

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FORESTRY INFORMATION REPORTED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL COLUMNS OF TWO NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Despite availability and functioning of several newspapers in Nigeria, little or no change was observed in people's attitude towards forestry related issues with attendant decline in the country's forest resources. This paper reports the content analyses of forestry information reported by two prominent and national newspapers in Nigeria with the view to determining the frequency, space allotted, prominence and content categories of forestry related information in the newspapers from June 2009 to May 2014. Purposive sampling technique was used to select Guardian newspaper and Nigeria Tribune for the study. Data were collected from the editions on the days these newspapers have slot for environmental columns and were analysed using descriptive such as percentage and frequency as well as chi-square inferential statistics at $\alpha_{0.005}$. It was found that 76.9% of the environmental articles identified by the study were reported by Guardian while Nigerian Tribune reported 30.1%. Also, only 9.0% of the reported forestry related news were on the centre pages while 31.3% took up 201 – 300 cm² spaces of the newspapers under study. Climate change issues linked with forestry (CCLF) was the modal news category (26.9%) reported in the pages of the dailies under study. Further, a significant relationship was established between the newspapers and the space allotted, but none was observed between newspapers and prominence of forestry information as well as between the newspapers and categories of forestry information reported. Training of forestry information editors and canvassing for more sponsor of forestry information in Nigeria newspaper therefore becomes apt.

INTRODUCTION

Information dissemination is critical to sustainable forest management. According to Adekunle *et. al.* (2011), the lack of information is one of the factors responsible for the wanton deforestation and ecosystem abuse.. This abuse can generate significant negative externalities such as loss of biodiversity, increased risks of erosion, flooding, desertification, food insecurity; decrease in agricultural productivity and lowered water tables as well as increased carbon emission into the atmosphere which in turn leads to global warming and climate change, Globally the newspaper is a major force in informing public (Bitter, 1983, in Oladele and Boago, 2011) and they impact national and international efforts geared at economic progress and global understanding. Many individuals receive news from daily newspapers and it is important that the public be presented with objective information so that individuals can form their own opinions about complex or controversial issues, including those related to forestry.

Edgar *et. al.* (2008) defined content analysis as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. Content analysis can be used to give researchers insight into problems or hypotheses that can then be tested by more direct methods. It is also considered as an

unobtrusive or non-reactive method of social research. Materials used for content analysis include: letters, diaries, newspaper content, folk songs, short stories, and messages of radio, television, documents, texts or any symbols.

Nigeria is endowed with a large expanse of land and harbors different vegetation types. In 1970, the forest area was 93,420km² covering about 10% of the total land area (FORMECU, 1999). However, this decreased to 46,542km² in the 1990s (FORMECU, *Op. cit.*). The increasing rate of deforestation in Nigeria could be adduced to a gap in the awareness of people about the negative consequences of wanton destruction of forests. In spite of several newspapers in Nigeria, there seems to be no change in the attitude of the people towards forestry- related issues and there has been continuous decline of the forest. It can therefore be concluded that the way an issue is reported and perceived will definitely affect the manner it is reacted or responded to. This study therefore aims to analyse the content of forestry related information reported in the environmental columns of the Guardian and Tribune newspapers in Nigeria from June 2009 to May 2014 with the view to determining the frequency, space allotted and content categories of such information.

METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling technique was used to select The Guardian newspaper and Nigerian Tribune because both have column for environment issues; they are readily available and their continued existence for the period of the research, circulation, accessibility, consistency and national coverage were guaranteed. Guardian Newspaper was established by Chief Alex Ibru in 1983 while Nigerian Tribune was established in 1948 by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The newspaper editions for the study were selected purposively based on the frequency of features on environmental issues.

The data collected from the newspaper editions of each newspaper include: the content category under which each article falls, their frequency, space and prominence allotted. The content categories developed for this study were:

- Sustainable Forest Resources utilization (SFRU)
- Forest Management (FM)
- Investment in Forestry (IF)
- Forestry Extension (FE)
- Forest Depletion (FD)
- Forest Policy (FP) and
- Climate change issues linked with forestry (CCLF).

