

Full Length Research Paper

Coverage and content analysis of agricultural transformation agenda news in selected newspapers in Nigeria

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Importance of accuracy and conciseness of type and content of information being disseminated to the populace in respect of a development intervention to avoid misleading the populace cannot be overemphasised. Given the strategic importance of Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) in policy drive of Nigerian government and useful lesson it has for repositioning Nigerian Agriculture in a bid to salvage Nigeria's economy dependence on oil, this study content analysed 193 ATA news in selected newspapers in Nigeria. Variables measured included news frames, frequency, space allotted and placement of ATA news. Data were analysed using both descriptive (frequency, percentage) and inferential (correlation and analysis of variance) statistics at $\alpha 0.05$. ATA news in Nigerian newspapers included press outcome, muster, courtesy call, commencement programmes, reports, analysis and gathering. There was a high coverage of ATA news in the first year (2012), with the Guardian allotting highest space (13203.5cm²) and the least by Nigerian Tribune (7987cm²). Majority of Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) news (98.5%) were placed in other pages of the newspapers. There was no significant difference between spaces allotted to ATA in the selected newspapers ($F = 0.660$). Time is apt for development advocates to promote placement of news on development issues in strategic positions in national dailies.

Key words: Agricultural transformation agenda, content analysis, coverage, development communication, Nigerian newspapers.

INTRODUCTION

The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) reported that more than one billion people or one fifth of the world's population lives in extreme poverty. The Vanguard newspaper of April 11, 2014, reported that Nigeria ranked third on world poverty index as revealed by the World Bank President Jim Yong

Kim, at the IMF/World Bank spring meeting. The picture painted by these statistics is similar to what have been consistently reported by recognised world's bodies over the years. In an attempt to reverse some of these statistics and in apparent response to put Nigeria in better pedestal, successive governments in Nigeria over the years

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have equally developed programmes that are aimed at alleviating the poverty situation in the country, especially through various programmes in agricultural development, health sector reforms, housing policies and financial sector reformations.

However, these efforts have barely yielded the much anticipated results. Though other sectors of the Nigeria's economy have witnessed several development agenda and policies, the agriculture sub-sector rivals any development areas in terms of numbers of such programmes that focused on agriculture (Olowa and Olowa, 2014; Agber et al., 2013; Iwuchukwu and Igbokwe, 2012; Arogundade et al., 2011). The probable explanation for this could be the realisation on the part of government that agriculture could serve as spring board for rejuvenation of Nigeria's economic. Nevertheless, these programmes have not been able to achieve their desired objectives as a result of policy instability and inconsistency, lack of policy transparency, poor coordination of policies and poor communication (Egbula, 2010; Olowa and Olowa, 2014).

In spite of this, government had continually evolve agricultural policy; one of such being the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) which targeted revamping the agricultural sector; ensure food security, engender diversification of the economy and enhance the country's foreign exchange earnings. The ATA program aimed to accelerate food and nutritional security, generates employment and transforms Nigeria into a leading player in global food markets to grow wealth for millions of farmers. It also intended to focus on the development of agricultural value chains, including the provision and availability of improved inputs (seeds and fertilizer), increased productivity and production, as well as the establishment of staple crop processing zones. It equally addresses reduction in post-harvest losses, improving linkages with industry with respect to backward integration, as well as access to financial services and markets. The transformation agenda targets rural communities particularly women, youth and farmers associations as well as improving rural institution and infrastructure (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2011).

According to Ologunsua (2008), mass media plays a central role in being the eye of communication through which facts, information and news circulates in the society. Effective communication of new research findings and technologies, developmental programmes in agriculture to rural farmers, and stakeholders in agriculture remains a promising strategy for increasing agricultural productivity (Abubakar et al., 2009).

This position was reaffirmed by Egbula (2010) that the use of communication strategies increases the awareness, information and education in the delivery of national developmental programmes. The effectiveness of mass media (print and electronic media) in disseminating information especially agricultural

information that are aimed at improving the lots of the farmers cannot be over emphasised. However, it is also of utmost importance that the type, content and coverage of information being disseminated to the populace is accurate, factual, focused and concise to avoid misleading the populace.

Given the orchestration of ATA news in the electronic media, it became imperative to investigate whether the print media had lived up to its expectation in the coverage of ATA related news. Hence, this study ascertained the coverage and content analysed ATA related news in selected newspapers in Nigeria over the years. Specifically, the study:

- (1) Established the frames ATA news were put in the selected newspapers
- (2) Assessed the frequency of ATA news reported in the newspapers
- (3) Ascertained the space allotted to ATA news in the newspapers; and
- (4) Assessed the placement given to ATA news in the newspapers

Propositions of the study

Proposition 1 (P_1): There is no significant relationship between frequency of ATA news reported and space allotted to this news

Proposition 2 (P_2): There is no significant difference in space allotted for ATA news in the selected newspapers

Theoretical frame work

Based on the concept of this study, the following theories where adapted to aid a clear understanding of the study.

