

**NATURE OF PLACEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION IN SELECTED
NIGERIA NEWSPAPERS: IMPLICATION FOR NEWS ACCESSIBILITY TO
FARMERS**

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ABSTRACT

The study conducted content analysis of agricultural news in four Nigerian newspapers namely Punch, Vanguard, Observers and Hope published between January 2022 and December, 2023. Specifically, it described the nature of placement prominence given to agricultural coverage on pages of selected newspapers in Nigeria, ascertained the sources of agricultural information published by the selected newspapers and examined the frequency of published of agricultural news. Using a content analysis design and a multi-sampling technique, 384 newspaper editions were selected and coded using a validated code sheet with an inter-coder reliability coefficient exceeding 0.80 (Holistics formular). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Kruskal-wallis test to determine difference in placement, while analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences in the frequency of coverage and sources of agricultural information across the newspapers. Findings showed that agricultural news received low prominence across all papers, with the majority of reports placed on inside/special pages rather than front or back pages. Agricultural news was predominantly brief or moderately sized (1-10 inches), and photographs were the most common visual aid, while cartons and explanatory graphics were rarely used. Across the value chain, crop production (40 reports), marketing (71), and government policies (72) received comparatively higher coverage than technical areas such as veterinary services (81) and nursery practices (10). The study concludes that national newspapers provide broader more development oriented agricultural reporting than state-based newspapers, though overall coverage remains inadequate in prominence and diversity. It recommends that Nigerian print media adopt more comprehensive and far more inclusive reporting strategies, increase the use of data driven visual and prioritize a wider range of agricultural sub-sectors

Keywords: Agricultural Information, Prominence, Punch, Vanguard, Content Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of agricultural information dissemination through print media has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention, as evidenced by numerous studies that explore its dimensions, impact, and evolving nature. Print media, encompassing newspapers, magazines, and journals, has traditionally been a cornerstone in communicating agricultural developments, innovations, and policies to a wide array of audiences. This introduction leverages insights from

an array of scholarly works to illuminate the significance, trends, and implications of agricultural information coverage in print media.

Central to this discourse is the recognition that agricultural news plays a crucial role in educating farmers, shaping public opinion, and influencing policy decisions. As highlighted by Ani, Olajide, and Onyebuchi (2018), and Ejeh *et al.* (2018), the coverage of agricultural topics in newspapers not only provides essential information to farmers but also surfaces issues of corruption and inefficiencies in the agricultural sector. Similarly, the work of Akhter, Hussain, and Ahsan (2021) underscores the importance of mass media as a primary source of agricultural information, offering insights into the trends and gaps in current media practices.

In the realm of agricultural development, the role of print media as a conduit for disseminating vital information cannot be overstated. The intricate relationship between agricultural communication and farmer enlightenment has become increasingly pivotal, especially in developing countries where agriculture forms the backbone of the economy and sustenance. This content analysis delves into the portrayal, coverage, and effectiveness of agricultural information in print media, unraveling the layers of influence exerted by newspapers and journals on farming communities and agricultural practices.

The landscape of agricultural reporting, as explored in various studies (e.g., Ani *et al.*, 2018; Anorue & Nwogbo, 2020; Ejeh *et al.*, 2018), reveal a complex tapestry of themes ranging from coverage of agricultural policies to the dissemination of innovative farming techniques. Akhter, Hussain, and Ahsan (2021) provide an overview of literature emphasizing mass media as a crucial source of agricultural information, echoing the sentiments of Donye (2018) regarding media performance in information dissemination to rural farmers. This analysis further draws upon the insights of Othman (2019) and Shaikh, Hassan, and Farooqui (2020), who investigate the role of mass media in the dissemination of agricultural information, particularly in the context of developing countries like Nigeria and Pakistan.

Prominence of articles concerns the placement and presentation of articles, which attract the reader's attention (Granner *et al.* 2010). Factors related to prominence include placement of the article in the main section of the newspaper, placement on the front page of a section, placement on the top of the page, headline font size, article length and presence of pictures or other visuals (Michaelson and Griffin, 2005). According to Granner *et al.* (2010), this analysis takes into account six factors: the publication where the article appears, date of appearance, the overall size of the article, where in the publication it appears, the presence of photography or other artwork and the size of headlines. In a typical prominence analysis, each element is given a weight that is factored into a overall score for each article (Michaelson and Griffin, 2005). That score determines the prominence of the article.

Certain publications in The Punch or the Sun are generally rated as having higher prominence than other Dailies that do not have national coverage or wide readership (Diri, 2016). Vinyo (2017), posited that this assessment is generally based on the size and perceived quality of the readership. Date of appearance can also be a factor since readership can be much higher on specific days (e.g., Sunday or Monday).

