

LOUISIANA MASS MEDIA PERCEPTIONS OF THE LSU AGCENTER COMMUNICATIONS EFFORT

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Abstract

The LSU Agricultural Center communications group sends news stories and materials to all three major mass media for news - newspaper, radio and television – in Louisiana. These news releases are designed to educate and inform the general public about LSU Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter) programs and research. LSU AgCenter Communications wanted to know the effectiveness of its news effort in terms of usage by the media, and the media's perception of the LSU AgCenter's news topics. Three researcher-designed surveys were developed, one for each medium (newspaper, radio, television). Each questionnaire was designed to determine how effective, in terms of usage, news materials are being incorporated by each medium. Each survey contained a list of the topics used by LSU AgCenter Communications in their news materials. AgCenter Communications wanted to determine the level of awareness and importance of its topics among the newsroom leaders of each medium: newspaper editors, radio news directors or general managers, and television news directors. According to the results the LSU AgCenter Communications effort has been effective in terms of usage of the news materials delivered to each medium. The newspaper and television efforts were found to be more effective than the radio service.

Introduction

Educating the public through the use of the mass media is not a new concept, but how effective is it? Many news organizations believe they help educate the public. According to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, gathering and distributing news and opinion primarily serves the general welfare of the people by informing and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time (Fink, 1988). The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, states the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their constitutional mandate and freedom, to uncover and then report the facts (Fink, 1988).

A Land Grant college or university is an institution that has been designated by its state legislature and the United States Congress to carry out the mandates of either the Morrill Acts of 1862 or 1890. The Hatch

Act of 1887 enhanced the Land Grant system by adding the agricultural experiment station program to the system. Each state was authorized direct payment of federal grant funds in order to establish an agricultural experiment station. The passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 created the Cooperative Extension Service in association with each Land Grant institution. Federal support for extension services was provided using a formula similar to the Hatch Act. This act also required that the states provide matching funds in order to receive the federal monies (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1995).

Public Awareness of Land Grant Institutions

Public awareness of LSU Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter) program initiatives in research and extension will play a large role in its success. In 1993, John Paluszek, CEO of Ketchum Public Relations of New York City, reviewed the Experiment Station-

Extension System. He stated, “The Land Grant system is in an epic competition – dare I say a life and death competition – for the hearts and minds of America” (King, 1993, p. 2). He added, “Priorities are shifting. We are approaching ‘zero-based’ public policy. That means don’t tell me about what you did for me yesterday, tell me how you’re going to help me today and tomorrow” (King, 1993, p. 3). The role and function of Land Grant institutions, in particular the Cooperative Extension Service, are being questioned and funding from the federal and state levels is declining (Ilvento, 1997).

Louisiana legislators were targeted in a study of their perceptions of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in 1998 (Hodson, 1998; Hodson & Kotrlik, 2002). The perceptions of legislators can have an impact on government programs. Overall, the legislators were familiar with CES. However, the perception of effectiveness of CES programs was varied. The perception of effectiveness among urban legislators was significantly lower than rural/suburban, rural/urban and rural legislators. The mass media was an information source for the legislature, with newspaper articles providing more exposure than radio and television news (Hodson, 1998; Hodson & Kotrlik, 2002).

Mass Media Research

The mass media is a delivery system for knowledge and understanding of events and issues. Audience reaction to the media depends on the beliefs and opinions they already have on certain topics (Gunter, 2000). Walter Lippmann, one of the most famous American journalists of the 20th century, presumed that each person cannot make decisions based on direct and certain knowledge, but instead decisions are based on pictures created by or given to him (Lippmann, 1922).

In the book, "Mass Media Systems & Effects," the authors wrote that most research demonstrates that interpersonal communication is more effective than the mass media in generating public response. However, they pointed out that other research shows the influential powers of the mass media on the public when it comes to particular issues. The book also noted that some researchers believe that informing the public of a new idea or technique is better accomplished by the mass media and interpersonal communication is more important later in the decision process (Davison, Boylan & Yu, 1982).

