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Content Analysis of Agricultural Issues Reported in Two Nigerian Daily Newspapers

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Abstract

This study used two widely read Nigerian newspapers (Punch and Guardian) to assess the extent of daily newspapers involvement in disseminating agricultural information. Samples of the newspapers between 2007 and 2010 were analysed for daily reportage, space allocation and types of stories published. All data collected were analysed using simple descriptive statistics. Results showed that 70%, 78.8%, 66.3% and 60% of the newspapers evaluated did not report any agricultural issues in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. Among those that reported agricultural issues, majority reported 1-2 stories per day representing 21.3%, 28.8%, 25% and 36% of total sample size in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. Mean column inch allocation were 27.43, 10.77, 35.89 and 27.52 for 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. Total column inch allocation to the publication of agricultural issues in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 were 2194.29, 861.54, 2870.94 and 2201.52 respectively for all eighty (80) newspapers sampled in each year. Finally, except in 2008, the subject that attracted the highest reportage was health implications of the consumption of agricultural commodities. Judging by previous and current trends, the authors concluded that newspapers are not likely to make significant contribution to the dissemination of agricultural information for enhanced agricultural production.

Introduction

Agriculture is becoming increasingly information sensitive (Padre *et al.*, 2003) hence access to information has become a pre-requisite and a valuable resource for agricultural development. In this context, information is needed to exploit opportunities in time, raise awareness about the potential negative impacts of current choices and to get to know about opportunities of other farmers, in order to search for better opportunities and sustainable solutions (LEISA, 2002). Success in enhancing food production, providing income and job opportunities and ensuring that the agricultural sub-sector performs its manifest functions in furtherance of rural and overall national development, depend largely on the communication system adopted to implement various agricultural programs.

Newspapers tend to reach more educated, elitist audiences in many developing countries. This may not seem the quickest way, compared with radio or TV, to reach a mass audience. But newspapers and magazines do have the advantages of being more permanent, carrying more information and often being more authoritative than other media. Writing and issuing a straightforward press release remains the most effective — and economic — tool for mass communication. And the other branches of the mass media tend to feed on what they have read in the press.

Newspapers and magazines can also be used to reach key groups — for example, by carrying materials which teachers can use in their classrooms or suggestions for discussions by development workers in the field. (International Mine Action Standard, 2005).

Newspapers provide up-to-date information on local, state provincial, national, and world issues. They are among the most widely-read periodicals that are available and accessible to the vast majority of people of all ages and walks of life in any community. Every category of reader can find some important, current, and interesting information in newspapers. Today's newspapers use design elements that make information easily accessible to the reader. For example, important stories have large bold headlines, while 'Graphics' appear next to related stories. The most current analysis and criticism of politics, economics, health, sports, psychological and emotional issues, music, theatre, television, the fine arts, and even comics are covered by newspapers. Ola and Ojo (2007) reiterate that, "newspapers are important because they carry current information and they keep the readers informed of events and happenings within and outside their immediate environments. They are useful for education, recreation, entertainment and relaxation." News is written as a way of disseminating information to a large group of people. Reporters and editors are usually conscious of the language they use in news reportage to attract popular readership.

In positioning newspapers within the news environment and establishing their academic and research viability, Cheney *et al.* (2006) insist that despite the growing presence of news on the Internet, radio, television, and so on, a library's current newspaper collection can continue to play a vital role in the academic community.

Despite the pervasive role of the electronic media in agricultural communication and based on the recommendation of the British Cabinet Office (2002) on the necessity for a rethink of the ways in which advice and information are made available to farmers, it becomes pertinent to focus on the print media as an important source of agro-information to farmers (Padre *et al.*, 2003).

This research work therefore examined the role of two Nigerian newspapers in the dissemination of agricultural information. The foci of the research work are the amount of space allocated to the dissemination of agricultural information and the types of information published.

Methodology

The study was carried out using two daily newspapers (Punch and Guardian) in Nigeria. Nigeria is located in the west coast of the African continent. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with close to 130 million inhabitants and a population growth rate of two percent.

The population of study involved sample from two newspapers published on a daily basis in Nigeria. These covered publications from 2007 to 2010 (Guardian and Punch). The two newspapers were selected because of ease of accessibility. Punch and Guardian newspapers are subscribed to on a daily basis by the College of Agricultural Sciences library, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Yewa Campus, Ayetoro, Nigeria which is within easy reach of the writers

Forty daily publications were randomly selected from the yearly publication of each of these papers over a period of four years (2007-2010) (Table 1). The issues of the two newspapers were jointly considered since this is not a comparative study.

