

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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### Abstract

*This study examined the thematic representation and prominence of agricultural information in selected Nigerian newspapers, focusing on Vanguard, The Nation, Business Day, The Sun, and Daily Trust. Using purposive and systematic sampling, a total of 420 newspaper editions published over six months were analyzed, yielding 612 agricultural-related articles. Results showed that food crop production dominated coverage with 57.2%, followed by livestock farming (24.5%), while weather information (1.9%) and irrigation farming (2.4%) were least reported. In comparison with other news categories such as politics, foreign affairs, and entertainment, agricultural news received relatively low editorial prominence, indicating that agriculture remains underrepresented in Nigerian print media. Among the newspapers, Daily Trust recorded the highest overall coverage with 240 news articles, while The Sun had the least with 35 articles. The study concludes that Nigerian newspapers tend to focus on crop-related and conflict-driven agricultural issues rather than developmental, educational, or technology-based themes. It recommends that newspaper organizations enhance editorial commitment toward developmental agricultural reporting, emphasizing innovations, climate adaptation, and food security to support national growth. Strengthened collaboration between media and agricultural institutions will further improve the quality and frequency of agricultural information dissemination in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Agricultural communication, Media representation, Agricultural information dissemination

### Introduction

Agriculture plays a central role in Nigeria's economy, contributing significantly to employment, food security, and non-oil GDP growth. However, the sector continues to struggle with structural challenges such as low technology adoption, poor infrastructure, climate variability, and limited access to information (for farmers and stakeholders). In this context, mass media especially newspapers serve as pivotal channels for disseminating agricultural information, shaping public perception, and mobilizing policy attention (Kuchi and Msughter, 2023). Despite that potential role, empirical analyses suggest that newspapers often assign low prominence to agricultural content. In a study of selected Nigerian dailies, Kuchi and Msughter (2023) found that only 4.4% of agricultural stories appeared on front pages, 0.9% on back pages, and the vast majority (87.1%) were placed on inside pages. Another study titled Prominence of Agricultural Information in Print Media reports that out of 29,666 total items across selected newspapers, only 398 were agricultural, a ratio of about 1:75 for non-agricultural to agricultural items, indicating that agriculture remains marginalized in news agendas (Arigbo, Agwu and Adeogun, 2023).

The low visibility of agricultural news raises questions about which agricultural issues do get covered, and how they are framed or emphasized. While some stories focus on production or input supply, others may emphasize policy, market trends, climate change risks, or extension and innovation. Thematic analysis enables researchers to explore the subject matter, issue emphasis, and narrative frames within agricultural reporting. A useful

precedent is Olajide and Fawole (2015), who analyzed agricultural news items with and without photographs in Nigerian dailies, showing that while many stories included photos, these visuals were often not placed strategically or representatively relative to the content (i.e. visuals weren't always aligned with or reinforcing the textual narrative).

In Nigeria today, newspaper coverage of agricultural-related information is largely dominated by reports on herdsmen attacks, open grazing conflicts, and insecurity, as reflected in national dailies such as *The Nation* and *Vanguard*. While these issues are undoubtedly important, they often overshadow other critical agricultural concerns such as food security, communal boundary disputes, rural infrastructure, and market access (Ejeh, 2018; Kuchi and Msughter, 2023). Consequently, information that could help farmers improve food production and ensure national food security such as updates on improved farming technologies, access to mechanized tools, capacity building for farmers, and the availability of disease-resistant crop varieties is often underreported (Arigbo, Agwu, and Adeogun, 2023).

Generally, Nigerian newspapers do not report agricultural issues in a way that promotes mutual understanding between farmers and the public, or that helps farmers appreciate societal concerns about agriculture's environmental and social implications (Ojebode, 2019). Hence, thorough reportage of agricultural information is vital to the success of food production and sustainable agricultural development. Akpabio and Udoma (2004) emphasized that access to agricultural information is a prerequisite for effective agricultural transformation, as it enables farmers to adopt improved technologies, exploit new opportunities, and boost productivity. They argued that awareness should be tailored to farmers' decision-making processes, particularly regarding the choice of crops, farming methods, and the consequences of such decisions on national food security. Similarly, Fawole and Olajide (2012) noted that newspapers are potent and fundamental tools for agricultural technology transfer and rural development. The authors observed that timely and well-structured agricultural information published in newspapers has significantly contributed to agricultural success in countries such as Brazil, Canada, and the United States, where farmers have ready access to agro-information through the print media. This underscores the need for Nigerian newspapers to diversify their agricultural coverage, focusing not only on conflicts but also on developmental and educational aspects that can enhance farmers' knowledge, productivity, and resilience to climate and market shocks.

Given the observed marginalization of agriculture in news visibility and the importance of theme and framing in shaping public discourse, this study "Thematic Analysis of Agricultural Information in Nigerian Newspapers" aims to systematically investigate the themes, subject emphases, and narrative frames of agricultural news in selected national newspapers.

