

Agricultural News Coverage in Selected Nigerian Newspapers (2005 and 2006)

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Abstract: The main objective of this study was to identify the number of agricultural news covered in the lead story, front page headlines, Editorials and special write-ups of the Guardian, Thisday, Punch, Tide, Pioneer and New Waves Newspaper (2005 and 2006). The Guardian Thisday and Punch are private owned newspapers, while the Tide Pioneer and New waves are government owned newspapers. The newspapers were selected based on purposive sampling. Data for the study were collected from 438 newspaper publications of the 6 mentioned newspapers which were selected based on stratified random sampling. These data were analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentages, tables and t-test. The result of this study showed that out of a total number of 438 lead stories identified only 3% were on agriculture; front page headlines identified were 1797 out of which 4% were on agriculture; 438 Editorials were identified, out of which 6% were on agriculture, special write up identified were 811 out of which 5% were on agriculture. Out of a total number of 160 agricultural news items identified in the 6 newspapers, 57% came from the government owned newspapers, while 43% came from the private-owned newspapers. Based on the result of this research, it is obvious that agricultural news was under published in the 6 newspapers examined. Necessary recommendations were made and these recommendations when put into practice will help to increase the number of agricultural news published by the newspapers thereby making newspaper an effective means of agricultural information dissemination.

Key words: Agricultural news, coverage, Nigerian newspapers

INTRODUCTION

Information has been identified as one of the basic resources required for the improvement of agricultural production. According to Kaniki (1995) information is defined as ideas, facts and imaginative works of the mind and data of value potentially useful in decision making, question answering and problem solving. On the other hand Aina (1995) simply defined information as the data for decision. Agricultural information can be defined as all useful and relevant knowledge on all aspects of agriculture. Oladeji and Olowu (2002) stated that for our agricultural sector to attain the nation's objective of substantial increase in food production, appropriate and relevant information must be dissemination to all users of agricultural information. Aina (1995) identified and categorized the various agricultural information user populations as follows: Policy makers, researchers, educators and students, agro-based industries and

servicesstaff and farmers. Each of these users contribute directly to the development of agriculture hence relevant information provided to each of these user populations will contribute positively to the development of agriculture in the country. Aina (1995) noted that a lot of agricultural information is continually generated in Africa but the problem lies with dissemination of the generated information. One can therefore say that agricultural information is a commodity readily available in developing countries. This correctly reflects the situation in Nigeria, agricultural information is being generated but the problem is lack of access to it.

Librarians/information specialists and extension agents have the primary responsibility of disseminating agricultural information to the relevant user population (Aina, 1995). The agricultural librarians/documentation centers are expected to collect all relevant agricultural literature and make it available to the user population through various methods. Unfortunately, in Nigeria the

very few librarians existing are unable to perform these functions principally because of inadequate funding and limited number of agricultural information can be said to lie squarely on the agricultural extension agents. The agricultural extension agents on their part face a lot of constraints amongst which limited number of existing extension agents is one of the outstanding ones. The insufficient number of agricultural extension agents in Nigeria overstretches the workforce and has led to a situation where many users of agricultural information do not benefit from the services of agricultural extension agent. Researcher results therefore make little or no impact on the production efficiency of majority of farmers because the recommended technologies accumulate in the archives of such institutes (Liman, 1981). Despite the use of contact farmer approach, the resultant effect is poor extension service delivery. This is because the agricultural extension personnel are handling too many clients than they can effectively handle.

