

Agritourism Imagery: A Content Analysis of Agriculture Portrayed on New Mexico True's Instagram

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Agritourism Imagery: A Content Analysis of Agriculture Portrayed on New Mexico True's Instagram

Abstract

Agricultural literacy is essential for informed decision-making regarding food systems, sustainability, and cultural appreciation. One method for improved agricultural literacy lies in the communication efforts within social media platforms due to the usage of such platforms for news and education. Agritourism is at the intersection of tourism and agriculture, making it a potential starting point for producers to bring gaps between agricultural efforts and consumers. For this study, we completed a quantitative content analysis using a popular tourism Instagram feed to determine if agriculture was presented and how it was displayed in posts. While 19 posts (52%) of the sampled posts depicted agriculture as defined by USDA, only three posts described agricultural terms. While no post directly mentioned agritourism, over half of the images were determined to have a tourism purpose, not uncharacteristic for a tourism profile. Based on our findings, we determine that agriculture is represented but not highlighted nor thoroughly described in the Instagram profile. Based on the findings of this study, we recommend agritourism entities, and agriculture communication practitioners in New Mexico post educational and engaging posts on their business Instagram accounts to contribute to the overall landscape of tourism social marketing for New Mexico. These images could be accompanied by educational captions to ensure agricultural information shared is provided by agriculturally literate sources to help bridge knowledge gaps and enhance public understanding.

Keywords

Content analysis, research in brief, agricultural communications, social media

Authors

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Introduction

Agricultural literacy is essential for informed decision-making regarding food systems, sustainability, and cultural appreciation. When people lack agricultural literacy, they may undervalue the contributions of agriculturalists and the broader discussion about food, land, and sustainability (Malloy, 2023). A clear opportunity for agricultural literacy development lies in social media usage. In today's digital age, social media platforms, such as Instagram, have emerged as powerful tools for knowledge exchange and cultural influence, shaping public perceptions through visual content (Leaver et al., 2020). Instagram is a major part of how people interact online, with 2 billion active users monthly (Hinga, 2026). Instagram brings together images, user behavior, and algorithm-driven trends, curating a personalized feed for every user. This results in certain image styles becoming more common on the platform (Leaver et al., 2020). For tourism, social media plays an important role in information search and decision-making behaviors, shaping travel perceptions through content (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

A growing area of interest at the intersection of agriculture and tourism, known as agritourism, highlights potential benefits for both agriculturalists and visitors. Agritourism fosters an increased understanding of agricultural practices and contributes to the health and overall wellness of participants (Schmidt et al., 2022). United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) census data shows New Mexico lost 4,068 farms between 2017 and 2022 (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022). To combat farm loss, agritourism offers a way for producers to diversify their portfolios with 416 farms engaged exclusively in agricultural tourism compared to 1,434 farms solely focused on direct product sales (Schmidt et al., 2017), highlighting tourism's growing role in supporting agriculture. Researchers studied agritourism communication for various states (Bowman et. al, 2020; Collins et. al, 2024; Miller et. al, 2012); however, a gap in literature exists for communication specific agritourism research in New Mexico. This research serves as a starting point for addressing communication needs for agritourism practitioners in the state.

With most people now far removed from day-to-day agricultural operations, media representations frequently become the primary source of information shaping their perceptions of the industry (Malloy, 2023). About 53% of American adults say they often get their news from social media, reinforcing how social media platforms have become a major source of information for the public (Pew Research Center, 2025). In addition, this audience spends an average of 33 minutes each day on Instagram consuming various messages out of an average 4 hours spent on all social platforms (Blank, 2026; Zulkarnain, 2025). This is important because the constant imagery and captions found on Instagram may play a role in how agriculture is portrayed online. This research explores the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in depicting instances of agricultural representations within New Mexico tourism content. Through this research, agritourism practitioners in New Mexico may better understand the impact of representing their agricultural spaces on social media for tourism audiences.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation theory, initially developed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) to understand television's influence on an individual's perceptions and beliefs, has been adapted to measure the

influence of various forms of media, including social media platforms in a variety of fields (Morgan et. al, 2015; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Mosharafa, 2015; Stein et. al, 2021). Cultivation theory consists of “cultural indicators” (Gerbner, 1969) measured in three areas: institutional process analysis, message system analysis, and cultivation analysis (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Institutional process refers to the organization forming messages and their decisions for forming shared messages (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Cultivation analysis measures the perceptions and adapted behavior made due to viewed messages (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). The message system analysis of cultivation theory focuses on identifying recurring patterns across large sets of media messages (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010), making it well suited for analyzing Instagram posts within this study.