Robert Ezra Park, a journalist and sociologist at the University of Chicago, developed a theory of news, public opinion and social control between 1904 and 1941. Park wanted to uncover the relationship between public opinion and social action. News and public opinion have an effect on social control in two ways. The public can use the information to validate keeping the social norm or this information can be the beginning of social change (Figure 1). Parks’ theory holds the view that the reporting of news and the beginning of the public opinion process can create structural change while maintaining societal stability (Frazier & Gaziano, 1979). This communications model best addresses news content delivery as addressed in this study.

The mass media is a proven source of knowledge to the public. Yet, is the mass media persuasive? Some researchers feel it has massive effects in terms of political communication. Whenever the media reports on an issue that has enormous political support, like the Persian Gulf War, it is impossible to neutralize the message. This unchallenged information will be very influential to those who regularly receive their news from the mass media (Mutz, Sniderman, & Brody, 1996).

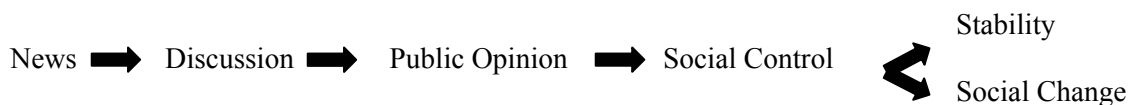


Figure 1. Central Elements of Ezra Park’s Theory.

Public opinion can also be influenced in non-political communication through the media. One example is the media coverage of an article in *Science* by Benbow and Stanley about the differences in the mathematical reasoning ability among gifted seventh and eighth graders pertaining to their gender. The results of their study showed boys were far superior in their mathematical reasoning than girls. Extensive coverage by the mass media was done shortly after the release of the article. Though the media questioned certain aspects of the study, no alternative views were provided until much later. Researchers conducted an evaluation of the impact of the media coverage a few months after the media finished covering the story. In general, parental attitudes were affected by the media coverage. As predicted by the researchers, mothers of daughters and fathers of sons were affected by the media exposure, becoming more stereotyped in their beliefs based on the findings of Benbow and Stanley (Jacobs & Eccles, 1982).

Land Grant Media Usage

Many people within Land Grant institutions continue to use mass media to promote programs and research. Many feel that it is the best way to reach people fast, efficiently and economically.

When questioned as to why extension should work with the media, Don Olson of the University of Minnesota said, "Media work is the lifeblood of extension - it makes or breaks extension. When you look at the counties with impact, they all have a heavy media impact. If we put a program together and can't market it through the media, I question whether we have a product to sell" (Sperbeck, 1997, p. 27).

Others, such as Don Black of the University of New Hampshire, believe there are other benefits. "When budget time comes, legislators who you involved in media events and made the news will remember. But more than that, when decision makers understand what you are doing, they can make an informed decision" (Sperbeck, 1997, p. 31).

In a recent study of Arkansas daily newspaper editors' attitudes toward

agriculture, the researchers concluded that more should be done to educate the media. "While editors and journalists should be encouraged to garner more information about agricultural issues, the responsibility for informing editors and other journalists rests primarily with agriculturists themselves" (Cartmell, Dyer, & Birkenholz, 2001, p. 455). The study also showed that these editors have a positive attitude towards agriculture, but do not believe that the agriculture industry does good public relations work.

Land Grant Communications Efforts

Past studies of Land Grant communications efforts have primarily looked at agricultural news releases. A study in Arkansas was conducted to evaluate the interest in and use of a weekly radio program on agricultural research. Twenty-four (60%) of the 40 stations returned the survey. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that they used the program each week, with most of the respondents (16) rating the programming as good, while some (4) rated it as excellent. Only two of the stations were from cities with a population of 70,000 or more (Barclay, 1997).

A study of the print news supplied to newspapers by the University of Idaho Agricultural Communications Center showed good use of these materials. In 1983, each print news release sent by communications averaged 5.7 appearances in newspapers around the state. Non-agricultural news, such as food preparation and housing topics, had wider use than agriculture research stories (Fritz, 1985).