The Prominence refers to where the article appeared in the newspaper edition such as Front page, Middle page, Back page and other pages. Space allotted for each article was measured in centimetres using a metric ruler.

The Data collected were analysed using descriptive such as percentage and frequency distribution and inferential statistics such as chi-square test of independence and association. at $\alpha_{0.005}$ The descriptive statistics involved the use of. The inferential statistics of were also used in analyzing data generated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the frequency of the articles reported by the selected newspapers. The Guardian newspaper has the highest frequency of features and reports on forestry mater with a total of 206 articles representing 76.9% of the total number of features and reports while Nigerian Tribune had 62 constituting 30.1%. By implication, Guardian newspaper paid more attention to reporting forestry issues than Nigerian tribune. The result also shows that Nigerian newspaper editors report more of forestry related issues in environmental columns than they do report in the agricultural columns. A similar finding has been reported by Ilo (2011), who observed only 17, 15, 14 and 17 articles as being reported in the agricultural columns of Punch, Guardian, Nigerian Tribune and Vanguard newspapers, respectively, between 2005-2010. This is an indication of low reportage of forestry related issues within the period of the reported study. Makanjuola (2002) had identified inadequate financial gain by newspapers as a disincentive to the reportage of agricultural-related news items.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Forestry-Related Information Reported in the Selected Newspapers from 2009-2014

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Guardian	206	76.9
Nigerian Tribune	62	30.10
Total	268	100

Eighty four articles were within the range of 101-200cm² space allotment, which was the modal range of spaces allotted to forestry information in the two dailies under study (Table 2). The space allotted shows there will be an average in-depth coverage of issues and not only superficial information. Such a space will barely be sufficient to succinctly analyse and explain forest related, which is barely popular among most respondents, most especially from their environmental amelioration perspective.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of the Space Allotted to Forestry Articles in the Newspapers under Study

	Guardian	Nigeria Tribune	Total	Mode
Identified Spaces (Cm²)				
<100	14	5	19	
101 – 200	50	34	84	
201 – 300	40	16	56	
301 – 400	28	2	30	
401 – 500	20	2	22	
501 – 600	21	2	23	
601 – 700	12	1	13	
701 – 800	5	0	5	201 - 300
801 – 900	4	0	4	
901 – 1000	7	0	7	
1001 - 1100	3	0	3	
1101 – 1200	1	0	1	
1201 – 1300	1	0	1	
Total	206	62	268	

The result in Table 3 shows that forestry related issues were only reported in the middle pages and other pages. Generally, out of the articles documented by this study, 244 (91.0%) were reported on the other pages of the dailies sampled while 24 (9.0%) were reported on their middle pages. In the Guardian newspaper, 189 (91.7%) of the articles were reported on other pages while 17 (8.3%) were reported on the middle page. In Nigerian Tribune, 55 (88.7%) of the articles were reported on other pages while 7 (11.3%) were reported on the middle page. Placement of story is one of the methods through which the print media perform the agenda setting role, hence, the prominence of an article goes a long way in determining the measure of importance attached to it by the publisher and the audience as well. It was observed that Forestry related issues were not reported on the front and back pages of the newspapers sampled. This is because editors preferred fascinating stories such as crime and or politics, which would draw the attention of the public to patronise their dailies in preference to any other ones on the front pages.

Table 3: Cross Tab Analyses of the Prominence of Forestry-Related Articles in the Newspapers under Study

		Prominence		Total
		MP	OP	
Newspaper	Guardian	Freq.	17	189
		%	8.3	91.7
	Tribune	Freq.	7	55
		%	11.3	88.7
Total		Freq.	24	244
		%	9.0	91.0

Note: MP = Middle page
OP = Other Page

Chi square analyses of the dependence of space allotted to forestry related information (Table 2) and prominence of forestry related information (Table 3) on newspaper (Table 4) revealed that space allotted to forestry related information is dependent on the newspaper under examination ($\chi^2 = 33.02$; $df = 12$) but prominence of such information is not dependent on newspaper ($\chi^2 = 0.54$; $df = 1$). This means that the space allotted to forestry-related information is dependent on the newspaper. Thus each newspaper determines the space allotted for publishing which article. The study (Table 4) could however not establish a significant relationship between the newspapers sampled and the prominence they accorded forestry related issues reported. This implies that the prominence given to the forestry related matters by the two newspapers examined were similar. Invariably, forestry related information is not considered interesting enough to warrant placement in the front, back or middle pages of the studied newspapers where readers attention can easily be drawn to them.