We aimed to identify the most consistent messages via images and captions about agriculture portrayed in tourism posts shared on Instagram. This analysis provided insights into how agricultural themes are represented and disseminated through platforms like Instagram, which serves as a significant conduit for knowledge exchange and cultural influence, thereby shaping public perceptions (Leaver et al., 2020). Understanding these consistent messages is crucial for enhancing agricultural literacy and promoting informed decision-making regarding food systems and sustainability. Gerber and Gross (1976) argue people adopt the meanings, assumptions, and views repeatedly appearing in media, especially when they don't have real world experience to rely on.

Methodology

This study examined if agricultural imagery was represented in Instagram images and captions and describe how it was represented if present using two research objectives.

- Research Objective 1: Determine if agriculture is portrayed in New Mexico True's Instagram throughout 2023.
- Research Objective 2: Describe the agricultural and tourism themes of sampled posts from the New Mexico True's Instagram.

We employed a quantitative content analysis to examine portrayals of agricultural themes on the New Mexico True's Instagram account. The account had 181,000 followers at the time of the study, classifying it as a macro account (Lehto Brewster & Lyu, 2020) and one of the most followed tourism accounts in New Mexico (Terry, 2021). To account for seasonal tourism variations, we systematically sampled three posts per month throughout 2023, selecting one post from each ten-day period (1st–10th, 11th–20th, 21st–31st). We randomly sampled images using a blind scrolling procedure. The lead researcher would scroll and randomly click on a post. If the selected post was not in the required date range, an adjacent image was selected.

We collected a total sample of 36 static posts. We sampled only static images to maintain consistency in sampled posts for this study. This reduced coding strain and variability among the coders. A priori codes were determined prior to sampling. We determined coding variables ($n=7$) through literature reviews over both visual and written message strategies and definitions of agriculture. Coded variables included photography type (i.e. portrait, landscape [urban or rural], motion, food, macro, etc.), image format (i.e. picture, graphic, or mix), exhibition of agriculture

in image and caption per study definition, sector of agriculture in image and caption per USDA categories, and post purpose (i.e. tourism marketing [i.e. depicting or describing activities or location] or educational content [i.e. providing additional knowledge or instructing viewers]). Initially, we developed a comprehensive definition of agriculture using the USDA topic list (USDA, 2024). After a codebook review, we determined the initial definition was too broad. We narrowed the definition by reducing ambiguous descriptors and cross referenced it based on the USDA topic areas (USDA, 2024). The final definition of agriculture used for this coding was: *agriculture is the cultivation, production, and harvesting of animals, plants, food, fiber, and related areas such as biotechnology, conservation, forestry, organic products, nutrition, and research across both rural and urban settings.*

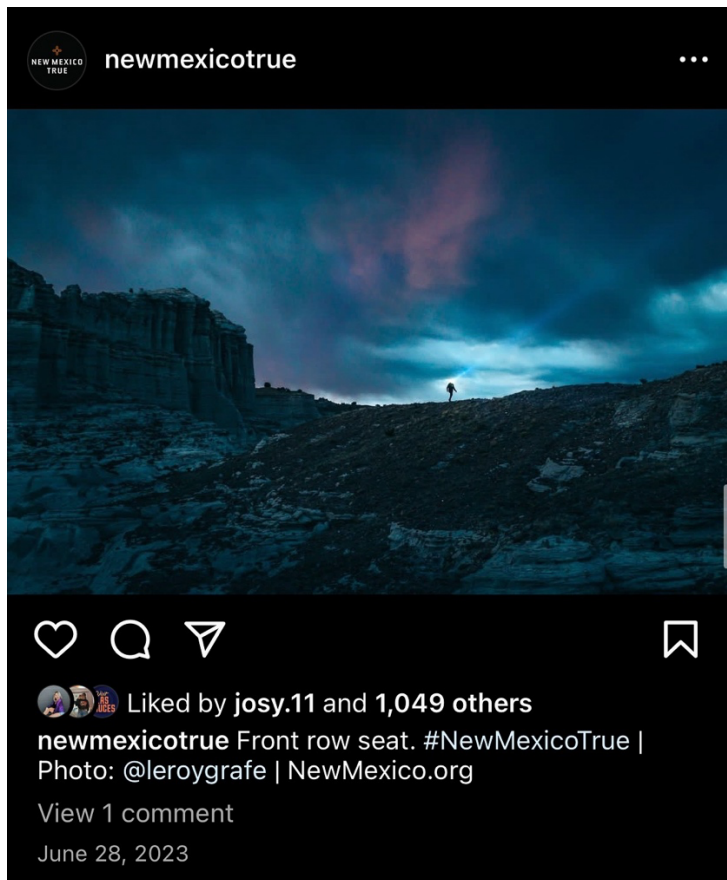
We completed coder training prior to data coding using images and captions from other tourism Instagram pages. Two coders independently coded seven variables for each sampled post. Inter-coder reliability was determined by Cohen's kappa which is appropriate when seeking reliability ratings between two coders (McHugh, 2012). According to McHugh (2012), any rating of .80 and above can be read as either "strong" or "almost perfect" agreement. Three variables rated below an 80% agreement after the first round of coding and were recoded to reach a minimum of 90% agreement. We used discussion and unanimous agreement to finalize recodes.