Another study in 1986 by Idaho Agricultural Communications, surveyed newspaper editors and broadcast news directors to evaluate their "Ag News" releases. Two-thirds (67%) of daily newspapers and 62% of weekly newspapers used two or more releases per month. Eighty-eight percent of radio stations used two or more releases per month with 37% using more than one release per week. Sixty-seven percent of television stations used two or three releases per month (Fritz, 1987).

Texas A&M University's Department of Agricultural Communications was the focus

of a study on Video News Releases (VNRs). Five to ten VNRs were produced every month and sent to 26 television outlets - commercial television stations in the Southwest, agricultural programs, and television news feeds. Sixteen outlets (66%) stated the program on which Texas A&M VNRs aired was predominantly news-oriented, with the remaining eight (34%) stating the program was predominantly agriculture-related. Most of the VNRs (75%) were aired mainly on weekdays. From a list of 16 story topic categories, nutrition and/or personal health was rated by television decision makers as the most likely topic to air on their programming followed closely by production agriculture. The two least likely topic areas to be aired on these television outlets were forestry and marine issues (Telg, 1992).

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine how well the communications effort of LSU AgCenter Communications is working and what else the AgCenter can do to help inform the public of extension programs and research through three news media, namely newspaper, radio and television. The primary research questions to be answered by the study were:

- How effective are the LSU AgCenter newspaper, radio, and television communications efforts, as measured by frequency of use by the media outlets receiving the service?
- How aware of LSU AgCenter programs and research topics are these newspaper editors, radio news directors, and television news directors?
- What is the level of importance of LSU AgCenter programs and research topics, as perceived by newspaper editors, radio news directors, and television news directors?

Methods

The target population consisted of the leaders of working news outlets in Louisiana, which receive LSU AgCenter news services. A census survey was

conducted due to the small size of each population. The surveys were sent to newspaper editors and television and radio news directors. Radio general managers were chosen only when the respective radio station using AgCenter Communications news services did not have a news director. The population for each medium was arrived at utilizing LSU AgCenter Communications mailing lists. The population of each medium was as follows:

- 122 daily and weekly newspaper editors
- 56 radio news directors and/or general managers
- 10 television news directors

Three researcher-designed questionnaires were developed, one for each medium (newspaper, radio, television). Each instrument was subjected to a content and face validity analysis and then approved by a survey committee comprised of members of LSU AgCenter Communications and the faculty of the LSU School of Human Resource Education and Workforce Development. The surveys contained open-ended questions and Likert-type scale items. Questions were designed to attain answers to the research questions addressed in the study.

The Total Design Method (TDM) was used for data collection. A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire and mailed to all the newspaper editors and radio and television news directors on the respective mailing lists. A postcard follow-up was sent to everyone on the lists one week after the original mailout. A second questionnaire and cover letter was sent to non-respondents two weeks after the original mailout. A phone follow-up of a random sample of non-respondents was conducted two weeks after the second mailing (Dillman, 2000).

The phone follow-up responses were compared to the responses from the first two mailings to determine if any differences existed between the non-respondents and the respondents. The grand mean of the awareness and importance scores were used to compare each response wave. This process is based on the non-respondent follow-up actions recommended by Miller

and Smith (1983). The results are reported in the results section.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the effectiveness of the LSU AgCenter Communications effort. The effectiveness of each medium - newspaper, radio and television - was determined through usage of the AgCenter Communications materials. Awareness of each topic, for each medium, was determined using count data by reporting the number and percentage selected by news directors, general managers and editors. Importance to each medium of the topics covered by the AgCenter was determined using means and standard deviations for each topic. The following scale was used to interpret the means. Any mean ranging from 1.0 to 1.5 signifies no importance. A 1.51 to 2.50 mean stands for slight importance. A 2.51 to 3.50 scale signifies moderate importance. A mean that ranges from 3.51 to 4.50 stands for substantial importance and a mean of 4.51 to 5.00 signifies extreme importance.

Results

Responses were received from three

television. Inferential *t*-tests were used to compare the grand means of the "Importance" and the "Awareness" of LSU AgCenter Topics scales by response wave (mail vs. telephone follow-up) to determine if they came from the same population.