In addition to the problem of inadequate number of extension agents it has been observed that the extension agents in disseminating agricultural information most often direct their efforts at non-literate rural dwellers while new entrant farmers who are educated, knowledgeable and literate are left to seek for information on their own (Oladeji and Olowu, 2002). It should be noted that this set of literate individual mostly farm on large scale and have the production capacity to increase food production, therefore their information needs should be adequately addressed if Nigeria's agricultural sector must attain the desired increase in production. Towards this end, the necessity for the agricultural extension system in this country to diversify the means of information dissemination becomes paramount. There is need to consider other literate forms of information dissemination. This brings the use of print media as a complementary device to help in reaching out to the bulk of the farming communities. Sambe Stated that innovations in agriculture and health sectors are brought to the knowledge of the people through the mass media. Agumagu (1988) have it that newspapers are the least expensive yet most popular and provide news and information in greater detail than the other 2, radio and television. Also, the fact that it is in written form makes it possible to be stored and consulted at any time. These enduring characters explain why newspapers can be very effective in disseminating information. But in order that the effectiveness of newspapers in disseminating information be experienced in the agricultural sector, newspapers must cover agricultural news.

In addition, the development of agriculture in Nigeria is primarily the responsibility of the government. And with much emphasis being laid in agriculture by the

government, one wonders whether the level of agricultural news published in the government owned newspapers is in consonance with the emphasis being laid in agriculture by the government.

The purpose of this study is to identify the number of agricultural news covered in the lead story, front-page headlines, editorials and special write-ups in the Guardian, Thisday, Punch, Tide, Pioneer and New waves newspapers for the years 2005 and 2006. Specifically, the write up shall address the following:

- Compare the number of agricultural news covered in the lead story, front-page headlines, editorials and special write-ups of the government (Tide, Pioneer and new waves) and private (Guardian, Thisday and Punch) owned newspapers.
- Identify whether a relationship exist between ownership of newspapers and number of agricultural news covered.

Hypothesis of the study: There is no significant difference between the number of agricultural news covered in the government and private owned newspapers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Nigeria. The population of this study consists of 730 days newspaper issues of the Guardian, Thisday, Punch, Tide, Pioneer and New waves (i.e. January 2005 to December 2006 publications) Table 1. This gives a total number of 4380 newspaper publications. The 6 newspapers were chosen based on purposive sampling. A total number of 438 newspaper publications were selected from the population using stratified random sampling. Data for this study was derived from newspapers namely the Guardian, Thisday, Punch, Tide, Pioneer and New waves newspaper for the period January 2005 to December 2006. Other sources of information include all existing literature which are relevant to this study e.g. journals, government publications, internet, textbooks and research reports. Data obtained was analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentages and means. Tables and charts were also used in presentation of results. t-test was used to test the hypothesis.

Table 1: Lead stories on agricultural in the 6 mentioned newspapers in Nigeria (2005-2006)

| Newspapers | Frequency | Coverage (%) |
|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Guardian | 2 | 2.8 |
| Thisday | 2 | 2.8 |
| Punch | 1 | 1.4 |
| Pioneer | 3 | 4.2 |
| Tide | 4 | 5.5 |
| New waves | 3 | 4.2 |

Source: Field survey, 2007

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lead stories on agriculture: Out of a combined total of 438 Lead stories, only 3% were on Agriculture. In Newspaper publication, Lead story is assumed to be the most important news for the day. The results above imply that Agricultural news is not considered important enough by the newspaper owners to be published as Lead story.

Front page headlines on agriculture: Out of a combined total of 1797 headlines identified on the front page of the 6 newspapers, only 4% were on Agriculture. A headline is a device for displaying in succinct form the most salient point in a news story (Babatunde, 1998). It also summarizes the news story as well as draws attention to the story and newspaper in general. In most Newspapers today, the Front-page is used to present to readers all the important, attractive, eye catching and major headlines contained inside the newspaper. This helps readers to have a glimpse of what is contained or the major stories in the newspaper at a glance. Going by the result in Table 2, it implies that Agriculture is not considered to be a major issue as to appear on the Front page headline.