Findings

Our analysis revealed 17 posts (47%) utilized rural landscape photography types in the images of the posts (see Figure 1). Other common image types included portrait ($n = 4$), urban landscapes ($n = 4$), and still life ($n = 9$).

Figure 1

Sampled Instagram Image from New Mexico True Depicting a Rural Landscape Photograph

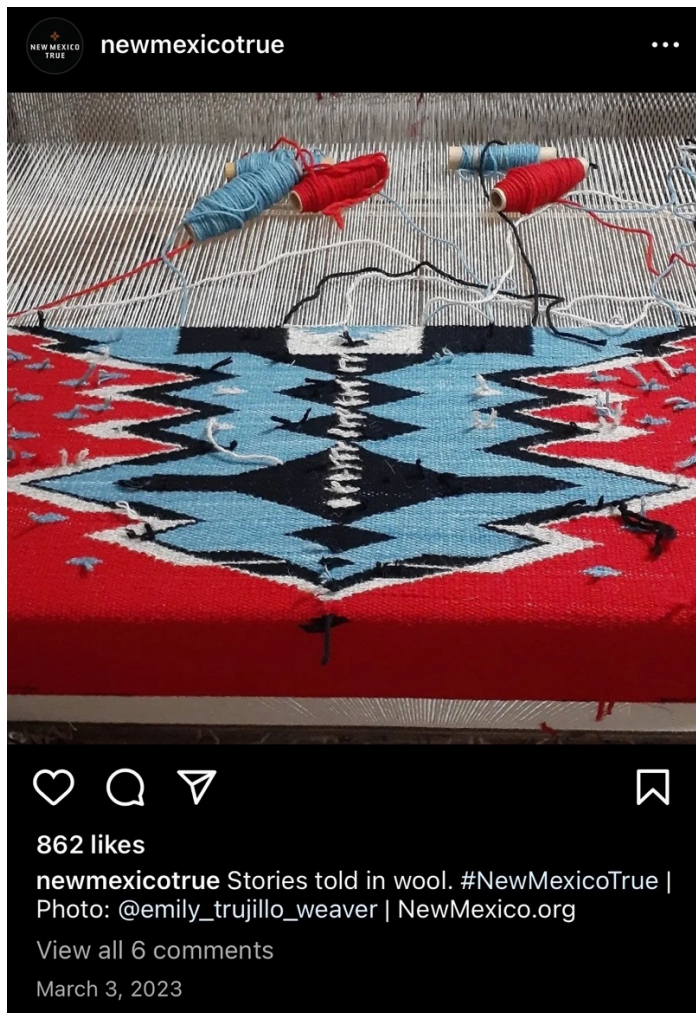


Note. From New Mexico True [@newmexicotrue]. (2023, June 28). *Front row seat.* #NewMexicoTrue | Photo: @leroygrafe | NewMexico.org [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CuDJeQCJDob/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&srtk=MzRIODBiNWFIZA== Copyright 2023 by New Mexico True. Reprinted with permission.