Newspaper

A total of 63 newspaper editors, 51%, responded to the survey. A random sample of the non-respondents was contacted with 16 newspaper editors responding, bringing the total response rate to 79 or 64.8%. Levine's test for equality of variances showed that the variances of the mail vs. phone follow-up respondents were not different. Therefore, pooled *t*-tests were used. Since no significant differences existed between the mail and telephone respondents for these two scales (Tables 1 & 2), it was concluded that the telephone follow-up responses came from the same population as the mail responses, and that the combined responses were representative of the population of newspaper respondents. It is important to note that only respondents who provided complete sets of data were used in Levine's test.

media populations: newspaper, radio, and

Table 1

Comparison of the Grand Mean of the Importance of LSU Agricultural Center's Topics by Response Mode for Newspaper Editors

Response Mode	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Mail	60	3.44	.61	1.77
Telephone	15	3.12	.69	

Note. *N* = 79. Mean substitution techniques were not used when computing scale means.

Table 2

Comparison of the Grand Mean of the Awareness Score of LSU Agricultural Center Topics by Response Mode for Newspaper Editors

Response Mode	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Mail	48	12.00	2.39	-.79
Telephone	10	12.60	.52	

Note. *N* = 79. Mean substitution techniques were not used when computing scale means.

The “News You Can Use” service provided by LSU AgCenter Communications, a number of consumer related news stories sent every month, was used by most of the newspapers in the state with almost 95% ($n = 79$) using the service. The data in Table 3 showed that most of the

daily and weekly newspapers using the “News You Can Use” service printed one to five or six to ten articles in their publication every month. Some users of the service had other comments like “depends” and “varies.”

Table 3
Use of LSU Agricultural Center’s “News You Can Use” Service by Those Newspaper Editors Who Indicated They Used the Service

Newspaper Type	Number of Printed Newspaper Articles Used per Month											
	1-5		6-10		11-15		16-20		Other		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Daily	9	47.4	5	26.3	2	10.5	1	5.3	2	10.5	19	100.0
Weekly	37	66.1	9	16.1	3	5.4	1	1.8	6	10.7	56	100.0
All	46	61.3	14	18.7	5	6.7	2	2.7	8	10.7	75	100.0

Note. $N = 75$.

The data for the “Time Sensitive” news service, such as events and discoveries, are delivered to every newspaper publication when necessary. These stories are considered more “Time Sensitive.” The data for this service reveals that more than 86% ($n = 79$) of the newspapers in Louisiana were using this service.

There was similar use between daily newspapers and weekly publications. Most of the newspapers using the service incorporate between one and five articles a month in their publication as indicated in Table 4. More than 27% had other remarks like “as apply” and “when they occur.”

Table 4
Use of the LSU Agricultural Center’s “Time Sensitive” News Service by Those Newspaper Editors Who Indicated They Used the Service

Newspaper Type	Number of Newspaper Articles Used per Month									
	1-5		6-10		11-15		Other		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Daily	11	64.7	1	5.9	0	0.0	5	29.4	17	100.0
Weekly	35	68.6	1	2.0	1	2.0	14	27.5	51	100.0
All	46	67.6	2	2.9	1	1.5	19	27.9	68	100.0

Note. $N = 68$.

AgCenter Communications sends a series of weekly horticulture articles called "Get It Growing" to newspapers. These articles were used by more than 70% of all newspapers. Eighty percent of daily newspapers used some or all of the articles.

The data in Table 5 show that more than 70% of all newspapers used at least two of the articles every month. Almost one-third of daily newspapers, 31.3%, used all of the "Get It Growing" articles while only 7.5% of weekly newspapers used all of the articles.

Table 5
Use of the LSU Agricultural Center's "Get It Growing" News Service by Those Newspaper Editors Who Indicated They Used the Service

Newspaper Type	Number of Newspaper Articles Used per Month											
	1		2		3		All		Other		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Daily	4	25.0	5	31.3	2	12.5	5	31.3	0	0.0	16	100.0
Weekly	11	27.5	19	47.5	6	15.0	3	7.5	1	2.5	40	100.0
All	15	26.8	24	42.9	8	14.3	8	14.3	1	1.7	56	100.0

Note. *N* = 56.