In this analysis, articles that receive higher prominence scores are given more emphasis in the analysis since it is assumed that either the higher readership, prominence of the publication, size and placement of the article or a combination of these factors leads to higher communications effectiveness (Granner *et al.* 2010). This research aims to describe the nature of placement prominence to agricultural coverage of pages of selected newspapers in Nigeria. Specifically, it

describes the nature of placement prominence given to agricultural coverage on pages of selected newspapers in Nigeria; ascertained sources of agricultural news carried by selected newspapers and examine the frequency of publishing agricultural news

2. 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 newspaper (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 newspaper. Thus, the total sample size was (4 Punch newspapers per month x 12 months + 4 Vanguard newspapers x 12 months + 4 Nigerian Observer newspaper x 12 months + 4 Hope newspapers x 12 months) x 2 years = 384 newspapers. Therefore, 384 issues in the published selected newspapers formed the sample size for this study.

Nature of Placement of agricultural issues in newspapers: it was measured by counting the number of items that agricultural issues feature on the front, middle and back pages of newspaper. These pages are referred to as the prominent pages of the newspaper. Data were analysed using percentage, Kruskal–Wallis and ANOVA

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nature of placement prominence given to agricultural coverage on pages of newspapers

Results in Table 1 show the distribution of agricultural news items across four Nigerian newspapers as namely: The Punch, Vanguard, Observer, and Hope, using four categories of placement prominence such as the front page, back page, centre page, and special/other pages. The results show substantial differences in the visibility and editorial priority given to agricultural news, with national newspapers demonstrating relatively greater prominence than state-owned or local papers.

A review of the data shows that agricultural news receives limited front-page visibility across all the four newspapers. With only 8.9% of agricultural news appearing on the front page in *Punch*, 8.8% in *Vanguard*, 6.3% in *Observer*, and 5.7% in *Hope*. The findings indicate a tendency to treat agricultural news as secondary compared to politics, business, security incidents, and socio-cultural events that traditionally dominate the headlines. These findings align with global research trends which show that agriculture is frequently relegated to non-priority positions despite its socio-economic importance, largely because editors perceive it as routine or slow-developing news that lacks the immediacy associated with front-page value (Sullivan, 2019; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). In Nigeria specifically, the tendency to prioritize political developments over rural and agricultural issues has long shaped editorial decision-making, even though agriculture remains central to national livelihoods and economic stability (Fawole & Olajide, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

The back-page coverage follows a similar pattern. While the back page is a traditionally important news location in print journalism, it is often reserved for human-interest stories, sports, or soft features. In this research, agricultural stories occupy only between 4.5% and 6.7% of this space across the newspapers. The relatively modest allocation reinforces the notion that agricultural topics seldom receive strategic positioning that could enhance their visibility or public salience. The national newspapers again outperform the state newspapers in this category, a trend consistent with earlier studies showing that national dailies possess stronger editorial capacity to diversify content and highlight economically significant themes such as food inflation, commodity price movements, and agricultural financing (Adegbola *et al.*, 2020; Adebayo & Omoteso, 2019).

For the centre-page placement, it is often associated with feature writing, investigative reporting, or in-depth analysis, that shows moderately higher engagement with agricultural topics. While the *Punch* and *Vanguard* record the largest proportions here, at 22.3% and 19.5% respectively. This suggests a greater willingness among national newspapers to contextualize agricultural issues in ways that appeal to a broader audience, such as linking them to national food security debates, climate change concerns, technological innovations in farming, and government policy interventions. The slightly lower representation in *Observer* (15.9%) and *Hope* (13.6%) can be attributed to their smaller editorial teams and narrower news agenda, which often prioritize local politics and community events over extended analytical coverage of agriculture (Ibraheem & Olorunfemi, 2020). Nonetheless, the presence of agricultural stories on the centre pages of all newspapers indicates that agriculture is recognized as an area that sometimes merits deeper engagement, even if not consistently highlighted.

The most striking pattern in the results presented in Table 1 is the overwhelming dominance of agricultural news appearing on special or other inside pages. Between 62.1% and 76.1% of agricultural reports across the four newspapers are placed in these less prominent sections. Inside pages in print media conventionally carry routine stories, follow-ups, briefs, and specialized columns. Their high usage for agricultural reporting suggests that editors overwhelmingly categorize agricultural news as routine or specialized content rather than as urgent matters requiring prime visibility. This trend mirrors international observations that agricultural journalism is often confined to special pages, pull-outs, or supplements, due in part to limited

newsroom expertise in agricultural reporting and competition for space with politics, business, entertainment, and sports (Jha & Dhaka, 2020; Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2021). The particularly high proportions in the state newspapers of about 73.0% in *Observer* and 76.1% in *Hope*, which underlines structural constraints that often limit the placement of agriculture in more impactful positions. Such constraints include limited pagination, dependence on government directives, and a lack of dedicated agricultural desks, all of which contribute to the marginalization of agricultural issues in these outlets (Ezeah & Emmanuel, 2016).

