

Journalists' Attitudes towards the Coverage of Agricultural and Rural Development News in Ogun State.

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Abstract

The study examined the journalists' attitudes towards the coverage of Agricultural and Rural Development News in Ogun State. Multistage technique was used to select 40 journalists from Print and Electronic media organizations in Ogun State. Primary data were collected with structured questionnaire. Chi-square and Spearman correlation were used to analyze the data collected. Result showed that most (57.5%) of the journalists were male and 72.5% married. Their mean age was 30.6years. About 70.0% were with a minimum of a Higher National Diploma (HND) qualification. Majority (55.0%) were Christians while 45.0% were Muslims. Most (85.0%) of the journalists live in urban areas while few (15.0%) live in semi-urban areas. Result showed that 85.0% of the journalists were operating on a permanent basis while 15.0% were on part time/freelance appointments. Half (50.0%) of the journalists had 6-10 years work experience. Result further showed that 40.0% of the journalists were constrained by organizational problems, 75.0% by lack of transportation to rural areas for news coverage, 92.5% by bad roads to rural areas, 55.0% by inadequate equipment and 90.0% were constrained by lack of interest in agricultural news by most of the members of the audience. Chi square analysis showed a significant association between age ($\chi^2=82.15$, $p<0.05$), work experience ($\chi^2=80.21$, $p<0.05$) and the perception of journalists toward the coverage of agricultural and rural development news. Result further showed an inverse relationship between the constraints experienced by the journalists and their reportage of agricultural and rural development news ($r=-0.24$, $p=0.00$). It was concluded that most of the journalists were not favorably disposed to the coverage of agricultural and rural development news owing to the identified constraints and challenges.

Keywords: Journalist, Attitude, Agricultural News, Rural development

1. Introduction

Agriculture is a very important sector in Nigeria's economy. In spite of the presence of petroleum, Nigeria is undoubtedly an agricultural economy having tremendous potentials and resources for providing food and agricultural raw materials for export and domestic industries. The country's total land area is about 98million hectares. Besides, she is endowed with a favorable climate suitable for the production of wide variety of crops and other agricultural products.

However, with the very high population growth in the country (about 3.5% per annum) coupled with the crude agricultural production methods employed, there is the fear that the resultant low productivity cannot match the food demanded for the nation. This situation may worsen in the nearest future if drastic measures are not taken immediately to arrest the imminent food crisis or insecurity. For Nigeria to overcome this critical condition, she could have to adopt agricultural production techniques that will relate effectively with researcher and ultimate users of research findings. Much of the valuable research carried out by National Agricultural Research systems does not reach people who could use them (CTA, 1991). As a result, it holds that the problem with Nigeria's agricultural and rural development has been her inability to establish an effective agricultural information delivery system; one of which is timely and systematic transmission of useful and relevant agricultural information from the research station via various communication media to the intended audience and the most serious constraints to agricultural development in Nigeria and in Africa as it were, is the limited access to agricultural information (Adekanye 1995).

Much of the food consumed in Nigeria is still being produced largely by small scale farmers who cultivate about 1-2 hectare of land. Majority of these small scale farmers are illiterate with very low access to media especially television and prints considering their differences in literacy, economic capability, social status and accessibility to research and information which made it difficult for some of the government oriented programmes to have impact on the farmers in terms of which programmes are more popular with the farmers and why.

It is of note that agricultural and rural development news and programmes have gradually disappeared from our electronic media and all forms of print media. What exactly could be the reason for this negative trend?

What are the challenges facing journalists who intend airing this news, and in what way can they be encouraged to air these news and programmes? Various successive governments in Nigeria had come with various agricultural programmes with different objectives but with the common goal of making food more abundant. Such agricultural programmes included the Operation feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976 in River Basin and Rural Development Authority (NALDA), the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) and the National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA).

In view of this, Matanmi (1991) advocated that the main problem facing the developing world today, particularly Nigeria, is not the lack of efficient technologies and scientific discoveries needed for economic growth and rural change but that of their effective utilization for the social and economic transformation of the country. This, he contended would depend to a great extent, on the speed with which the technology is transferred from the source (Agricultural Universities and Research Institutes) to the ultimate users so that they clearly understand, accept and apply it in their day-to-day agricultural practices. This in effect demands a suitable and effective communication system. A missing aspect to their developmental programmes is the ability to communicate effectively to the farmers as the channels used for passing a new idea to receiver is important in his decision to adopt or reject it. The effectiveness of extension services hinges on effective communication through the right channels to the target audience. It is known that farmers need information on agricultural production. Such information help the farmers to participate more in agricultural production activities (Oyekunle 2011) the basic kinds of information needed by these farmers are hitherto well defined.

