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Selected GO TEXAN Members' Online Presence: A Communications Audit

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Abstract
Prior research has indicated that alternative, or nontraditional, agricultural producers have more difficulty marketing their products, which may lead to them turning to online and social media tools to meet their unique marketing needs. In order to assess the extent to which alternative agriculture producers are using these communication tools, a communications audit was conducted to determine and describe how select members of the GO TEXAN network are utilizing websites and social media tools for their alternative agricultural business or company. A majority of the members included in this study were found to be using websites, while fewer were utilizing social media tools. Facebook, blogs, and Twitter were found to be the most popular social media tools used. Both website and social media content was found to be mostly general information about the company and either its products or services or marketing and advertising information. Future research should be conducted on effective methods to train businesses in employing social media and online tools for marketing, promotion, and advertising.

Keywords
websites, social media, alternative agriculture, communications audit, content analysis, GO TEXAN, online communication

Research

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Prior research has indicated that alternative, or nontraditional, agricultural producers have more difficulty marketing their products, which may lead to them turning to online and social media tools to meet their unique marketing needs. In order to assess the extent to which alternative agriculture producers are using these communication tools, a communications audit was conducted to determine and describe how select members of the GO TEXAN network are utilizing websites and social media tools for their alternative agricultural business or company. A majority of the members included in this study were found to be using websites, while fewer were utilizing social media tools. Facebook, blogs, and Twitter were found to be the most popular social media tools used. Both website and social media content was found to be mostly general information about the company and either its products or services or marketing and advertising information. Future research should be conducted on effective methods to train businesses in employing social media and online tools for marketing, promotion, and advertising.

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Introduction

In the past decade, the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies (blogs, social networking sites and wikis) on the Internet has created a new culture for communicating, connecting, marketing, and advertising, not only for individual people, but for products, businesses, and industries, as well (Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed, 2008). First, the evolution of Web 2.0 allowed for a more user-generated, socially connected Web. With the Web being more social, users want to feel connected and a part of the Web 2.0 applications they are utilizing (Anderson, 2007). Organizations recognized this phenomenon, and started incorporating social media avenues in their marketing schemes to promote products and services as a means to have an active, online community interested and willing to provide feedback (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The technologies these organizations are implementing can be grouped under the Web 2.0 umbrella, but more specifically, social media applications (Borsheim et al., 2008). Society has changed

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drastically as a result of social media, especially when considering the ways in which people want to consume information (Qualman, 2009). A growing online community is now looking for information in new ways through the use of an increasing number of social media channels. In 2011, two-thirds of online adults (66%) were using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace or LinkedIn (Smith, 2011).

As new communication methods are introduced, the marketing, promotion, and advertising of products has become an area of particular focus for many manufacturers and companies, including those within the agricultural industry. As more alternative or nontraditional agricultural products and services are introduced to the world, finding a way to market these products becomes a challenge for agriculturalists. According to Gold (2007), alternative agriculture includes nontraditional crops, livestock, and other farm products; service, recreation, tourism, food processing, forest/woodlot, and other enterprises based on farm and natural resources; unconventional production systems such as organic farming or aquaculture; or direct marketing and other entrepreneurial marketing strategies. Alternative, or nontraditional, agriculture producers experience more difficulty in marketing their products and must find creative ways to market effectively (Hazzell, 2005).

The Texas Department of Agriculture implemented a marketing program in order to help market Texas agriculture that "represents Texas agri-business on state, national and international levels by building recognition for the GO TEXAN market" (Texas Department of Agriculture, 2011a, para. 2). According to the GO TEXAN website (2011a), "more than 25 million Texans shop, travel and dine out in support of Texas business and agriculture and look for the GO TEXAN mark" (Texas Department of Agriculture, 2011a, para. 1). The GO TEXAN network has three types of membership: Product and Associate Membership, Restaurant Membership, and the Wildlife Initiative. Within each of these membership levels, members are allowed to use the official GO TEXAN mark "on product packaging and promotional materials" (Texas Department of Agriculture, 2011c, para. 4) in order to identify the company as a Texas business (Texas Department of Agriculture, 2011b).

Many agriculturalists are embracing state programs, such as the GO TEXAN network, along with social media as tools to market their farm-related businesses (Hardesty, 2011). Social media tools provide opportunities for communities to share information and are available online and, for the most part, free of charge (Kinsey, 2010). This makes social media use an attractive and potentially advantageous avenue for agriculturalists looking for ways to market and promote their business and products.

Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

Although social media is a relatively new concept, its uses for marketing and promoting companies and products have been found to be advantageous (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009). Social media provides new opportunities to market businesses and products (including those within the agricultural industry) to audiences that might not be reached through traditional methods of marketing. Through the use of social media, firms can engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at a relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The changing nature of communications has encouraged more businesses to utilize a promotional mix with traditional media (i.e. television, newspaper, radio) and social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). General Electric and Procter & Gamble are two organizations that found the importance of utilizing social media in their media campaigns, because "first, social media enables companies to

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talk to their customers, and second, it enables customers to talk to one another" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358). CM Photographics directly recognized the impact of utilizing a $600 Facebook ad and being allowed to target their intended audience. From this ad, CM Photographics generated $40,000 in revenue over a 12-month time span (Facebook, 2011).

One technique an organization can use to market their products is to utilize social media avenues, which could help organizations that face hindered research and development spending (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009). Gary Vaynerchuk, a family business owner, personally found "$15,000 in direct mail equals 200 new customers; $7,500 in billboard costs equals 300 new customers; and $0 on Twitter equals 1,800 new customers" (Qualman, 2009, p. 257). This new technology allows organizations to engage with customers and relate to one another without any cost to the organization (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009).

Social media is being used not only for advertising purposes, but also for customer service experiences (Best Buy, 2011). According to a case study on Twitter, Best Buy created a Twitter account, @twelpforce, to provide customer service through a real-time experience. As of December 15, 2010, @twelpforce had more than 2,900 employees signed up to help respond to questions and more than 38,000 questions had been answered (Best Buy, 2011). Social media is not just a new technology teenagers are utilizing, but a fundamental shift in marketing strategies (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009; "How Social," 2010). By utilizing social media outlets, organizations can further their dollars on products and service awareness. In addition, businesses have an opportunity to build relationships with their consumers and "accelerate innovation and collaboration" ("How social", 2010, p. 59).

Mangold and Faulds (2009) discussed how social media use has changed the way consumers communicate, find and view information, advertise, and trust sources of information. Organizations recognized this phenomenon and started incorporating social media avenues in their marketing plans to promote products and services as a means to have an active, online community interested and willing to provide feedback (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Consumers are turning more frequently to various types of social media to conduct their information searches and to make purchasing decisions (Lempert, 2006; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Research has shown a shift from the global population seeking information rather than waiting on experts to give it to them, and more recently, to the information finding them, through the growth of social media (Seger, 2001). Because of social media, society is changing and it is important for organizations to change with it (Qualman, 2009). As consumers change where and how they gather information about the products they buy, those wanting to market and advertise to consumers must also shift how and where they make information available. Agricultural companies must change and evolve to keep up with the demands of current technologies and audiences (Seger, 2011).

The interactive nature of Web 2.0 technologies creates the need for communicators to be aware of the presence of an interaction partner involved in a communication medium (Universiteit Twente, 2010). Biocca, Harms, and Burgoon (2003) defined social presence as the "sense of being with another" (p. 456) and said that studies that explore human-computer interaction use the theory to study "how this 'sense of being with another' is shaped and affected by interfaces" (p. 456)

Social presence research is often conducted to explore, describe, or examine some aspect or the effects of technology (Biocca et al., 2003). In the context of mediated communication, the conceptualization of social presence was developed from Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). Short and colleagues said social presence is "the salience of the other in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions" (Short et al., 1976, p. 65).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) combined social presence theory with media richness theory to develop a classification of social media. Media richness theory states the goal of any communication is to address ambiguity and reduce uncertainty (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Within this theory, types of media are classified on a spectrum from rich to lean. More rich forms of media (e.g. face-to-face communication) allow more information to be transmitted in a given time frame. These mediums can "overcome different frames of reference or clarify ambiguous issues to change understanding in a timely manner" (Daft & Lengel, 1986, p. 560). Lean media (i.e. impersonal letter) do not allow for feedback, clarification, or detailed information to be transmitted (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Social media, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), is unique because of the richness of the medium and the degree of social presence it allows. This indicates that social media allow significant amounts of information to be broadcast to large audiences within a short amount of time and that the information can influence the behavior of others.