Of the image portion of posts, 19 images (52%) depicted agriculture as outlined by the study definition. Of these images, 10 specifically showcased rural areas with mountain, plains, and canyon landscapes as subjects corresponding with our definition of agriculture, though they did not represent production agriculture. In contrast, only three images (8%) described or used agricultural terms in their captions (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Sampled Instagram Image from New Mexico True with Agricultural Wording in Caption



Note. From New Mexico True [@newmexicotrue]. (2023, March 3). *Stories told in wool.* #NewMexicoTrue | Photo: @emily_trujillo_weaver | NewMexico.org [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CpVnThBMpuB/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&mdxt=MzRlODBiNWFIZA==&srk=MzRlODBiNWFIZA== Copyright 2023 by New Mexico True. Reprinted with permission.

Notably, only two images (5%) highlighted food or plant production or fiber. Unsurprisingly, 55% of the images were posted specifically to direct tourism to a specific location. Of these images, eight had captions provided names of locations or experiences in New Mexico. Some images were accompanied by a tagged location and not a direct caption. In total, 56% of images ($n = 20$) were coded as having a tourism marketing purpose, whereas no images were determined to have an agricultural-focused educational purpose (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Sampled Instagram Image from New Mexico True with Tourism Purpose



Note. From New Mexico True [@newmexicotrue]. (2023, April 3). *Give it a rest.* #NewMexicoTrue | Photo: @alisonmarlborough | NewMexico.org [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq1Cw1At1kB/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&cplk=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==&srtk=MzRIODBiNWFIZA== Copyright 2023 by New Mexico True. Reprinted with permission.

The remaining 44% of images ($n=16$) were coded as having a purpose other than agriculture education or tourism marketing which included short captions with no clear purpose or a more poetic caption rather than instructive.

Conclusions

As a tourism and travel-focused page, New Mexico True showcased a variety of New Mexico experiences, including agricultural environments per the USDA definition. Because 55% of sampled images marketing a specific New Mexico experience, we determined this as appropriate given the account's focus on tourism and displaying New Mexico culture. Nearly half of the posts shared depicted rural landscapes, underscoring an emphasis on rural aesthetics over agricultural function when promoting tourism through social media, like findings from Kohls (2023). However, agricultural images did not educate audiences about agricultural topics or promote a consistent message about the industry's value. Captions for these agricultural images did not focus on providing agricultural facts or knowledge related to the image shown, thereby missing opportunities to influence people's worldviews of agriculture through the cultivation of messages (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Instead, posts emphasized experiential aspects of specific locations which was unsurprising. Consistent with tourism-focused Instagram accounts, New Mexico True prioritized promoting and educating audiences about tourism over agriculture, despite the frequent presence of agricultural elements.

This lack of educational content about the environment or production depicted in agricultural posts prevents the platform from leveraging its reach to enhance agricultural exposure and appreciation. Agritourism research has identified promotion, advertising, and media relations as important communication needs within the industry, supporting the importance of stronger agricultural messaging in tourism content (Bowman et. al, 2020; Collins et. al, 2024; Miller et. al, 2012). Through the lens of message system analysis (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010), these findings of repeated agricultural imagery with a lack of supporting context in captions could shape viewers' perceptions. Repeated exposure to rural landscapes disconnected from agricultural practices or agritourism experiences may lead viewers to develop a limited perception of agriculture's impact and influence in New Mexico. This perception would directly contradict the value of the agricultural industry which contributed over \$50 billion in economic impact in 2026 (Lohman, 2026).

Implications and Recommendations

Future research should investigate the appearance of agricultural messages across multiple Instagram tourism accounts. Additionally, long-term exposure to tourism accounts and the influence of Instagram on people's views of agriculture should be explored. This focused research could measure the impact of recurring messages on agricultural perceptions and agricultural literacy to further incorporate cultivation theory into new media studies.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend agritourism entities, and agriculture communication practitioners in New Mexico post educational and engaging posts on their business Instagram accounts to contribute to the overall landscape of tourism social marketing for New Mexico. These images could be accompanied by educational captions to ensure agricultural information shared is provided by agriculturally literate sources. To accompany these posts, we recommend agritourism entities and agriculture communication practitioners also use tourism related hashtags like #NMTrue as well as tagging or collaborating with the New Mexico True's account. Sharing these visual images and educational captions on business

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. Posts representing agriculture through industry tours and value-added operations are prime content for this type of post. This is a way to integrate agritourism into well performing social media accounts.

To aid in the improvement of social media content for New Mexico agritourism marketing, we recommend agricultural communication practitioners partner with Extension agents in New Mexico to provide communications training through field days or workshops to improve the online messaging and marketing of agritourism operations for greater agricultural exposure.

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