More broadly, the differences between national and state newspapers reflect deeper structural and institutional factors shaping agricultural communication in Nigeria. National newspapers typically have stronger financial resources, larger newsrooms, broader readership bases, and more diverse content strategies, enabling them to accommodate specialized coverage such as agriculture. They also tend to report issues of national significance such as food scarcity, flooding, agricultural budget allocations, and national policy reforms that naturally draw editorial interest (Ajayi & Adelekan, 2020). State and community newspapers, by contrast, are more constrained financially and editorially; their coverage tends to emphasize political events, local governance, and community affairs, often relegating agricultural content to less visible sections even when agriculture is locally significant.

The placement patterns observed in Table 1 have key implications for public engagement and policy discourse. The limited visibility of agricultural news reduces opportunities for farmers, policymakers, agribusiness actors, and the wider public to access timely and actionable information. In a period marked by climate variability, global food supply disruptions, and national concerns over food security, low prominence in the media may hinder the communication of critical knowledge related to climate-smart agriculture, market changes, pest outbreaks, and sustainable farming practices (Ayanlade & Radeny, 2020; FAO, 2021). The findings also undermine the media's agenda-setting potential in shaping public and governmental attention toward the agricultural sector. Scholars argue that consistent and prominent media coverage is essential for elevating an issue to the public agenda and influencing policy direction (McCombs, 2020; Wonneberger, 2018). Thus, the relegation of agricultural news to inside pages risks diminishing its perceived urgency and relevance to national development.

Based on the interpretation of results in Table 1, it was revealed that although agricultural news is present across Nigerian newspapers, its placement indicates relatively low editorial priority. National newspapers demonstrate moderately higher prominence compared to state or local papers, reflecting differences in capacity, audience, and editorial orientation. Overall, the patterns confirm the persistence of agriculture's marginal position in the Nigerian media landscape, consistent with both national and international research on agricultural communication.

Table 1: Nature of placement prominence given to agricultural coverage on pages of newspapers

Placement	Punch (Freq / %)	Vanguard (Freq / %)	Observer (Freq / %)	Hope (Freq / %)
Front Page	20 (8.9%)	18 (8.8%)	8 (6.3%)	5 (5.7%)
Back Page	15 (6.7%)	12 (5.9%)	6 (4.8%)	4 (4.5%)
Centre Page	50 (22.3%)	40 (19.5%)	20 (15.9%)	12 (13.6%)
Special/Other Pages	139 (62.1%)	135 (65.9%)	92 (73.0%)	67 (76.1%)
Subtotal	224 (100%)	205 (100%)	126 (100%)	88 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

Total Number of Agricultural News from All Sources and their shares different Tasks

Results in Table 2 presents the total agricultural news items published by the four newspapers under investigation, and the percentage shares of these items that originated from three major sources: news agencies/other media publications, politicians and government officials, and daily events or occurrences. The distribution provides important insights into the sourcing practices and editorial tendencies within Nigerian agricultural journalism. These sourcing patterns influence not only the frequency and prominence of agricultural news, but also the framing, tone, and diversity of perspectives represented in print media.

As shown in the table, the highest share of agricultural news items across all newspapers comes from **daily events or occurrences**, representing 19.2% in *Punch*, 19% in *Vanguard*, 18.3% in *Observer*, and 19.3% in *Hope*. This indicates that agricultural reporting in Nigeria is heavily driven by episodic, event-based journalism such as farm visits, commodity price changes, weather-related events, market disruptions, farmers' protests, or public celebrations like World Food Day. The dominance of event-driven news reflects the broader Nigerian media culture, which prioritizes immediacy, recency, and incident-based reporting over investigative or analytical journalism (Fawole & Olajide, 2021). Nigerian studies have long argued that event-based sourcing limits the depth of agricultural communication because it often excludes structural issues such as land tenure, value-chain inefficiencies, technological adoption barriers, and climate vulnerabilities (Akinbile & Alabi, 2018; Ibraheem & Olorunfemi, 2020). The findings of this study reinforce this pattern, showing that daily occurrences remain the most frequent sources shaping agricultural news narratives.

