Early Career Members

Social Media: A Revolution in Modern Agricultural Communication

Our civilization undertook a profound revolution when social media was brought into our lives. Traditional media such as newsletters, magazines, and books (in paper format); face-to-face interactions (e.g., meetings, field days, and conferences); and radio and TV news are less preferred today by certain users due to the delay in the way information is delivered. Agricultural information exchange has not been an exception. Growers now share “real time” information and interact with other producers from different states and countries.

Before proceeding to understand how social media plays a key role in agriculture today, we should define and clarify some important concepts and points.

How Can We Define the Term Social Media?

Social media can be defined as web-based applications that enable end-users to interchange electronic content.

Can Social Media Be Used to Communicate Scientific Information?

Yes, social media should be understood as an avenue to empower our communication efforts rather than a hindrance to our communication. At the present, there are a numerous social media communication channels that agricultural audiences can choose from including websites, sites for posting and viewing pictures, blogs, sites where stories or timelines are created using other social media or web resources, audio and video casts, and channels for sharing news.

Why Is Social Media Important in Agriculture?

1. Timeliness and relevancy: information is continuously exchanged and within seconds can travel everywhere—the “scalability” phenomenon. A document or link share from one location for a specific target audience can have worldwide relevance in just seconds. Reports in real time about agriculture-related issues provide a sense of “relevancy,” with growers better informed albeit with significantly more information to digest.

2. “Open book” philosophy: news, activities, meetings, and other sources of information are quickly spread using the social media tools. Currently, professionals can keep themselves updated worldwide, candidates for job interviews can be first screened by their social media behavior, and meetings are more successfully advertised via Facebook or Twitter.

3. Discoverability: outreach materials are “discoverable.” Content transferred via the web fosters web-based interactions between educators (personnel) and students (growers), even outside the classroom and/or meeting place.

4. Privacy issues: end-users share quite a bit of information while using these web-based tools, but personal information can be disseminated without consent. Using social media as an outlet for posting private or not-yet published scientific information is a primary topic of discussion.

5. Big data collection: more information gets transferred and shared with the use of web-based applications. Private industries are gathering, processing, and re-shaping information posted to a cloud with the ultimate goal of learning more about how to target their products based on customer preferences. Examples of companies collecting and synthesizing all sources of information such as weather, yield maps, soil web-based resources, field locations (e.g., apps for scouting purposes), and management practices are falling within this category.

6. Data ownership: who controls the information produced? There is an open debate relating to the practices and regulations the industry and institutions need to follow for securing, accessing, and sharing the use of data of individual growers.

7. Marketing: web applications personalize individual preferences, companies are more consumer-centered, and consumption behaviors are more governed by social media interactions and the need of consumers. Within the scientific community, professionals share their common interests by “liking” something or providing a specific suggestion related to a professional issue (e.g., recommended reading list).

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