

Nutrition - in the German Press

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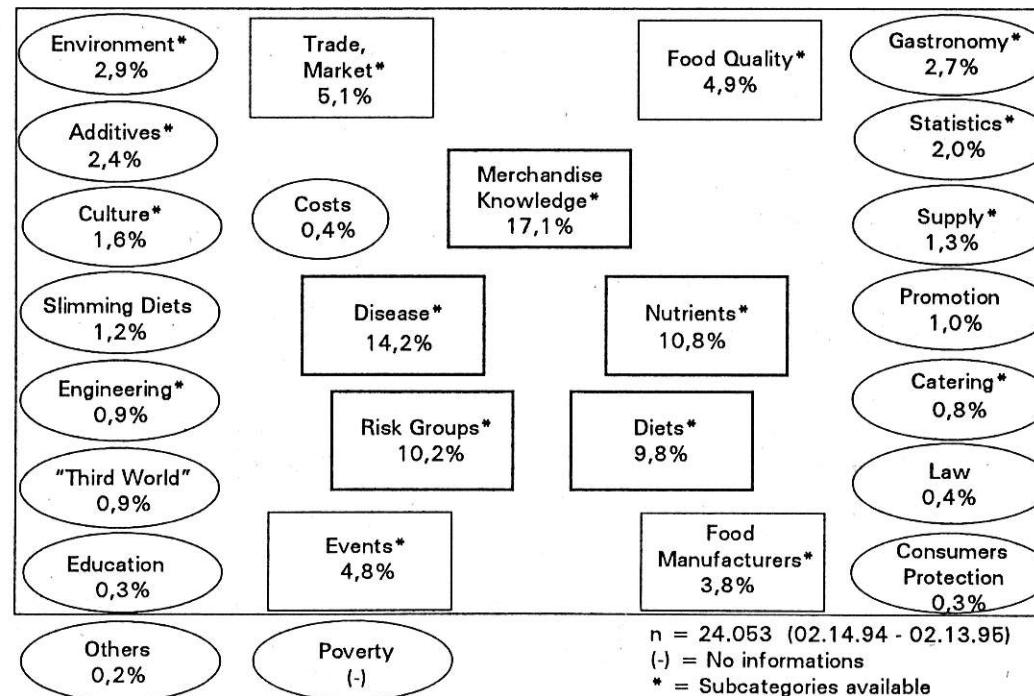
PROBLEM

The dissemination of nutritional information via mass media has often been criticized. The media are necessary on the one side to inform consumers about prevention, for example. On the other, media are blamed for a selective choice of subjects such as harmful substances and for distorting and misrepresentation.

AIM AND METHOD

Several studies including one financed by the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry were initiated to find out to what extent and what nutritional subjects were reported upon in German newspapers. Over a period from February 14, 1994, to February 13, 1995, a newspaper cutting service, collected 15.292 items dealing with nutrition from 501 newspapers according to a given wide definition. Of these, 6.049 articles were analyzed.

Frequency of nutrition-related contents in German newspapers



RESULTS

An article dealing with nutrition appeared in every 10th issue only. Weekly journals, supraregional and boulevard papers reported more often about nutritional subjects than regional daily newspapers. Subjects discussed most frequently were merchandise knowledge, diseases, nutrients, risk groups, and diets (see figure). 4,8% of the total number of articles dealt with events (harmful substances, genetic engineering and irradiation; 1,5% with BSE). Such events were reported more frequently in supraregional newspapers (9,3%) and less in boulevard newspapers (2,6%).

CONCLUSIONS

- the extent of reporting has been overrated so far
- subjects are selected according to a narrow understanding of nutrition
- selectivity with regard to controversially discussed subjects has not been found