

Perceptions and Usage of Communication Tools by Nebraska Cattle Producers

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Summary and Implications

Communication is an important aspect of agriculture. Beef producers have access to a number of communication tools. It is important to study beef producers perceptions and usage of communication tools so that beef industries can effectively communicate with beef producers. This study examines the perceptions regarding the importance and frequencies of communication tools used by beef producers. Results indicate that beef producers, specifically Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors, prefer print and electronic media sources over social media sources for both general and beef industry information. Since social media was the least important communication tool used in this study one could imply that the Nebraska board of directors has not yet formed and attitude toward social media. Further research is needed to determine if demographics play an important role in the uses of social media.

Introduction

Rogers (2003) defined communication as a process in which people create, share, and exchange information in order to reach a mutual understanding. Communication is an important aspect of agriculture, as “United States farmers are insatiable consumers of information” (Boehlje & King, 1996, p. 21). Cattle production enterprises are one such operation whose producers utilize a number of communication channels that include face to face, print media, and electronic media (Boone, Meisenbach, & Tucker, 2000). There is a need to explore cattle producer’s perceptions and usage of communication tools to better target industry information. Rogers (2003) Innovation Diffusion Process served as a conceptual framework for this study. Rogers (2003) defines innovation as an “idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by the individual or other unit of adoption” (p. 12). The innovation decision process is a progression where individuals form the knowledge of an innovation, develop an attitude about the innovation, and lastly make a decision to adopt or reject the innovation (Rogers, 2003). The purpose of this study was to determine Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors’ current uses and perceptions of communication tools used in the beef industry. The objectives of this study were to; 1) determine demographics of Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors; specifically, gender, role in cattle operation, and type of

cattle operation; 2) determine perceptions regarding the importance of communication tools identified by Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors, and 3) determine the frequency of communication tools used by Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors.

Materials and Methods

The population for this study consisted of members of the Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors (N=36) who participated in an electronic survey administered through Qualtrics®. Of these participants (N=36), nine responses were collected for a response rate of 25 percent. This census study utilized an electronic instrument which consisted of 120 individual items framed in three constructs which included traditional media, electronic media, and social media. The constructs measured respondents’ perceptions of the importance and frequency of personal and beef industry information in the areas of traditional communication, electronic, and social media. The importance scale utilized anchors ranging from one to four that included: 1) very unimportant, 2) moderately unimportant, 3) moderately important, and 4) very important. The frequency scale included: 1) never, 2) rarely, 3) occasionally, and 4) frequently. Data was collected using the Tailored Design method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). After data collection, responses were analyzed using Predictive Analytical Software (PASW) Statistics 18. Descriptive statistics reported included mean and standard deviation. Since this census study utilizes an easily accessible population, it should not be generalized beyond the population surveyed.

Results and Discussion

Of the participants in this study (n=9), seven (78%) were male and two (22%) were female. Seven (78%) of the respondents were owners/operators and two (22%) were owners/non-operators of their operation. Six (67%) of the producers identified themselves as cow/calf producers and three (33%) of the producers identified themselves as seedstock producers. Table 1 identifies the number of items, mean, and standard deviation for the perceived importance and frequencies of communication tools used by Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors. Traditional media, included magazines and brochures, and was important for beef industry usage ($\mu= 2.91$). The Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors used electronic media such as websites and electronic newsletters for general usage, ($\mu=3.24$) and beef industry information ($\mu=3.05$) more than social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Since social media was the least important communication tool used in this study one could conclude

that Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors are in the knowledge stage of the innovation decision process in which they may not understand how to use the social media platform. Perhaps these Nebraska Cattlemen board of directors have not yet formed an attitude toward the innovation. Given that electronic media was identified as the most important and most used form of communication in this study, it is recommended that social media tools be promoted through electronic forms of communication. It is also of particular interest to determine if demographics characteristics play an important role in the uses of social media.

Table 1. Importance and Frequency of Communication Tools.

Construct	Items	Mean (μ)	SD (σ)
<i>General Usage</i>			
Importance of General usage of Traditional Media	9	2.43	0.89
Importance of General usage of Electronic Media	12	2.87	1.03
Importance of General usage of Social Media	9	2.26	1.04
<i>Beef Industry</i>			
Importance of Traditional Media usage in Beef Industry	9	2.91	0.71
Importance of Electronic Media usage in Beef Industry	12	2.90	1.05
Importance of Social Media usage in Beef Industry	9	2.39	1.07
<i>General Usage</i>			
Frequency of General usage of Traditional Media	9	2.77	0.79
Frequency of General usage of Electronic Media	12	3.24	0.89
Frequency of General usage of Social Media	9	1.70	0.89
<i>Beef Industry</i>			
Frequency of Traditional Media usage in Beef Industry	9	2.92	0.74
Frequency of Electronic Media usage in Beef Industry	12	3.05	0.93
Frequency of Social Media usage in Beef Industry	9	1.72	1.03

Note: The importance scale 1) very unimportant, 2) moderately unimportant, 3) moderately important, 4) very important. The frequency scale 1) never, 2) rarely, 3) occasionally, 4) frequently.