Table 1 Total number of newspaper issues used for the research work

Name of newspapers	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Guardian	40	40	40	40	160
Punch	40	40	40	40	160
TOTAL	80	80	80	80	320

Source (Field survey, 2010)

The study carried out an in-depth column inches and content survey analyses of the two selected newspapers. The survey and analyses of the selected newspapers on a daily basis for four years determined the column inches allocated to issues or advertorial and propaganda on agriculture. The research did critical review of column inches of agricultural issues reported. Also, content analysis allocated to agricultural news by the newspapers was conducted.

Simple descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution were used to describe most data collected from the newspapers. All data were analyzed using SPSS (2006)

Results and Discussion

In 2007, out of the 24 editions of newspapers that reported on agriculture, 21.3% reported one or two stories a day, 7.6% reported 3-4 stories while only 1.3% reported up to 5-6 agricultural news items. In 2008, out of the 17 editions of papers that reported on agricultural issues, 28.8% of them reported once or twice daily, 2.6% of the newspapers reported 3-4 times. In 2009, 27 editions of newspapers reported on agricultural issues and out of which 25% reported once or twice and 8.8% reported 3-4 times. In 2010, out of the 32 editions of newspapers that reported on agriculture, 36% reported once or twice and 3.8% reported 3-4 times.

Table 2 Daily reportage of agricultural issues in Guardian and punch newspapers

# of stories	2007		2008		2009		2010		Total	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
1-2	17	21.3	15	28.8	20	25	29	36.3	81	
3-4	6	7.6	1	2.6	7	8.8	3	3.8	17	
5-6	1	1.3	1	1.3	0	0	0	0	2	
total	24	30.2	17	32.7	27	33.8	32	40.1	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Based on information on Table 2, majority (81%) of the news on agricultural issues in newspapers were reported either once or twice, and based on these, reportage of agricultural issues in Nigerian newspapers is very low. It could be inferred that as a result of the low level of reportage, farmers and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector are not likely to obtain required information on agricultural practices from newspapers.

Table 3 Frequency and percentage distribution of range of volume of space allocated to agricultural issues in punch and guardian newspapers (2007-2010)

Column inch	2007		2008		2009		2010	
	# of papers	%	# of papers	%	# of papers	%	# of papers	%
0.00	56	70.0	63	78.8	54	67.5	48	60.0
7.00-50.00	8	10.0	12	15.0	8	10.0	13	16.3
50.01-100.00	3	3.8	3	3.8	6	7.5	11	13.8
100.01-150.00	9	11.3	1	1.3	5	6.3	7	8.8
150.01-200.00	4	5.0	1	1.3	5	6.3	1	1.3
200.01-250.00	0	0	0	0	2	2.5	0	0
Subtotal	80	100	80	100	80	100	80	100

Source: Field survey, 2010

From Table 3, in 2007 it was revealed that just 9(11.3%) had the column inches ranging from 100.01-150.00, and was closely followed by 8(10.0%) which had the column inch ranging from 7.00-50.00. Majority (70%) had no report on agriculture. This shows that enough space was not allocated to agricultural news in the year 2007. In 2008, 12(15.0%) had the volume of space (column inch) ranging from 7.00-50.00. Majority (78.4%) had no column inches allocated to agriculture. This is also the same trend with what obtained in 2007. In 2009, 67.5% had column inch ranging from 7.00-50.00, also in 2010, 60% of the newspapers had the column inch ranging from 7.00-50.00.

Table 4 Summary of volume of space allocated to agricultural issues in 'Punch' and 'Guardian' newspapers.

Volume of space	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	2194.29	861.54	2870.94	2201.52
Minimum	11.70	7.13	9.75	11.70
Maximum	192.66	240.64	292.62	151.20
Mean	27.43	10.77	35.89	27.52

Source: Field survey, 2010

This implies that enough spaces were not allocated to agricultural issues in the selected newspapers (Punch and Guardian).

In 2007, out of the 24 newspapers that addressed the types of agricultural news, 4(5%) of them reported on production, 3(3.8%) reported on management, 2(2.5%) reported on ornamental, 1(1.3%) reported on production and management, 1(1.3%) reported on production, management and technology, 11(13.6%) of the newspapers reported on health and 2(2.5%) reported on finance.