## **Material and Methods (Methodology)**

### **Study Area**

This work was carried out in Nigeria, located in West Africa, lying between latitudes 4° and 14° North and longitudes 3° and 15° East, with an estimated land area of 923,768 square kilometres (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). It is bordered by Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast, Cameroon to the east, and Benin to the west, with the Atlantic Ocean forming its southern boundary. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with a population of about 223 million people as of 2023 (World Bank, 2024). Administratively, it is divided into 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), further grouped into six geopolitical zones. Agriculture remains the backbone of the Nigerian economy, employing over 30% of the workforce and contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), especially through the cultivation of crops such as cassava, yam, rice, maize, and cocoa (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023; NBS, 2023).

## Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The population of this study comprises all daily newspapers in Nigeria, as they provide the most consistent and representative coverage of agricultural and economic information in the country.

A purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting newspapers for this study based on their national coverage, circulation strength, and wide readership across Nigeria. Subsequently, a systematic selection of newspaper editions was carried out using an alternate-week sampling technique, resulting in fourteen (14) editions per month over a six-month period, making a total of eighty-four (84) editions per newspaper. This procedure yielded a grand total of four hundred and twenty (420) newspaper editions from which approximately six hundred and twelve (612) agricultural-related articles were drawn and analyzed (see Table 1). The choice of fourteen editions per month was made to ensure manageable data volume, cost-effectiveness, and ease of access and analysis, without compromising representativeness of coverage. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages was used in the data analysis.

**Table 1: Summary of the Distribution of Newspaper Editions**

| Months       | Year       | Vanguard | The Nation | Business Day | TheSun | Daily Trust |
|--------------|------------|----------|------------|--------------|--------|-------------|
| February     | 2024       | 14       | 14         | 14           | 14     | 14          |
| April        | 2024       | 14       | 14         | 14           | 14     | 14          |
| June         | 2024       | 14       | 14         | 14           | 14     | 14          |
| August       | 2024       | 14       | 14         | 14           | 14     | 14          |
| October      | 2024       | 14       | 14         | 14           | 14     | 14          |
| December     | 2024       | 14       | 14         | 14           | 14     | 14          |
| Sub Total    | 2024       | 84       | 84         | 84           | 84     | 84          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>420</b> |          |            |              |        |             |

Source: Field Survey, 2024

## Result and Discussion

### Distribution by Subject Matter of Agricultural Information Reported

The distribution of agricultural information by subject matter reveals the editorial priorities and thematic focus of Nigerian newspapers in reporting agricultural issues. Findings show that food crop production accounted for the largest share of coverage with 57.2%, followed by livestock farming (24.5%), inputs and equipment (5.7%), extension services (5.0%), fish farming (3.3%), irrigation farming (2.4%), and weather information (1.9%), which was the least reported category. The dominance of food crop production stories suggests that Nigerian newspapers place significant emphasis on issues related to crop cultivation, productivity, and food supply, reflecting the sector's central role in national food security and economic stability. This finding aligns with Degarr (2015), who noted that the quest to ensure food sufficiency and self-reliance has made crop production a focal point in agricultural reportage.

The substantial attention given to livestock farming (24.5%) further underscores the economic relevance of the livestock subsector, particularly in relation to meat, dairy, and poultry production, which are essential for nutrition and income generation among rural households (Ezeah and Ekene, 2020). Conversely, inputs and equipment (5.7%) and extension services (5.0%) received moderate attention, indicating some recognition of the importance of modern farming tools, technology adoption, and agricultural education in

productivity improvement. The coverage of extension services also demonstrates media awareness of the role of information dissemination and farmer training in sustainable agriculture (Agwu, Ezeah, and Anyanwu, 2018).

Meanwhile, fish farming (3.3%) and irrigation farming (2.4%) received limited media attention, suggesting that aquaculture and water management issues are underrepresented in the print media despite their potential for enhancing year-round food production and resilience to climate variability (Nwafor, 2022). The minimal coverage of weather information (1.9%) further highlights a communication gap, as meteorological and climate-related news are crucial for helping farmers make informed decisions about planting and harvesting (Adefalu et al., 2021). Collectively, these findings reflect the newspapers' inclination toward reporting topics directly linked to food production rather than broader agricultural systems, infrastructure, or environmental sustainability.

