

Content analysis of agricultural news with and without photographs in selected Nigerian Daily Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Photographs have the potency to enhance farmers' understanding of news items in the print media. This, therefore, presupposes that news items on innovations in agriculture should be representative and strategically placed in the newspapers. Past studies have focused on coverage of agricultural news with little attention to whether such stories were accompanied by photographs that tell the story. This study therefore focused on content analysis of agricultural columns with and without photographs in selected Nigerian Daily Newspapers. Two Nigeria's newspapers (New Nigeria and the Guardian) were purposively selected based on geographical location, large circulation, prominence and blend of agricultural news and activities. A total of 144 news items with and without photographs were analysed using frequency and percentages for frequency, space allotment, prominence and representativeness of the photographs. Results show that most of the stories (90.3%) were accompanied with photographs with the Guardian allotting more space to photographs in general (7,902.75sqcm) compared to New Nigeria (4,190.33sqcm). However, while the Guardian had more space for agricultural produce and products (6,094.34sqcm) compared to New Nigeria's 2,143.52sqcm, New Nigeria had more space (1,092.72sqcm) for agricultural equipment than the Guardian's 820.58sqcm. Most of the photographs (62.5%) were not representative of the story lines and none was strategically placed (100.0%) in the Newspapers. It is recommended that editors should ensure that photographs for agricultural news items are representative of the content of the story lines as well as placed in strategic location as space allows in their newspapers.

Keywords: Photographs, Prominence, Space allotment, Representativeness

INTRODUCTION

Photograph is one of the very numerous means to achieve effective communication. It is one of the principal media of visual communication used in print media to back up stories at times as a major source of such stories. According to Oxford Dictionary, photograph is a picture that is made by using camera that has an inbuilt film sensitive to light and in the word of Ellis (n.d) and Lasén and Gómez-Cruz (2009) voicing popular adage state that it tells a thousand words. Igene (1990) says it is a mysterious phenomenon; a means that helps man to answer many questions through his five senses most importantly his sense of sight.

Photographs in the media are regarded as a means through which information produced in form of printed visual image(s) on paper is used to communicate to the mass audience. Perhaps this informs Ballenger's (2014) position that photographic methods and tools are available today to serve as a platform for social change. This is why the newspapers ensure proper documentation of events and its preservation for

immediate and future consumption by the mass heterogeneous audience.

Newspapers use photography to achieve wide range of purposes. Such purposes include facilitating proper understanding of information, sustaining and stimulating the interest of the readers, ensuring the credibility of news stories, for illustrating and reinforcement of information and to captivate its audience and attract readers' attention with pictures that has a long visual context. Most times, the agricultural column of Nigerian daily newspapers contains photographs purposely to allow better understanding of the message content. Arising from this, the printed word would appear to be the best suited for mass education and mobilization of illiterate and semi-illiterate farmers who are generally slow in learning.

The function of collecting and transferring agricultural information from researchers to the farmers is sometimes done with the use of photographs that enable target audience or readers to form their own opinions concerning issues or events at hand. Better still, such

pictures enhance farmers' understanding as they can put faces to news items that carry stories on innovations in agriculture. However, like most other news items accompanied by photographs, sometimes, content of some agricultural stories were often different from the capture of the photographs in most Nigerian dailies. Media hype is a common place with newspapers implicated in banner headlines that do not match with the story contents. Based on these issues, this study answered the following questions with respect to news papers agricultural columns' use of photographs in coverage of agricultural news in selected dailies in Nigeria. .

- (1) What is the frequency of stories with and the without photographs?
- (2) What is the space allotted to each of the photograph in agricultural column in the selected Nigerian newspapers?
- (3) Do the photographs represent the content of the information in the agricultural column?
- (4) Where were the photographs placed?

METHODOLOGY

Time frame of the study and selection of newspapers

The period chosen for this study was January 2000 to December 2005. Two newspapers (New Nigerian and Guardian) were analysed for their manifest contents. The two newspapers were selected because of the geographical location, large circulation, prominence and blend of agricultural news and activities. All the editions of the two newspapers published from January 1st 2000 to December 31st 2005 constituted the study population.