Agenda setting theory

Agenda-setting theory as developed by McCombs and Evatt (1995), describes the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. It is premised on the concept that if a news item is covered frequently and prominently the audience will regard the issue as more important, with regard to the presentation in the news report about events, issues etc. Agenda setting theory examines how media coverage affects both what and how the public thinks about it. It deals with specific attributes of a topic and how this agenda of attributes also influences public opinion (McCombs and Evatt, 1995). According to Maxwell et al. (2013), agenda setting theory involves two major hypotheses about attribute salience:

- (1) The way an issue or other object is covered in the

media (the attributes emphasized in the news) affects the way the public thinks about the issue.

(2) The way an issue or other object is covered in the media (the attributes emphasized in the news) affects the salience of that issue in the public agenda.

The magic bullet theory

The magic bullet theory also known as the “Mechanistic Stimulus-Response” theory or “Hypodermic Needle” theory of communication holds that the mass media are so powerful that they can ‘shoot’ or ‘inject’ their messages straight into the viewer’s head. The passive viewers (referred to collectively as the ‘masses’) are immediately influenced by the message. According to this theory, there is only one way for an audience to read a particular media ‘text’, and that is when its frame is catching and drawing. This implies that the mass media could influence a very large group of people directly and uniformly by “shooting” or “injecting” them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response (Yahaya, 2008). This theory was important in this study as it implies on the issue of framing news content, and that the framing of news content rightly will draw attention to the content of the news, and thus influence wide readership.

METHODOLOGY

A whole news item was the unit of analysis. A news item is any article which satisfies the study’s definition of news on ATA and the content of which could be coded into one of the content categories developed. The time frame chosen for this study was January, 2012 through December, 2014 as this was the active period of initiation and implementation of the ATA programme.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select newspaper editions for the study. Firstly, purposive sampling technique was used to select three Nigerian daily newspapers that have wide coverage of readers and report agricultural news routinely. According to media reach; OMD Nigeria (2005), The Guardian, Vanguard and Nigerian Tribune top the list; hence, these were used in the study. The second stage involved the random selection of three months each from the three Nigerian newspapers covered for the three years.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select news articles or editions with agricultural transformation agenda stories in the third and final stage. These articles or editions constituted the sample size for the study. Sixty seven items each from Guardian and Vanguard and 59 from Nigerian Tribune giving a total of 193 ATA related news items were used. Inter coder reliability was carried out for the purpose of ensuring the reliability of the data collected for the study.

Reliability test with two coders was carried out using Holsti (1969) reliability formula. The inter-coder reliability coefficient obtained was 0.95. Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, percentage and means) were used to arrange and describe data collected for the study while inferential statistics (Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test for differences and relationship between study variables.

A qualitative presentation of results of a study variable (framing) was done also to achieve variances in pattern of presentation of

findings of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Framing of ATA news in Nigerian newspapers

The framing of ATA news as identified was grouped into seven categories namely; press outcome, muster, courtesy call, commencement programmes, reports, analysis and gathering.

Press outcome

These are news items that emanated as a result of interactions of stakeholders in agricultural transformation agenda with the press. For example, “Cassava bread to hit streets soon says Adesina” (The Guardian, 17th October, 2012, Page 15 and 18) after meeting with executive officers of prints and electronic media in Nigeria.

Muster

These are news articles from seminars, conferences, workshops, trainings, lecture and summit; which are accounts of how to drive the ATA programme. The Vanguard reported one of such meeting in its caption of September 9th, 2013 “Economic Summit on Agriculture: A trial that convinced”.

Courtesy call

These are news items that covered visits made by stakeholders in the agricultural sector, which is either national (within the country) or international (outside the country). The Guardian reported that “China proposes to partner Nigeria on rice” in its edition of 22nd February, 2012.

Commencement programmes

This is the third largest frame that agricultural transformation agenda news was based in the newspapers. These are news items emanating from launching, inauguration and flag off of programmes relating to the goals and mandate of ATA. The Vanguard, 14th May, 2012 reported that President Jonathan inaugurates ATA council.

Report

These are news items on official report, achievements,

Table 1. Frequency distribution of ATA news in the selected Nigerian newspapers.

Variable	Year			Total
	2012	2013	2014	
Vanguard	32 (47.8)	19 (28.4)	16 (23.9)	67(34.7)
Nigerian Tribune	17 (28.8)	21 (35.6)	21 (35.6)	59 (30.6)
The Guardian	32 (47.8)	14 (20.9)	21 (31.3)	67 (34.7)
Grand total				193(100)

Source: Newspapers content analysis (2015).

