

**Communicative Functions of a Closed Facebook Group for
School-Based Agricultural Education Teachers in California**

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Introduction

With the world at our fingertips, people are reaching out more to social media and other outlets to receive instant feedback and advice. Agricultural education teachers are no different. As of February 17, 2020, the national Ag Education Discussion Lab Facebook group had 11,164 members (Ag Education Discussion Lab, n.d.). Likewise, multiple state level agricultural teacher associations utilize Facebook groups to highlight organization news, field state-specific questions, and boost morale for teachers. Some of these states include California, Oregon, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas. The California Ag Ed Discussion Lab Facebook group (CAEDL) was created as a “resource to help teachers navigate challenges, seek advice, share successes, and share resources” (California Ag Ed Discussion Lab, n.d.).

Lampe et al., (2014) surmised “whether or not a request for help receives any responses from one’s network may significantly affect how people experience the efficacy of seeking help through their online social connections” (p. 5). An analysis of the communicative functions of the California Ag Ed Discussion Lab Facebook group and the reactions and comments of the posts could offer insight into the success of the social network.

The purpose of this study was to identify the communicative functions of the posts of SBAE teachers present in the California Ag Ed Discussion Lab Facebook group. The objectives were to: (1) identify the communicative functions of the posts, and (2) which types of posts had the most interactions (reactions and comments).

Conceptual Framework

Saxton and Waters (2014) identified four functions of which social media serves consumers. They contend social media posts can be split into one of four categories, *community building*, *information sharing*, *mobilization*, and *promotion*. *Community building* posts build goodwill amongst members, *information sharing* posts are one-way communication used to provide information to members, *mobilization* posts request an action or favor from other members, and *promotion* posts promote an event or activity to other members (Ellison et al., 2013; Lampe et al., 2014; Saxton & Waters, 2014).

Methodology

This study used quantitative content analysis (Riffe et al., 1998) to collect data from posts of the California Ag Ed Discussion Lab Facebook group. *Sociograph* was used to record the timestamp, text, reactions, shares, and number of comments for all posts from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019. The research team captured screenshots of content from posts, including graphics, weblinks, or photos, which they used in the coding process. Two coders, both former SBAE teachers, coded the posts for their communicative functions into the categories outlined in the conceptual framework. The data from *Sociograph* was then used to calculate frequencies of comments and reactions for each communicative function.

Findings

Researchers coded 419 posts for their communicative function. Frequencies of posts are shown in Table 1. Thirty-eight posts (9.06%) received no interaction, e.g. comments or reactions, from other members, of which 14 were *information sharing* posts and 24 were *mobilization* posts. The number of reactions per post ranged from 0 to 102 ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 11.12$), with 116 posts (27.68%) receiving no reactions, e.g. like, love, haha, wow, sad, mad. The number of comments per post ranged from 0 to 65 ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 7.81$) with 96 posts (22.91%) receiving no comments.

Table 1

Frequency of posts, reactions, and comments by communicative function

Communicative Functions	Posts		Reactions		Comments	
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Community Building	12	407	33.92 (36.24)	66	5.50 (7.83)	
Information Sharing	122	1357	11.12 (12.06)	421	3.45 (6.02)	
Mobilization	270	512	1.90 (2.91)	1868	6.92 (8.40)	
Promotion	15	122	8.13 (4.61)	29	1.93 (2.06)	

Mobilization posts accounted for 64.44% of the posts ($n = 270$), *information sharing* posts accounted for 29.12%, *promotion* posts accounted for 3.58% ($n = 15$), and *community building* posts accounted for 2.86% ($n = 15$). *Community building* posts had the highest mean reaction per post ($M = 33.92$, $SD = 36.24$), and *mobilization* posts had the lowest mean reaction per post ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 2.91$). *Mobilization* posts had the highest mean number of comments per post ($M = 6.92$; $SD = 8.40$), and *promotion* posts had the lowest mean number of comments per post ($M = 1.93$; $SD = 2.06$).

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

Community building posts received the most reactions per post and *mobilization* posts received the most comments per post. These conclusions reflect those of Lampe et al., (2014) that *mobilization* requests get more responses than others kinds of posts, and Saxton and Waters (2014) conclusion that liking and commenting happen more on *community building* and *mobilization* posts. However, 24 (8.89%) of the 270 *mobilization* posts did not receive any interactions at all, and 38 (14.07%) of the *mobilization* posts received no comments. With the intent of *mobilization* posts to receive some sort of feedback or help from other members of the community, this lack of response could potentially stifle members' desire to post questions in the California Ag Ed Discussion Lab Facebook group for fear of not getting a response. The lack of interactions on a post hindering future posts reflects findings from Lampe et al. (2014) that not receiving responses from one's network may significantly affect how participants ask for requests and favors in their social network.

Lampe et al. (2014) found a significant difference in the amount of responses mobilization posts receive based on the type of resource requested by the post. A more in-depth analysis of posts that received no interactions could inform best practices to members to increase interactions with their posts. Further research to determine traits of posts that did not receive any comments could offer insight to the Administrators of the group to place guidelines or suggestions for members to ensure interaction on posts.

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