Tagged to Teach Ag: National Teach Ag Day's use of YouTube Commercials to Promote Agricultural Education

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Introduction

The teacher shortage is one that has plagued secondary agricultural education programs for almost four decades due to issues with program growth, expansion, requirements, and openings (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2017). In an attempt to combat this, the National Teach Ag Campaign was developed to encourage students to pursue a career in agricultural education while also supporting existing instructors (NAAE, 2017). In 2018, nine universities in eight states submitted videos to promote agricultural education and were highlighted during the National Teach Ag Day Live Broadcast. Most of these videos were also shared through other platforms including Facebook and Twitter to further their reach. While the videos were designed for the contest, many served as additional promotional materials for their respective programs.

Social media is an ideal platform for promoting post-secondary education (Wade, n.d.). In 2018, it was estimated that 95% of teens had access to a smartphone and 45% admitted to being online "almost constantly." Further, 85% of youth report using YouTube (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). With the shortage of school based agricultural educators and high use of social media by youth, research should be completed to determine the reach and effectiveness of agricultural education promotional materials on social media. One way to measure the effectiveness of these social media recruitment efforts is with social media analytics programs. These programs provide users with a variety of information regarding the social media content shared online (Zeng, Chen, Lusch, & Shu-Hsing, 2010). The YouTube analytics add-on, Videolytics, is one program that identifies best practices of YouTube videos including the inclusion or exclusion of specific components that can increase search engine optimization (SEO) (TubeBuddy, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

The communicative purposes of social media messaging from organizations presented originally by Saxton and Waters (2014) and highlighted by Meyer, Holt-Day, Steede, & Meyers (2017) served as the conceptual framework for this study. Saxton and Waters (2014) identified three main functions of social media for information sharing, community building and dialogue, and promotion and mobilization. The main focus for this study was the promotion and mobilization of the agricultural education programs represented. Promotion and mobilization posts strive to elicit a response from audience members (Saxton & Water, 2014; Meyer et. al., 2017).

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore how the National Teach Ag organization used YouTube commercials submitted by university agricultural education programs for its annual "Teach Ag Day" campaign. The following research objectives were used to address this purpose:

RO1) Describe viewer interactions with videos posted during the week of the 2018 Teach Ag Day campaign.

RO2) Describe the "best practices" used by each video posted during the week of the 2018 Teach Ag Day campaign.

Method

This study used a quantitative content analysis to address the research objectives. At the conclusion of the National Teach Ag Day telecast, where the winner of the video contest was announced, screenshots of the YouTube page for each of the nine videos posted were taken to be analyzed using a researcher-developed codebook. The web add-on Videolytics was used to retrieve best practices analytics not provided directly with the video via YouTube.

The researcher-developed codebook identified views, likes and dislikes, and comments on YouTube, and likes on Facebook and Twitter for each video. Additionally, Videolytics provided "best practices" information for each video. The researchers served as the coders for this study with the lead researcher conducting coder training using screenshots of videos from an unrelated YouTube channel. Perfect agreement in intercoder reliability was achieved between the two coders.

Results

In order to address RO1, descriptive statistics were reported. The nine videos submitted by agricultural teacher preparation programs received a total of 6,592 views throughout the week of National Teach Ag Day. Video views ranged from 181 – 2,480 (M = 732.4, SD = 707.98). The number of likes on each video ranged from 1 – 38 (M = 24.7, SD = 26.48). YouTube allows viewers to dislike videos with a "thumbs down" button. Six of the nine videos received one dislike while three received zero dislikes. Comments ranged from 0 – 3 comments on the nine videos.

In order to address RO2, Videolytics was used to report best practices used by the videos to increase reach and SEO. All videos were shared on Facebook with Facebook likes ranging from 25 – 584 (M = 184.7, SD = 168.05). Two of the nine videos did not contain a high-resolution thumbnail. All videos, however, were missing key components identified as best practices by Videolytics including zero being shared on Twitter, zero having an end screen added, and zero having an informational card. However, eight of the nine videos did contain closed captioning, thus providing opportunities for those with hearing disabilities the ability to enjoy the video and potentially be #TaggedToTeachAg.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

In its first year as a contest, participation was low across all agricultural teacher preparation programs with only nine of the 90 U.S. teacher preparation programs participating. Based on results from the content analysis, views and engagement with the videos were low as indicated by the large standard deviations observed. Results from the Videolytics program additionally indicated that some key best practices to increase reach, spread, and engagement were neglected for most of the videos, thus missing the mobilization portion of the communicative functions (Saxton & Water, 2014).

The overarching goal of these videos was to promote agricultural education programs and mobilize viewers to pursue a career in agricultural education. By overlooking best practices, future agricultural educators could have been missed during this campaign. Future research should include a content analysis of the content of each video to determine how the videos are implementing a call-to-action to pursue careers in agricultural education.

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