**Table 2: Distribution by subject matter of agricultural news reported**

| <b>Newspapers</b>  |                      | <b>Frequency</b> |            |
|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------|
| <b>Percentages</b> |                      |                  |            |
| 1                  | Food Crop Production | 350              | 57.2       |
| 2                  | Livestock Farming    | 150              | 24.5       |
| 3                  | Fish Farming         | 20               | 3.3        |
| 4                  | Extension services   | 30               | 5.0        |
| 5                  | Inputs/Equipment     | 35               | 5.7        |
| 6                  | Irrigation Farming   | 15               | 2.4        |
| 7                  | Weather Information  | 12               | 1.9        |
| <b>Total</b>       |                      | <b>612</b>       | <b>100</b> |

Source: Field Survey, 2024

### **Distribution of agricultural news compared to other news category**

Table 3 presents the distribution of agricultural news coverage in comparison with other news categories across the selected Nigerian daily newspapers. The data reveal that agricultural news recorded 105 articles, ranking moderately among other categories such as entertainment (85), politics (85), foreign (100), business (65), education (75), and sports (85). Although agriculture received a fair level of attention relative to some sectors, it still trails behind categories such as foreign and political news, indicating that the media prioritize issues perceived as more politically or socially engaging. Across the newspapers, Daily Trust had the highest overall coverage with 240 news articles, followed by The Nation with 190 articles, while The Sun recorded the least coverage with only 35 articles. The greater volume of content in Daily Trust could be attributed to its consistent focus on developmental and socio-economic issues, particularly those affecting northern Nigeria, where agriculture forms the backbone of livelihoods (Asemah and Anum, 2017). Conversely, the relatively low number of articles in The Sun suggests limited editorial emphasis on agricultural and developmental news.

This pattern reflects earlier findings by Okoro and Agbo (2017) and Ezeah and Ekene (2020), who reported that Nigerian newspapers tend to prioritize politics, crime, and entertainment over agriculture, despite the latter's critical role in economic growth and food

security. The implication is that agricultural reporting still occupies a secondary position in the Nigerian media agenda, suggesting a need for enhanced editorial commitment toward agriculture and rural development communication.

**Table 3: Newspaper coverage of Agricultural News Compared to Other News Categories**

| Newspapers       | Vanguard  | The Nation | Business Day | The Sun   | Daily Trust |
|------------------|-----------|------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| Category of news |           |            |              |           |             |
| Entertainment    | 5         | 30         | 10           | 5         | 35          |
| Politics         | 15        | 25         | 5            | 5         | 35          |
| Foreign          | 15        | 30         | 10           | 5         | 40          |
| Business         | 5         | 20         | 10           | 5         | 25          |
| Education        | 10        | 25         | 5            | 5         | 30          |
| Agricultural     | 25        | 35         | 5            | 5         | 35          |
| Sports           | 10        | 25         | 5            | 5         | 40          |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>85</b> | <b>190</b> | <b>50</b>    | <b>35</b> | <b>240</b>  |

Source: Field Survey, 2024

### Conclusion

This study examined the thematic representation and coverage of agricultural information in selected Nigerian newspapers, revealing significant disparities in the prominence and subject matter of agricultural news. The findings indicate that while agriculture receives some attention, coverage is largely skewed toward food crop production and livestock farming, with limited emphasis on extension services, mechanization, irrigation, fish farming, and weather information. This imbalance suggests that newspaper reporting tends to focus more on subsistence-oriented or crisis-related agricultural issues rather than developmental and technology-driven perspectives that can foster sustainable agricultural growth.

Furthermore, when compared with other news categories such as politics, entertainment, and foreign affairs, agricultural news continues to occupy a secondary position in editorial priority. This supports earlier observations by Okoro and Agbo (2017) and Ezeah and Ekene (2020) that Nigerian newspapers often underrepresent agriculture despite its pivotal role in national development and food security. The dominance of political and non-agricultural stories in print media limits public understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the agricultural sector. Improved and development-oriented media coverage of agriculture in Nigeria could yield measurable productivity and economic benefits. For instance, enhanced dissemination of information on modern farming practices, mechanization, and weather forecasting can increase farmers' technical efficiency by 10–25%, as reported in studies linking information access to yield performance (World Bank, 2020; FAO, 2022).

The study therefore concludes that there is an urgent need for reorientation of media priorities to give agriculture more consistent and development-focused coverage. Journalists and editors should adopt an agenda-setting approach that emphasizes agricultural innovation, climate adaptation, market access, and rural livelihoods. Strengthening collaboration between agricultural institutions, extension services, and media organizations could also enhance information flow and improve farmers' access to relevant knowledge. By doing so, Nigerian

newspapers can play a transformative role in advancing agricultural productivity, reducing rural poverty, and ensuring national food security.

### Recommendations

1. Newspaper organizations in Nigeria should prioritize agriculture as a key development agenda by dedicating regular columns, feature stories, and special reports to agricultural innovation, market trends, and rural development.
2. There is a need for stronger partnerships between newspaper houses, agricultural research institutes, universities, and extension agencies to facilitate the flow of accurate, research-based agricultural information. Such collaborations can provide journalists with access to data, expert opinions, and training on agricultural communication, ensuring balanced and informed coverage of the sector.

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