Radio

There were 29 respondents to the two mailings, which represented more than 51% (*n* = 56) of the radio population. An attempt was made to phone all of the 27 non-respondents with 11 responding (41%) by faxing back the surveys. Levine's test for equality of variances showed that the variances of the mail vs. phone follow-up respondents was not significantly different. The pooled variance *t*-test revealed that no significant differences existed between the grand mean of the mail and telephone follow-up respondents for the "Importance of LSU AgCenter Topics" scale (Table 6).

However, the analysis of the summated

mean for the "Awareness of LSU AgCenter Topics" scale showed a significant difference existed between the mail and telephone respondents for this scale (Table 7). It was decided that the telephone follow-up responses did not come from the same population as the mail responses, and that the combined responses were not representative of the population of radio respondents. Therefore, the results from this study apply only to those radio operations (40) that responded to the survey by either mail or fax, not to the entire population. Only respondents who provided complete sets of data were used in Levine's test for equality of variances.

Table 6
Comparison of the Grand Mean of the Importance of LSU Agricultural Center Topics by Response Mode for Radio

Response Mode	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Mail	26	3.37	.80	.41
Telephone	10	3.22	1.21	

Note. *N* = 40. Mean substitution techniques were not used when computing scale means.

Table 7
Comparison of the Grand Mean of the Awareness Score of LSU Agricultural Center Topics by Response Mode for Radio

Response Mode	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Mail	22	11.09	2.78	2.69
Telephone	8	7.75	3.62	

Note. *N* = 40. Mean substitution techniques were not used when computing scale means.

The respondents were separated into three different sub-groups for further analysis based on the LSU AgCenter service which they were signed up for, except for the radio networks, which represented multiple radio stations. The news group represented those radio stations that signed up for the AgCenter radio services primarily for its news service, which consisted of 10 radio news stories sent twice a month. The “Get It Growing” group represented those radio stations that were primarily interested in the new horticulture segments called “Get It Growing”, a 60-second segment sent to stations for every weekday of the month. The final group represented the two statewide syndicated networks, which syndicate their news programming to

multiple radio stations throughout Louisiana.

The general radio news service provided to these radio stations was used by 75% (*n* = 40) of the entire population. The “Get It Growing” group percentage is similar to the percentage for the general news group, with those services reported as used by 71.4% and 74.2%, respectively.

The data in Table 8 show that more than half of the users of the service (*n* = 18), 60%, broadcasted between one and five news stories every month. Only the news group and one of the two statewide syndicated networks used more of the news stories. Other responses included “several” and “usually one per day.”

Table 8
Use of LSU Agricultural Center’s Radio News Service by Those Radio News Directors and General Managers Who Indicated They Used the Service

Radio Group	Number of Radio News Stories Used per Month											
	1-5		6-10		11-15		16-20		Other		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
News	14	58.3	4	16.7	1	4.2	2	8.3	3	12.5	24	100.0
“Get It Growing”	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
Statewide Network	1	50.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
All	18	60.0	4	13.3	2	6.7	2	6.7	4	13.3	30	100.0

Note. *N* = 30. There were 9 non-users and 1 non-respondent from the radio group.

Use of the “Get It Growing” segments was not as high as the use of the news service. Fifty percent of the entire group used the segments with the “Get It Growing” group showing the highest percentage of use with 71.4% (*n* = 40). A review of Table 9 reveals that none of the statewide syndicated networks used the “Get It Growing” segments, while 48.4% of the news group were using them. A review of Table 9 shows that thirty-five percent of the users incorporated all of the daily segments in their programming. The only responses in the other category were “several” and “most of them”.

Television

A total of eight television news directors responded to the survey, leaving two non-respondents. Telephone contact was made with the two remaining non-respondents and surveys were faxed to each. One of the non-respondents returned the survey bringing the response rate to

90%. Because of this high return rate and the small population size, a comparison of the respondents and non-respondents was not necessary or appropriate. Therefore, it was assumed that the data represents the entire television population receiving LSU AgCenter communications television news services.

