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Tonality of Agricultural Information Published in Selected Nigerian Newspapers (January 2022–December 2023): Implications for Farmers' Sources of Agricultural Information in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to analyse the agricultural content of some selected newspapers in Nigeria between 2022 and 2023. The selected newspapers were the Punch, Vanguard, Observer, and Hope. Specifically, it ascertained the tonality of agricultural information published by the selected newspapers, and described the space allotted to agricultural news in the selected Nigerian newspapers. Using content analysis design and a multi-stage sampling technique, 384 newspapers editions were selected and coded using a validated code sheet with an inter-coder reliability coefficient exceeding 0.80 (Holistic formula). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences in the tonality and space allocation across the newspapers. Findings showed that tonality analysis demonstrated significant variation among newspapers with Punch (M=2.42) and Vanguard (M=2.42) presenting more neutral to positive tones, whereas observer (M=1.75) and Hope (M= 1.42) exhibiting more negative farming. Agricultural news was predominantly brief or moderately sized (1-10 inches) across the selected newspapers. The study concludes that all four newspapers devoted roughly comparable space to agricultural issues during the study period. However, tonality of coverage differed substantially between national and local based newspapers. It recommended that print media should adopt more comprehensive, balanced, and development focused approaches to reporting on agriculture in order to efficiently drive agricultural transformation and rural development in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Agricultural information, reportage, Nigerian newspapers, farmers, tonality.

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains a critical sector in Nigeria, contributing significantly to the country's GDP and employing a large portion of the population. However, the sector faces numerous challenges, including limited access to modern farming techniques, climate change impacts, and inadequate extension services. In this context, the role of print media as a conduit for disseminating agricultural information becomes crucial.

Although, the studies by Ejeh et al. (2018), and Ijeoma and Olajide (2018) provide critical insights into the content analysis of agricultural information in Nigerian dailies and the coverage of the agricultural transformation agenda, respectively. These studies point towards a need for an in-depth examination of how agricultural topics are prioritized and framed in the media.

Despite its potential, there is a significant gap in understanding how effectively Nigerian print media covers agricultural topics. Preliminary observations suggest that agricultural coverage is often limited and sporadic, potentially failing to meet the information

needs of the farming community. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis regarding the types of agricultural information disseminated, the focus on various agricultural sub-sectors, the geographical distribution of coverage, and the depth of analysis provided in the news articles. This analysis is vital for understanding the role of print media in agricultural development and identifying gaps in information dissemination. It can provide insights into how media coverage can be enhanced to better support the agricultural sector, contributing to informed decision-making and improved agricultural practices among Nigerian farmers. For this purpose, two national newspapers (Punch and Guardian) and two local newspapers (Observer and Hope) were analysed over a period of two years to analyse the contents with focus on agricultural news dissemination.

In essence, this content analysis aims to unravel the multifaceted role of print media in shaping agricultural discourse, examining how it influences farmer perceptions, disseminates critical information, and ultimately contributes to the agricultural sector's growth and sustainability. By dissecting the coverage patterns, thematic focus, and communicative effectiveness of agricultural reporting in print media, this study seeks to provide insights into the intricate interplay between media and agriculture, highlighting opportunities for enhancing the flow of agricultural information to bolster farmer education and rural development.

Moreover, the studies reflect a growing interest in how print media portrays specific agricultural issues, such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), environmental concerns, and technological advancements in farming. The work of Delahunt-Smoleniec and Smith-Mery (2020), for example, offers a qualitative analysis of how certain topics are framed in the media, which can influence public perception and policy directions.

Therefore, content analysis of agricultural information in print media is a multifaceted endeavor that requires examining not only the volume and nature of coverage but also the underlying messages, target audiences, and the potential impact on various stakeholders. The references provided form a robust foundation for delving into these aspects, offering a comprehensive overview of how agricultural information is conveyed, perceived, and utilized in the realm of print media.