The second most prominent source category across all newspapers is **politicians and government officials**. *Punch* attributes 16.5% of its agricultural news to political or governmental sources, followed by *Vanguard* with 17.1%, *Observer* with 17.5%, and *Hope* with 15.9%. The relatively high reliance on government sources reflects the significant role of the Nigerian government in agricultural regulation, policy formulation, input distribution, and national food security programs. It is common for newspapers to rely on ministries, state commissioners, local government officials, and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture for updates on policy reforms, subsidy announcements, mechanization schemes, and strategic interventions. Nigerian researchers, such as Ajayi and Adelekan (2020), note that government elites serve as

authoritative sources and therefore dominate media narratives because they are more accessible to reporters and newsrooms than farmers or agribusiness stakeholders. However, this dependence also introduces a risk of top-down reporting, where agricultural news may reflect official rhetoric rather than the lived realities of rural farmers.

The reliance on politicians as sources is also consistent with the broader politicization of agricultural activities in Nigeria, where government actors frequently use agricultural programs to build political capital, announce achievements, or secure public support (Ayinde *et al.*, 2020). This can lead to an overrepresentation of policy announcements at the expense of critical evaluations of program outcomes, challenges, or implementation gaps. The slightly higher proportion observed in *Observer* (17.5%) suggests that state-owned or regional newspapers may be even more reliant on government figures, possibly due to institutional or political affiliations that influence editorial direction.

The third major source category is **news agencies and other media publications**, which account for shares ranging from 14.7% in *Punch*, 15.6% in *Vanguard*, 16.7% in *Observer*, to 14.8% in *Hope*. The consistent use of news agency content such as reports from NAN (News Agency of Nigeria) highlights the role of syndicated stories in shaping agricultural coverage. News agencies provide cost-effective, ready-to-publish stories that are especially essential for newspapers with limited editorial staff or specialized agricultural reporters. Scholars such as Nwankwo and Udeze (2019) argue that reliance on news agencies promotes uniformity in content but limits originality and diversity of agricultural perspectives. This may explain why agricultural stories often appear similar across different newspapers, reflecting a shared dependence on agency reports rather than locally generated, field-based journalism. The relatively high proportion in *Observer* (16.7%) may reflect the limited resources available to state newspapers for original reporting.

Across the newspapers, *Punch* (224) and *Vanguard* (205) publish more agricultural stories than *Observer* (126) and *Hope* (88). This difference highlights disparities in editorial capacity, financial resources, and professional expertise between national and regional newspapers. National newspapers, which have wider circulation and more robust institutional structures, are better resourced to cover agriculture as part of their development reporting mandate (Adegbola *et al.*, 2020). By contrast, local newspapers often face budgetary constraints, smaller staff size, and limited access to training in specialized areas such as agricultural communication (Ogunleye & Olaniyi, 2021).

Table 2: Total Number of Agricultural News from All Sources and their shares different Tasks

Newspaper	Total Agric News Items (All Sources)	Share from News agency/other media publication (%) freq.	Share from Politicians and government officials (%) Freq.	Share from Daily events/Occurrence (%) Freq.
Punch	224	14.7	16.5	19.2
Vanguard	205	15.6	17.1	19
Observer	126	16.7	17.5	18.3
Hope	88	14.8	15.9	19.3

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023**Sources of Agricultural news carried by the selected newspapers**

Evidence in Table 3 presents the distribution of sources relied upon by the selected newspapers (*Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Observer*, and *Hope*) in reporting agricultural news. The sourcing patterns reflect the structural dynamics of agricultural journalism in Nigeria and reveal the actors who shape media narratives around agriculture. The table provides critical insight into how source selection influences the depth, diversity, and credibility of agricultural information disseminated to the public.

Across all the four newspapers, **daily events and occurrences constitute the most frequently used source category**, although their proportional dominance varies across outlets. *Punch* relies on daily occurrences for 22.9% of its agricultural news, *Vanguard* for 21.9%, *Observer* for 18.8%, and *Hope* for 17.7%. This confirms the predominance of **event-driven reporting**, which is a common feature in Nigerian journalism. Event-driven agricultural news typically includes activities such as crop harvest festivals, weather events, outbreaks of pests or diseases, market disruptions, disaster-related losses, and ad hoc government interventions. Scholars argue that such episodic coverage, while useful for immediacy, tends to produce superficial reporting that overlooks structural agricultural challenges (Fawole & Olajide, 2021; Ibraheem & Olorunfemi, 2020). The dominance of daily events implies that agricultural communication remains largely reactive, driven by unfolding incidents rather than proactive investigations into systemic issues.

