

Social Media Analysis during Mental Health Awareness Month in Agriculture

In rural communities, mental health resources are often difficult to access due to lack of health professionals and distance to resources (Morales, 2020; Rural Health Information Hub, 2021). Social media platforms can provide ways from individuals to connect with others about mental health, regardless of their geographic location (Naslund et al., 2020). Specifically, Twitter (now known as X) can be used to raise awareness about mental health problems (Berry, 2017). We examined posts from May 1 to May 30, about what was communicated about mental health to answer our research objectives about rural mental health posts: RO1) Identify the top posters by reach, RO2) Describe the trending themes, and RO3) Describe topic momentum concept categories. This study was guided by social marketing theory, where marketing is used to change behavior (Kotler, 2011) and is frequently used in public health campaigns (Kolter & Lee, 2008). In this study, we applied social marketing theory as communicating online mental health resources to encourage the behavior change (e.g., being able to access mental health resources for populations with limited accessibility.).

We conducted an exploratory social media analysis (Jeong et al., 2019) using Meltwater, a media intelligence platform that can capture real time insight from various social media platforms (Meltwater, 2023). We used Meltwater's widgets to analyze the widgets that revolve around the words "mental health," "rural communities," and "farmers." Top posters by reach were analyzed by the top ten posts using the filter of engagement. Trending themes were analyzed through a frequency keywords, and topic momentum through a frequency during a defined period. We compared April 2023 to May 2023 for posts in the U.S.

RO1: There were four universities, one news station, and five politicians/influencers. The four universities were Harvard, Penn State, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Harvard Graduate School of Education. The news station was FOX 5 Atlanta. The politicians/influencers were from the states of Iowa, Arizona, Montana, Washington D.C, with three of the individuals being from the Democratic party and two from the Republican party. The posts with the most reach had 1.59 million views and the posts with the least had 157k views.

RO2: Trending themes within Meltwater showed that "mental health" (408 associated posts) was the most frequent posts with "support" (50) being the least frequent. "Rural areas" (109) and "farmers" (139) are the most closely related to the mental health theme cluster. The larger the theme, the more posts were made about mental health during this month. Mental health was discussed as a need, but there is no information on how or where to access the resources.

RO3: During Mental Health Awareness month, the topic momentum of mental health increased by 11.78%, rural areas by 53.52%, and resources by 27.27%. A new word that appeared only during the month of May was "help." Before the month of May, "help" was nonexistent in the mental health posts. The increase of mental health related topics demonstrated an increase of promotion during the month.

Social media is a powerful tool used to access mental health resources (Berry, 2017). On X, mental health is discussed in terms of awareness, but no resources were provided. It is recommended that future posts include hyperlinks to mental health resources. Additionally, mental health awareness and promotion of resources should be present year-round, not just in May. This focus could be replicated and focused on throughout the year. To promote mental health awareness and access, agriculture influencers and mental health campaigns/organizations should promote resources on their own platforms to reach a larger population especially in rural areas. Mental health is a challenge within agriculture communities that awareness and accessibility needs to be at the forefront.

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