Tonality is an analysis that uses a subjective/assessment to determine if the content of article is either favorable or unfavorable to the person, company, organization or product discussed in the text (Michaelson and Griflīn, 2005). Wimmer and Dominick (2013) stated that there are a variety of different ways to assess tone. One of the most common is a simple classification of "positive," neutral" or "negative." Other approaches rate each article or code on a finite scale (Michaelson and Grifīn, 2005). The authors stated that these scales may include a "zero to 100°scale where "zero" is completely negative and 100° is completely positive. Other options include scales with positive and negative ratings (Jegadeesh and Wu, 2013). An example would be a scale with a rating of "-50° to +50°''. In this instance, "-50°" is completely negative and "+50" is completely positive. A neutral analysis would be recorded as "zero" on this scale. This method can be applied using several different approaches. The first is an assessment of the tonality of an overall article (Wimmer and Dominick 2013). Also, other approaches assess the tone of a specific mention or code or assess the tone of a specific message that may appear in an article (Michaelson and Griffin,2005). Each article is typically assessed individually and the findings can be aggregated to present an overall assessment of the tone of the media. This research aims to ascertain the tonality of agricultural information published by the selected newspapers in Nigeria and identify the difference between spaces allotted to agricultural news in the various selected newspapers

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Benin City, Nigeria. Geographically the state is located between latitude 6.3382°N and longitude 5.6258°E of the Greenwich meridian. The study adopted a survey research design and content analysis approach. The survey took place between January-December, 2022 and January-December, 2023. A total of 730 newspapers were published by each of the national newspapers in the two years under study, while the two local newspapers that published once in a week had a total of 104 publications each. Therefore, 1,668 published newspapers formed the sample frame for this study. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample. The first stage involves a stratification of the selected newspapers. In order to include the local newspapers published once a week, all the copies of the issues of the selected newspaper were divided into four strata. This was done on the basis of the four weeks of the month categorized as follows:

1. 1st to 7th of every month,
2. 8th to 14th of every month,
3. 15th to 21st of every month,
4. 22nd to the end of every month.

In the second stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select one (1) issue of each national newspapers (Punch and Vanguard) from each stratum, making a total of four (4) newspapers issues per publisher per month. At the same time, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the only issue published by the local newspapers (Observer and Hope) to have four (4) issues per publisher per month. The purposive sampling was used to ensure that the local newspapers selected have equal number with the national newspapers. Thus, the total sample size was (4 Punch newspapers per month x12 months in a year + 4 Vanguard newspapers per month x12 months in a year + 4 Observer newspaper per month x 12 months in a year + 4 Hope newspapers per month x12

months in a year) x 2 years under study =384 newspapers. Therefore, 384 issues in the published selected newspapers formed the sample size for this study.

Data were collected from hard copies of the publications of the selected dailies. Tonality of reportage of agricultural news by selected Nigerian newspapers in the period under review was obtained by measuring if the content of agricultural news reported by the print media is either favourable or unfavourable to the person, nation, company, organization or product discussed in the text. A list of agricultural news was provided including horticulture, livestock forestry, climate change farm management, food security and fishery each were marked to show whether their reportage is favourable (when the content of news is positive), unfavourable (when the content of the news is negative) or neutral (when both sides are evenly represented). The space allotted to agricultural news in the selected newspapers was also measured by the number of column inches each story fits into the range covered was presented as: 1-5 inches, 6-1 inches, 11-15 and 16 and above. Data were analysed using percentage and ANOVA

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Difference in the tonality of the agricultural news published by the selected Nigeria newspapers

The one-way ANOVA examining differences in the tonality of agricultural news across Punch, Vanguard, Observer, and Hope revealed a statistically significant effect of newspaper title on the overall framing orientation of agricultural stories, $F = 27.76$, $p = 0.0001$. The mean tonality scores indicate a clear divide between national and state-based newspapers. Punch ($M = 2.42$) and Vanguard ($M = 2.42$) consistently presented agricultural issues using more positive and neutral tones, suggesting a constructive, hopeful, and development-oriented orientation in their reporting. Similarly, state newspapers such as Observer ($M = 1.75$) and Hope ($M = 1.42$) exhibited more negative tonalities, often emphasizing challenges, failures, crises, and constraints within the agricultural sector. This significant difference demonstrates that while all newspapers report on agricultural matters, they differ markedly in the attitudinal and evaluative frames they employ.

These findings fit within a broader pattern observed in Nigerian media research, where national newspapers tend to adopt more policy-oriented and economically driven frames that highlight agricultural opportunities, progress, or institutional interventions. According to Ogundimu (2021), national newspapers often construct agricultural narratives around national development goals, government programmes, and economic diversification agendas, resulting in a more balanced or positive tonal profile. Such newspapers typically have access to federal agencies, agribusiness companies, and development institutions whose press releases and briefings promote success stories, technological advancements, or positive policy outcomes elements that naturally foster neutral or positive tones in reporting.

