picked was Monday followed by Thursday which was the second card. This particular method is referred to as 'hand drawing balloting'. The method/technique gives equal opportunity or chance to issues selected each day or date without any form of bias.

Unit of measurement/analysis

The parameters for this study unit of analysis in collecting data included news, stories, features articles, editorials, special reports and news sources, etc. In addition, in terms of content(s) of the units of analysis, frequency slant/direction and prominence, etc was tested.

In the case of frequency, it was determined or tested based on the volume of reports on issues about agriculture vis-à-vis other sectors of the economy. On the other hand, slant of the 3 newspaper reports on agriculture was determined by the stand of the newspaper, that is, favorable and neutral categories.

Unlike slant/direction, the prominence was determined by the specific position/placement of each item of agriculture issues essentially on pages of the newspaper. In other words, those that appeared on the front pages for instance was regarded as more important while those issues about agriculture that appeared on the back pages was regarded as second in importance compared to the front page stories. Both front and back pages was divided into 2 sub-categories, that is; front page lead and minor as well as back page lead and minor, respectively. Consequently, the inside page in terms of prominence was regarded as the least important.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of news items.

Story type	News items	Percentage
News story	550	73.3
Features	30	4
Editorial	20	2.7
Special reports	150	20
Total	750	100

RESULTS

The data analysis of this research work was based on the 750 news items content analyzed. These were the various newspaper reports on agriculture as reported by Punch, Guardian and the Nigerian Tribune between January and December 2007. In addition, the data was analyzed with the use of simple percentage and frequency tables. This study in general terms was aimed to find out the attention given by the Nigerian press to agricultural issues or matters.

DISCUSSION

The presentation and analysis of the data above shows in clear terms the level of coverage the Nigerian press gave to the agricultural issues or matters. Essentially, the focus of this research is on the attention the Nigerian press gave to the issues on agriculture as well as level of coverage given to other sectors as against the agricultural issues. The study also examined the attention given to some sectors of the agriculture by the 3 newspapers. Out of a total of 4,220 news items which the 3 newspapers published during the period under review, 750 news items were devoted to agriculture representing 17.7%

In addition, the data analyzed indicated that of the 750 news items, 610 (81.3%) were on the inside page, while the back page (both lead and minor) recorded the least. It was observed that the 3 newspapers devoted the back page to sports with the exception of the Guardian. Furthermore, the data analyzed also indicated that 401 news items (53.4%) were unfavourable against 164 (21.8%) news items that were favourable and 185 (24.6%) that were neutral. This is a pointer to the fact that issues on agriculture did not receive a favourable reportage by the Nigerian press. The presentation and analysis of data has largely aided in answering the research questions and satisfying the objectives of study.

Research question one

What was the volume of coverage given to agricultural activities/programmes by the Nigerian newspapers?

Tables 1, 2 and 3 clearly indicates that out of 4,220 news reports during the period under studied, 750 news items were reported about agriculture. This represents 17.7% of the entire news reports and based on the data, the agricultural sector was under reported by the Nigerian press.

Research question two

What is the volume of reportage given to each sub-sector of agriculture by the Nigerian newspapers?

Obviously, it can be deduced from Table 4 that cash crop farming, a sub-sector of agriculture received the highest press attention with about 170 news items (22.6%). The forestry sub-sector of agriculture received the least with 10 news items (1.3%).

Research question three

What is the volume of coverage given to other areas of economic activities by the Nigerian newspapers?

Table 3 specifically showed that matters or issues on politics received the highest press attention with 1,450 news items representing 34.3% within the period of study. This was followed by commerce and industries which received 1,120 news items (26.5%) then oil and gas about 900 news items (21.3%) of the press attention in the study.

Importantly, from the data analyzed, it was revealed that issues on agriculture were under reported by the Nigerian press.

Research question four

What is the degree of prominence given to issues reported about agriculture?

Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 revealed the degree of prominence the Nigerian press accorded to agriculture. It was evident that 610 news items (81.3%) out of the 750 news items were published on the inside page 36 news items (4.8%) were carried on the front page lead; 68 (9.0%) on the front page minor and 36 (4.8%) on the back page minor. Therefore, it can be deduced that the Nigerian press did not attach much importance to news reported on agriculture.

Research question five

What is the slant (direction) of the news report on the agricultural activities by the newspapers?

It was observed closely that news items about issues on agriculture did not receive adequate favorable reportage. Table 9 indicates that out of the 750 news items, 401 (53.4%) were unfavorable, 164 (21.8%) were

Table 2. Number and percentage of news items on the agriculture.

Story type	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
News story	250 (76.9%)	190 (84.4%)	110 (55%)	550 (73.3%)
Features	13 (4%)	15 (6.6%)	2 (1%)	30 (4%)
Editorial	12 (3.6%)	Nil	8 (4%)	20 (2.7%)
Special reports	50 (15.3%)	20 (8.8%)	80 (40%)	150 (20%)
Total	325	225	200	750

Table 3. Frequency distribution of agriculture and other sectors.

