



Coverage of Organic Farming Practices by Kenya's Leading Newspapers

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the coverage of organic farming practices by Kenya's leading newspapers: *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. The study is anchored in an interpretivist research philosophy, which is qualitative in nature. The study targeted the two newspapers' weekend pull-outs (Saturday) on 'Seeds of Gold' and 'Smart Harvest'. The coverage of 'organic farming' content in the two newspapers was determined by examining how much space (in terms of percentage) was dedicated to an A3 page of a newspaper. Analysis of results has been done using descriptive statistics. It was found out that whereas the two newspaper pull-outs were expected to highlight and report on organic farming, the content covered in six to eight-page articles was less than 25.0% with the rest being sponsored articles by pesticides and other inorganic farming organisations. Considering the two pull-outs are expected to inform the public (consumers and farmers) on matters about organic farming, they did not do so by having much of the information in sponsored articles. Only 9.4% of the articles received whole-page coverage. The debates on organic farming rarely featured in the two newspaper articles despite their wide readership around the country. It is therefore recommended that the two newspapers should give prominence to organic farming information as part of fulfilling ethical reporting systems towards addressing climate health challenges and attainment of the United Nations sustainable development goals by 2030.

Introduction

Agriculture is a critical sector that drives the economic development and industrialisation of many countries worldwide. With rising incidents of global warming and climate change resulting in decreased agricultural production, one alternative system gaining prominence is organic farming (FAO, 2014; Lyons & Burch, 2007). Organic farming is a system of agricultural production that uses no agrochemicals and adopts an environmentally and socially responsible approach (Frick & IFOAM, 2014). In Kenya, the low adoption of organic farming methods may be attributed to a lack of adequate skills and knowledge in organic farming technologies, high cost of certification, low level of awareness, low market development, lack of organic agriculture policy, poor post-harvesting handling and processing (Nyamwamu & Onkundi, 2021; Kamau et al., 2022). The foregoing information confirms that information awareness is a critical determinant of the extent to which farmers can adopt organic farming practices. This paper, therefore, examines the coverage of organic information in Kenya's two newspapers, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, which have dedicated pull-outs every Saturday covering various agricultural topics under "Seeds of Gold" and "Smart Harvest".



Literature Review

The number of organic farmers is low, and the land under organic management in Kenya accounts for only 5.0% of the total organic-certified arable land in Africa (Ayuya et al., 2015). There are some problems in the progress of organic farming, such as the inability of government policy to promote organic agriculture, lack of awareness, shortage of biomass, marketing problems with organic inputs, and lack of financial support (Sushmita & Goel, 2021).

The mass media, as the watchdog of society, have the responsibility of informing citizens on issues of national interest and government policies on agriculture from time to time (Kuchi & Msughter, 2023). There is an increasing need for accessible information sources that help organic farmers learn about and implement sustainable agricultural practices. Farmers may access organic farming information through various mass media platforms near them, and when they access content on these channels, they may use it to understand, adapt, or even adopt various farming methods. Despite the important role that mass media play in the dissemination of organic farming information, a study carried out in Nigeria revealed that the degree of prominence accorded to agriculture by newspapers was very low, as only 4.8% out of 750 news items on agriculture were published on the front pages (Odessa & Sife, 2018). In Botswana, Oladele and Boago (2011) reported that the way newspapers cover agricultural news differs from one newspaper to another. This is because some newspapers may consider focusing more on political news, while others focus more on sponsored content.

Newspapers are important for providing the public with vital information, but worldwide concerns persist that they will prioritise political, entertainment, and advertising over development issues such as agriculture (Darji & Yadav, 2024). Newspapers typically provide little information about agriculture. According to a Nigerian survey, newspapers do not focus much on agriculture; 36 out of 750 agriculture news stories (4.8%) were featured on the first page (Kuchi & Msughter 2023). Also, Ovwigho and Orogun (2013) stated that, despite being an important sector of the state, print media provided minimal coverage of agricultural news stories in 2009. Darji and Yadav (2024) reported that public media in Botswana cover agricultural news less frequently than private publications. Various research studies have been undertaken to examine coverage of agricultural research topics across newspapers platform. A study by Robert (2011) examined the coverage over time of organic farming in *Progressive Farmer*, *Successful Farming*, and *Farm Journals*, which focused on professional farming. A quantitative content analysis was used to determine whether there had been changes in how the topic of organic farming was covered in the mainstream press. It was established that, over time, the three newspapers portrayed organic farming differently and varied in the amount of coverage they provided in their coverage of organic farming.