Sampling procedure and sample size

This study adopted the sampling method described by Olowu (1990). It is a multi-stage sampling procedure which involved sampling of months, weeks and days from which editions of the two newspapers were selected to constitute sample size of news items (with and without photographs) used for the study. In the first stage, six months were randomly selected from each of the 6 years of the study for both papers resulting in a total of 12 months. In the second stage, from each of the months, two weeks were randomly selected from each of the four weeks of a month; hence, 24 weeks were selected at this stage. In the third and final stage of sample selection, all five week days of the weeks were considered for selection in all the 24 weeks; given 120 days and 120 news items with and without photographs. Also, a day was randomly chosen out of the weekend days resulting in 24 days; and a total of 144 days and 144 news items with and without photographs for the two newspapers used for this study.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency of stories with and without photographs

Information on frequency of stories with and without photographs (Table 1) indicates that 90.3% of agricultural stories were accompanied with photographs, while 9.7% did not have photographs. This implies that most of the news items covered in the study's time frame was accompanied by photographs. It can then be inferred that newspapers' editors recognize that photographs is a powerful tool to reinforce claims and contents of their stories; and will therefore strive to ensure that photographs are placed to further tell the stories. This is deliberate as photographs most often serve the purpose of holding readers' attention after glancing through the content of the story and preventing them from flipping to the next page almost immediately. This also makes the readers to understand the content of the story better and likely better able to recall such story.

Table 1
Frequency of stories with and without photographs

Newspapers item	Frequency	Percentage
With photographs	130	90.3
Without photographs	14	9.7
Total	144	100.0

Space allotted to the photographs

Analysis of space allotted to photographs in Table 2 shows that variations exist in space allotted to agricultural photographs in the selected newspapers. Guardian allotted the highest space of 7,902.75sqcm with a mean of 102.633sqcm while New Nigeria allotted the lesser space of 4,190.33sqcm with a mean of 58.199sqcm over the study's time frame. Guardian allotted a space of 6,094.34sqcm for agricultural produce and products while the space allotted to agricultural equipment was 820.58sqcm. New Nigeria allotted a total space of 1,092.72sqcm for agricultural equipment and lesser space of 2,143.52sqcm for agricultural produce and products. A cursory assessment of these statistics suggests that for the selected newspapers not to have used photographs to tell the stories beyond equipment and products, such photographs may have accompanied promotional advertorial of companies that produce the equipment and products. This reflects common trend in Nigeria's print media to only cover certain news areas only if such is paid for.

Table 2
Space allotted to the photographs

Variables	Mean	Space allotted (sq.cm)
Guardian	102.633	7902.75
New Nigeria	58.199	4190.33
Agricultural equipment (Guardian)	91.176	820.58
Agricultural produce and product (Guardian)	117.198	6094.34
Agricultural equipment (New Nigeria)	68.307	1092.92
Agricultural produce and product (New Nigeria)	53.654	2413.52

Representativeness of the photographs

Data in Table 3 on how representative the photographs are in telling the stories they accompanied reveals that barely more than one-third (37.5%) of the photographs were actually depicting the content of the story in the selected newspapers while 62.5% were at variance with the content of stories they were to portray. This is one of the underlining arguments that prompted this study. For enterprises like agriculture, this does not augur well for the intent and purposes photographs are to serve. For whatever reason, this is one trend that should be discouraged as according to Dickson (2004), the effectiveness of photographs should not be compromised when used to tell a story. Therefore, if pictures in newspapers are not representative, its effectiveness is in doubt. This agrees with the position of the National Art Education Association (2013) that further reiterates the significance of photographs being representative of the story it accompanies.

Table 3
Representativeness of the photographs

Representativeness	Frequency	Percentage
Representativeness	54	37.5
Non-representativeness	90	62.5

Prominence of agricultural photographs in the newspaper

Table 4 shows that agricultural photographs are not prominently placed in the Nigerian newspapers. They are mostly displayed on the non-prominent pages. Several studies (Olowu and Yahaya, 1993; Fawole and Olowu, 1997; Fawole and Olajide, 2012a; Fawole and Olajide 2012b; Olajide and Fawole, 2014) have reported non-strategic placement of agricultural related news items in Nigerian newspapers. It is a common knowledge that if stories are not placed in strategic locations in the newspapers, photographs accompany such stories cannot get a fair deal. It is the prerogatives of editor of the Newspapers for placement of stories and photographs in locations in the Newspapers.

Table 4
Prominence (placement) of agricultural photograph

Prominence	Frequency	Percentage
Other	144	100
Total	144	100

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is concluded that most agricultural news items covered in the newspapers are accompanied by photographs; the Guardian allotted more space to photographs in general. Whereas the Guardian had more space for agricultural produce and products compared to New Nigeria, the New Nigeria had more space for agricultural equipment than the Guardian. However, most of the photographs are neither representative of pictures painted in the story lines nor placed in strategic locations in the Newspapers. It is recommended that editors should ensure that photographs for agricultural news items and related development areas like health, environments and climate change be representative of the content of the story lines as well as placed in strategic location as space allows in their newspapers.

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