

#LoveIt! Social Media Framing Education in Agricultural Leadership Courses

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

Americans consider their food choices frequently, but 72% of consumers say they know nothing or very little about farming or ranching (Mulholland Curtin, 2020) Their food and lifestyle choices also seem to be influenced by social media as 71% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase based on a social media reference (Luth Research, 2025). As agricultural leadership courses prepare students to enter the workforce, it is beneficial to take time to educate students on properly framing social media messaging for various audiences.

A foundation of agriculture leadership course at Cal Poly State University (Cal Poly) introduces both theory and practical application of leadership in agriculture (Cal Poly, 2025). The course emphasizes strategies for self-improvement and personal development with technical agricultural information and presenting said information to a public audience while designing and implementing leadership theory in community settings. As leaders are charged with the task of influencing others (Grenny et al., 2013) and, given the varying levels of agricultural knowledge across audiences, agriculture leadership practitioners need to equip their students with the skills to frame social media messaging in a way that educates and engages all audience segments. Understanding target audiences and how to tailor audience messaging may better prepare students for agriculture leadership roles.

How it works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

To foster agricultural leadership student development in the art of influencing, a workshop was held focusing on the appropriate use of social media framing. To ground the workshop in theory, we used sociological accounts of framing (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Gitlin, 1980). Media frames are used to get to the central story of an issue and visual imagery and catchphrases, likened to hashtags, can be used to create these frames (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). A complete lesson plan and a copy of the slide deck used will be provided with the final poster. The workshop was implemented using the following steps:

1. Scaffold: This step included establishing objectives, designing the learning activity, and determining supplies. The workshop had two objectives: 1) When given a social media scenario, students will be able to describe social media framing and its relation to agricultural leadership, and 2) When given an agriculture statistic, students will create two social media posts to influence two different audiences in agriculture.
2. Deliver: A slide deck was used to guide and deliver the session and included all activity instructions. For the active learning component, students were divided into groups of three to create social media posts for two different audience segments (i.e., industry and consumer). Students were given the option to pick which social media platform they designed for, but they were given a specific commodity fact to share with both audiences. The session concluded with a class discussion to synthesize the workshop's learning.
3. Assess: After the workshop, the instructor of record and teaching assistant reviewed the submitted social media posts and checked them against the assignment criterion. This criterion included the use of topic-related imagery, clarity of messaging, content appropriate for the social media platform selected, and relevance of selected hashtags for two audience segments (i.e., industry and consumer).

4. Reflect: After delivery and assessment, those who delivered the workshop met to reflect on the effectiveness of the session. This included reviewing student work samples and comparing them with specific learning objectives as well as course and program learning objectives. Adjustments were made to the lesson plan as well as the slide deck to include more specific industry examples and clarify assignment instructions and requirements.

Results to Date/Implications

The workshop was presented by an industry professional working for a non-profit organization as a social media director, who was also a master of agricultural education teaching assistant, and a faculty member in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department. Participants ($N = 59$) involved in the workshop were students enrolled in Foundations of Agricultural Leadership at Cal Poly in the Fall 2024 and Winter 2025 terms. Most students were undergraduate bachelors of agricultural science and agricultural communication, with all graduate students being masters of agricultural education students. The workshop was conducted during a regularly scheduled two-hour class session in a foundational agricultural leadership class.

While no formal human subject research approval was received for this activity, the presenters noticed universal student engagement during the lesson, and subsequent reflection resulted in a rich discussion concerning the roles of leaders involved with agriculture in framing media messaging effectively. Photographs of students during the activity, as well as products created, will be included with the final poster.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

As the course discussed is offered every term and is a required course for two undergraduate majors in the college, the instructors recognize the impact the workshop has on its students' leadership development and the scope of that impact. Thus, they plan to keep teaching the workshop but also keep refining the delivery to meet changing student and industry needs. Each term, there is an opportunity for the instructors to modify and deliver this workshop iteratively, which includes the updating of data and facts used for the active learning component as well as staying current with social media trends.

Those who wish to implement this lesson should consider utilizing in-season agricultural commodities relevant to the state in which the lesson is taking place. Additionally, facilitators should provide current data and facts from trusted sources for the participants to use to frame their narratives. These specific learning objectives for this session were aligned with the required course text, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*, a book by John C. Maxwell (2007). Others who wish to implement an activity like this may alter their objectives to align with their specific course and program learning objectives, as well as other frequently used course materials.

Costs/Resources Needed

There are minimal costs associated with this workshop activity. At Cal Poly, the facilitator utilized poster tear sheets (1 at \$20) and markers (5 at \$3.50 each = \$17) readily available within the course department, totaling \$37. Additionally, the facilitator provided facts from various sources, including non-profit organizations, commodity groups, and state and national departments of agriculture, to base the activity on. Having access to similar statistics that are locally relevant will provide contextualized pertinence to the class audience.

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