*Figures parentheses are percentages.

cautions, announcement, assessment, commendation, accolade and challenges as it relates to agricultural transformation agenda. An example of this frame was found in Vanguard December 29th, 2014 as it reported issues and events that shaped Agriculture in 2014. This is directly connected to the success recorded in ATA as the farmers and other stakeholders in the agricultural value chain show concern for lapses in the programme but equally expressed optimism and interest in the programme. This was done constantly by appraising the programme as it unfolds, which in-turn provides executors of the programme guidelines to follow.

Analysis

These are reports, commentary and editorial. An editorial of Nigerian Tribune of 11th June, 2012 dwelled on "Food insecurity: Rescuing Nigeria from pangs of hunger"

Gathering

These are news items that sprang from forum of stakeholders meetings and interactions on challenges, and way forward for ATA programme. For example: FG, Kwara sign Memorandum of Understanding on cassava transformation (Nigerian Tribune, 17th February, 2012).

Frequency of ATA news in Nigerian newspapers

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of ATA news in the selected Nigerian dailies. While the Vanguard (34.7%) and the Guardian (34.7%) accounted for more than one-third each and by extension most of news items during the period under review, the Tribune had less than one-third and the least (30.6%). Most of the coverage of ATA news by Vanguard (47.8%) and the Guardian newspapers (47.8%) was mostly in the first year (2012); however, while the frequency of coverage by the Vanguard witnessed a steady declined in 2013 (28.4%) and 2014 (23.9%), the Guardian declined in its coverage in 2013 (20.9%) and picked in 2014 (31.3%). The frequency of coverage by the Nigerian Tribune was a

rapid departure from what was obtained for Vanguard and Guardian as its frequency of coverage picked as the years rolled by (28.8% in 2012 and 35.6% in years 2013 and 2014), this can be seen in Figure 1. According to Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development (2009), most development programmes needed to maintain some level of relevance all through their life span to remain relevant and considered worthy of coverage by newspapers outfit. This becomes pertinent as other programmes compete for features in prominent national dailies and only those programmes with some level of relevance will be focused. The high coverage of ATA activities in 2012 yielded wide result, and ensured that all stakeholders in the agricultural sector were carried along. This was evidence as states started keying into the agenda (for example, FG, Kwara sign MoU on cassava transformation (Nigerian Tribune, 17th February, 2012).

Space allotment to ATA news in Nigerian newspapers

Table 2 shows the space allotted to ATA news in the newspapers across years and papers. In the first perspective of the results across the years, the result shows that there was a high coverage of ATA news in the first year (2012), with the Guardian allotting more space (13203.5cm²) followed by the Vanguard (10560.75cm²) and Nigerian Tribune (7987cm²). However, the trend changed in the second year of the programme, with Nigerian Tribune allotting more space (10441cm²) to ATA news compared to the previous year and a sharp decline in the space allotted by the Guardian (5717.75cm²) and Vanguard (8225.5cm²). This is further corroborated in the data presented in Table 1 where the frequency of ATA news was high in the year 2012 for Vanguard and Guardian, low in Nigerian Tribune for same year and period but picked in 2014 in the Nigerian Tribune but plummeted in the Vanguard and Guardian. In the second perspective in terms of total space allotment, the Guardian and Nigerian Tribune allotted total space of 27289.25cm², 26816.5cm² respectively, with Vanguard having the least amount of space (24300.7cm²) allotted to ATA news. This reveals that agricultural transformation agenda news did not enjoy much space on the newspapers

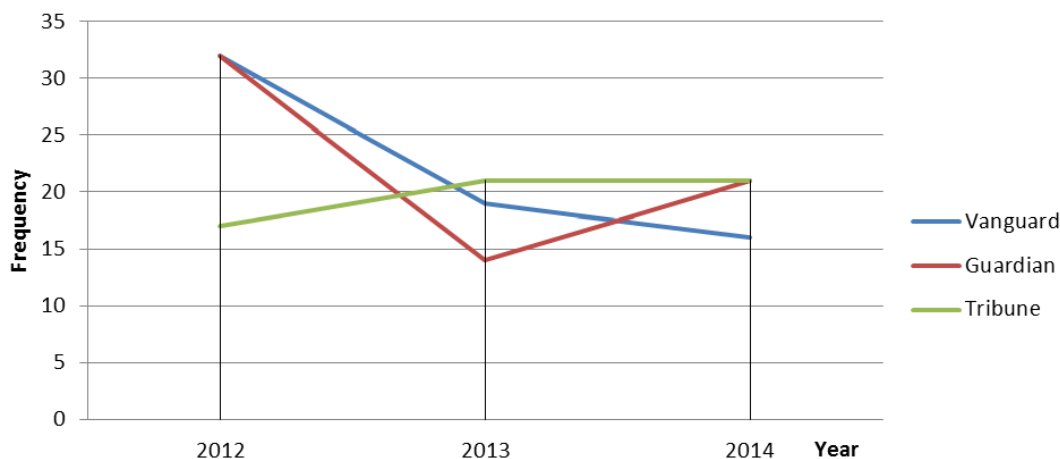


Figure 1. Trend in frequency of ATA news across year.
Source: Newspapers content analysis (2015).