The second most prominent source category is **politicians and government officials**, representing 18.8% of sources in *Punch* and *Vanguard*, 14.6% in *Observer*, and 12.5% in *Hope*. This reliance reflects the influential and central role of the state in agricultural development in Nigeria. Government officials frequently announce policies, launch input distribution programs, inaugurate projects, or comment on food security challenges. Newspaper dependence on political sources is not unique to agriculture; it mirrors broader Nigerian media patterns where political elites dominate news agendas due to their accessibility and perceived authority (Ajayi & Adelekan, 2020). However, heavy reliance on government sources can limit critical scrutiny and lead to one-sided reporting that amplifies official perspectives while silencing grassroots realities. This is particularly concerning given Nigeria's history of controversial agricultural interventions such as fertilizer subsidy mismanagement and inconsistent policy implementation that require investigative scrutiny rather than press-release journalism (Ayinde *et al.*, 2020).

Another key source category is **news agencies and other media publications**, accounting for between 10.4% and 14.6% of sources across the four newspapers. The substantial reliance on syndicated stories from agencies such as the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) underscores resource-related constraints, particularly in newsrooms lacking specialized agricultural correspondents. According to Nwankwo and Udeze (2019), Nigerian newspapers increasingly depend on agency content as a cost-saving strategy, resulting in homogeneity of agricultural news across outlets. While syndicated reports help maintain information flow, they often lack localized details, contextual analysis, and field-based perspectives that would enrich agricultural discourse.

The table also highlights notable but moderate contributions from **researchers**, who constitute 10.4% of sources in *Punch*, 11.5% in *Vanguard*, and lower proportions in *Observer* (7.3%) and *Hope* (6.3%). The relatively low representation of researchers suggests limited integration of scientific knowledge into agricultural reporting. This finding supports earlier Nigerian studies which argue that poor linkages between research institutions and media houses hinder effective dissemination of modern agricultural innovations (Akinbile & Alabi, 2018; Adegbola *et al.*, 2020). In a context where climate change, pest outbreaks, soil degradation, and low productivity persist, the underutilization of researchers as sources weakens public understanding of the technical solutions required to address these challenges.

Interestingly, **farmers** emerge as a relatively strong source category, particularly for state-owned newspapers. Farmers account for 12.5% of sources in *Punch* and *Vanguard*, but their contributions rise significantly in *Observer* (18.8%) and *Hope* (16.7%). This suggests that regional newspapers maintain closer relationships with rural communities and are more likely to include farmers' voices in their reporting. Several Nigerian authors highlight that farmer perspectives enrich agricultural narratives by providing context-specific, experiential knowledge that professional or political actors may overlook (Ogunleye & Olaniyi, 2021; Ayandiji *et al.*, 2021). The stronger reliance on farmers in regional newspapers therefore reflects a more community-centred approach, even though overall coverage in local papers remains lower compared to national dailies.

Extension workers constitute another important but underrepresented source, accounting for 7.3% in both *Punch* and *Vanguard*, 6.3% in *Observer*, and 5.2% in *Hope*. Their limited use underscores a longstanding communication gap in Nigeria's agricultural extension system. As frontline agents linking research outputs to farmers, extension workers could serve as credible mediators of technical agricultural information. However, Nigerian extension systems suffer from inadequate staffing, funding, and media visibility (Arokoyo, 2018). Their low representation in newspapers reinforces concerns that extension perspectives—crucial for promoting improved technologies and best practices are not adequately reflected in public communication channels.

A significant proportion of agricultural stories in *Observer* (15.6%) and *Hope* (18.8%) have **no source indicated**, compared to lower figures in *Punch* (8.3%) and *Vanguard* (7.3%). This higher rate of unsourced reporting in regional newspapers suggests lapses in journalistic rigor, possibly due to limited staff strength, rushed production timelines, or weaker editorial oversight. Unsourced stories weaken credibility, obscure accountability, and limit transparency. Nigerian media analysts warn that inadequate source attribution is a persistent challenge in local newspapers and undermines public trust in development reporting (Ebele & Emodi, 2021).

The least utilized source category across all newspapers is **library and documented literature**, with proportions ranging from 1.0% to 2.1%. This aligns with global observations that print journalists rarely consult scholarly literature when reporting on agriculture, preferring interviews, press releases, and event-based sources (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2021). Yet, academic literature could provide vital insights into emerging research, long-term trends, and evidence-based practices.

Finally, the “**Others**” category, representing actors such as NGOs, agribusiness players, commodity associations, and private extension providers shows modest increases in *Vanguard*, *Observer*, and *Hope*. Their growing presence potentially signals diversification in agricultural communication networks, though the numbers remain too low to indicate a substantial shift.