With the addition of self-presentation and self-disclosure concepts, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified social media in regard to their level of social presence/media richness (low, medium, high). Blogs were ranked as low in social presence/media richness, social networking sites and content communities (e.g. YouTube) were ranked as medium, and virtual social worlds and game worlds were ranked as high.

Purpose and Objectives

The 2011-2015 National Research Agenda Priority Area 2 states that social science research goals should address "the use of new technologies and social networking tools for communication to selected target audiences" (Doerfert, 2011, p. 17). The rapid growth of social media use has created new channels for communicating about a variety of topics. Addressing how these channels can be used to effectively to communicate about the agricultural topics and products can offer new opportunities for those within the industry. The first step for doing so involves determining what, if any, social media tools are currently being used by agriculturalists, so that researchers may identify areas of potential need for expanding social media used amongst agriculturalists.

The purpose of this study was to determine and describe how selected GO TEXAN members utilize social media outlets and online tools. This research study sought to determine how social media outlets and online tools (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, websites, You Tube, Flicker, etc.) were being utilized by alternative agriculturists in the GO TEXAN network. For the purposes of this study, alternative producers includes those that produce specialty crops, small-scale fruits and vegetables, or anything outside of the large farms that grow grains, oilseed, or fiber crops. Since this was a communications audit, only the social media and online sites utilized by members of the sample were investigated, not the members themselves. The following objectives were used to guide the study:

1. To describe the utilization of websites by the selected GO TEXAN members.
2. To describe the social media presence of the selected GO TEXAN members.

Methods/Procedures

In order for organizations to gain more insight into the effectiveness of the communications methods being used, a communications audit can be conducted (Coffman, 2004). "The communications audit is a method of measuring communications effectiveness internally and externally" (Strenski, 1978, p. 17). The results of a communications audit allow "streamlining communication

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with members without compromising efficiency and reach" (Keiser & Stein, 2006, p. 1). One type of communications audit that can be conducted is a content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use. It is an unobtrusive technique that allows researchers to analyze data for the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play for the data's sources (Krippendorff, 2004). Understanding the methods of communication between the producer and consumer has "an impact on the way users interact with the organization and others" (Keiser & Stein, 2006, p. 2). With communication channels varying from traditional to social, and new outlets developing daily, it is important to analyze them and determine the need of a communications audit for an organization (Keiser & Stein, 2006).

This study used a qualitative content analysis design to determine how selected GO TEXAN members utilized websites and social media outlets. The population for this sample consisted of members within the GO TEXAN network. Only current, active (dues-paid) members of the GO TEXAN network were considered to be members of the population. The sample for this study was selected using purposeful sampling. As defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), purposeful sampling is done to "select cases that are 'information-rich' with respect to the purpose of the study" (p. 178), so that a "deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied" (p. 178) can be achieved. This type of sampling allows researchers to better understand the selected sample, rather than infer results to a larger population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Using the criteria of identifying GO TEXAN members who were engaged in alternative agricultural enterprises involving nontraditional crops, livestock, and other farm products, an employee of the GO TEXAN program selected the GO TEXAN members that met the aforementioned definition of alternative agriculture production and provided their names and contact information. Alternative producers were selected because, as Hazzell (2005) stated, alternative producers experience more difficulty in marketing their products and may be more likely to utilize the social media being investigated in this study. The provided sample consisted of 42 GO TEXAN members who operate a variety of alternative agricultural businesses throughout the state of Texas.

Due to the fact that a purposeful sample was selected, some sampling error may be present. Only GO TEXAN members who were deemed to be involved in alternative or nontraditional agricultural enterprises were selected. The researchers established this criterion, but the GO TEXAN representative was responsible for determining which members fit this specific criterion. This may have lead to some error due to bias created by the representative selecting the sample. Because only members who met the alternative agriculture criterion were selected, the data found from this study are only valid for this particular sample, and, therefore, cannot be generalized to a larger population.

