

Communicating with Impact Using Art or Science: Examining Student Reactions to Media Portrayals of Animal Agriculture

Fally Masambuka-Kanchewa, Ph.D., Alexa Lamm, Ph.D., Shuyang Qu, Ph.D., Michael Retallick, Ph.D., Catherine Sanders, Ph.D., & Kevan Lamm, Ph.D.

Introduction

- Mainstream media responsible for negative perception of U.S. agriculture (Holt & Cartmell 2013; Sato et al., 2017).
- Communication as an art, using thought-provoking titles and disturbing images from slaughterhouses or crowded production pens (Sato et al., 2017).
- Frustration when faced with negative portrayals of agriculture, resulting in reactive, rather than proactive communication.



- Limited skills among students to recognize tactics used by the media to frame content.
- Need to assess agricultural students' ability to decipher communication approaches used in the media.

Purpose

Explore agricultural students' perception of approaches used by mainstream media to portray the animal industry.

Research Questions

- How do agricultural students react to the negative media portrayal of the animal industry?
- How do agricultural students describe the communication approach employed the negative media portrayal of the animal industry?

Method

- Qualitative research, 66 undergraduate students



Participants reflected on:

- What impact would the article have on the reader's perceptions of the pork industry?
- How would you describe the author's approach to communication?
- The data were analyzed with MaxQDA using inductive coding.
- Themes and sub-themes were identified (Creswell, 2007).
- Peer debriefing and member checking were conducted to ensure trustworthiness.

Results

Audience Reactions

Nate stated,
"The article brings up real issues in the food production industry, there is no denying that"

Jack said,
"The article uses shocking statements to captivate their audience. As agriculturalists, articles such as these are threatening as they do not completely, depict agriculture."

PJ echoed,
"I believe that some of the things shared in the article were a bit drastic and overexaggerated, but I also think that some of the scenarios spoken about in the article could have been handled in a better manner."

Approach to Communication

Xavier indicated,
"From a science perspective, the authors used real-life examples. These experiences are facts and cannot be argued."

Patrick stated,
"It was approached more as a science. You can tell the author's feelings towards the pork industry, the author backs this up well and uses good evidence to support what they are saying."

Kaley stated,
"It was approached as an art because they were very illustrative in their language. It [used] story telling rather than statistics..."

Jackie shared,
"Communication is both a science and an art! The writers were able to incorporate facts, statistics, and research into both of their projects."

Conclusion, Implications, & Recommendations

- Most participants found the information presented in the article as valid but were concerned about its framing.
- Differences in perceptions towards the communication approach employed.
- Gap in agricultural students' analytical skills
- Need to enhance students' ability to discern fact-based versus emotionally charged messaging strategies.
- Future research should determine if the students' reflections are specific to the U.S. or global in nature.

References