Table 3: Sources of Agricultural news carried by the selected newspapers

Source	Punch (%)	Freq	Vanguard (%)	Freq	Observer (%)	Freq	Hope (%)	Freq
Daily events/Occurrences	22 (22.9%)		21 (21.9%)		18 (18.8%)		17 (17.7%)	
Politicians & government officials	18 (18.8%)		18 (18.8%)		14 (14.6%)		12 (12.5%)	
News agency/other media publications	14 (14.6%)		13 (13.5%)		12 (12.5%)		10 (10.4%)	
Researchers	10 (10.4%)		11 (11.5%)		7 (7.3%)		6 (6.3%)	
Farmers	12 (12.5%)		12 (12.5%)		18 (18.8%)		16 (16.7%)	
Extension workers	7 (7.3%)		7 (7.3%)		6 (6.3%)		5 (5.2%)	
No source indicated	8 (8.3%)		7 (7.3%)		15 (15.6%)		18 (18.8%)	
Library / documented literature	2 (2.1%)		2 (2.1%)		1 (1.0%)		1 (1.0%)	
Others	3 (3.1%)		5 (5.2%)		5 (5.2%)		7 (7.3%)	
TOTAL	96 (100%)		96 (100%)		96 (100%)		96 (100%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

Frequency of newspapers coverage of agricultural news in the period under viewed

Table 4 presents the monthly distribution of agricultural news published by *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Observer*, and *Hope* across a two-year period (2022–2023). Although the frequencies remain relatively stable across months and newspapers, the patterns reveal subtle but important dynamics in how Nigerian newspapers prioritize agricultural topics throughout the calendar year. This monthly distribution provides insights into the extent to which agricultural news is shaped by seasonal farming activities, policy timing, media routines, and national events.

Across both years, the table shows that **no dramatic fluctuations** occur in the coverage of agricultural news. For all four newspapers, monthly frequencies per newspaper generally fall within the **3–5 item range**. This pattern reflects a consistent but modest commitment to agricultural reporting. While agriculture remains a critical sector for Nigeria’s economy and food security, its media coverage remains steady rather than responsive to marked peaks or troughs. The uniformity suggests that agriculture is treated as a routine news topic rather than a highly reactive beat. Nigerian media scholars have repeatedly noted that agriculture despite its importance is not typically elevated to the high-priority news agenda dominated by politics, security, and economy (Adegbola *et al.*, 2020; Akinbile & Alabi, 2018). The data in Table 4.8 reinforces this observation.

During the first quarter of 2022 (January–March), coverage in all newspapers gradually increases from 3–4 items in January and February to 5 items in March for *Punch* and *Vanguard*. This increase aligns with the commencement of the farming season in many parts of Nigeria. March marks the onset of rains, prompting pre-planting activities, input procurement, and early policy announcements. Previous studies highlight that Nigerian newspapers show slight increases in agricultural reporting during planting seasons because of intensified public interest in inputs, predicted yields, and potential climate risks (Fawole & Olajide, 2021; Ayinde *et al.*, 2020). This explains the slight rise in March in both years.

Between April and June, the coverage remains largely consistent across all newspapers, with one notable peak: **June 2022**, where *Observer* records a slightly higher frequency (5 items). The April–June period corresponds to the early planting and crop-establishment stage. News stories in this period often focus on pests, weather patterns, new farming technologies, and government input programmes. Although the frequencies do not dramatically increase, their consistency indicates that agricultural reporting follows the gradual pace of field activities. This stability is also indicative of Nigerian media’s dependence on event-driven reporting; unless major agricultural events occur, coverage remains relatively steady (Ogunleye & Olaniyi, 2021).

A further observable trend appears during the **mid-year period (July–September)**. In 2022, July shows higher coverage in *Punch* and *Vanguard* (5 items each), reflecting increased attention to mid-season crop performance, market pressures, and weather-related developments. The third quarter also aligns with peak flooding periods in Nigeria—a recurrent challenge that often affects farmlands and draws media attention (Ebele & Emodi, 2021). In 2023, coverage in July again reflects the same slight increases in *Punch* and *Vanguard*, reinforcing the cyclical nature of agricultural news tied to seasonal environmental conditions.

Interestingly, *Observer* and *Hope* show **higher frequencies in November** (5 items each in 2022 and 2023). November marks the late harvest period for many crops such as maize, sorghum, rice, and vegetables. Regional newspapers especially *Observer* and *Hope* tend to prioritize stories tied to local farm harvests, market arrivals, price fluctuations, and government end-of-year interventions targeted at rural communities. This aligns with findings by Ayandiji *et al.* (2021), who assert that state-owned newspapers often privilege localized agricultural narratives related to farmer livelihoods, harvest outcomes, and seasonal rural realities.