According to White & Rutherford (2012), they examined coverage of the December 2003 bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) event to discover differences in the sources reporters used based on their employing newspapers' geographical location, circulation, and ownership type. Sixty-two stories dealing with the first U.S. bovine spongiform encephalopathy incident were subjected to content analysis. Stories – published from December 23, 2003, to October 31, 2004, were selected through a keyword search from U.S. newspapers included in the LexisNexis database. These stories were divided into two equal groups based on reporters' work-role identity and analysed by length, number of sources, source variety, and the employing newspapers' geographical location, circulation, and ownership type. ANOVA and bivariate correlation were among the statistical analysis techniques used. Results indicated that the number of stories, story length, and the number of sources per story are related to newspaper location and to the use of scientists and agricultural scientists as sources, depending on newspaper ownership type. Circulation and ownership type explained a statistically significant amount of variance in the number of sources used. Results of this study linking newspaper



location (proximity to the event, community heterogeneity, and urbanity) to crisis coverage, as measured by story length and the number of sources cited, support previous research and lend credence to the assumption that newspaper characteristics influence news coverage. And the correlation between chain ownership and the use of scientists as sources for crisis stories suggests that ownership does matter for news coverage. Thus, in the age of convergence, whether through merger or adoption of new media, the particulars of a given newspaper's identity should be considered when predicting or evaluating the nature of its news coverage. Although this study was limited by a small sample size and by a focus on the first U.S. BSE event on December 23, 2003, the above findings may prove useful to agricultural public information officers and media relations practitioners in "pitching" stories and sources for similar agriculture-based crises. In particular, this study addressed priorities stated in the National Research Agenda -- the desire of agricultural communicators to "aid the public in effectively participating in decision-making related to agriculture," through providing information on which such decisions can be based.

Ganegoda (2023) argues that selected television news channels have not fulfilled their role in media advocacy concerning organic fertiliser policy. Findings from Sri Lanka reveal that Ada Derana TV allocated more time to news supporting the organic fertiliser policy and blamed external forces for its failure. In contrast, News First TV devoted more time to reporting the collapse of the policy, holding the government responsible for the calamity in the agricultural sector. The news channels used news sources that could strengthen their political agenda. As a result, these news channels allocated less time to agricultural scientists, agricultural economists, and food scientists who could deliver trustworthy, unbiased information about the policy's impact. Thus, this research concludes that the selected news channels failed to fulfil their media advocacy role regarding the organic fertiliser policy, and the media's openness in news reporting is significantly low.

Marck (2024) analysed longitudinal shifts regarding the coverage of the Dutch nitrogen crisis. The aim of this study is to determine whether computational methods can identify imbalances and biases in framing practices to monitor journalistic practices. To research this, 9,374 articles from June 2019 until March 2024 were extracted and analysed using Natural Language Processing techniques. Topic modelling and Named Entity Recognition were applied to perform a framing analysis on the dataset, which was visualised using knowledge graphs. The results show shifts in topics and entities, with topics quite diverse and entities mostly framed politically. Lastly, the knowledge graphs proved successful at capturing the context of topics and entities, while also indicating differences in the frames that outlets applied. The results show that these methods can be used to develop a tool for analysing journalistic practices. Development of this tool should start after addressing the limitations, whereas the current study did not address sentiment toward the topics and allowed only one topic per article. Additionally, it would be good practice to extend the case beyond the nitrogen crisis to validate the study's findings. The developed tool can support news organisations in monitoring imbalances and biases in their framing, helping them critically analyse their reporting styles.

The media plays a significant role in informing the public about climate-smart agriculture to achieve food security amid climate change. Kutyaauripo, Mavodza and Gadzirayi (2021) sought to investigate the coverage by newspapers in Zimbabwe on food security issues related to climate-smart agriculture. Quantitative data on food security issues were collected by reviewing newspapers, namely *The Herald*, *Newsday*, *The Standard* and *The Sunday Mail*, in 123 days. The main objective was to analyse quantitative coverage of climate-smart agricultural news. The study analysed newspaper coverage of crop production, animal production, fisheries, postharvest management, food safety, value addition, marketing and administration as they relate to climate change. Results from 469 food security articles revealed that 22.6% covered climate change, while 77.4% covered food security issues unrelated to



climate change. The study concluded that there was significant variation in the coverage of various food security issues related to climate change, with postharvest management, food safety, and fishery management issues not covered during the study period. It is recommended that stakeholders in the agriculture sector and the media industry work to improve the publication of climate change adaptation and mitigation in agriculture. This is not different from the current study, since only 20% of the newspapers under study had a full-page dedication to stories on agriculture.