Communication can only be effective if the media chosen to communicate do so with more clarity and precision (Olowu, 1999). Media are means of transmission of information from a source to a receiver. A medium can be verbal, visual or the combination of the two. They are important in carrying the new research results to farmers for application on the farms. The attainment of desirable socio economic status depends to some extent on the communication system adopted as it is the communication system that makes news, facts figures, and opinions available to the public. With the potentials of newspapers, radio and television as media of agricultural information, Nigerian journalists have often been accused of poor reportage of agricultural and rural development news. What then is responsible for this low spate of reportage? Are there individual, institutional or societal factors that have negated the potentials of newspapers, radio and television for agricultural and rural development in Nigeria?

It is against this background that this study provided answers to the following research questions: is there any need for agricultural and rural development news, to what extent do journalists report agricultural and rural development news, what are the constraints associated with the coverage and reportage of agricultural and rural development news, and how can journalists be encouraged to give more attention to agricultural and rural development news? The general objective of the study was to determine the perception of journalists towards the coverage and reportage of agricultural and rural development news while the specific objectives were to: determine the need for agricultural and rural development news, determine the extent to which journalists cover and report agricultural and rural development news, identify the constraints associated with the coverage and reportage of agricultural and rural development news and to determine how journalists can be encouraged to give more attention to the coverage and reportage of agricultural and rural development news. The following hypotheses stated in the null form were tested: There is no significant relationship between the socio economic characteristics of the journalists and their perception of the coverage of agricultural and rural development news. There is no significant relationship between the constraints experienced by the journalists and the coverage of agricultural and rural development news.

2. Research methodology

The study was carried out in Ogun State, which is located in the southwestern Nigeria. It has a tropical climate with rainforest vegetation on its southern part and a derived savannah on its northern end. Ogun State has twenty (20) Local Government Areas (LGAs). It is bounded in the West by the Republic of Benin, in the South by Lagos State and Atlantic Ocean, in the East by Ondo State and in the North by Oyo and Osun States. The population of the study comprised of journalists cutting across radio and television as well as various newspaper organizations in the state. All the radio and Television stations and Newspaper organizations that have daily editions and published in English language were used for this study. The reporters were contacted on individual basis for questionnaire administration. Because of the limited number of these categories of staff; all accessible reporters in these media organizations constituted the sample size. The reporters were drawn from rock city FM, Ogun State Television, Ogun State Broadcasting Corporation, Paramount FM, NTA Channel 12, This Day, Nigerian Compass, Tribune, Vanguard, The Westerner, Punch, The Sun, The Nation, Daily Independent and Guardian Newspapers. A total of 40 journalists were used as respondents for the study.

Data for the study were collected from the journalists through the use of questionnaires. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity through critical review by experts in agricultural communication. The

research instruments were administered to 20 randomly selected journalists who were not included in the actual study population. Scores were assigned to the responses of the selected journalists. Total scores for each period were computed and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to determine the correlation between the two set of scores. The 'r' value obtained was 0.87 on the average indicating a high degree of consistency and reliability.

Variables such as sex, marital status, religion nature of appointment and education were measured at nominal level while age and work experience were measured at interval level. A five point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) was used to determine the attitude and perception of journalists towards the coverage of agriculture and rural development news.. Constraint associated with the coverage of agricultural news were harvested from the journalists and ranked to determine the severity of each of them. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency counts were used to describe the socio-economic characteristics of the journalists while inferential statistics such as the chi-square and the Spearman Rank Correlation were used to test the significance of association between relevant variables in the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Journalists

Data in Table 1 showed that majority of journalist are within the active age of 31-40 years with an average of 30.6years. A few of those below 30years of age were involved. This indicates that journalist is a profession for the active and vibrant individuals that are mobile enough to nose for agricultural news. Majority (57.5%) of journalists were males while 42.5% were females. This indicates that men are more involved in journalism probably due to the physical and mental task involved in nosing for agricultural news. Most (82.5%) of the respondents were married while 17.5% were single. This indicates that the majorities of those involved in journalism are responsible and have family to take care of.

