ENGAGING AUDIENCES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA IN COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Meredith Oglesby, Emily Buck, Ph.D. **Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership**

Introduction

- 70% of Americans use social media.
- 79% of 18-29-year olds are using Facebook and 38% are using Twitter.
- Does the type of post influence engagement rates?

Theoretical Framework

- The theory of Uses and Gratifications (UG) guides us in understanding how people have motivations and expectations through using certain media.
- Social media can foster connections between users allowing them to generate content and share content.
- Higher education can benefit from using social media to interact with students and influence potential applicants.

Methods

- The researcher gathered social media analytic information from January 2018 to April 2019 from four departments within a College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at {STATE} University.
- The top five posts based on impressions and reach from each month were pulled for analysis.
- For each departments' Twitter impressions, engagements, and engagement rate were averaged, and for Facebook lifetime post total reach and lifetime engaged users were averaged.
- Engaging elements were tracked through if the post has a photo, video, link, hashtag or tagged another page.
- The audience of each post was analyzed to track popular themes.

Results

- The results show that all departments are engaging with three main audiences on these platforms: students, faculty/staff, and alumni.
- The themes found across the platforms for the top five highest impressions and reach were: students on campus, student organizations, research, and events.

Objectives

This study is designed to determine how the departments in one Midwestern college of agricultural and environmental sciences are engaging with students and to identify the specific tactics they are using.

1. **Understand how the departments within CFAES use the social media platforms of Twitter and Facebook to engage their different audiences**
2. **Determine the success of different tactics used and determine which tactics have the highest level of engagement**
3. **Track popular themes posts are targeting**

Department / Number of Tweets	Average Impressions	Average Engagements	Average Engagement Rate	Total Photo/Video	Total Link	Total Hashtag	Total Tags	Total Engaging Elements
1 - 80	1801.7	88.04	.053	71	24	69	35	199
2 - 79	1098.38	51.41	.044	56	22	33	8	119
3 - 80	2878.54	77.00	.031	52	35	42	48	177
4 - 68	1097.43	13.71	.018	32	31	16	34	113

Table 1. Average analytic findings and engagement elements on Twitter platform

Department /Number of Posts	Average Lifetime Post Total Reach	Average Lifetime Engaged Users	Total Photo/Video	Total Link	Total Hashtag	Total Tags	Total Engaging Elements
1 - 80	2946	338	34	47	68	62	211
2 - 76	1701	253	57	31	0	12	100
3 - 67	416	36	29	47	21	7	104
4 - 80	382	18	33	41	0	4	78

Table 2. Average analytic findings and engagement elements on Facebook platform

Conclusions/Discussion

- There appears to be a positive relationship between the number of engaging elements, such as photos or videos, links, hashtags, or tags, and the engagement level the posts received across Twitter and Facebook.
- When the departments are posting on social media, using these engaging elements could encourage more engagement among their audiences.
- Posts often also have an impact on the engagement levels as seen where department 1 had the most posts on Twitter and Facebook and had higher levels of engagement.
- Twitter overall had more impressions than Facebook although this may be linked to the fact that engagement elements were used more on Twitter than Facebook.
- This study followed with most social media research in that posts with engaging elements have more reach.
- Further study may be able to determine if there is a statistically significant positive correlation.

References

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