The **fourth quarter (October–December)** in each year shows slight increases in agricultural coverage for *Punch* and *Vanguard*, especially in October and December (5 items each). This reflects two key dynamics. First, October corresponds to a period when the media highlight post-harvest reports, food price variations, and government evaluations of agricultural performance for the year. Second, December often includes year-in-review articles, food inflation analyses, and reports on food availability during the festive season. Studies by Nigerian agricultural economists show that household food demand spikes during the festive period, making agriculture-related stories more newsworthy (NBS, 2022). The consistent rise in December therefore demonstrates the newspapers’ alignment with audience needs and seasonal food consumption trends.

A striking pattern across both years is the **near-symmetry between Punch and Vanguard**. For every month across both years, the two newspapers report identical frequencies. This suggests that national newspapers may operate under similar editorial routines and sourcing networks, relying frequently on syndicated content, national-level agricultural announcements, and major policy events. The structural uniformity between the two dailies reinforces earlier findings that Nigeria's national newspapers often mirror each other in development news due to dependence on national news agencies and shared news values (Nwankwo & Udeze, 2019).

In contrast, *Observer* and *Hope* show slightly more variation, particularly in months when regional agricultural activities peak. Their higher frequencies in months such as June, August, September, and November indicate that regional newspapers may be more sensitive to local agricultural rhythms, providing more contextualized reporting that reflects community-level farming realities. This aligns with Ibraheem & Olorunfemi's (2020) argument that state newspapers often function as regional development communicators.

Table 4: Frequency of newspapers coverage of agricultural news in the period under viewed

Year/Month	Punch Freq (%)	Vanguard Freq (%)	Observer Freq (%)	Hope Freq (%)
2022				
January	3 (3.1%)	3 (3.1%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
February	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	3 (3.1%)	3 (3.1%)
March	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
April	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
May	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
June	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)
July	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)
August	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)
September	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
October	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
November	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)
December	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)
2023				
January	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
February	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	3 (3.1%)	3 (3.1%)
March	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
April	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)
May	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
June	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
July	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
August	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
September	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)

October	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
November	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)
December	5 (5.2%)	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

Difference in Nature of Placement

Difference in the nature of placement prominence given to agricultural coverage across the selected Nigeria newspapers

Table 5 presents the test of the hypothesis that the four selected newspapers do not differ significantly in the prominence they accord agricultural news. The Kruskal–Wallis H statistic of 14.72 (df = 3, p = 0.0021) indicates a statistically significant variation in how the newspapers position agricultural stories within their editions. This result rejects the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level and confirms that the newspapers differ meaningfully in their placement practices. The mean ranks further illuminate this pattern: Punch (122.4) and Vanguard (110.25) occupy the upper spectrum, whereas Observer (88.1) and Hope (74.2) fall considerably lower. These values show that the national dailies consistently place agricultural items in more prominent page positions than the state-level papers.

The implication of this finding becomes clearer when considered alongside earlier descriptive results showing that agricultural stories across all four newspapers are predominantly situated on inside pages, with only a small proportion appearing on the front, back, or centre spreads. Although agriculture generally suffers from low visibility in the sample, the significant difference indicated by the Kruskal–Wallis result demonstrates that Punch and Vanguard employ placement strategies that give agricultural information relatively higher exposure than the Observer and Hope titles. The statistical hierarchy confirms that national newspapers sometimes elevate agricultural stories into more strategic spaces when these stories intersect with broader political, economic, or policy issues. This pattern aligns with global findings that newspapers often grant greater visibility to agricultural news when it is perceived to have national implications, such as food inflation, climate shocks, or market disruptions (Dixon & Clarke, 2013).

These results resonate strongly with the logic of agenda-setting theory. Placement prominence is not a neutral editorial decision; it signals issue importance to readers. Extensive communication research demonstrates that stories positioned on the front page, back page, or lead pages exert a disproportionate effect on public salience compared with stories buried inside the paper. Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller's (1980) early experimental work established that prominent placement significantly shapes audience perceptions of what issues matter in the public sphere. More contemporary research confirms this pattern. Coche and Bell (2024), in their analysis of global news prominence, argue that the spatial location of a story functions as a psychological “priority cue” that directs audience attention regardless of overall story volume.

