

State FFA Association Use of Instagram to Promote Membership Diversity

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State FFA associations are active within the National FFA Organization, but have opportunities to develop their own programs, leadership structures, awards, and competitions (National FFA Organization, 2017). To promote their activities through photos, many state associations have Instagram accounts. Instagram is a social media platform focused on mobile photo sharing. Further, Instagram allows for insight development about a program's culture and activities through images (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). While other social media platforms tend to lead in overall user numbers, a recent market research report indicated teens prefer Instagram to Facebook and Twitter (Murphy, Olsen, Regan, & Kemp, 2018).

While the FFA offers many opportunities, it also faces obstacles toward achieving a more diverse membership. Multiple scholars have pointed to cultural obstacles such as stereotypes, perceptions, and prejudices that have prevented diverse membership within FFA programs (LaVergne, Jones, Larke, & Elbert, 2012; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Warren & Alston, 2007). However, the National FFA recognizes the issues of inclusiveness and diversity within its programs and claims, "it is imperative that barriers be removed in order to engage all young people enrolled in agricultural education," (Crutchfield, 2013, p. 1). Given the importance of the visual image's role in society, it is important to determine the messages these images emit regarding culture and perceptions (Rhoades & Irani, 2008) pertaining to diversity and inclusion within state FFA associations.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by the concept of user-generated content. As information increases with technological advancements, so changes the role of the user. While users of social media can engage in a variety of ways such as commenting and sharing, user-generated content assumes a higher degree of involvement, and refers to content that has been created and distributed by internet users (Wardle & Williams, 2010). As users gain more control in consuming and sharing information, organizations are prone to a more thorough evaluation than in the past (Tredinnick, 2006). Web technologies enable users "to extract information and data and reuse that information and data in flexible way," (Tredinnick, 2006, p. 229). Mobile applications, such as Instagram, provide users with abilities to select and filter information which thereby gives more power to the user. In social media, content is created as needs arise, and is viewed by users as a symbol of an organization's expertise and knowledge (Tredinnick, 2006). Further, users collect information via direct or indirect user-participation to add value to information they already have, and to create new information sources that are useful (Tredinnick, 2006).

Methodology

State FFA associations were the focus of this study and those with Instagram accounts were analyzed by the researchers. Researchers identified which associations had Instagram accounts and conducted an environmental scan of each association's Instagram presence through an analysis of photos posted to each individual account. The researchers viewed posts between June 1, 2017 and June 1, 2018 to identify relevant content featuring diversity. Relevant content included any photograph with a person or persons whose ethnicity excluded Caucasian, persons with disabilities, or other images promoting diversity as beneficial to the membership.

Results

The analysis revealed 47 of 52 (90.4%) state FFA associations had Instagram accounts. Combined, the 47 Instagram accounts generated 2,946 posts (06/01/2017-05/31/2018) with 434 posts (15%) having content featuring diversity. While California ($n = 60$) led the group of state FFA associations in number of diversity posts, many other state FFA associations held higher

percentages of diversity posts comparatively overall. Further, 23 associations had less than 10 posts, and of those, nine associations (19% of the 47 accounts) had no diversity posts on their Instagram pages. Figure 1 details the percentage of diversity posts by state.

Many of the diversity posts included photos with minority National FFA officers or minority chapter members with state officers. Consequently, states with minorities serving as officers appeared to have higher percentages of diversity posts during the timeframe of this study. Additionally, some states posted infographics about diversity to celebrate national events such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Black History month versus posting on a more consistent basis.

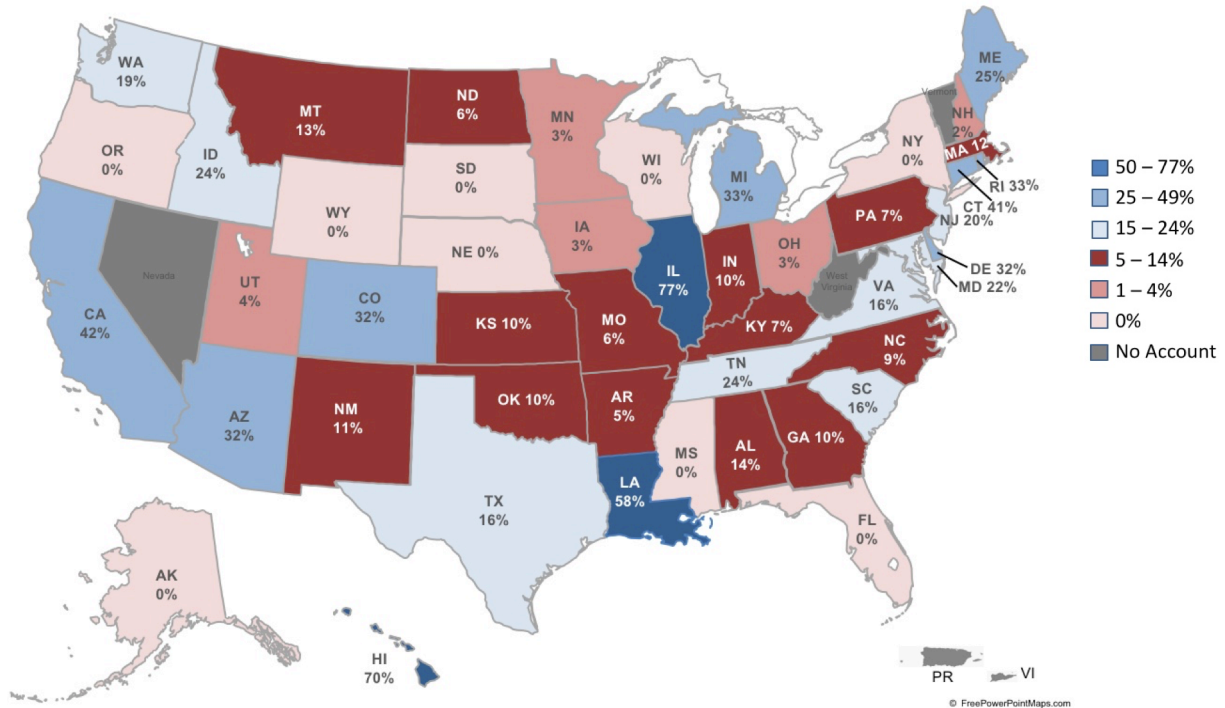


Figure 1. Percentage of Total Instagram Diversity Posts by State FFA Associations ($M = 15\%$).

Conclusions, Implications & Recommendations

The results of the study illustrated the tremendous variability in the diversity efforts by state FFA associations in their Instagram account. As the state FFA associations focused primarily on the activities of their state officers in their Instagram posts, it is not surprising that those associations with minorities on their teams had higher instances of diversity on Instagram. Further, photos taken with chapter members also yielded examples of diversity beyond state officer teams. However, efforts to promote diversity and enhance FFA’s membership must be purposeful rather than convenient. Instagram provides a unique opportunity for associations to make a meaningful impression to a wide audience, as the stories photographs tell are strong influencers of viewer emotions (Lester, 2005), and may help teens to generate interest in the organization. As stereotypes continue to be identified as an obstacle to a diverse membership (LaVergne, Jones, Larke, & Elbert, 2012), Instagram provides an opportunity for organizations to visually demonstrate their commitment to diversity, and to engage with minorities who may visit Instagram to look for signs of inclusion. To further encourage diversity and inclusiveness, state FFA associations should utilize Instagram to highlight and promote a diverse membership on a consistent and intentional basis.

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