Researchers investigated the GO TEXAN members' use of multiple social media and websites. Specifically, this study examined each member's use of websites, Facebook, Twitter, blog platforms, YouTube, and Flicker in connection with their agricultural business. The researchers analyzed the content found on the online communication sites used by individuals in the sample. This content was coded according to the type of information presented. Content categories represented material regarding marketing or advertising information, general information about the company and its products, e-commerce and online purchasing, personal use not related to the business or products, and combinations of these content categories. Researchers also reported the frequency of when each type of social media or website was updated. A coding book was developed by the researchers to assist in the data collection, which was used as they completed the content analysis. This coding book

outlined the categories of information the researchers examined as they inspected each website and social media outlet used by the members of the sample. The researchers entered the code that corresponded to the information present on the sites used by each member of the sample.

This study was conducted using observations and interpretations of the content found on social media and online sites used by individuals in the sample for their agricultural enterprises. No examination or analysis of their personal online presence was conducted. A panel of experts comprised of agricultural communications professors at [university] examined the document for face validity and completeness. The researchers who collected the data for this study were trained on the coding methods used to analyze the content on the social media and online sites under investigation to ensure inter-rater reliability. Because more than one researcher collected data on this instrument, it was essential that all researchers coded content in the same way to avoid error in the results. Using Microsoft Office Excel to record their observations, the researchers searched each GO TEXAN members' name or company name to identify if they had a website and the different types of social media sites. For each site found, the researchers analyzed the content displayed and how often they updated or posted new information to that site.

The most common type of internal validity issue at risk in this study was that of inter-rater reliability. Having multiple researchers coding the data for this study created an extraneous variable that may have affected the results. The data gathered through this study is only applicable to the sample from which it was collected and cannot be generalized to a larger population.

Data collection was conducted in October and November of 2011. Using open and axial coding, the researchers looked for themes and subthemes in the qualitative data collected. Descriptive statistics such as the mean, mode, and frequencies were calculated where appropriate.

Results/Findings

Describe the Utilization of Websites by the Selected GO TEXAN Members

Two types of websites were found for the members of this study. Websites were found that were provided and maintained by the business or company themselves, as well as websites that were provided and maintained by a third-party or external organization. Websites provided and maintained by the business or company themselves contained information and content that was uploaded or supplied by the business. They were responsible for updating and maintaining the content on these websites for their own use. Websites provided by a third-party or external organization were not the responsibility of the business or company nor was it their responsibility to provide content or maintain the website.

The researchers found 71.4% (n = 30) of the sample had a website related to their business or product that they provided and maintained themselves. These websites were found to have a copyright date ranging between 2005 and 2011. Of those websites, 14 had a copyright date of 2011, indicating they had been created or updated within the past year. Six of the sites reported no copyright date.

The researchers found half (n = 15) of the user generated and maintained websites contained material related to the marketing of products or services offered by the member and general information about the company or business. Marketing information included descriptions of the products or services provided by the GO TEXAN member, reviews and testimonials about the company or business and its products or services, information on where to buy the products, or how to contact the company about products or services offered. General information included history of the com-

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pany or business, biographies about the owners and staff who run the company or business, contact information, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and mission or goal statements for the company or business. Slightly fewer (n = 12, 40%) of the websites included e-commerce content in addition to marketing and general information content. E-commerce content included opportunities for users to purchase products online via the company's website.

Qualitative comments regarding the websites noted several sites (n = 9, 21%) used a very simple or outdated design, were difficult to navigate, or had missing links. Other websites (n = 6, 14%) had more user-friendly and/or modern design, ease of navigation, and quality of information provided.

In addition to user generated and maintained websites, the researchers found 26.2% of the sample (n = 11) had websites that were provided and maintained by a third party or an external organization. These externally provided websites were found to have a copyright date ranging between 2010 and 2011, with most being reported as 2011. One site did not report a copyright date.

The third-party or external websites found for the sample (n = 11, 26.2%) were provided by a number of sources on behalf of the companies and business, and of these, the majority (n = 10, 90.9%) provided content related to marketing and general information. Most of these websites contained general information about the company or business within a larger site that provided similar information about other related businesses. One such site, www.texasandwine.com, provided basic profiles with general information about many Texas wineries and products. Some of these sites also provided links to the company's own website, where users can view content provided by the company themselves.

Describe the Social Media Presence of the Selected GO TEXAN Members

Social media presence was explored based on popular venues of social media commonly used online. Facebook, Twitter, blogging, YouTube and Flickr were evaluated for each member of the sample. Researchers also found additional social media sites for some member other than the ones listed above.

Facebook.