All members of the television population were users of the television news stories sent every week by satellite or mail. More than 44% (*n* = 4) of the population used all of the news stories supplied by AgCenter Communications (Table 10). The remaining television stations used between one and three stories per month.

More than 66% (*n* = 6) of the television stations used the “Get It Growing” segments sent to television stations every week. More than 66% (*n* = 4) of the users of the “Get It Growing” segments broadcast all of them (Table 11).

Table 9

Use of LSU Agricultural Center’s “Get It Growing” Radio Service by Those Radio News Directors and General Managers Who Indicated They Used the Service

Radio Group	“Get It Growing” Radio Segments Used per Month									
	1-5		6-10		All		Other		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
News	6	40.0	1	6.7	5	33.3	3	20.0	15	100.0
“Get It Growing”	1	33.3	0	0.0	2	66.7	2	0.0	5	100.0
All	7	35.0	1	5.0	7	35.0	5	25.0	20	100.0

Note. *N* = 20. There were 20 non-users from the radio group. None of the Statewide Network users reported using the Horticulture Feature.

Table 10

Use of the LSU Agricultural Center’s Television News Service by Those Television Stations That Indicated They Used the Service

Television Stations	Number of Stories Broadcast per Month							
	1		2		3		All	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
All	2	22.2	1	11.1	2	22.2	4	44.4

Note. *N* = 9.

Table 11
Use of the LSU Agricultural Center's "Get It Growing" Television Service by Those Television Stations That Indicated They Use the Service

Television Stations	Number of Stories Broadcast per Month							
	1		2		3		All	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
All	1	16.7	1	16.7	0	0.0	4	66.7

Note. *N* = 6. There were 3 non-users from the television group.

Comparison of Awareness and Importance Levels of All Media

Newspaper editors and radio and television news directors were asked if they were aware the LSU AgCenter was involved with certain topics listed. These media representatives were also asked to rank the importance of these AgCenter topics to their respective media outlet.

Newspaper editors were much more aware of LSU AgCenter extension program and research topics than both radio and television news directors (Table 12). Newspaper editors had more than 70% awareness level of all AgCenter topics except personal finance. Radio had less than 70% awareness of eight of the 13 AgCenter

topics. Television also had less than 70% awareness of eight topics, and had less than 50% awareness of five topics.

Agriculture and emergency preparedness were the most consistently high scoring topics with all media (Table 13). Agriculture was rated second most important by newspaper editors, second among radio news directors and general managers, and second among television news directors. Emergency preparedness received the third highest marks among newspaper editors, and was first on the radio and television lists. Personal finance received the lowest marks in the newspaper and radio surveys, and received the second lowest marks in television.

Table 12
 Comparison of Awareness of LSU Agricultural Center Topics Among All Media Respondents

Topic	Newspaper			Radio			Television		
	Aware	UA	NR	Aware	UA	NR	Aware	UA	NR
	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>	<i>n</i> / <i>%</i>
Agriculture	64/81.0	2/2.5	13/16.5	33/82.5	1/2.5	6/15.0	8/88.9	0/0.0	1/11.1
Aquaculture	58/73.4	5/6.3	16/20.3	31/77.7	1/2.5	8/20.0	8/88.9	0/0.0	1/11.1
Economic Development	57/72.1	7/8.9	15/19.0	23/57.5	10/25.0	7/17.5	5/55.6	3/33.3	1/11.1
Emergency Preparedness	58/73.4	6/7.6	15/19.0	24/60.0	9/22.5	7/17.5	4/44.4	4/44.4	1/11.1
Environment	62/78.5	3/3.8	14/17.7	30/75.0	4/10.0	6/15.0	7/77.8	1/11.1	1/11.1
Family	61/77.2	3/3.8	15/19.0	21/52.5	12/30.0	7/17.5	2/22.2	6/66.7	1/11.1
Health and Nutrition	61/77.2	3/3.8	15/19.0	27/67.5	5/12.5	8/20.0	4/44.4	4/44.4	1/11.1
Horticulture	63/79.7	1/1.3	15/19.0	32/80.0	1/2.5	7/17.5	8/88.9	0/0.0	1/11.1
Housing	57/72.2	7/8.9	15/19.0	21/52.5	11/27.5	8/20.0	4/44.4	4/44.4	1/11.1
Personal Finance	52/65.8	11/13.9	16/20.3	17/42.5	16/40.0	7/17.5	0/0.0	8/88.9	1/11.1
Pests	61/77.2	3/3.8	15/19.0	31/77.5	3/7.5	6/15.0	7/77.8	1/11.1	1/11.1
Wildlife and Fisheries	59/74.7	5/6.3	15/19.0	26/65.0	7/17.5	7/17.5	5/55.6	3/33.3	1/11.1
4-H	61/77.2	3/3.8	15/19.0	25/62.5	9/22.5	6/15.0	5/55.6	3/33.3	1/11.1