Table 2. Distribution by space allotted to ATA news by the newspapers.

Variable	Space allotted in cm ²			Total
	Vanguard	Nigerian Tribune	The Guardian	
2012	10,560.75	7987	13203.50	31751.25
2013	8,225.50	10441	5717.75	24384.25
2014	5,514.45	8388.50	8368	22270.95
Total	24,300.70	26816.50	27289.25	78406.45
Mean	362.68	454.52	410.81	409.34

Source: Newspapers content analysis (2015).

Table 3. Distribution of placement of ATA news in the newspapers.

Newspaper	Placement pattern			
	Front	Middle	Back	Other pages
Vanguard	0 (0.0)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	66 (98.5)
Nigerian Tribune	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	58 (98.3)
The Guardian	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	66 (98.5)

Source: Newspapers content analysis (2015).

*Percentage in parentheses.

as the spaces allotted to them in the newspapers are relatively low. This is agreement with Fawole (1995) and Olajide and Fawole (2014)

Placement of ATA news

The result in Table 3 shows that majority of ATA news (98.5%) were placed in other pages of the newspapers, with just 1.0% in front pages and 0.5% in the middle

page. However, no ATA news was placed on the back pages of the newspaper. This indicates that prominence was not given to ATA news in the newspapers as it was not considered very important by the tabloids despite its strategic importance and priority to the policy drive of government. This is in consonance with Akpabio et al. (2006) that agro-related news are seen as non-worthy item by newspaper editors/management, as it is seen as incapable of generating revenue for the news agency, hence, much importance is not attached to it (Okorie and

Table 4. Correlation analysis between the frequency of ATA news and space allotment.

Variable	N	r-value	p-value
Frequency and space allotment	193	0.083	0.251

Table 5. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) test of difference in space allotment in the selected newspapers.

Variable	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	p-value
Between groups	264616.175	2	132308.088	0.660	0.518
Within groups	38094866.850	190	200499.299	-	-
Total	38359483.025	192	-	-	-

Oyedepo, 2011), as media hype in Nigeria's daily normally revolves around issues like politics, economic, sports and entertainment (Oloruntoba, Oladeji, Odedele, 2013; Olajide and Fawole, 2014).

Correlation between frequency of ATA news and the space allotment

Table 4 shows the correlation coefficient result between frequency of agricultural transformation agenda news and the space allotted in the selected newspapers. The result shows that there was no significant correlation between the frequency of reportage of agricultural transformation agenda news and the space allotted ($r = 0.083$). It thus means that the frequency of occurrence of ATA news does not amount to more space allotment. This implies that newspapers covered ATA news as the need arises like any other regular news items in spite of its strategic and central position in policy drive of the then government. This is similar to the picture painted in the conclusion of Ukonu et al. (2012) that though, newspapers reported development news (climate change, health, environment and agriculture) somewhat significantly, but hardly place such strategically. In their opinion, newspapers hardly put the whole context in clear view for the readers. This was because news items which usually occupy smaller space were the dominant genre, and they focused on new issues each time, without putting former reports in context.

Difference in space allotment for ATA news across the newspapers

The result as shown in Table 5 indicates that there was no significant difference between spaces allotted to ATA in the selected newspapers ($F = 0.660$; $p = 0.518$). This implies that the Vanguard, Guardian and Nigerian Tribune do not differ in the amount of space allotted to

coverage of ATA news. The traditional unfavourable disposition of management of newspapers in Nigeria to agricultural news could perhaps be the reason for this. This thus becomes imperative for the establishment of newspaper or magazine that its main focus will be the dissemination of agricultural related information.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It can be inferred that seven categories namely; press outcome, muster, courtesy call, commencement programmes, reports, analysis and gathering were major frames ATA news were put. Most of the coverage of ATA news was by Vanguard and the Guardian newspapers, and was mostly in the first year (2012) with steady decline in subsequent years (2013 and 2014). However, for Nigerian Tribune, frequency of coverage picked as the years rolled. The Guardian and Nigerian Tribune allotted more space compared to the Vanguard. Placement of ATA news was poor and non-strategic as most of the news was hidden in all the newspapers. Time is apt for development advocates to promote placement of news on development issues in strategic positions in national dailies, hence, it is important that developmental programmes such as ATA, be placed strategically and given wide coverage in Nigerian dailies if Nigeria tends to compete favourably with the committee of nations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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