

**Like, Comment, and Share: What Content Drives Engagement on the
AAAE Facebook Page?**

Dylan Davidson
Graduate Student
dylan.s.davidson@ttu.edu

Dr. Courtney Meyers
Professor
courtney.meyers@ttu.edu

Department of Agricultural Education & Communications
Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409
806-834-4364

Introduction/Need for research

Facebook continues to be one of the most popular social media platforms for U.S. adults (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). As nonprofit organizations and associations strive to communicate with their audience members, Facebook has been a helpful tool (Bellucci & Manetti, 2017; Waters et al., 2009). In a study of how 10 nonprofits were using Facebook, McKay (2015) found that while no single Facebook post type received the greatest engagement, certain posts received more likes and shares while others received more comments. As a nonprofit organization, the American Association for Agricultural Education strives to share useful information through its Facebook page. To inform future communication efforts, it is necessary to evaluate what types of content garner the most audience engagement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) communicative functions that influence engagement – information, community-building, and action. These functions were identified in an examination of how nonprofit organizations utilize Twitter to communicate and engage with their stakeholders (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Saxton and Waters (2014) applied these functions to research Facebook messages from nonprofit organizations. Within agricultural communications, Meyer et al. (2017) used these communicative functions to explore Facebook content about National Teach Ag Day.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine what types of posts encourage engagement in the 2020 and 2021 AAAE National Conference. The specific research objectives were:

1. What communicative functions were used in the Facebook posts?
2. How did audience engagement vary based on the post's communicative function?

Methodology

AAAE Facebook post data were collected via the Facebook Insights page. The date range for the data collection was the Friday before and Friday after each national conference to ensure that all posts related to the national conferences were collected and that any engagement in the days after the national conference are measured. Facebook post data were exported from the Insights page to Microsoft Excel. We coded the posts into categories using Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) communicative functions. AAAE posts that featured winners of AAAE awards such as the Distinct Researcher Award or induction into the AAAE Fellows were coded as Community posts. AAAE posts featuring the daily schedule or contained other logistical details about the conference were coded as Information posts. AAAE posts that encouraged audience engagement such as asking the audience to guess who the Distinguished Speakers might be were coded as Action posts. AAAE posts that did not fall into these categories were classified as Other Posts.

Audience engagement was identified from the Lifetime Engaged Users and the Lifetime Post Total Impressions data Facebook Insights provided for each post. Lifetime Engaged Users are the number of people who engaged in certain ways with the post such as liking or sharing it. Lifetime Post Total Impressions are the number of times the post was on a person's screen. These two measurements provided an indication of the engagement and impressions each post had.

Results

RO 1: What communicative functions were used in the Facebook posts?

Sixty-seven posts were provided during the 2020 ($n = 34$) and 2021 ($n = 33$) national conferences. Of the 67 posts, 48 (71.64%) were Community Posts. Twelve (17.91%) posts were Information Posts, two (2.98%) posts were Action posts and five (7.46%) were Other posts.

RO 2: How did audience engagement vary based on the post's communicative function?

Table 1 displays the data to compare the total engagement data and average engagement data for each communicative function post type.

Table 1

Audience Engagement Metrics for Each Communicative Function

Function	Number of Posts	Lifetime Post Total Impression	Average Impressions	Lifetime Engaged Users	Average Engaged Users
Community	48	106,357	2,215.8	8,381	175
Information	12	12,539	1,044.9	724	60
Action	2	831	415.5	93	47
Other	5	4,777	955.4	214	43
Total	67	124,504	1,858.3	9,412	140

The 67 posts shared during the 2020 and 2021 AAAE national conferences received 124,504 impressions, and 9,412 users engaged with the posts. The most common communicative function was Community with nearly two-thirds of the posts. On average, Community posts received the most engagement ($M = 2215.8$) followed by Information posts ($M = 1,044.9$) Other posts ($M = 955.4$) and lastly, Action posts ($M = 415.5$). Community posts had the highest average number of engaged users ($M = 175$) followed by Information posts ($M = 60$), Action posts ($M = 47$) and lastly Other Posts ($M = 43$).

Conclusions/Recommendations

This study focused on what communicative functions AAAE used in their Facebook posts and if these functions influence audience engagement. Based on the data, Community posts were the most engaging posts based on the average number of impressions and engaged users. This is in agreement with Saxton and Waters (2014) who found audience members were more likely to interact with Facebook content from nonprofits when they used community-building posts. These types of posts should continue to be created and shared to encourage audience interaction with AAAE's social media content. While the other communicative function posts did not garner the same level of engagement, they are still relevant posts that provide information and details the audience did engage with, albeit at a lower level. Additional research could examine what characteristics of AAAE Facebook posts (e.g., graphics, quotes, photos, videos) influence engagement.

References

- Auxier, B., & Anderson, M. (2021, April 7). *Social media use in 2021*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>
- Bellucci, M., & Manetti, G. (2017). Facebook as a tool for supporting dialogic accounting? Evidence from large philanthropic foundations in the United States. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 30(4), 874–905. <https://doi.org/10.1108/aaaj-07-2015-2122>
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, Community, and Action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 337–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x>
- McKay, L. (2015). *How social is social? Nonprofit audience engagement by types of Facebook posts*. [Master's thesis, Gonzaga University]. ProQuest.
- Meyer, D., Holt-Day, J., Steede, G., & Meyers, C. (2017). A content analysis of the 2016 National Teach Ag Day's Facebook posts. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 58(3), 120–133. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2017.03120>
- Saxton, G. D., & Waters, R. D. (2014). What do stakeholders like on Facebook? Examining public reactions to nonprofit organizations' informational, promotional, and community-building messages. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(3), 280–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2014.908721>
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 102–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006>