



A Quantitative Content Analysis of COVID-19 Communication on Texas Agriculture Organizations' Websites



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Introduction

- The Texas agriculture industry faced COVID-19 economic losses estimated at \$6 to \$8 billion (Outlaw et al., 2020)
- A crisis is an unpredictable, unforeseeable, or unavoidable event that negatively impacts organizations and their stakeholders (Coombs, 2012; Ulmer et al., 2007)
- Agriculture companies and organizations play a role in communicating on behalf of agriculture during a crisis (Irlbeck et al., 2013)
- Crisis communication should be included on organizational websites (Taylor & Perry, 2005)

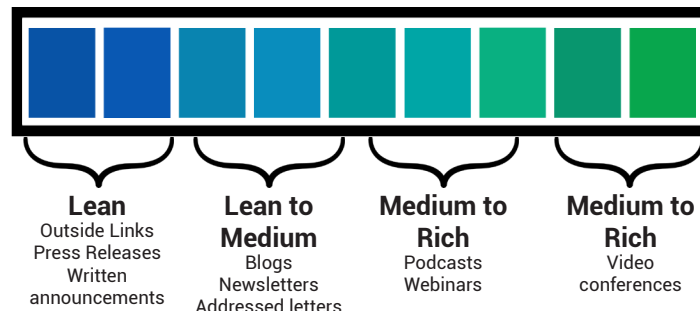
Theoretical Framework

- This study used Media Richness Theory
- Media can be either rich or lean (Daft & Lengel, 1986)
- Richness is based on the medium's capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization, and language variety (Daft & Lengel, 1986)

Methodology

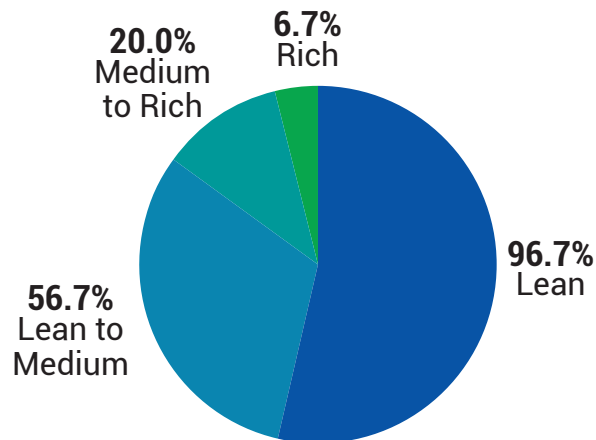
- Texas Agriculture Council members' websites ($N = 51$) were analyzed after removing entries that were improperly linked or not Texas-based
- A codebook containing four definitions spanning the lean to rich media continuum were developed and used to train two coders (Krippendorff, 2013; Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft & Steers, 1986; Greer & Moreland, 2007)
- Dichotomous variables (0 = not present, 1 = present) were used to record the presence of COVID-19 related communication
- Websites were accessed July 3 – 6, 2020

Results/Findings

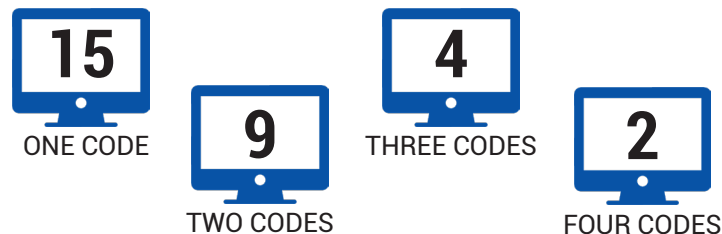


58.8%
of websites that communicated about COVID-19

Richness of Media Used to Communicate about COVID-19



Use of Media Codes on Websites



Conclusions

- Many websites ($n = 21$) did not communicate about COVID-19 within one click of either their homepage or news/media/blog page
- TAC members relied heavily on "lean media" and few utilized "rich media" to communicate about COVID-19 on their website
- Half of the websites communicated through more than one type of media on the lean to rich media continuum

Implications & Recommendations

- Practitioners should be aware of the expectation of organizations to communicate often and early during a crisis
- Future research should determine whether TAC members utilized other media to communicate with stakeholders
- Practitioners should ensure the richness of media fits the situation they communicate about
- Future research should determine how TAC members decided on the media they used to communicate about COVID-19 and if those decisions were aided by resources like a crisis management plan