Researchers found the most commonly used social media site used by the sample was Facebook. In this study, half (n = 21, 50%) of the sample maintained a Facebook profile, all of which were categorized as business type profiles. The majority of these profiles, 95.2 percent (n = 20), contained general information about the company, as well as marketing information about their products or services. General information included in these Facebook profiles included history of the company or business, biographies about the owners and staff who run the company or business, contact information, maps and directions to facilities, and mission or goal statements for the company or business. Marketing information included descriptions of the products or services offered by the company or business, information on where to buy or how to contact the company about products or services offered, and comments from users or followers of the company or business and its products or services.

This study found the number of likes each business profile had ranged from seven to 1,763. The mean number of likes was found to be 392 (SD = 448.4). It was also found that the frequency of Facebook profiles used varied from no updates in more than six months (n = 1, 5%) to updates at least once a day (n = 1, 5%). The most commonly reported frequency of use found was those who updated two to three times per month (n = 10, 47.6%).

Twitter.

Twitter proved to be a less popular social media tool for the sample of this study. Researchers found 16.7% (n = 7) of the sample had a Twitter account for their company or business. All of the Twitter accounts found for this sample contained general information and marketing content. The use of each Twitter account by the members of the sample varied from six total tweets to 1,169 total tweets (M = 418.29, SD = 421.11). Users tweeted about new products and services provided by the company or business, promotional offers or events involving their company or products, and news involving their company or business.

The number of Twitter accounts each member of the sample was following ranged from 11 to 508 (M = 202, SD = 186.09). The number of followers each member of the sample had ranged from 66 to 1,405 (M = 358.29, SD = 473.24). The frequency of Twitter use varied from no new tweets in the past three to six months (n = 1, 14%) to tweets two to three times per week (n = 3, 42.8%), which was found to be the most commonly reported frequency of use.

Blogs.

Blogs were utilized by 19 % (n = 8) of the GO TEXAN members of this sample. The blog platform used by each member varied, with a fairly even distribution between three different platforms. The most popular blogging platform used by this sample was Blogger/Blogspot (n = 3, 37.5%), followed by blogs run through the company's website itself (n = 2, 25%), and Wordpress (n = 1, 12.5%). Blog use ranged from one total blog entry to 158 total blog entries (M = 33.86, SD = 55.19) with 62.5% (n = 5) containing content relating to general information about the company and its products and marketing information. Blog entries were found to be similar in content to Twitter tweets, but with more detail and sometimes included pictures. E-commerce content was included in 12.5% (n = 1) of blogs. The researchers of this study found that of the blogs evaluated for this sample, 50% (n = 4) had not had new posts in more than six months, 25% (n = 2) received their last post in the past one to three months, and 25% (n = 2) had new posts two to three times per month.

YouTube.

YouTube and Flickr were found to be the least commonly used social media tools by the members of this sample. YouTube was found to be used by only one member (2.4%). This company had established a YouTube channel that contained two videos at the time this study was conducted. Both videos were aimed at the marketing and promotion of the company, along with providing basic details of its everyday operations. No new videos had been uploaded to the company's YouTube channel in more than six months.

Flickr.

Like YouTube, researchers found that Flickr was utilized by only one member (2.4%) of the sample. Twenty-three photos were found on the Flickr page, with a focus on general photos of the member and their business and products. No date was found as to when the photos were uploaded, so frequency of use is unknown, but they appeared to be from generally the same time of year, which led researchers to believe they were uploaded all at the same time.

Other Social Media.

In addition to the social media outlets investigated above, 21.4% (n = 9) of the members of this sample were found to have utilized other social media for their companies and businesses. A variety

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of other social media outlets were found to be associated with members of this sample with content including general information, marketing and advertising, and e-commerce channels. LinkedIn profiles were found for 7% (n = 3) of the sample. LinkedIn serves as an online networking community to connect companies and business professionals from across the country. Foursquare pages were found for 7% (n = 3) of the sample, as well; however, these sites were not utilized by the same members who utilized LinkedIn. Foursquare allows patrons of businesses and organizations to "check-in" at specific locations and post information about that location to that page. The Foursquare pages found for the members of this sample were created by the patrons who had checked-in at the business location, not created by the businesses themselves. A TripAdvisor profile was found for 2.4% (n = 1) of the sample. TripAdvisor allows patrons and fans of local businesses to rate and review their experience with a business. Users of TripAdvisor look for highly rated and well-reviewed businesses to visit while in a certain area. jAlbum was utilized by 2.4% (n = 1). jAlbum is similar to Flickr, in which users create a page to which they upload photos to share with others. Finally, Groupon was utilized by 2.4% (n = 1) of the sample. Groupon allows businesses to market and promote their company and products by offering highly discounted deals to Groupon subscribers. The frequency of use of these additional social media outlets was found to range from no updates or uploads in more than six months (n = 3, 33.33%) to updated or uploaded content within the past one to three months (n = 1, 11%).