In Kenya, a research by Kamau (2012) analysed the content of agricultural news coverage in *The Standard* and the *Daily Nation* Newspapers from September 2011 to August 2012. This was done by categorising the articles covered during the study period, identifying their page locations (either the cover, middle, or last pages), determining their frequency, and allocating space to agricultural information. The results show that the two dailies published seven distinct article categories during that study period. They are advertisements, features, editorials, letters to the editor, hard news, opinions and photographs and virtually all of the identified and categorised articles were located in the middle pages (95%). Photographs were the most frequently published categories of agricultural information (35.1 per cent) during the study period in both dailies, and opinions were the least (0.9%). *Daily Nation* devoted only 7 per cent to all its published categories of agricultural information, and *the Standard* allocated only 2 per cent of its total available space during the one-year study period. *The Standard* published more agricultural articles than the *Daily Nation* in the Features (39.7 against 16.5 per cent), and Letters to the Editor (4.4 against 2.8 per cent) categories, but the *Daily Nation* published about four more advertisements (17.7 per cent) compared to the *Standard* (4.4 per cent). Unlike *the Daily Nation*, *The Standard* did not publish any editorials, opinions and black and white agricultural photos.

Theoretical review

The study was guided by framing theory as proposed by Entman (1993). It is instrumental in understanding how the media shapes public understanding and attitudes towards organic farming (Arowolo, 2017). It asserts that the media's selection and presentation of information can influence public perception and opinion by defining what is newsworthy, evoking emotions, and connecting with the audience. The theory provides a framework for analysing how the media frames organic farming practices and how these frames can influence public perception. It highlights the importance of agenda setting and priming, suggesting that the media's selection and emphasis on certain aspects of an issue can shape public opinion (Spradlin & Givens, 2022). In the application of newspaper coverage on organic farming practices in Kenya's leading newspaper, the theory suggests that attributing responsibility to specific issues and making the salient can influence public perception. It is therefore relevant to this study, as the more newspapers highlight organic farming practices, the greater the impact and the change in perceptions among individuals who consume them. This can translate into changes in behaviour towards modern agriculture and, more importantly, the adoption of organic farming.

Materials and Methods

The study was anchored on an interpretivist philosophical paradigm, which holds that people construct knowledge as they interpret their experiences of and in the world (Saunders et al., 2019). The interpretivist paradigm follows a qualitative research approach. Hence, the target population for this paper was Kenya's mainstream newspapers, *The Saturday Standard* and *Saturday Nation*, which have special pull-outs every Saturday on Agriculture. *The Saturday Standard* publishes the 'Smart Harvest' while *Saturday Nation* publishes 'Seeds of Gold'. Given that the two newspapers publish the pull-out for 52 weeks a year, the study focused on those published for 6 months (October 1, 2022, to April 29, 2023). The reason for making this decision was to make the research more manageable and



better suited to achieving the research objectives. Data in this study were collected using a coding sheet (book). The coding book was used to analyse the content of the information required from the two newspapers regarding their different coverage of organic farming. Data for this study were collected from the two newspapers' pull-outs covering organic farming practices in Kenya. Articles were identified and thereafter extracted. To undertake the process, the researcher first identified articles on organic farming. The collected data were properly organised into qualitative and quantitative forms. Quantitative data from the coding book were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Findings

The objective of the study was to determine the coverage of organic farming information in Kenya's newspapers *Smart Harvest* and Nation '*Seeds of Gold*', published by Nation Media Group and Standard Media Group, respectively. The process of categorising the articles covered during the study period, identifying their page locations (cover, middle, or last pages), and establishing the frequency and space allocated to organic farming information. The summarised result from the two newspapers is provided in Table 1:

Table 1: Coverage of Organic Farming information by Kenya's Newspapers

Coverage in Newspaper Page	Smart Harvest		Seeds of Gold	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Below 25.0%	2	6.9	4	17.4
26 - 40.0%	6	20.7	4	17.4
41-60.0%	2	6.9	6	26.1
61 - 80.0%	13	44.8	7	30.4
81-100.0%	6	20.7	2	8.7
Total	29	100.0	23	100.0