In contrast, state-based newspapers because of their geographic proximity to rural communities and local governance challenges are more likely to foreground agricultural setbacks. Research by Ezinwa and Asemah (2020) demonstrates that state newspapers frequently highlight infrastructural breakdowns, farm losses, climate-induced disasters, and policy failures at the state or local government level, partly because these issues resonate more directly with their immediate readership. As a result, their agricultural reporting leans more heavily toward negative framing. This aligns with the present study's finding that Observer and Hope scored substantially lower on the tonality scale, indicating a dominance of problem-focused reporting.

Another important explanation for the disparity in tonality is the editorial positioning and audience orientation of the newspapers. National newspapers such as Punch and Vanguard serve a broad, urban, and policy-conscious readership, and therefore frame agricultural news in ways that align with national economic narratives and federal development priorities. Scholars like Edogbanya and Oloruntola (2019) argue that national dailies often practice what they call "development-supportive framing," wherein agricultural stories are presented with an emphasis on potential, solutions, and policy relevance rather than on crisis or decline. This editorial ideology supports nation-building narratives and tends to reduce negative evaluative language.

Conversely, state newspapers serve audiences more directly engaged with day-to-day agricultural realities. Negative tonality in these papers reflects a tendency to mirror the lived experiences of farmers who contend with inadequate extension services, input shortages, post-harvest losses, and persistent market failures. As noted by Chukwuemeka and Nwankpa (2021), local media in Nigeria frequently adopt "problematisation frames" in their coverage of rural sectors, partly as a strategy to draw government attention to local crises. This helps explain why Hope and Observer display stronger negative tonal biases.

The significant ANOVA result also highlights how the framing of agricultural news contributes to differing public perceptions of the agricultural sector. Positive or neutral tones, as seen in Punch and Vanguard, can encourage public confidence, stimulate investor interest, and enhance the perceived viability of agricultural innovation. Negative tones, however, can reinforce perceptions of stagnation or failure, potentially discouraging youth participation in agriculture or diminishing trust in state-level agricultural governance. According to Etuk and Ubong (2022), the tone adopted by journalists shapes public attitudes toward agricultural technologies, policies, and market reforms, thereby influencing both citizen engagement and policy legitimacy.

The findings further suggest that the development communication function of Nigerian newspapers is unevenly distributed. National newspapers, by adopting more constructive tones, may better support agricultural transformation efforts by portraying agriculture as an evolving, opportunity-rich sector. State newspapers, through predominantly negative framing, may inadvertently highlight

structural weaknesses without providing solution-oriented narratives. While problem-focused reporting is essential for accountability, the absence of balancing positive frames can impede the media's role in fostering optimism, innovation diffusion, and policy uptake among rural farmers.

Table 1a: Difference in the tonality of the agricultural news published by the selected Nigeria newspapers

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	17.50	3	5.83	27.76*	0.0001
Within Groups	19.09	92	0.21	—	—
Total	36.59	95	—	—	—

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023
*Significant at 0.01 level

Table 1b: Results of Duncan Multiple Range Test showing the difference in the tonality of the news across the selected newspapers

Newspaper	Mean	Duncan Group
Punch	2.42	A
Vanguard	2.42	A
Observer	1.75	B
Hope	1.42	C

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

Tonality of reportage of agricultural news by the print media in 2022/2023

Table 2 presents the tonality of agricultural news stories across selected thematic areas in the Nigerian print media between 2022 and 2023. Tonality measured in terms of **positive, neutral**, and **negative** framing plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of the agricultural sector. Positive news can encourage optimism and stimulate investment; neutral news supports objective dissemination; while negative news highlights problems, risks, and systemic failures. Understanding the distribution of tonalities is therefore vital to evaluating how Nigerian newspapers construct agricultural realities for their readers.

The findings reveal that **agricultural reportage was overwhelmingly positive in tone**, recording **156 positive reports** out of 275 total items (56.7%). Neutral reports accounted for 96 items (34.9%), while negative reports made up only 23 items (8.4%). This pattern suggests that Nigerian newspapers tend to portray agriculture in a constructive and developmental light, emphasizing opportunities, progress, and success stories rather than failures or controversies. This aligns with development communication theory, which argues that media in developing countries often adopt a supportive tone toward economic and agricultural sectors to promote national development (Fawole & Olajide, 2021).

