An Assessment of Communication Technology and Social Media Adoption

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of a survey of cooperative managers regarding the use of communication technology including social media. The survey categorized 105 different cooperatives by current technology use and management practices. The survey found that Texas cooperative managers are willing to expand on their current use of communication technology; however, a clear definition of how to use new concepts as a powerful tool is needed. In terms of governance, we found that many cooperatives have no stated policies regarding the use of communication technologies.

Keywords: communication, cooperatives, agribusiness, management

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Introduction

The advancement of communication technology in the modern business atmosphere continually improves customer relations through the rapid exchange of information, ideas and insight. "Business blogs, corporate Facebook pages, instructional YouTube videos, private enterprise-grade social networking platforms, and other social media and web 2.0 tools can facilitate speedy and successful two-way communication with customers, as well as well as creative and constructive collaboration with colleagues" (Flynn 2012). As technology progresses, the importance of understanding the capacity of specific tools to improve business functions becomes paramount. A business can stimulate healthy customer interaction and internal dialogue from the proper employment use of social media strategies, digital communication practices for the Board of Directors, and flexible adoption policies that adapt to the influx of technology.

A Survey of Cooperatives

This study conducts market research of the Texas cooperative industry through a written and electronic survey. The sample for the survey was derived from the list of cooperatives operating within the state of Texas provided by the Texas Agricultural Cooperative Council. TACC personnel estimate that this list accounts for 95% of all active cooperatives within the state. A total of 32 questions were developed to accomplish the objectives of the survey. The questions for the survey include discrete, categorical, ordinal categorical, and continuous data. The use of varying questions was intended to capture the spectrum of opinions from those least likely to be open to adopting new technology to those most likely to adopt new technology.

The survey was created and distributed in both printed and electronic formats to the entire sample. Providing identical alternate response avenues in this way avoids selection bias consistent with providing only an electronic response avenue when measuring technology adoption. The printed survey was mailed to every cooperative on the TACC list located within the state of Texas, along with a pre-stamped return envelope. The cover page of the survey contained a URL linked to the online survey. The URL takes respondents to an identical survey using Qualtrics survey software. A similar invitation to take the survey online was delivered via email to each potential respondent.

Results

The survey had a 33% response rate, with 105 out of 312 cooperatives in the survey population. Regarding data collection, 37% of the responses were recorded electronically, with one response completed via mobile device. Of the 105 total responses, 82 respondents were members of the TACC. Utility cooperatives made up 24 of the responses, with 14 of them being TACC members. Cotton gins were represented by 18 respondents, all of which belonged to TACC. Selected results are presented here.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (strongly disagree to strongly agree) with statements regarding management practices. In general, respondents seem to indicate that there is value in marketing efforts that extend beyond traditional word of mouth. Further, they

generally agreed that using communication technology and social media could be an effective means for improving their competitiveness. However, when asked about their plans to use social media, respondents were less certain and responses were more disparate (see Table 1 for more detailed results).

Table 1. Manager responses regarding value and use of communication technologies

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Stan Dev.
Marketing to Customers Beyond Word of Mouth is Essential	105	4.14	4	2	5	0.85
Member/Customer Engagement is Essential	105	4.57	5	3	5	0.52
Only Adopt User Friendly Tech	105	3.90	4	1	5	0.78
New Forms of Tech Make Us Competitive	105	3.94	4	1	5	0.93
Must Develop Better Lines of Communication	105	4.24	4	1	5	0.81
Can Fully Engage Customer Through Word of Mouth	105	2.47	2	1	5	1.04
Use of Social Media Is Effective Communication With Members	105	3.99	4	1	5	0.86
We Use/Planning to Use Social Media to Communicate With Members	105	3.43	4	1	5	1.07

Regarding cooperative policies of communication and information technology, average responses indicate that 31% provide a text messaging policy, 29% provide a chat platform policy, 43% provide an email policy, 49% provide a personal phone use policy, 23% provide a social media policy, and 38% do not provide any communication and information technology policy. The median respondent in this survey does not have policies defining the use of text messaging, chat platforms, emailing, personal phone use, or social media use in the cooperative (see Table 2 for more detailed results).

Table 2. Manager Responses to Use of Policies Regarding Communication Technologies

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Stan Dev.
Text Messaging Policy	105	0.31	0	0	1	0.47
Chat Platform Policy	105	0.29	0	0	1	0.45
Email Policy	105	0.43	0	0	1	0.50
Personal Phone Policy	105	0.49	0	0	1	0.50
Social Media Policy	105	0.23	0	0	1	0.42
None of the Above	104	0.38	0	0	1	0.49

Conclusion

An overall need has been identified for communication and technology communication education and adoption, and an implementation strategy is in order. Social media campaigns can be tailored to each organization to help them find workable solutions to communicate with their members and customers. Understanding the driving forces behind each cooperative's adoption of new technology will aid educators in developing educational materials to help progress the technological literacy of cooperatives and inspire improved member interaction and involvement.

References

Flynn, Nancy. 2012. The Social Media Handbook, ed. Donna Weinson. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.