Table 4: Chi-square Statistics of the Dependence of Space allotted and Prominence of Forestry Related Information on Newspaper

	χ^2	df	p	Remarks
Space allotted	33.021 ^a	12	0.001	Significant
Prominence	0.539 ^b	1	0.463	Not Significant

Climate change issue linked with forestry was the highest forest related news category (26.9%) reported by the newspapers under study. This was followed by issues categorized as FM, with 22% while issues categorized as FE and FD were represented with 13.1% each. The FP forest related news category was represented with 11.6%, IF with 10.4% and SFRU, 3.0% (Table 6).

However, the two newspapers published significant percentage of articles on climate change compared to other news categories such as sustainable forest resources utilization, forest management, forestry extension, investment in forestry, forest depletion and forest policy. This may be attributed to the current trend of the attention on climate change globally. This is similar to the findings of Popoola (2014), that issues on climate change were more reported in The Guardian, This Day, The Punch and Daily Trust than other issues like environmental pollution, deforestation, begging and destitution.

Table 6: Cross Tab Analyses of News Category of Forestry Related Information in the Newspapers under Study

Newspaper		News category								Total
		SFRU	FM	FE	IF	FD	FP	CCLF		
Guardian	Freq.	6	43	28	25	25	28	51	206	
	%	2.90%	20.90%	13.60%	12.10%	12.10%	13.60%	24.80%	100.00%	
Tribune	Freq.	2	16	7	3	10	3	21	62	
	%	3.20%	25.80%	11.30%	4.80%	16.10%	4.80%	33.90%	100.00%	
Total	Freq.	8	59	35	28	35	31	72	268	
	%	3.00%	22.00%	13.10%	10.40%	13.10%	11.60%	26.90%	100.00%	

Chi-square analysis in Table 7 shows that there is no significant relationship between the newspapers and the news category of the issues that were reported. ($\chi^2 = 8.377^a$, $p = 0.212$). This implies that news category is not dependent on the newspapers. This may be due to inadequate knowledge of, and lack of interest in forestry by the editors. Also, worthy of note is that the appearance of no category of forest related news is skewed to any of the two newspapers under study. Invariably, none of the newspapers is noted for any category of forestry related information.

Table 7: Chi-Square Statistics of the Dependence of News Category Reported on Newspaper

	χ^2	df	P	Remark
Dependence of news category reported on the newspaper	8.377 ^a	7	0.212	Not Significant

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the reportage of forestry information was better in environmental columns of the selected Nigerian daily newspapers than they are reported in the agricultural columns. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the reportage of forestry information was too low compared to other issues that are reported in Nigerian daily newspapers.

It was also observed that forestry information was not given sufficient prominence. Majority of the articles were found on other pages, few in the middle pages and none

was reported in the front or the back page of these Nigerian dailies. This obviously has impact on the attention that the public will give to these forestry related issues. The study also revealed that issues on climate change had the highest percentage amongst other news categories that were reported. However, emphasis placed on reportage of issues on climate change cannot be effective towards reshaping the negative attitude of the public if issues like forest management, forest depletion are not also emphasized. This is because if the latter are being emphasized, it would inform the public about the implication of various actions that will either mitigate or aggravate the effect of climate change.

RECOMMENDATION

The training of editors handling forestry issues in environmental columns of Nigerian daily newspapers cannot be overemphasized. This is to give equal chance to the reportage of all the news categories to avoid the repetition of only one of the news categories when they have basic knowledge of what they are reporting. There should be more sponsorship on the coverage of forestry activities by the media; in this way, the public will be fed with recent happenings in forestry.

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