Majority (97.5%) of the respondents were well educated having a minimum of an HND. More than half (55.5%) were Christians while 44.5% were muslims. Majority (75.0% of the journalists were reporters, 15.0% deals with editorials while 10.0% were columnists. Majority of the respondents (85%) live in urban areas compared to the few (15.0%) that live or reside in semi-urban areas. Most (85.0% of the respondents were employed on a permanent basis while 15.0% were on Part time/Freelance appointments. This indicates that the journalist will be committed to duty as majority of them tend to earn a living from it. Half of the journalists' (50%) have been in the profession for less than 5years with 32.5% having practiced journalism for 6-10years, and 12.5% have practiced for 11-15years. Over half (62.5%) of the journalists had worked in media organizations prior to their current place of work. Thirty seven point five percent (37.5%) were new comers in the journalism profession.

3.2 Journalists' attitude to the Coverage of Agricultural and Rural Development News

Data in Table 2 shows that majority (60.0%) of journalists agreed that Agricultural news are difficult to gather while 15.0% disagreed. Most (62.5%) of the journalists believed that they have little or no interest in Agricultural news while few (32.50% were of the opinion that many people listen to, and read agricultural news. Eighty five percent (85.0%) of the journalists believed that agricultural news is very important. Majority (87.5%) of them opined that it is not necessary for reporters to leave or reside in rural areas before they can successfully cover agricultural news. Over 70% of the journalists agreed that reporting scientific issues is difficult especially in the area of use of terminologies. Most (72.5%) of the respondents did not subscribe to the establishment of agricultural newspapers, while over 70% of them opposed to having specialized agricultural reporters.

3.3 Constraints Associated with the Coverage of Agricultural and Rural Development News

Data in table 3 shows that 75% of the journalists indicated that inadequate transportation has been a major challenge towards coverage of agricultural news. Majority (87.5%) of them believed that the distance to rural areas was a major limiting factor hindering reportage of agricultural news. Over half (57.5%) of the journalists agreed that one major factor hindering the coverage of Agricultural news is their inability to recognize the needs of the rural people. On the other hand, 42.5% disagreed with that statement. Over half (60%) of the journalists did not agree that organizational problems hinder the coverage of Agricultural news. More than half (55%) of the journalists agreed inadequate equipment for coverage is key to poor coverage of agricultural news. Most (90%) of them agreed that lack of interest in agricultural news on their part and that of the general public contributes largely to the poor coverage of agricultural and rural development news. Majority (92.5%) of the journalists agreed that bad road networks to rural areas constitute a major challenge for reporters who wish to cover agricultural news while over 90% of them saw their lack of knowledge of sciences as a constraint to effective reportage of agricultural news.

3.4 Regularity of reportage of Agricultural and rural development issues

Data in table 4 shows that 57.5% of media organizations seldom cover agricultural and rural

development news. Few (20.0%) of the organizations covered agricultural and rural development news regularly while 22.5% did not cover at all.

3.5 Hypotheses Testing

There is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the journalists and their attitudes towards the coverage of agricultural and rural development news. The socio-economic characteristic of the journalists that were considered are: age, sex, religion, marital status, education level, professional status, home background, nature of appointment and years spent in the profession. Result showed that there is significant relationship between age, work experience of the journalists and their perception of the coverage of agricultural news. In other words, age and work experience determine how the journalist perceive the reportage of agricultural and rural development news.

