

**Land of Enchantment ...and Agriculture: A Content Analysis of Agriculture Portrayed on
New Mexico True Instagram**

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Introduction

Agricultural literacy is essential for informed decision-making regarding food systems, sustainability, and cultural appreciation (Malloy, 2023). In today's digital age, social media platforms, such as Instagram, have emerged as powerful tools for knowledge exchange and cultural influence, significantly shaping public perceptions through visual content (Maddox, 2020). A growing area of interest at the intersection of agriculture and tourism, known as agritourism, highlights the potential benefits for both agriculturalists and visitors. Agritourism not only fosters an increased understanding of agricultural practices but also contributes to the health and overall wellness of participants (Schmidt et al., 2022). This research explores and emphasizes the role of social media in enhancing agricultural literacy while promoting tourism.

Conceptual Framework

Cultivation theory, initially developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) to understand the influence of television on an individual's perceptions and beliefs, has been effectively adapted to measure the influence of various forms of media, including social media platforms (Mosharafa, 2015). By employing the message system analysis step of cultivation theory, we aimed to identify the most consistent messages about agriculture portrayed in social media posts. This analysis provided insights into how agricultural themes are represented and disseminated through platforms like Instagram, which serve as significant conduits for knowledge exchange and cultural influence, thereby shaping public perceptions of agriculture (Maddox, 2020). Understanding these consistent messages is crucial for enhancing agricultural literacy and promoting informed decision-making regarding food systems and sustainability (Malloy, 2023).

Methodology

We employed a quantitative content analysis to examine the portrayal of agricultural themes on the [State] Instagram account, one of the most followed tourism accounts in [State] (Terry, 2021). To account for seasonal variations in tourism-related posts, we systematically sampled three posts from each month throughout 2023, selecting one post from each ten-day period (1st–10th, 11th–20th, 21st–31st). We collected a total sample of 36 static images or graphics. Static images were selected over videos due to their consistency in viewing among followers. A priori codes were determined prior to sampling, based on an adapted codebook from Steede et al. (2019). We determined coding variables ($n=11$) through literature reviews over both visual and written message strategies and definitions of agriculture. We developed a comprehensive definition of agriculture using the United States Department of Agriculture topic list (USDA, 2024). We completed coder training prior to data coding using images and captions from other tourism Instagram pages. Two coders independently coded 11 variables for each sampled post. Intercoder reliability was determined by Krippendorff's alpha which is appropriate when seeking reliability ratings between two coders (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). According to Riffe et al., (2014), variables below .667 require recoding for reliability measures. Krippendorff's

alphas ranged from perfect agreement to -0.01. Four variables were recoded based on Krippendorff's alpha. We used discussion and unanimous agreement to finalize recodes.

Findings

Analysis revealed that 19 images (52%) depicted agriculture as outlined by the USDA (2024) definition. Of these images, 10 showcased rural areas with mountain, plains, and canyon landscapes. In contrast, only three images (8%) described or used agricultural terms in their captions. Notably, only two images (5%) highlighted food or plant production or fiber. Instead, 55% of the images were posted specifically for tourism to a specific location, which is appropriate given that the [State's] Instagram page is dedicated to tourism and displaying [State] culture. Despite the limited focus on agricultural production, all 36 images and their captions conveyed positive connotations or verbiage. Additionally, we found 47% of the images utilized rural landscape types. This analysis underscores the emphasis on rural aesthetics over agricultural function in promoting tourism through social media (Steede et al., 2019; Terry, 2021). In total, 56% of images ($n=20$) were coded as having a tourism purpose, whereas no images were determined to have an agricultural focused educational purpose. The remaining 44% of images ($n=16$) were coded as having a purpose other than agriculture or tourism. This highlights a clear preference for promoting and educating about tourism over agriculture, despite the presence of agricultural elements in most of the images.

Conclusions

As a tourism and travel-focused page, [State] showcased a variety of [State] experiences, including agricultural-based environments. However, the agricultural images shared are not educational and do not promote a consistent message about the value of the industry. Captions for these agricultural images do not focus on providing agricultural facts or knowledge related to the image shown, thereby missing opportunities to influence people's worldviews through the cultivation of messages (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This lack of educational content in agricultural posts prevents the platform from leveraging its reach to enhance agricultural literacy and appreciation among its audience.

Implications and Recommendations

Future research should investigate the appearance of agricultural messages across multiple Instagram accounts. Additionally, the impact of exposure time to tourism accounts and the influence of Instagram on people's views of agriculture should be explored. Posting agricultural content on tourism accounts should focus on visually compelling images and relatable narratives that highlight agricultural practices, connect viewers with the people behind the scenes, and frame agriculture as an integral part of the destination's identity. Agricultural producers and supporters should be encouraged by agricultural communicators and advocates to submit and portray agriculturally based images. These images could be accompanied by educational captions to ensure that agricultural information shared is provided by agriculturally literate sources. Sharing these visual images on tourism accounts can help bridge knowledge gaps and enhance the public's understanding and appreciation of the agricultural industry, putting agriculture and communication professionals on a proactive communication strategy rather than reactive.

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