

**Visual and Popular Culture Media at AAAE: A 25-Year Historical Review in the National
AAAE Conference Proceedings**

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Introduction

For decades, using popular culture in the classroom and analyzing its effectiveness through research has been heavily debated, specifically on how it can be viewed as entertainment and not learning (Champoux, 2001) versus how it can help students retain information (Al-Bahrani et al., 2016). In the agricultural discipline, popular culture has been used to analyze agricultural literacy, teamwork, and students' perceptions of agriculture, among other topics (Gold & Greenhaw, 2024; Specht & Beam, 2015; Summerfield et al., 2023). However, previous literature has found that while teachers in agricultural and extension education are interested in using popular culture, almost half were not using it (Bruce & Ewing, 2009) even though faculty in similar disciplines, such as behavioral and social sciences, find it helpful for enhancing critical thinking (Peacock et al., 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to quantify the number of research and innovative idea presentations at the National American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) Conference and explore the variation of those presentations over the past 25 years to understand trends that may exist between the use of popular culture media (media with a shared social system that is popular in society (Duff, 2002)) versus visual media (any media that has a visual component (Jaynes, 2024)).

Framework and Methods

The framework for this study relied on a historical analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2021), which was used to analyze the past 25 years of National AAAE proceedings on the upcoming and recent national conferences page on the conference website. This framework and method are typically used to understand phenomena (Wyche et al., 2006) and, in this case, it was utilized to understand how popular culture media (PCM) has been incorporated into research and innovative ideas at the National AAAE Conference.

For this historical analysis, a total of 1,821 poster abstracts and 1,431 full papers in proceedings (there were no poster abstracts or titles in 2011, and only poster titles in 2014) posted on the conference website were considered for analysis. All of the abstracts and papers were deductively analyzed using keywords of *film*, *movie*, *TV*, *television*, *pop/popular culture*, and *documentary* to align with various aspects of visual media and/or PCM (Duff, 2002) and related terms from the researcher's own experiences with the topic. For example, *YouTube* was added to the keywords during the analysis. A total of 40 poster abstracts/papers were identified as relevant to the visual media or PCM based on the keyword search. Four posters (two research and two innovative ideas) were removed due to a lack of connection or not using visual media or popular culture as a research or teaching tool. Of the 36 remaining poster abstracts and papers fully analyzed in this study, 16 were papers, 11 were research posters, eight were innovative idea posters, and one was an uncategorized poster. Broken down even further, nine of the 35 abstracts (two papers, five research posters, and two innovative idea posters) utilized PCM and 27 were more closely associated with visual media.

Results/Findings

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the posters and papers that incorporated visual or PCM in a five-year breakdown to show an even progression of time.

Table 1
Visual or PCM in National AAAE Conference Proceedings

Years	Poster (<i>n</i> = 19)	Papers (<i>n</i> = 16)	Number of PCM
1999 – 2003	0	1	1 Paper
2004 – 2008	4 (3 II, 1 U)	2	2 II
2009 – 2013	3 (1 II, 2 R)	2	2 R
2014 – 2018	5 (2 II, 3 R)	6	1 R
2019 – 2024	8 (2 II, 6 R)	5	1 Paper, 2 R

Note. II = Innovative Idea Poster, RP = Research Poster, U = Uncategorized Poster

One trend in the variation of PCM use that emerged was the use of visual media—the use of visual elements—instead of PCM, which has a cultural component. The first use of popular culture was in the 2003 National AAAE proceedings in a paper by Doolittle and Camp (2003), which briefly mentioned how information can be gathered in an inquiry process for determining a solution to a problem using television or film documentaries. Visual media was first seen in 2004, when an interactive CD-ROM called *CottonLink* incorporated visual components of the cotton industry as a reference tool (Bullock et al., 2004). The first specific use of PCM and not video clips of a piece of other research was in 2008 with two innovative idea posters titled *Reel me in! Using movies to reinforce foundations in teaching and learning* (Houck et al., 2008) and *Using movies to teach leadership* (Jones, 2008). As noted, though, these were innovative ideas and did not incorporate findings from research to support the use of PCM. The first two research posters analyzing popular culture specifically were presented in 2010 and 2012, two and four years after the two innovative idea posters. In 2013 and 2014, a paper and a research poster, respectively, were published in the proceedings that focused on agricultural imagery seen in a television news broadcast or PCM. Even though more papers and posters with aspects of visual media were seen after 2014, works with a direct connection to PCM were not published until 2019, when a research poster discussed narrative transport in an environmental film course. From 2019 to 2024, three of the twelve submissions examined focused on using PCM as a teaching or research tool, such as the use of the show *Clarkson's Farm* in an undergraduate classroom (Summerfield et al., 2023); the remaining nine were only connected to visual media.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

Even though PCM has been used in the classroom for decades (Champoux, 2005; Gold & Greenhaw, 2024; Wegner, 1977), research on its use and best practices for using it is not widely seen in the AAAE proceedings until the last five years. However, visual media use appeared more frequently in the past ten years. The lack of PCM in the National AAAE Conference proceedings suggests that this subfield is still mainly unexplored compared to other research topics in agricultural education. Based on this implication, future research could explore reviewers' perceptions of PCM research and the value placed on this research. Additionally, we could analyze regional conference proceedings and others in the broader agricultural education discipline, such as the National Agricultural Communications Symposium, to see if the lack of PCM research is unique to the National AAAE conference or representative of the field. Furthermore, we could analyze whether researchers and educators differentiate between visual media and PCM in the classroom and in research to understand whether they should be looked at independently.

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