Editorial on agriculture: Out of a combined total of 438 Editorials in the 6 newspapers only 6% were on Agriculture. The Editorial page is very significant in the newspaper industry. An Editorial performs the correlation, opinion, interpretation or even propaganda function in a Newspaper (Babatunde, 1998). It is the only page where management of the newspaper expresses its opinion, tries to interpret news (issues) and helps readers to understand issues or occurrences especially on very topical issues, 28 editorials out of 438 are not enough. Agriculture in the opinion of this study is of grave national attention and having stated that Editorials represent newspaper management opinion, one can infer from the result in Table 3 that the management of these newspapers do not consider agriculture important enough for many Editorials. Also, Agumagu (1988) examined the extent of Agricultural reporting in Nigerian press for the period 1985-1986 and found out that Agricultural related Editorials constituted 2.8 and 2.6% in the Daily Times and New Nigerian newspapers, respectively. From the result of this study, it can be said that there is a little improvement in Agricultural news coverage though the problem of low coverage still persists.

Special write-ups on agriculture: Out of a combined total of 811 special write-ups identified, only 5% were on agriculture. Special write-ups in the context of this study

Table 2: Front page headlines on agriculture in the 6 mentioned newspapers in Nigeria (2005-2006)

| Newspaper | Frequency | | Coverage (%) |
|-----------|-----------|----|--------------|
| | A | a | |
| Guardian | 414 | 15 | 3.6 |
| Thisday | 213 | 9 | 4.3 |
| Punch | 353 | 11 | 3.3 |
| Tide | 307 | 16 | 5.3 |
| Pioneer | 255 | 13 | 4.7 |
| New Waves | 255 | 9 | 3.5 |

A: Total number of headlines news; a: Headlines news on Agriculture; Source: Field survey, 2007

Table 3: Editorials on agriculture in the guardian, thisday, punch, tide, pioneer and new waves newspapers in Nigeria (2005-2006)

| Newspapers | Frequency | Coverage (%) |
|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Guardian | 3 | 4.2 |
| Thisday | 4 | 5.5 |
| Punch | 2 | 2.8 |
| Pioneer | 5 | 6.9 |
| Tide | 7 | 9.6 |
| New Waves | 7 | 9.6 |

Source: Field survey, 2007

Table 4: Special write-ups on agriculture in the guardian, thisday, punch, tide, pioneer and new waves newspapers in Nigeria (2005 and 2006)

| Newspaper | Frequency | Mean per month |
|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| Guardian | 6 | 0.3 |
| Thisday | 8 | 0.3 |
| Punch | 5 | 0.2 |
| Pioneer | 9 | 0.4 |
| Tide | 9 | 0.4 |
| New waves | 7 | 0.3 |

Source: Field Survey, 2007

can be defined as prominent coverage given to doings of prominent persons and of Government, accounts of unusual events reports of development and achievements of persons and nations. Concisely it can be said to be an account of any real happening that is of great importance to the people or the nation as a body. The results in Table 3 show that the special write-ups on Agriculture in the 6 newspapers examined in this study are few. This implies that the owners of these 6 newspapers do not consider issues on agriculture important enough to merit prominent coverage (Table 4).

In summary, out of an overall total number of 160 items on Agriculture identified in the 6 newspapers, 9% were identified in the Lead story, 46% in the Front page headline, 18% in the Editorial and 28% in the special write-up.

Out of a total number of 160 items on Agriculture identified in the 6 newspapers examined 58% came from Government owned newspapers while 42% came from the Private owned newspapers. This indicates that the Government owned newspapers covers more Agricultural news than the Private owned newspapers.

Test of hypothesis: The hypothesis propounded in this study was tested with T-statistic, Ho: There is no

significant difference between the number of Agricultural news covered in the Government and Private owned newspapers.

Decision rule: Reject H_0 and Accept H_A if $T_{cal} > T_{tab}$: Since, t_{cal} in the T-test value is greater than the t_{tab} , the H_0 is rejected and the H_A which states that there is significant difference between the number of Agricultural news covered in the Government and Private owned newspapers is accepted. This is not contentious as the information in Table 5 revealed a 15% difference in the level of Agricultural news covered in the Government and Private owned newspapers.

Based on the information in Table 5 and 6, it can be stated that there is a relationship between ownership of newspapers and the number of Agricultural news covered. This is understandable as newspaper contents are known to be influenced or controlled by the managerial policy as well as the Editorial policy lay down by the owners of the newspaper. Newspapers may not be

said to be surprising since agricultural development is one of the major responsibilities of the Government.