The result shows that for *Smart Harvest*, organic farming information occupied 61–80.0% of space in 13 articles, representing 44.8%, compared to *Seeds of Gold*, which allocated 7 articles to the same topic at 30.4%. The same can be seen with *Smart Harvest*, which has six stories on organic farming at 20.7%, covering a total page area of 81–100.0%, compared to *Seeds of Gold*, which had only two articles at 8.7%, occupying the same space on a page. The above result suggests that coverage of organic farming information is uneven across the two newspapers under focus. Further, a comparison of the two newspapers shows that *Smart Harvest* devoted more space to organic farming information than *Seeds of Gold*. In the *Standard Newspaper*, the editor indicates that organic farming stories appear, though not as frequently as mainstream political or economic stories. They are often featured in our *Smart Harvest* pull-out, which is dedicated to agriculture and agribusiness reporting. Through *Smart Harvest*, we highlight farmer innovations, new market trends, and sustainable practices, and it is in this space that organic farming receives the most visibility. During interviews, the editor of the *Standard Newspaper* confirmed this observation, noting that although organic farming stories do not appear as frequently as mainstream political or economic news, they are prominently featured in the *Smart Harvest* pull-out, an insert devoted to agriculture and agribusiness reporting. Through *Smart Harvest*, the newspaper highlights farmer innovations, emerging market trends, and sustainable practices, thereby providing the main platform through which organic farming receives substantial media visibility in Kenya.

Discussion

This finding aligns with the news values theory proposed by Gatlung and Ruge (1965). The standards include placement, spatial allocation, length of the story, headline sizes, story sizes (images), whether half fold, middle fold or bottom fold and prominence as indicators of perceived importance. This



implies that Nation Media Group's '*Seeds of Gold*' provides less attention to issues of organic farming compared to the Standard Group's '*Smart Harvest*' weekend pull-out. The implication here is that *Smart Harvest* editors considered organic farming to be of greater editorial value than their counterparts at *Seeds of Gold*.

The results align with Oyewole, Oloyede, and Meludu (2014), who found that coverage of organic agricultural farming in Nigeria's *Punch*, *Guardian*, and *Tribune* newspapers was low. This affected farmers' awareness and their decision to embrace organic farming practices, as newspapers focused more on other agricultural topics than on organic farming. The same can be said in Kenya, where analysis has shown that, even with the dedication of the two newspaper pull-outs to agricultural matters, organic farming information is not given the prominence it deserves in coverage.

The extent of mass media coverage of organic farming practices, while generally minimal compared to coverage of conventional agricultural practices, was sufficient to imply that the two newspaper editors were not ignorant of their audiences' potential interest in organic farming. However, the earlier results showed a clear sense of scepticism towards organic farming practices and considerable emphasis on members of the public's misperceptions about the safety of agro-chemicals.

Beyond the pull-out, coverage of organic farming also appears at national agricultural shows, during international observance days such as World Environment Day, and whenever new policies, research findings, or donor-funded projects on sustainable agriculture emerge. While organic farming does not make headlines every day, it consistently features in thematic reporting on food safety, climate change, and youth agri-preneurship. This shows that, while it remains a specialised beat, its importance is gradually increasing within our overall editorial agenda.

The findings demonstrate that while both *Smart Harvest* and *Seeds of Gold* allocate space to organic farming, the extent of coverage remains relatively limited and uneven. *Smart Harvest* consistently devotes more space and visibility to organic farming stories, suggesting a stronger editorial prioritisation of sustainable agriculture. Conversely, *Seeds of Gold* exhibits lower frequency and prominence of such content, reflecting a narrower editorial focus. Overall, the study reveals that organic farming occupies a peripheral, though growing, position in Kenya's print media landscape. This uneven coverage influences public awareness and may partly explain the slow adoption of organic practices among farmers, highlighting the need for deliberate editorial strategies to enhance visibility and engagement on sustainable agricultural issues.

Conclusions

The coverage of organic farming activities in the two farming pull-outs varied widely from one newspaper to another, and it was most often lumped into certain time periods, with long stretches in between, without any stories about organic farming practices. Stories about organic farming were represented in a minimum of pages in nearly all issues of all newspapers' pull-outs under investigation. With few exceptions, most newspaper issues contained one or two content pieces about organic farming despite the newspaper's pull-out focusing purely on agriculture; occasionally, a newspaper featuring a multitude of stories about organic practices was published, but that happened on rare occasions across the two newspapers, with *Smart Harvest* having more stories compared to the *Seeds of Gold*. Mentions of organic farming topics on the covers of the newspapers' pull-outs were exceedingly rare. The study recommends that the two newspapers consider increasing coverage of articles on organic agriculture as one way to address climate change and realise the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.



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