

**Seeds of Communication:
A Communications Audit of Instagram Posts Promoting the AgriStress Helpline for Texas**

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Introduction/Need for Research

Mental health is a growing topic of conversation and concern for people around the globe. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024), one in five adults live with a mental illness making it one of the most common health conditions in the U.S. Since the 1980s, a substantial body of literature has reported mental health concerns within the agricultural industry (Younker & Radunovich, 2021). Agricultural producers face unique challenges contributing to stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders (Baker et al., 2022). The burden of these mental illnesses on farmers continues to grow with large impacts on health and major social, human rights, and economic consequences (Yazd et al., 2019). In the U.S., agricultural producers die by suicide at almost twice the rate of individuals in differing occupations (Peterson et al., 2020). In response to these high suicide rates, AgriSafe (2023) and The Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention and Education (SW Ag Center) have developed platforms and communication channels with the mission of reducing occupational injuries, mental health concerns, and diseases among agricultural workers and their families. This led to the creation of the AgriStress Helpline, a free and confidential 24/7 crisis and support line designed specifically for agricultural producers. Mental health literacy campaigns have been effective in raising awareness of resources available to agricultural producers, who value basic messaging and layouts in print and digital materials with relatable photos (Ward & Witt., 2023). However, it is not yet known how or how well the AgriStress Helpline for Texas is communicating to producers.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the creation and utilization of posts promoting the AgriStress Helpline for Texas, we applied Shen and Bigsby's (2013) conceptual framework for crafting messages and Siricharoen and Siricharoen's (2015) insights into the fundamentals of effective design. Messages should be developed by first determining the content (i.e., topic and theme) and then specifying the visual format (i.e., structure) of the message (Shen & Bigsby, 2013). Additionally, effective design is achieved through the use of effective visuals, content, and knowledge (Siricharoen & Siricharoen, 2015). These frameworks were applied to determine if posts promoting the AgriStress Helpline for Texas are effectively reaching and resonating with the target audience.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to analyze the presentation of visual messages on social media promoting the AgriStress Helpline by focusing on the key elements of content, structure, and visual components. We focused our investigation on posts promoting the AgriStress Helpline for Texas via Instagram due to the platform's popularity among adult users and its focus on visual and engaging content (Gottfried, 2024). The following research objectives guided this study:

1. Examine the messages found in Instagram posts promoting the AgriStress Helpline for Texas.
2. Determine the design elements used in Instagram posts promoting the AgriStress Helpline for Texas.

Methodology

A communications audit was conducted to gain more insight into what content was being shared on Instagram to promote the AgriStress Helpline for Texas by agricultural organizations and state agencies. "Communication audits identify what is being done well, what is not being done well, and how communication efforts can be improved" (Goodwin et al., 2014, p. 1). To retrieve Instagram posts, we searched pages and hashtags for key terms related to the AgriStress Helpline – AgriStress, #AgStrong, #Agmentalhealth, #seasonschangeyouremain. The earliest post found using the AgriStress Helpline logo was from March 4, 2022, and the most recent post was on October 10, 2023. We found and analyzed 57 posts on four Instagram pages – @swagcenter95, @txagriculture, @agwomenconnect, and @capitalfarmcredit. A codebook based on previous research (Butler, 2022) was created and used to code posts. Each post was examined and coded on the message, design elements, and demographics of people depicted in the post. Messages were coded for content; design elements were coded for fonts, colors, QR codes, and logos used; and demographics were coded for the gender and ethnicity of individuals shown in the posts. Descriptive statistics and frequency counts were calculated for each coded variable in Microsoft Excel. Two coders made notes regarding the message and design elements included.

Results

We found that within the 57 posts, 10 different messages were found with the most common message being "It's okay to ask for help" ($n = 17$, 29.8%), followed by the message "Is stress getting the best of you?" ($n = 14$, 24.5%). A majority of the posts ($n = 41$, 71.9%) used an image of a male, while only 29.8% ($n = 17$) used an image of a female. Additionally, the most common ethnicity depicted was Caucasian ($n = 36$, 63.1%), followed by Hispanic ($n = 9$, 15.7%), African American ($n = 5$, 11.4%), and Asian ($n = 1$, 1.7%). A majority of the posts ($n = 45$, 78.9%) used the same design elements as other posts including fonts, colors, and Helpline logos. However, 21% ($n = 12$) used additional design elements such as a QR code or the Texas Department of Agriculture seal. Lastly, a majority of posts ($n = 53$, 92.9%) had the same design structure and layout.

Conclusion/Implications/Recommendations

The messages and layout structure depicted in the Instagram posts promoting the AgriStress Helpline align with previous research on what agricultural producers value because of their basic messaging and simple designs (Ward & Witt, 2023). However, the unequal distribution of ethnicities and genders within the posts raises important considerations. The prominent use of males and Caucasians does not accurately reflect the diversity within the agricultural population. This could potentially further isolate individuals who already feel isolated (Yunker & Radunovich, 2021), hindering the inclusivity of mental health support messages. Future efforts should focus on creating designs that close the gender and ethnicity gap as cultural competence is vital when designing suicide prevention campaigns (Joe et al., 2008). Efforts to increase awareness and engagement with the AgriStress Helpline may require tailored strategies for different demographic groups that can enhance the effectiveness of the outreach initiatives. By acknowledging these unique needs and communication styles, AgriStress could develop more personalized messages that resonant with those who need these messages most.

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