

**ACTivate Agriculture: A Social Media Content Analysis of a National Agricultural
Communications Collegiate Organization**

Kensie Taylor Todd

Graduate Assistant

417-229-5606

mdarst@ttu.edu

Taylor Kennedy

Graduate Assistant

785-323-7366

taylor.kennedy@agnet.tamu.edu

Dr. Erica Irlbeck

Associate Dean for Outreach and Engagement

806-834-6708

erica.irlbeck@ttu.edu

Davis College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources

Texas Tech University

Box 42131

Lubbock, TX 79409

Introduction/Need for Research

Utilizing an online presence has the potential to positively impact organizational performance, reach broader audiences, enhance engagements, and gather valuable data to inform future marketing efforts (Ravaonorohanta & Sayumw, 2020). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many collegiate organizations have struggled to maintain member involvement. Research indicates that students are less likely to participate in in-person organizations, leading to a detrimental impact on collegiate organization membership nationwide (Wiley, 2023). Consequently, collegiate leadership teams are challenged to utilize online mediums to engage students effectively.

The National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) is an organization dedicated to telling the stories of agriculture to various targeted audiences by equipping its members with the necessary skillsets. In August 2023, the officers of National ACT established a content calendar reflecting the organization's purpose and scheduled content through three social media platforms, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. By conducting a thorough content analysis of National ACT social media accounts, this study aims to provide actionable insights to help revitalize member participation and enhance the organization's digital presence.

Conceptual Framework

The Content Analysis Theory focuses on analyzing the use of bodies of texts, images, and symbolic matter (Krippendorff, 2019). This technique is used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. It examines communication content, such as words, themes, and patterns. For this study, the frequency and context of keywords, visuals, and themes in National ACT social media posts were analyzed by two coders who determined the themes through divisions of content and the alignment of the messages. These insights may indicate the rate at which these content themes are being used effectively to communicate with National ACT audiences.

Methodology

This study utilized qualitative content analysis to discover how National ACT framed their messages centered on various content themes. Adopting a qualitative research design is well-suited for exploring the depth and complexity of social media content, allowing for an in-depth understanding of textual, visual, and contextual aspects of social media posts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study focused on three specific social media platforms, chosen based on their relevance to the research question and their popularity among the target demographic.

The analysis covered 74 posts on Instagram, 75 on Facebook, and nine on LinkedIn from August 10, 2023, to June 4, 2024. Data collection involved creating an Excel sheet and transferring data from the Meta Business Suite. Collected data included captioning verbiage, duration of the content, published time, post type, reach, accounts engaged, profile activity, shares, likes, comments, saves, plays, and tags. This data collection helped in determining the most effective messages quantitatively. The sampling criteria for this study included captioning themes, hashtags, keywords, timeframes, and visuals. A codebook was developed after collecting all data

from the online media accounts. Initial coding involved identifying significant phrases, text segments, and visuals, which were then grouped into themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

An audit trail was maintained, documenting all research decisions and changes in the research process to ensure consistency and replicability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To ensure confirmability, reflexive journals were kept, documenting the researchers' reflections, decisions, and potential biases throughout the study (Berger, 2015).

Statement of positionality

Prior to introducing the findings of this study, it is important to explore the positionality of the researcher to ascertain how the study was approached and analyzed. This researcher is a member of the 2023-2024 National ACT officer team.

Findings

The analysis revealed posts focusing on member showcases garnered significant engagement. These posts were frequently shared and commented upon, indicating a strong interest in showcasing members' work and achievements. Posts focusing on advocacy content had the second-highest engagement, while scholarly announcements had the least interaction.

Engagement levels varied significantly based on the time of day and day of the week. Posts made during weekday afternoons and early evenings tended to receive the highest engagement. Visual content, particularly high-quality images and graphics featuring National ACT members, was more engaging than text-only graphics. Visuals that included people, especially members or events, generated more likes and shares.

Conclusions

The qualitative content analysis of National ACT social media accounts provides actionable insights to help the organization enhance its digital communication strategies. By focusing on advocacy content, community building, scholarly announcements, and optimizing posting times and visual content, National ACT can better engage its audience and potentially reverse the trend of declining membership involvement. These findings offer a foundation for National ACT to develop a more effective and targeted social media strategy moving forward. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations must reevaluate the methods they implement in restructuring their organizations to suit their membership and recruit future members of interest.

Implications/Recommendations

Collegiate agricultural organizations should closely monitor the themes of posts they regularly upload. Expanding content to align with organizational goals could help increase engagement and broaden their following. Future research should focus on expanding content to include more educational items centered on issues within their discipline from the college organization's leadership team.

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