Note. Newspaper: *N* = 79; Radio: *N* = 40; Television: *N* = 9. UA = Unaware. NR = Non Response.

Table 13
Level of Importance of LSU Agricultural Center Topics Among All Media Respondents

Topic	Newspaper		Radio		Television	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Agriculture	3.65	1.10	3.60	1.29	4.00	1.00
Aquaculture	3.07	1.23	3.59	1.31	3.78	.83
Economic Development	3.48	.99	3.44	1.37	3.56	1.24
Emergency Preparedness	3.51	1.14	3.86	1.40	4.44	.88
Environment	3.40	1.08	3.58	1.46	3.78	1.09
Family	3.49	1.13	3.18	1.31	3.44	1.13
Health and Nutrition	3.39	1.09	3.15	1.16	3.78	.97
Horticulture	3.41	1.05	2.91	1.15	3.44	1.01
Housing	3.07	1.06	3.29	1.17	3.89	.78
Personal Finance	2.82	1.05	2.76	1.05	3.11	1.05
Pests	3.22	.98	3.34	1.28	3.78	.97
Wildlife and Fisheries	3.53	.93	3.41	1.08	3.33	1.18
4-H	3.87	1.08	3.08	1.11	3.00	1.41

Note. Scale of Importance: 1 = No Importance; 2 = Slight Importance; 3 = Moderate Importance; 4 = Substantial Importance; 5 = Extreme Importance.

Conclusions and Implications

The LSU AgCenter Communications effort is effective in terms of usage of the news materials delivered to newspapers, radio and television stations. The newspaper and television efforts are more effective in terms of usage than the radio service. The newspaper service of AgCenter Communications is the most used of all three media. Television exhibits high usage throughout much of the state while radio is the most inconsistent.

Newspaper editors are more aware of LSU AgCenter topics. Both television and radio news directors have limited awareness of certain AgCenter topics. Distinct differences existed within each medium as to what topics are important to their publication or broadcast facility. This demonstrates the importance of knowing what the news content leader in each medium thinks about AgCenter topics.

Better use of this could lead to increased use of AgCenter news materials by each medium.

LSU AgCenter Communications should examine the level of importance of AgCenter topics by each medium. If properly evaluated, this information could lead to greater use of LSU AgCenter stories. This does not mean that the topics rated less important are not newsworthy. It should simply be used as a tool for refining the news services offered.

A comparison of this study of the AgCenter Communications effort with a previous Land Grant institution communications study seems to validate previous conclusions in terms of effectiveness. The only other Land Grant study that surveyed all three mass media was the University of Idaho Agricultural Communications Center study (Fritz, 1987). LSU AgCenter Communications showed higher usage of newspaper articles and

television news releases than the University of Idaho Agricultural Communications effort but not their radio effort.

It would be beneficial for other Land Grant communication groups to do similar studies to evaluate the use of their services. It is also recommended that LSU AgCenter Communications continue to survey the media about their services. A follow-up of the awareness and level of importance part of this study should be replicated in the future. It would detect any changes in the level of awareness and importance of AgCenter topics and comparing it to the results of this study would allow the researcher to detect any trends. Comparing this data on awareness to future research would allow LSU AgCenter Communications to determine if the level of awareness grew among all three media. This would allow the researcher to determine if AgCenter Communications personnel were able to raise the level of awareness of LSU AgCenter program and research topics with the media.

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