

Sources of Information as an Essential Correlate in Agricultural News Reportage in Nigerian Dailies

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Abstract

The impact of the print media in agricultural development has been the focal point in the recent times and has received considerable awareness from researchers, planners, politicians and media practitioners of developing countries especially Nigeria. The underlying factors responsible for ways the print media projects agricultural news and the sources responsible for the information are diverse. Sources of information in news reporting are a pedestal on which print media stand. The individual and public perception and attitudes towards societal issues are a function of knowledge based on available information and it significant that, print media make use of experts who are well grounded in their various fields, to comment or serve as sources for the agricultural and agro-allied news. It is on this view that the study was carried out to investigate the importance attached to the sources used by journalists in reporting agricultural news. The selected Nigerian daily newspapers were the Nigeria Tribune, Punch, the Guardian and Vanguard. The time frames of the study were between January 1st 2000 to December 31st 2004 and this covered five years. The reason for this is that, the Nigeria agricultural sector was just coming under a new republic and the study equally showed the level of coverage giving to development of agriculture. The content analysis performed on the 128 editions of newspapers revealed that, there is significant difference in the sources used by journalists in reporting agricultural and agro-allied news (The chi-square value is 33.23, P value is 0.0001 when $P \leq 0.05$). The study also revealed that, there is significant difference in the relevance of areas of specialization of the sources and the topics commented upon (Chi-square value is 29.50, $P = 0.0189$ when $P \leq 0.05$). Recommendations have been articulated to enable the newspaper play its expected facilitating role in furtherance of agricultural and rural development of Nigeria, in general.

Keywords: Agricultural news; The Tribune newspaper; The Guardian, The Punch, The Vanguard: Reportage; The Experts

1. Introduction

The role of the print media in development has been the focal point in the recent times and has received considerable awareness from researchers, planners, politicians and media practitioners of developing countries especially Nigeria. The underlying factor in print media is now to have the audience in mind as it expected of the media houses to influence the practices and attitude of the readers (Agbamu, 2006).

Sources of information in news reporting are a pedestal on which mass media stand. The individual and public perception and attitudes towards societal issues are a function of knowledge based on available information. Consequently, mass media play important role in imparting knowledge to the public through information dissemination (Fawole 2000). The reportage of comments on subject matter in agriculture by daily newspaper usually plays important role as a basis for information for farmers and the public as foundation for their action. The sources of this information have to be from the experts in the field. Although, a lot of sensitive issues are handled by the print media but agricultural experts may be called to present on issues relating to education, while, environmentalists are called to present comments about gender issues and an expert on gender analysis is left uncalled. Since, there are different experts in various fields of knowledge; the real qualified experts are not usually called upon. This constitutes a problem to the public when reading the interview. The journalists have increased the use of experts, but they are not displaying fair level of discretion in choosing the right experts to comment on the right issues and events.

According to Shoemaker (1999), there are factors that influence Journalists' choice in selection researchers as sources and this consequently affect the content of the articles. The factors identified by Shoemaker (1999), are individual differences, newsroom routines, organizational constraints, extra-organization influences, and social-cultural differences. However when these factors are present, they affect the choice of researchers of information at the disposal of the Journalists. They are constrained to make use of available sources to the beat the dead line and it will affect the public reaction towards the articles. The influence of mass media should not be underestimated because perceptions and attitudes go hand-in-hand. Many of the attitudes expressed through the media directly affect consumers' perceptions of agriculture (Shoemaker 1999). The recommendation of Pepper-Sitton (2000) that readers should use newspaper as source of information, but they should not consider every article to be factual information stated in a purely objective further gives credence to the fact that, the journalists are not making use of the right and expected sources for their articles, especially on the issues that boarder on agriculture.

Greater access to and use of knowledgeable and reliable sources in the agricultural industry will help reporters write more factual and verifiable statements and this will prevent undesirable ripple effects generated from unsubstantiated and unproven information. It is with this view that the study seeks to investigate sources of agricultural articles in selected Nigerian daily newspapers.

The research questions developed for this study are stated in the following:

1. What are the institutional sources of information on agriculture published by the selected newspapers?
2. What is the level of relevance of areas of specialization of sources of information and agricultural articles published by the selected newspapers?
3. What are the contemporary agricultural issues published by the selected newspapers?

1.1 Methodologies and Materials:

The population of the study included all of editions of the Nigerian Tribune, the Vanguard, the Guardian and the Punch newspaper containing agricultural news published during January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2004. A multistage sampling technique was used to select samples for this study. The first stage involved the identification of all agricultural and agro allied news articles within the selected newspapers. Two hundred and seventy nine (279) of agricultural and agro allied news articles which constituted the population for the study were identified in all.

The Vanguard newspaper contained the least number of agricultural and agro allied news articles; hence all of the news articles which total 32 were analysed for the study. However, an equal number of 32 news articles were randomly chosen from Nigerian Tribune, the Guardian and the Punch newspaper. These news articles formed the sample size for the study. This resulted in 183 agricultural and agro-allied news articles.

The content categories developed for this study were adapted from a similar study by Terry, Dunsford, Lacewell and Gray, (1996). The content heads are, animal, crop production, extension and economics. The inter-coders reliability for content categories of all the news was calculated using Holstis (1985) reliability formulae. For punch, 0.86. Tribune, 0.89. Guardian, 0.96 and Vanguard, 0.79.

1.1.1. Result and Discussion

Research question 1: What are the institutional sources of information on agriculture published by the selected newspapers?