In 2008, 17 newspapers addressed the types of agricultural news, 5(6.3%) of them reported on production, 3(3.8%) reported on management, 1(1.3%) reported on production and management, 1(1.3%) reported on management and technology, 1(1.3%) reported on production, management and finance, 1(1.3%) reported on production, management and health, 2(2.5%) of the papers reported on health while 3(3.8%) of them reported on finance.

Table 5 Types of agricultural issues, (frequencies and percentages) in punch and guardian newspapers (2007- 2010)

Types of news	2007		2008		2009		2010	
	Frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
No report	56	70.0	63	78.8	53	66.3	48	60.0
Production	4	5.0	5	6.3	6	7.5	5	6.3
Management	3	3.8	3	3.8	5	6.3	7	8.8
Technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ornamental	2	2.5	-	-	-	-	2	2.5
production / management	1	1.3	1	1.3	2	2.5	3	3.8
Management /finance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Management /technology	-	-	1	1.3	-	-	-	-
Production/ management/technology	1	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Production/management/finance	-	-	1	1.3	1	1.3	-	-
Production /management/health	-	-	1	1.3	4	5.0	-	-
Production/health	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2.5
Management/finance	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.3
Management/ornamental	-	-	-	-	1	1.3	-	-
Health	11	13.8	2	2.5	7	8.8	8	10.0
Finance	2	2.5	3	3.8	-	-	4	5.0
Management/health	-	-	-	-	1	1.3	-	-
Total	80	100	80	100	80	100	80	100

Source: Field survey, 2010

In 2009, out of the 27 newspapers that addressed the types of agricultural news 6(7.5%) of them reported on production, 5(6.3%) reported on management, 2(2.5%) reported on production and management, 1(1.3%) production, management and finance, 4(5.0%) reported on management and health, 1(1.3%) reported on management and ornamental, 7(8.8%) of the papers reported on health, and 1(1.3%) reported on management and health.

In 2010, 32 newspapers addressed the types of agricultural news, 5(6.3%) of them reported on production, 7(8.8%) reported on management, 2(2.5%) reported on ornamental, 3(3.8%) reported on production and management, 2(2.5%) reported on production and health, 1(1.3%) reported on management and ornamental, 8(10.0%) reported on health, and 4(5.0%) reported on finance.

In 2007, health related issues were reported more than any other types of agricultural issues 11 times (13.8%). In 2008, production related issues were reported more than any other agricultural issues 5 times (6.3%). In 2009 and 2010, health related issues were reported 7 and 8 times (8.8 and 10%) respectively.

This implies that health related issues of agricultural items in the selected newspapers were given prominence over the period of four years, except for year 2008 when agricultural production issues were mostly reported. Issues like nutritional values of agricultural produce are more prominent compared to management, production, technology; finance (which talks about loan, credits and other related issues). This also implies that health related issues are targeted at the consumers not at the farmers. News is not really targeted to improve agricultural production, but the health of members of the general public who care to read newspapers.

The findings of this research corroborate earlier reports on the subject. Agumagu (1988), Adeokun (1988), Olowu (1990) and Mundy & Sultan (1999) all reported a low reportage of agricultural issues by Nigerian daily newspapers. Despite the fact that all these investigations took place over two decades ago,

the current findings have shown that the status quo has remained over the years. This research has also shown that not only is the reportage low, the space allocation to agricultural issues, to say the least, is meagre. The information gathered from this research has also shown that the majority of agricultural issues published are in the area of health implications of agricultural commodities and counts terribly low for increase in agricultural production.

Conclusion

The findings of this research has shown that judging by the performances of two widely read newspapers (Punch and Guardian) in Nigeria, reportage, space allocation and types of agricultural issues featured could not have played any significant role in the improvement of agricultural production. Furthermore, based on previous evidence and the current trend, daily newspapers are not likely to be able to make any appreciable impact on the improvement of agricultural production in this part of the world for some time to come. This study suggests that consumer of agricultural commodities are likely to have benefitted more from newspaper publication of agricultural issues. Newspapers should endeavour to publish information more relevant to increasing agricultural production. Perhaps, consideration should also be given to the inclusion of the importance of agricultural reportage in newspapers in the curricula of the institutions of journalism in the country.

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