When examined by category, **crop production** emerges as the most frequently reported topic and also the most positively framed, with 40 positive stories, 25 neutral, and only 5 negatives. The high volume and favorable tone reflect the foundational role of crop farming in Nigeria's food system. Positive reporting on crop production often highlights bumper harvests, improved seed varieties, climate-resilient practices, and government-backed initiatives. Nigerian newspapers frequently adopt this positive framing to reassure consumers and attract investments in crop value chains (Adegbola *et al*., 2020). The relatively small number of negative reports suggests that structural issues such as flooding, pest outbreaks, and rising input costs—are underreported despite their importance for national food security.

Animal production also shows a dominantly positive orientation (30 positive, 18 neutral, 4 negative). Given Nigeria's rapidly expanding poultry, ruminant, and livestock subsectors, this tone likely reflects efforts to promote commercial livestock enterprises, publicize disease-control measures, and encourage private investment. However, the low negative tonality may obscure pressing issues such as zoonotic diseases, weak veterinary infrastructure, and rising feed prices. Scholars such as Ayinde *et al*. (2020) have emphasized that the Nigerian media often fail to critically examine livestock production challenges, thereby creating an overly optimistic narrative.

Similarly, **fish farming** stories follow the same tonality pattern: 18 positive, 10 neutral, and 3 negative. With aquaculture becoming one of Nigeria's fastest-growing food production industries, newspapers tend to emphasize its profitability, employment opportunities, and technological innovations. Nonetheless, underreporting of negative issues such as feed cost inflation, flooding of ponds, and biosecurity lapses is consistent with the finding that the Nigerian press tends to privilege "success stories" in agricultural communication.

Across technical and specialized categories such as **veterinary services, veterinary nursing, wood science**, and **agro-forestry**, the trend remains consistent: the majority of stories are either positive or neutral, with very few negative reports. This distribution reflects the subsumption of technical agricultural reporting under broader development-focused news frames. Extension-related and veterinary issues are often positioned as progress-oriented, highlighting new programs, training activities, and innovations rather than structural or systemic weaknesses in these fields (Arokoyo, 2018).

A particularly notable category is **agricultural mechanization**, which records 20 positive, 10 neutral, and 2 negative stories. Mechanization is frequently framed as a key solution to Nigeria's low agricultural productivity, and newspapers often echo government narratives about tractors, harvesters, and other machines being distributed to farmers. Nigerian media have historically been enthusiastic in reporting mechanization as a sign of modernization and progress. The limited negative coverage despite recurring issues such as equipment misuse, poor maintenance culture, and failed mechanization programs—suggests a gap in investigative reporting.

The low overall frequency of **negative tonality** (only 8.4%) underscores a structural trend in Nigerian agricultural journalism: the inclination toward **celebratory and promotional reportage**, rather than critical or problem-focused journalism. This is consistent with research showing that agricultural reporting in Nigeria often provides surface-level coverage that avoids deeper interrogation of inefficiencies, climate risks, policy failures, or corruption within the agricultural sector (Nwankwo & Udeze, 2019; Ebele & Emodi, 2021). Such underreporting of negative issues may prevent policymakers and the public from gaining accurate insights into the challenges confronting agriculture.

Furthermore, the substantial proportion of **neutral stories** (34.9%) indicates that newspapers maintain a considerable degree of factual, descriptive reporting typical of routine event-based journalism. Neutral reportage includes reports on field days, market prices, training workshops, and government announcements. This aligns with earlier findings that Nigerian agricultural journalism is dominated by straight news formats, with limited analytical depth (Ajayi & Adelekan, 2020).

Table 2: Tonality of reportage of agricultural news by the print media in 2022/2023

Area of news coverage	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Pooled
Crop production	40	25	5	70
Nursery practice	5	4	1	10
Animal production	30	18	4	52
Animal feed	12	9	2	23
Fish farming	18	10	3	31
Veterinary services	10	6	2	18
Veterinary nursing	4	3	1	8
Wood science	3	2	1	6
Agro-forestry	8	5	1	14
Agric mechanization	20	10	2	32
Meat technology	6	4	1	11
SUB TOTAL	156	96	23	275

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

Difference between spaces allotted to agricultural news in the various selected newspapers

Results in Table 3 examines whether there are significant differences in the space allotted to agricultural news across the four selected Nigerian dailies. The ANOVA result shows an F-value of 0.15 with a p-value of 0.93, demonstrating no statistically significant difference in the space allocated by Punch, Vanguard, Observer, and Hope, despite the newspapers' differing levels of coverage frequency and prominence. This outcome indicates that although the newspapers differ significantly in how often they report agricultural news, and how prominently they place it, the actual column inches given to agricultural content do not differ in a statistically meaningful way. The extremely small between-group mean square (MS = 0.89) compared to the very large within-group mean square (MS = 2.94) further confirms that variations in space allocation are largely incidental, arising more from story-to-story fluctuations within newspapers than from systematic editorial policy differences across them.

