Understanding Agricultural Communicators' Priority Research Areas Using Q Methodology

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Introduction

Agricultural communications as an academic discipline still lacks a research agenda, despite researcher's suggesting a need for one (Doerfert et al., 2007; Irlbeck & Buck, 2017). We believe that focusing and coordinating research efforts in the discipline can help broaden its impact. The purpose of the study was to understand agricultural communications scholars' priority research areas to identify the types of research and researchers working to advance the discipline.

Method

Using Q methodology, we characterized viewpoints about research priorities in the agricultural communications discipline. To develop the concourse, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of 616 peer-reviewed journal articles published in the *Journal of Applied Communications* using the key search phrase "agricultural communications." We removed all articles published before 2000 and interpreted the topic of agricultural communications research in each of the remaining 259 articles. We identified 27 research topics, which represented our Q set. Our P set (N = 45) consisted of agricultural communications scholars who attended the National Agricultural Communications Symposium.

Results and Conclusions

We identified four dominant types of researchers in agricultural communications:

Message Framing Influencers

- Explained 33% of the variance; 9 defining variables; Composite reliability of 0.97; Eigenvalue of 14.85.
- Most important statements: "Effects of message framing on consumer perceptions and behaviors" and "Agricultural advertising."

Extension Scholars and Practitioners

- Explained 10% of the variance; 4 defining variables; Composite reliability of 0.94; Eigenvalue of 4.4.
- Most important statements: "Communication in the Cooperative Extension System" and "Farm Safety Communication."
- Least important statements: "Ag communications programs and curricula" and "Ag comm students."

Method-Conscious Researchers

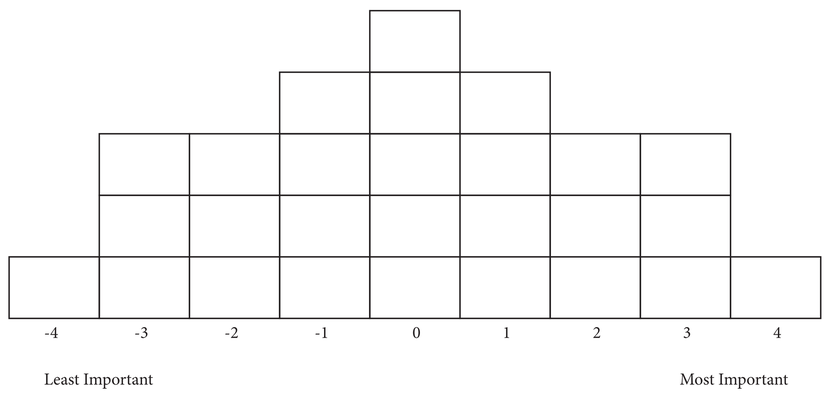
- Explained 9% of the variance; 8 defining variables; Composite reliability of 0.97; Eigenvalue of 4.08.
- Most important statements: "Use of rigorous research methods in ag comm" and "Ag comm academic programs and curricula."
- Least important statements: "Role of social media in ag comm."

Production-Oriented Academics

- Explained 8% of the variance; 5 defining variables; Composite reliability of 0.95; Eigenvalue of 3.41.
- Most important statements: "Technology in ag comm" and "Best farm management practices."
- Least important statements: "Effects of message framing on consumer perceptions and behaviors" and "Agricultural advertising."

Participants generally agreed that "Ag comm efforts during historical events" and "Agritourism" were not important research topics.

Q Sort Sorting Board



References

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