News categories	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Agriculture	325 (19.1%)	225 (13.4%)	200 (23.9%)	750 (17.7%)
Oil and Gas	324 (18.9%)	450 (26.8%)	126 (15.0%)	900 (21.3%)
Commerce and industry	650 (38.0%)	210 (12.5%)	260 (31.1%)	1,120 (26.5%)
Politics	410 (23.9%)	790 (47.1%)	250 (29.9%)	1,450 (34.3%)
Total	1,709	1,675	836	4,220

Table 4. Frequency distribution of news items about sub-sector of agriculture and percentage.

Agric sub-sector	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Agriculture	15 (4.6%)	10 (4.4%)	14 (7%)	39 (5.2%)
Food farming	45 (13.8%)	30 (13.3%)	16 (8%)	91 (12.1%)
Cash crop farming	35 (10.7%)	65 (28.8%)	70 (35%)	170 (22.6%)
Poultry	16 (4.9%)	55 (2.4%)	1 (0.5%)	72 (9.6%)
Animal husbandry	27 (8.3%)	Nil	Nil	27 (3.6%)
Animal health	70 (21.5%)	10 (4.4%)	Nil	80 (10.6%)
agric educator	25 (7.6%)	15 (6.6%)	10 (5%)	50 (6.6%)
Prices/inflation/market survey	17 (5.2%)	5 (2.2%)	20 (10%)	42 (5.6%)
Food	20 (6.1%)	Nil	37 (18.5%)	57 (7.6%)
Forestry	5 (1.5%)	2 (0.8%)	3 (1.5%)	10 (1.3%)
Fertilizer and agric inputs	40 (12.3%)	17 (7.5%)	23 (11.5%)	80 (10.6%)
International organizations	10 (3.0%)	16 (7.1%)	6 (3%)	32 (4.2%)
Total	325	225	200	750

Table 5. Frequency distribution of agriculture area of focus and percentage.

Area of focus	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Urban	215 (66.1%)	125 (55.5%)	137 (68.5%)	477 (63.6%)
Rural	80 (24.6%)	35 (15.5%)	27 (13.5%)	142 (18.9%)
Foreign	30 (9.2%)	65 (28.8%)	36 (18%)	131 (17.4%)
Total	325	225	200	750

Table 6. Prominence of the news items of agriculture.

Prominence	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Front page lead	4 (1.2%)	7 (3.1%)	25 (12.5%)	36 (4.8%)
Front page minor	40 (12.3%)	23 (10.2%)	5 (2.5%)	68 (9.0%)
Inside page	255 (78.4%)	195 (86.6%)	160 (71.1%)	610 (81.3%)
Back page lead	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Back page minor	26 (8%)	Nil	10 (5%)	36 (4.8%)
Total	325	225	200	750

Table 7. Attention scores for each of the newspaper.

Attention	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Front page lead	20 (4.1%)	35 (10.8%)	125 (37.3%)	180 (15.7%)
Front page minor	160 (32.8%)	92 (28.5%)	20 (5.9%)	272 (23.7%)
Inside page	255 (52.3%)	195 (60.5%)	160 (47.7%)	610 (47.7%)
Back page lead	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Back page minor	52 (10.6%)	Nil	30 (8.9%)	82 (7.1%)
Total	487	322	335	1,144

Table 8. Number and percentage of prominence given by each of the newspapers on agriculture.

Newspaper	Attention score	Percentage
Punch	487	42.5%
Guardian	322	28.2%
Tribune	335	29.3%
Total	1,144	100

Table 9. Direction of the news items on agriculture.

Direction	Punch	Guardian	Tribune	Total
Favourable	85 (26.1%)	45 (20%)	34 (17%)	164 (21.8%)
Unfavourable	175 (53.8%)	130 (57.7%)	96 (48%)	401 (53.4%)
Neutral	65 (20%)	50 (22.3%)	70 (35%)	185 (24.6%)
Total	325	225	200	750

favorable, while 185 (24.6%) were neutral.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the findings of this study, it was revealed that the Nigerian newspapers did not give sufficient press coverage in terms of prominence in its reportage to agriculture compared to other issues. Also, the press did not give sufficient attention on certain areas of agricultural sub-sector in its report as observed in the study.

The Nigerian press as an institution or organ is expected to report all or every sector of the Nigerian economy with sufficient attention on each sector. This becomes necessary because each sector of the economy is of equal importance to the development of the Nigerian society. As observed in the study, it would be necessary for the Nigerian press to give equal attention to all agricultural sub-sector of the Nigerian economy. It was likewise observed that issues on agriculture did not receive a favorable coverage by the press.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following

recommendations should be considered:

The Nigerian press should endeavor to give adequate attention to issues concerning agriculture in their day-to-day activities just like the manner in which attention was given to oil and gas, etc. This will go a long way to create opportunity for growth and development of agricultural sector, thus improving the living standard of the people via job creation.

In addition, the press should make significant effort to set agenda or make agriculture more important through information dissemination and packaging of reports. In essence, sufficient attention should be given to agricultural matters by the Nigerian press.

Furthermore, the press should adequately utilize its developmental theory/function for the positive change and development of the agricultural sector.

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