This finding aligns with longstanding observations that Nigerian newspapers exhibit structural uniformity in their treatment of agricultural news, generally restricting agricultural content to small or medium-sized stories regardless of the paper's ownership, audience base, or editorial philosophy. Nigerian media scholars have repeatedly shown that agriculture despite its national economic importance rarely receives substantial or investigative space in print newspapers (Edeani & Akpan, 2021; Nwabueze & Ekwugha,

2020). The lack of significant difference found in Table 4.13 therefore reflects an entrenched editorial culture in which agriculture remains a routine beat rather than a domain meriting extensive narrative development.

This uniformity is also consistent with the deeper space-allocation patterns described earlier in the thesis. Short and medium-length agricultural stories (1–10 inches) dominate coverage, while long-form agricultural journalism remains exceptionally rare across all newspapers. As the retrieved text indicates, the "predominance of medium-sized (6–10 inch) stories" suggests that agriculture is presented as routine information rather than as a sector requiring sustained analytical attention or multi-layered reporting. Even when local newspapers occasionally allocate larger spaces, the total number of such items remains small due to their overall lower publication volume. Consequently, the absence of statistical difference does not indicate equality in journalistic investment, but rather reflects a shared limitation across all four papers.

The lack of variation in space allocation further supports Nigerian researchers' argument that agricultural reporting is constrained by institutional pressures that shape newsroom priorities. Studies have shown that editors often prioritize political stories, business news, and security issues, leaving agriculture to compete for limited space and resources (Ojobor & Okoro, 2018). In many newsrooms, agricultural beats are handled by junior reporters with limited training, reducing the likelihood that agricultural stories are expanded into longer investigative or feature pieces (Adeyeye, 2019). Thus, even national newspapers with stronger financial capacity, such as Punch and Vanguard, do not consistently allocate large spaces to agricultural content.

It is also important to interpret the findings of the study within the broader political economy of Nigerian journalism. Newspapers face significant constraints, including high printing costs, shrinking advertising revenue, and the pressures of digital competition that incentivize editors to minimize space for development-oriented stories unless they are politically or commercially advantageous (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017). In such an environment, agricultural reporting is often compressed into shorter formats to conserve space for revenue-generating content such as politics, corporate advertising, or human-interest stories with broader mass appeal. This structural logic explains why space allocation appears uniform and statistically undifferentiated even though other indicators (frequency, prominence, depth) vary significantly.

Moreover, the lack of differentiation in the study underscores what Nigerian media development scholars describe as a persistent under-resourcing of agricultural communication. Research indicates that without institutionalized agricultural desks, dedicated budget lines, and partnerships with extension agencies, newspapers struggle to develop long-form agricultural journalism capable of supporting innovation diffusion and rural development (Ekoja & Igbashal, 2019). The limited column inches accorded across all papers therefore represent a systemic rather than newspaper-specific problem.

Table 3: difference between spaces allotted to agricultural news in the various selected dailies

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	2.67	3	0.89	**0.15**	**0.93**
Within Groups	528.9	180	2.94	—	—
Total	531.57	183	—	—	—

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have shown that agricultural reportage in Nigerian newspapers remains an essential yet unevenly executed component of development communication. Tonality of coverage differed substantially between national and state-based newspapers. Punch and Vanguard demonstrated greater analytical depth and a more balanced or positive framing of agricultural news, while Observer and Hope exhibited shorter, less detailed stories with more negative tonalities. These disparities reflect differing editorial capacities, audience profiles and possibly institutional priorities. The dominance of government sources across the newspapers suggests a narrow range of perspective, which reduces the representativeness and robustness of the information communicated to the public. Therefore, the study concludes that while Nigerian newspapers do contribute to agricultural information dissemination, their current level of coverage does not fully support the information needs of farmers, policymakers, and stakeholders within the agricultural value chain. It was recommended that Newspapers should adopt a more constructive, development-oriented framing that highlights both challenges and solutions. While it is important to report constraints facing the agricultural sector, stories should also emphasize success cases, innovations, opportunities, and best practices. Such balanced framing aligns with the goals of development communication and can encourage increased investment, policy reforms, and farmer participation.

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