3.6 Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between the constraints experienced by the journalists and their coverage of agricultural and rural development news. Data in Table 6 shows a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.22$ and $P = 0.00$. This implies that the constraints experienced by the respondents are inversely related to their coverage of agricultural and rural development news. The inverse correlation shows that the constraints impacted negatively on journalists. The more the severity of the constraints the less the coverage of agricultural and rural development news and vice-versa.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study assessed the attitudes and perception of journalist in Ogun State towards the coverage of agricultural and rural development news. It was found that Nigerian journalists realize the important role they have to play in rural development. Despite this realization, they were unfavorably disposed to the coverage of agricultural and rural development news neither do they favor having agricultural newspapers and specialized agricultural reporters. There is relative inconsistency in the coverage of agricultural and rural development news by the journalists. The constraints they experienced are a major setback to the coverage of agricultural news. These findings make it imperative for rural development efforts to tactically include agricultural development communicators who will foster the aims and objectives of those projects as they are likely to be ignored by the main stream Nigerian press. In a similar manner, training of development communicator should receive appropriate attention in the University.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Media organizations should embrace agricultural and rural development news their daily news bulletins.
2. Training of development communicator should receive appropriate attention in higher institutions of learning.
3. The roads linking the rural areas to the urban areas should be made motorable to ensure that these journalists who reside in semi-urban areas are able to nose for news in rural areas.
4. Journalists should be encouraged to be more interested in the coverage of agricultural and rural development news through incentives and the provision of necessary equipment and facilities.

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Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of the respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Sex	Male	23	57.5	
	Female	17	42.5	
Age	21-30	14	35.0	
	31-40	20	50.0	30.6
	40-50	5	12.5	
	Above 50	1	2.5	
Marital status				
	Single	7	17.5	
	Married	29	82.5	
Educational level				
	ND	12	30.0	
	HND	4	10.0	
	First Degree	17	42.5	
	Masters	6	15.0	
	Others	1	2.5	
Religion	Christianity	22	55.0	
	Islam	18	45.0	
	Traditional	0	0.0	
	Others	1	2.5	
Professional status				
	Editorial	6	15.0	
	Columnist	4	10.0	
	Reportorial	30	75.0	
Home Background				
	Semi-urban	3	7.5	
	Urban	37	92.5	
Nature of Appointment				
	Permanent	34	85.0	
	Part time/Freelance	6	15.0	
Work Experience				
	Less than 5yrs	13	32.5	
	6-10yrs	20	50.0	
	11-15yrs	5	12.5	6.6
	16 and above	2	5.0	
Worked in media				
	Yes	25	62.5	
	No	15	37.5	

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

Table 2: Journalists' attitudes to the coverage of agricultural and rural development news

Attitude Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Agricultural New is difficult to gather	10(25.0)	18(45.0)	6(15.0%)	2(5.0)	4(10.0)
Easy to gather Agric news	6(15.0)	5(12.5)	7(17.5)	10(25.0)	12(30.0)
Lack of interest by the audience	8(20.0)	17(42.5)	2(5.0)	8(20.0)	5(12.5)
Many listen to and read agricultural news	0(0.0)	13(32.5)	4(10)	10(25.0)	13(32.5)
Agricultural news is not important	2(5.0)	4(10.0)	2(5.0)	5(12.5)	26(65.5)
Agricultural news is very important	14(35.0)	20(50.0)	3(7.5)	0(0.0)	3(7.5)
Agricultural news reporter should live in rural areas	0(0.0)	5(12.5)	2(5.0)	14(35.0)	19(47.5)
Reporting scientific issues is difficult because of terminologies	15(37.5)	14(35.0)	2(5.0)	4(10.0)	5(12.5)
Having specialized agric reporters	3(7.5)	1(2.5)	6(15.0)	12(30.0)	18(45.0)

Source: Field survey, 2011. *Figures in Parentheses are Percentages

Table 4. Frequency of Organization reportage of Agricultural and Rural Development Issues

	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly	8	20.0
Seldom	23	57.5
Never	9	22.5
Total	40	100.0

Table 5: Chi-square result of the relationship between the Socio-economic characteristics of the journalist and their attitudes towards the coverage of Agricultural and Rural Development News

Variable	X ²	DF	P value	Decision
Age	82.15	60	0.03	Significant
Sex	18.85	20	0.53	Not significant
Marital status	69.62	60	0.18	Not significant
Educational level	68.45	60	0.21	Not significant
Religion	37.83	60	0.98	Not significant
Professional status	51.59	40	0.10	Not Significant
Family background	22.63	20	0.30	Not Significant
Nature of appointment	36.76	40	0.61	Not significant
Work experience	80.21	60	0.04	Significant

Source: Field survey May, 2011.

Table 6: Relationship between the constraints experienced by journalists and their coverage of agricultural and rural development news.

Variable	rho	P	Decision
Journalist' constraints	-0.22	0.00	S

Source: Field Survey 2011

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