

Who's Talking Anyway?

An analysis of sources used by a St. Louis newspaper to communicate about Monsanto's dicamba-tolerant seed technology

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Introduction & Need for Innovation

Farmers have long struggled to manage weeds in crop production, and rely upon seed and herbicide technologies despite weeds' ability to quickly grow resistant.

Seed and chemical company Monsanto began developing a dicamba tolerant seed-trait in 2008 and released its new seeds in 2015 without corresponding herbicides (Dowell, 2017). Problems emerged and continued until the herbicides were released in late 2016 (Dowell, 2017).

Agricultural technology can be prone to controversy (Nisbet & Huges, 2006) and sources used by the media play an important role in what is communicated to the public (Andsager, 2000; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

As reporters often have little understanding science and technology, reliable sources are needed to communicate these issues (Nelkin, 1987).

Conceptual Framework – Source Expertise

Sources can influence word choice, terminology, or phrases selected for publication by journalists (Andsager, 2000) by sharing their viewpoints to design, construct, or impact an article's frame (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Journalists should seek appropriate experts from the associated field of study, but tend to select sources that favor economic growth (Andrews & Caren, 2010) and those within close proximity of the news (Stempel, 1991).

The perceived level of source expertise is an important factor in the outcomes of strategic risk communication (Yuan, Ma, & Besley, 2019). Experts shape the news by providing information and quotes to enhance the story (Conrad, 1999).

Methodology

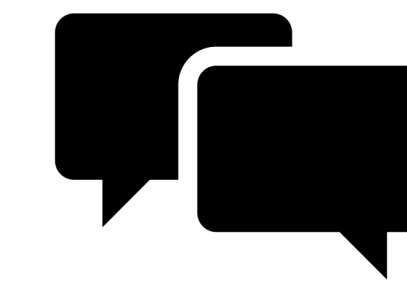
Newspapers play an important role in covering local businesses (Riffe & Reader, 2007).

St. Louis Post-Dispatch articles were selected for analysis because of its proximity to Monsanto headquarters and its status as the largest newspaper in the area and state. Articles were identified using the terms "dicamba" and "Monsanto" using NexisUni.

The timeframe selected was January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2018 to encompass both the dicamba-tolerant seed and corresponding herbicide's development and use.

Fifty-three articles were analyzed for source type. Relevant sources included any person or organization quoted or cited within the articles.

Eleven different source types appeared throughout the 53 articles

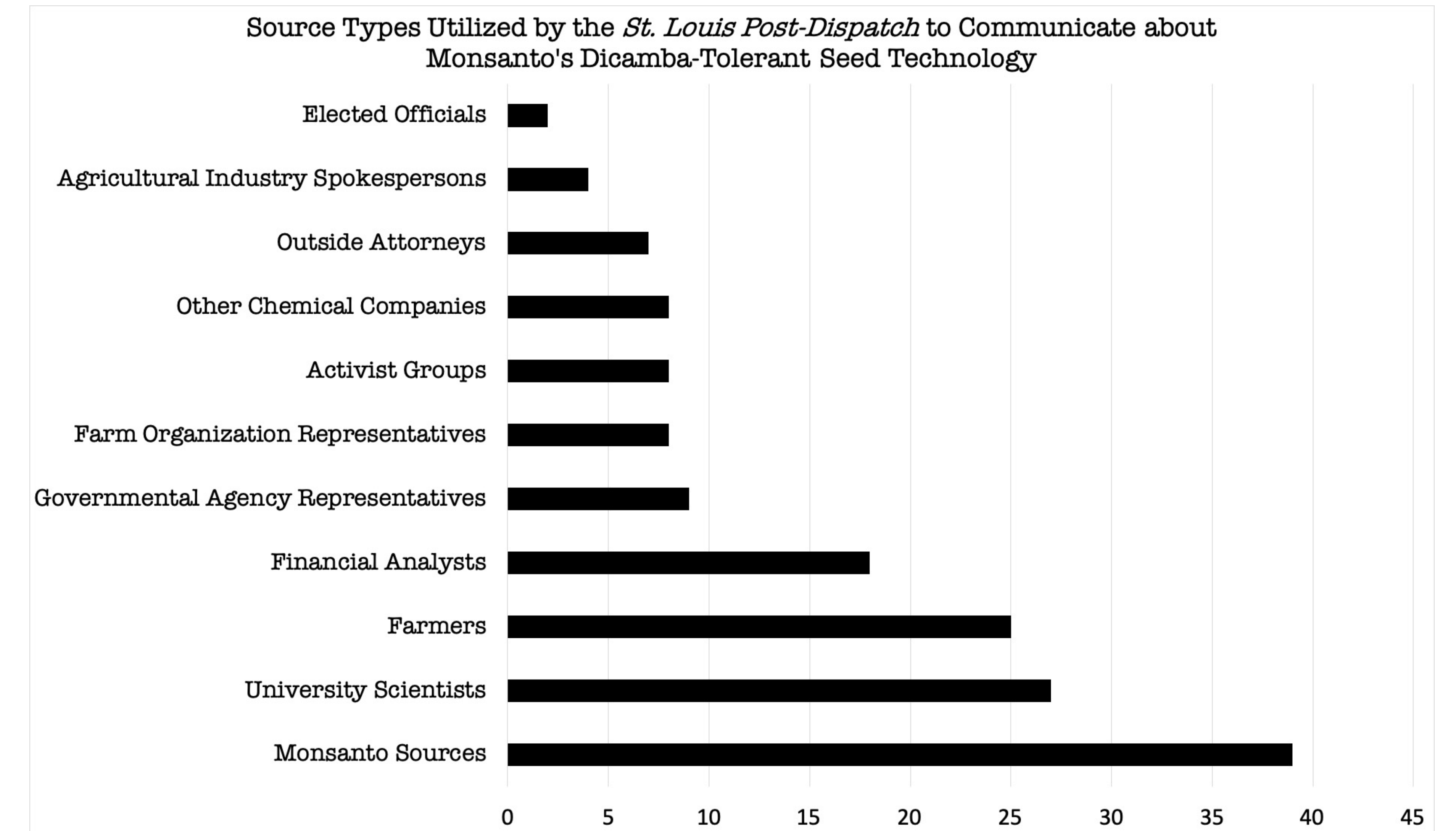


Sources were cited a total of 155 times



Many sources appeared to be referenced in various articles

Results



Conclusions & Recommendations

Regarding the Most Prominent Sources

- **Monsanto Representatives:** Journalists tend to seek sources within close proximity (Stempel, 1991) and those associated with economic growth (Andrews & Caren, 2010). Could be an indication of Monsanto's attempts to influence the message frames (Andsager, 2000).
- **University Scientists:** Consistent with Conrad's (1999) study that suggested journalists tend to rely upon scientists for scientific news articles.
- **Farmers:** Use of farmers was likely done in an effort to share viewpoints of impacted stakeholders in the issue (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

For Future Research

Issues of science tend to follow a pattern in the news media with positive coverage early on, but increased negativity and conflict over time (Cacciatore et al., 2012). Future research should investigate Monsanto's media responses at different points in time.

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* relied upon a variety of sources to report upon the issue. Future studies should investigate the degree to which media outlets rely upon the same, or different sources over time.

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