

What is New on the News: A Content Analysis of a TV News Show in Agriculture

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Introduction

In the United States, national television news continues to be one of the most seen and reliable sources of updated information about any kind of issue (Greico & Mitchell, 2019). However, this amount of data shared on the screen is only one part of a whole piece about a complex reality (Sucháček et al., 2023). This mass media plays an essential role in taking these aspects of the perceived reality to connect the audience with the context they are living in (Levendusky, 2022). According to Alam and Haque (2014), one of the simplest and easiest ways for producers to satisfy their information needs on current agricultural knowledge is through agricultural television news. News from this industry supports improved communication between agricultural stakeholders such as farmers, agricultural scientists, extension agents, and policy-makers (Sucháček et al., 2023). This study seeks the importance of investigating the U.S. Farm Report's framing shifts to understand how agricultural news prioritizes information for stakeholders and informs media strategy. (Maj & Lewandowsky, 2020). This study aimed to explore and identify frames used by the U.S. Farm Report news and how these frames change from 2022 to 2023.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base chosen for this study is the Framing Theory, which is the process of elevating one aspect of a perceived reality or issue to a higher level of importance for the audience (Entman, 1993). According to Brüggemann (2014), frames arrange the world for the benefit of journalists who report on it and for those who depend on their reports. In this media of communications, frames help to portray the nature of the issues, responsible actors, and the tone in which news is presented (Khan et al., 2020). Analyzing how media outlets frame news stories reveals how audiences understand issues and develop their trust towards the media.

Methodology

A descriptive, quantitative content analysis was conducted to explore and identify the frames reporter in an agricultural television news show. Systematic random sampling was used to choose one episode per month from February 2022 to December 2023. U.S Farm Report was chosen because of the availability of the episodes online. A codebook was created using an approach proposed by Ghosh and Sharma (2014) and Matthes and Kohring (2008) to describe the main characteristics of television news, such as topic, airtime of each headline, depth of spread, method of delivery, source and USDA priority area. However, for the framing analysis, elements such as tone of coverage, nature of the issue, actors or stakeholders involved in the news, benefits, and barriers mentioned were based on the approach of Essary et al. (2022). A total of 23 episodes were selected and downloaded for analysis. The headlines, an average of 13 per each episode, were analyzed using descriptive statistics to record the frequencies of the elements detailed in the codebook. This information was used to compare how frames were shown between 2022 and 2023 episodes. The codebook created based on previous framing research was revised by an expert in the area for its validity. Also, three coders were trained to measure reliability in the coding process, analyzing for each coder three episodes. A Krippendorff's alpha was used to measure intercoder reliability, obtaining an average of .81 for the elements from the codebook.

Findings

According to Table 1, 20.13% of the headlines in 2022 were related to environment and natural resources ($n = 30$), and 23.17% of 2023 headlines were related to market and economy topics ($n = 38$). However, the headlines with more airtimes were related to the food industry in 2022 (86 minutes) and 2023 (102 minutes). In 2022, the source most used to get the information was from experts ($n = 40$) and in 2023 news were from government sources ($n = 41$).

Table 1

Comparison of Modes in 2022 and 2023 News (N = 313)

Variables	2022 ($n = 149$)	2023 ($n = 164$)
Most mentioned headline	Environment and natural resources ^c	Market and economy ^b
Most airtime headline	Food industry ^a	Food industry ^b
Agricultural priority	Advancing justice, equity, opportunity, and prosperity	Advancing justice, equity, opportunity, and prosperity
Depth of Spread	National	National
Source	Expert	Government
Method of Delivery	Voiceover	Voiceover
Nature of the issue	Economy	Economy
Actor and stakeholder	Producer	Producer
Benefit mentioned	Producer	Producer
Risk mentioned	Producer	Producer

^a Positive tone; ^b Neutral tone; ^c Negative tone

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

The findings revealed a shift in the predominant topics covered, with the market and economy-related headlines gaining prominence in 2023 compared to the environment and natural resources in 2022 due to the extreme weather conditions that occurred that year (NCEI, 2022). However, the focus on the food industry remained consistent across both years. Additionally, there was a notable change in the sources of information, with government sources being utilized more frequently in 2023 compared to experts in 2022. Despite these variations, the agricultural priority, depth of spread, method of delivery, nature of the issue, and key actors/stakeholders remained relatively stable across both years. These findings have several implications for agricultural stakeholders, policymakers, and media practitioners. The change toward market and economy-related topics suggests a potential change in audience interests or media priorities, which could influence decision-making and resource allocation within the agricultural sector (Levendusky, 2022). The consistency in framing elements such as agricultural priorities and method of delivery implies a certain level of continuity in how agricultural news is presented to the public, which can help maintain trust and credibility in the media. Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness and impact of agricultural television news. This medium of communications should continue diversifying its coverage to reflect the dynamic nature of the agricultural sector while ensuring balanced and accurate reporting on traditional and emerging issues. Future research could explore the influence of framing on audience perceptions and behaviors regarding agricultural issues, providing valuable insights for media strategy and communication practices in the agricultural sector.

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