Discussion/Implications/Recommendations

This research study sought to determine how selected GO TEXAN members utilized social media outlets and online tools. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggested, using social media allows for more timely and direct end-consumer contact at a relatively low cost and at higher levels of efficiency than traditional communication tools. The results found the majority (71.4%) of the GO TEXAN members in the sample were using some type of website to promote and market their business or company, but far less utilized social media sites. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) indicated, social media's degree of media richness and social presence allows it to be an effective tool for reaching large audiences and communicating detailed information; however, many of the GO TEXAN members in this study did not take advantage of social media opportunities. This indicates an area where agricultural communication practitioners can help agricultural businesses more effectively use social media in their promotion efforts, thus increasing their social presence.

Some members of the sample had websites provided by a third party or external organization. Although these sites were not generated or maintained by the company themselves, they provided valuable marketing and business exposure for those companies and businesses. The same can be said for the social media profiles created by the GO TEXAN members' patrons and users. The businesses themselves did not create these pages or profiles, but they can benefit from site traffic and good ratings, reviews, and comments regarding their business or product. This should be a valuable lesson to all businesses and companies in regard to social media and online presence and the affect it can have on their reputation.

The copyright dates and frequency of use varied for the websites and social media outlets evaluated for this study. Some websites had no copyright at all, which provided users with no indication as to how old the information on the site was. Up-to-date and timely pages and content are more effective and attractive to users of this content. As Seger (2011) mentioned, agriculturally related companies must change and evolve to keep up with the demands of current technologies and audi-

ences, which includes keeping website and social media content current and up-to-date. Maintaining a company's website or social media site should be made a priority to ensure users' trust in the content and information presented.

Future research should be conducted regarding social media use and how it can benefit agricultural businesses and companies. Several areas of further research can be developed from the results of this study such as understanding agricultural businesses' and companies' perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of each social medium. The results of this study are limited due to the small, non-random sample; therefore, replicating this study with a larger, random sample would provide more generalizability. Such research could provide valuable information to further our understanding of website and social media use by agricultural companies and businesses. Some companies were found to not be utilizing websites and social media, so research could be conducted to explore as to why. If information on why some members did not use these tools could be collected, researchers may be able to develop ways to help social media and website use become more widely employed. Another area of research that may be of interest to researchers includes evaluating efforts to help agricultural businesses implement social media and websites, especially those that are classified as being media rich (Daft & Lengel, 1986), for marketing, promotion and advertising purposes. Some may not be using online or social media tools because they simply do not know how. After a training program has been developed and implemented, a cross-sectional study could be conducted to determine if the training impacted the use of these tools for marketing and promotion.

Social media and online sites hold great potential for marketing and promoting businesses of all types and sizes. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described, utilizing social media tools, particularly those which are classified as medium or high in media richness and social presence, can allow information vital to influencing public behavior to be disseminated to large audiences in a short amount of time. As the world becomes increasingly technological, utilizing these tools will become more and more essential for effective marketing of agricultural businesses and products.

If agricultural businesses and companies are educated about the importance and effectiveness of utilizing websites and social media for promotion and marketing, they could potentially see an increase in consumers and revenue. Furthermore, education of social media tools and their impact on today's society could help agricultural businesses and companies understand what social media tools they should or should not incorporate into their marketing mix and why. We live in a society that uses the Internet on a daily basis, whether it is via smart phones or computers, and providing educational efforts to agricultural businesses and companies in order for them stay up-to-date with technology is imperative to their vitality.

About the Authors

Courtney Gibson and Chelsey Ahrens are both doctoral students in agricultural communications at Texas Tech University. Courtney Meyers and Erica Irlbeck are assistant professors in agricultural communications at Texas Tech University.

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