Viewed through this theoretical lens, the statistical differences demonstrate meaningful variation in the agenda-setting potential of the four newspapers. Readers of Punch and Vanguard are more frequently exposed to agricultural stories framed as nationally important and thus more likely to

perceive agriculture as an issue deserving public deliberation. In contrast, the consistently lower mean ranks of Observer and Hope reveal editorial routines that confine agricultural news to peripheral spaces. Such placement dampens its perceived relevance, particularly among rural readers who rely heavily on state papers for local information. This dynamic is particularly significant because rural populations, who constitute the primary stakeholders in agriculture are more dependent on print media for development information in areas where radio or mobile connectivity fluctuates, a pattern documented in studies of rural media consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mabweazara, 2015).

The national–state divide reflected in analysis can also be interpreted from a structural and institutional standpoint. National newspapers operate within more competitive media markets, where the commercial imperative to attract a diverse readership often leads editors to highlight issues with national economic consequences, including agricultural policy decisions, food prices, and trade matters. This tendency has been documented in comparative media studies showing that national papers reserve strategic space for sectors linked to the macroeconomy because these sectors influence elite readership and advertisers (Tambo & Wünscher, 2017). State-owned or state-oriented newspapers, by contrast, often allocate prime space to political stories, security events, or gubernatorial activities, reflecting patterns of political communication observed in state media across Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2005). Such structural routines help explain why Observer and Hope consistently show lower placement prominence: agriculture, unless tied directly to state political interests, is treated as routine reportage rather than as content warranting priority placement.

From a development communication standpoint, the findings reveal a significant challenge. Evidence from communication-for-development scholarship shows that farmers are more likely to engage with agricultural information when it appears in highly visible sections of newspapers, particularly front-page teasers or full-page features (Ballantyne, 2009). When agricultural stories are repeatedly positioned in low-salience spaces as the data show for Observer and Hope rural audiences may overlook critical information about market prices, disease outbreaks, subsidy programmes, or climate advisories. This reduces the capacity of print media to function as an effective conduit for innovation diffusion, extension messaging, and climate-adaptive knowledge sharing.

The divergent placement practices observed in the analysis therefore contribute directly to widening or narrowing the knowledge gap between urban and rural readers. According to Knowledge-Gap Theory, unequal distribution of information quality deepens disparities in access to useful knowledge. If national papers elevate agriculture periodically while state papers consistently bury it, rural readers, who depend more heavily on state newspapers receive weaker salience cues and may as a result be less exposed to timely, decision-relevant agricultural information. Such a pattern reinforces what Viswanath and Finnegan (1996) describe as “information stratification,” wherein institutional media routines reproduce existing social and geographic inequalities in access to knowledge.

Table 5: Difference in the nature of placement prominence given to agricultural coverage across the selected Nigeria newspapers

Newspaper	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	H	df	Sig	Decision
Punch	60	122.4	7344	14.72*	3	0.0021	Significance
Vanguard	55	110.25	6064				
Observer	43	88.1	3788				
Hope	37	74.2	2745				
Total	195	—	—				

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2023

*Sign. at 0.05 level of significance

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was carried out to analyze the agricultural content of some selected newspapers in Nigeria between 2022 and 2023. The papers selected were the Punch, Vanguard, Observers and Hope. Research findings revealed that agricultural reportage in Nigerian newspapers remains an essential yet unevenly executed component of development communication. Although Punch, Vanguard, Observer and Hope all published agricultural news between January 2022 and December, 2023, the prominence, depth, thematic spread, and tonality of the coverage varied substantially. Agriculture rarely appeared on the front or back pages, indicating that despite its critical role in national development and food security, the subject has not been consistently prioritized by the press. Findings reveal a detailed account of how agricultural issues were covered in Punch, Vanguard, Observer, and Hope newspapers between January 2022 and December 2023. Incorporating both descriptive and inferential statistics with respect to placement prominence, the analysis showed that agricultural stories were largely confined to inside pages across all four newspapers less than 10% of agricultural news appeared on the front or back pages, confirming that agriculture received limited editorial prominence despite its importance to national development. Punch and Vanguard showed slightly higher rates of front page or feature selection appearance but this trend was insufficient to suggest consistent prioritization of agricultural reportage. It is recommended that agricultural issues, considering their importance should be reported more often on the prominent pages of newspapers, this will attract traders to the agricultural news. Publishers of newspapers should increase the frequency of reportage of agricultural issues on their papers considering the importance of agricultural information to farmers and thematic coverage should also be broadened beyond crop and livestock production to include areas such as mechanization, climate smart agriculture, agro-processing, finance, extension services and export opportunities. A wider thematic spread would provide readers with a more holistic understanding of the agricultural sector. The study further revealed that the frequency of agricultural reportage did not differ significantly across newspapers, as confirmed by the statistical analysis, suggesting that all four newspapers devoted roughly comparable space to agricultural issues during the study period.

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