The result in table I show that, the journalists from the selected newspapers houses resolved to the use of universities' faculties of agriculture as major sources of news article on agriculture. It further shows the level of importance attached to legitimatization of news articles. In the submission of Giddens (2003), he argues that modern societies depend increasingly on highly specialized expert systems not just for problem solving, but also for understanding modern society itself-what he calls the "reflexivity of modernity. If this conception of modern society is correct, it is to be expected that journalists would turn increasingly to good and factual source, both to acquire information on and to interpret the events of the day.

Research question 2: What is the level of relationship between of areas of specialization of sources of information and agricultural articles published by the selected newspapers?

Running chi-square analysis to test significant difference in the news article commented upon and the backgrounds of the experts used by the journalists show that there is significant relationship.

The results in table 2 further reveal that, there is significant difference in the topic commented upon and the specialization of the experts used by the journalists. In the submission of Akpabio, Makanjuola and Udoma (2006), newspaper editors and agricultural news reporters have realized that farmers are most interested in hearing about the experiences of other farmer as well as recommendation of experts. This re-orientation of agricultural news reporting is expected to engender farmers' interest in the print media and will have ultimate effect of increasing their productivity. The results show that, the backgrounds of experts influenced their choices as sources along the agricultural stories they are to report upon. Akpabio et al (2006) opined that, due to prevalent economic situation in Nigeria, elites and literate individuals are making inroad to farming; therefore the journalists have recognized this trend and now focusing on reporting agricultural news with right experts as sources.

Researches question three: What are the contemporary agricultural issues published by the selected newspapers?

The study identified the critical contemporary issues in agriculture. The results from table 3 outlined them, from poverty alleviation to biodiversity. The contemporary issues were mentioned in the information that served as sources for agricultural news articles. Out of 183 news articles studied, 82 articles did not have any of identified contemporary issues mentioned in them. This represents 44.81%. The importance of some of these contemporary issues can be deduced from the comments generated from the information filtered in from research organizations, multinationals and academic institutions. In the report credited to CPA (2001), most of the poor of the world's people live in the rural areas and rely on agricultural for their subsistence; their projection in media

will create awareness about their state and possible solution. The data in table 3 supports the submission as it shows the experts mentioning issues around rural livelihood, the totality of means by which people secure a living, have or acquire in one way or another, the requirement for survival and the satisfaction of needs as defined by people themselves in all aspects of life (Loubser 1995).

Olawoye (2000) presented that; livelihood includes income generating activities and those that cannot be monetized. These assertions can contribute to the reasons why experts commented on them or why the journalist seeks credible information on them. There is more emphasis on food security and poverty alleviation as shown in the data. Poverty incidence can easily become a basis for news reporting due to the recent government intervention programme.

The flagship, being the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP) by the Federal Government of Nigeria is to fight poverty among her citizens. Also in the recent submission of the World Bank president, Robert Zoellinck in June 2008, that rocketing global food prices are causing acute problems in developing nation and have put back the fight against poverty by seven years. These submission and observation are possible to generate strong reasons for the journalists to seek experts who can comment on them as sources for information for agricultural news.

Another critical point is the low news reportage on gender issues. This supports the submission of Stifel (1991), that relative little has been written on gender issues in Nigeria because of the invisibility and under reporting of women's work, as well as the convention of treating the farm family or house-hold as the unit of analysis. The table shows that, the experts commented on GMO, which stands for Genetically Modified Organism, referring to organisms which have been modified by the new methods of genetic engineering. Genetic modification is also used to alter other traits of an organism, like its nutritional properties, shelf-life, flavour or processing characteristics. The importance of G.M.O to food cultivation and process might influence the experts' comment. The relative newness of the subject may interest the journalists and their investigative will come to play.

1.1.2 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study shows the significant roles played by experts in mass media. Therefore it is pertinent to say that the experts have become visible part of mass media in publishing news that can serve as platform for the audiences to make their positive informed decision. Newspapers are readily becoming a reference tools for the general, especially the literate farmers for attitude development and decision making process.

The study therefore, showed the reasons why journalists are using experts as sources of their stories on agricultural and agro allied news articles in the selected newspapers. Content analysis was carried out to collect data. In view of this assertion, the following are the recommendations emanating from the findings of this study.

1. Development of government policies in collaboration with media houses, supporting and recognizing experts in agriculture as major source for all agricultural news.
2. Establishment of agricultural based newspapers by research organizations to disseminate quality information on agriculture.
3. There should special awareness programs for journalists about the importance of agricultural literacy to their job performance, especially for those in agricultural desk.
4. Conduction of further studies by Researchers on the selectivity of sources by print media journalists.

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Table 1: the institutional sources of information on agriculture (2000-2004)

Institutional sources	frequency	percentage
Universities' faculties of agricultural science	60	34.3
Agricultural based research organisation	21	12.0
Government ministries/department of agriculture, forestry and food security	31	17.7
Non-government organisation	13	7.4
Private agro-allied companies	21	12.0
Non-agro allied institutions	29	16.6

Source: field survey (2010)

Table 2: Analysis of relationship of the news commented upon and the areas of specialization of the sources used by the journalists

Variables	DF	χ^2	P	DECISION
Areas of specilization	3	29.500	0.001	SIGNIFICANT

χ^2 = Chi-square DF= Degree of freedom P= significance level = 0.05

Table 3: contemporary agricultural issues:

Contemporary issues	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty alleviation	22	12.02
Sustainable development	13	7.10
Rural livelihood	8	4.37
Gender issues	1	0.55
Food security	48	26.23
GMO	9	4.92
Neutral	82	44.81
Total	183	100

Source: field survey (2010)

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