Also in news papering the dictating factor is economic control. Media that are not owned by Government are likely to pay allegiance to their sources of financial sustenance. This explains the reason why most privately Omu (1989), stated that newspaper under the control of Government provide an important outlet for the dissemination of information on Government policies, programmes, activities, achievements and also an instrument for social mobilization.

Based on this statement, the result shown by Table 7 and 5 which indicates that government owned newspapers covers more Agricultural news than the private owned owned newspapers in the struggle to satisfy the desires of those who finance them fall victim to the control of those persons. This explains why Agricultural news covered in these private owned newspapers are very few since most of the people who owned and sponsor them have no interest in agricultural activities.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study showed that Agricultural news was given little coverage by the newspapers; percentage coverage of 3% for lead story, 4% for front-page headlines, 6% for editorial and 5% for special write up is meagre

The t-test showed that there is a significant difference between the number of Agricultural news covered in the government and private owned newspapers. This implies that the number of significantly more than that of private owned newspapers.

Also, with the Government-owned newspapers accounting for 58% of the total Agricultural news identified in the 6 newspapers and the private-owned 42%, the study established that government owned newspaper covers more agricultural news than the private owned newspapers. Newspapers by the virtue of their characteristics of being written from of information, having wide circulation, being the cheapest compared to Radio and Television as well as being a major means of communication in Nigeria can be said to be very good means of disseminating agricultural news but going by the number of agricultural news covered by these newspapers, it can not be said to be an effective means. Therefore the result of this study indicted that newspapers can not be an effective means of disseminating agricultural information unless something is done to improve the of agricultural news covered in them.

Table 5: Summary of agricultural news covered in the lead story, front page headlines, editorial and special write-ups of the 6 mentioned newspapers in Nigeria (2005-2006)

| | Lead story | Front page headline | Editorial | Special write-up | Total no. of agric. | Coverage (%) |
|--------------|------------|---------------------|-----------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Guardian | 2 | 15 | 3 | 6 | 26 | 16 |
| Thisday | 2 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 23 | 14 |
| Punch | 1 | 11 | 2 | 5 | 19 | 12 |
| Tide | 4 | 16 | 7 | 9 | 36 | 23 |
| Pioneer | 3 | 13 | 5 | 9 | 30 | 19 |
| New waves | 3 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 26 | 16 |
| Total | 15 | 73 | 28 | 44 | 160 | 100 |
| Coverage (%) | 9 | 46 | 18 | 28 | | |

Source: Field survey, 2007

Table 6: t-test result of the hypothesis

| Newspaper ownership | N | Mean | SD | Df | t-value |
|---------------------|----|------|------|----|------------------|
| Government | 24 | 4 | 1.38 | | $t_{cal} = 2.38$ |
| Private | 24 | 3 | 1.58 | 46 | $t_{tab} = 2.02$ |

Significant level = 0.05; Note: SD: Standard Deviation; DF: Degree of Freedom

Table 7: Comparism of agricultural news covered in the lead story, front page headlines, editorial and special write-up of the government and Private Owned Newspapers (2005-2006)

| Newspapers | Total no. of Agric. news | Total no. published by govt owned newspapers | Total no. published by private owned newspapers | Coverage % by govt news-papers | Coverage % by private news-papers |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Lead stories | 15 | 10 | 5 | 67 | 33 |
| Front page headlines | 73 | 38 | 35 | 52 | 50 |
| Editorials | 28 | 19 | 9 | 68 | 32 |
| Special write-ups | 44 | 25 | 19 | 57 | 43 |
| Total | 160 | 92 | 68 | 56 | 43 |

Source: Field survey, 2007

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having learnt that the managerial and editorial policy of media houses affect the kind of information or news they published, government should ensure that the policies of the government and private owned newspapers are agricultural friendly, this could be done by setting guiding rules for all media houses operating in the country. Also reports of important meetings in the agricultural sectors (e.g. FNT, MTRM) should be acquired by the media houses and published.

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