

An analysis of the level of trust Texas cotton producers place in the Texas newspaper media: A qualitative determination of the characteristics of trust

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Abstract

Newspapers provide information to a wide-range of audiences. However, newspapers are sometimes looked upon as biased, liberal members of the mass communication industry. This issue has been a focus for researchers in the realm of agricultural communications, as well as members of the general public. Many efforts have been made in recent years to study the quality and quantity of the Texas newspaper media's coverage of cotton and cotton-related issues. However, the cotton producer has had little opportunity to voice his/her opinion on the issue. This study sought to identify producers' perspectives on trust for the Texas newspaper media, as well as determine those characteristics which Texas cotton producers look for in other entities in order for them to enact that behavior in them. Key findings of this research study included the identification of the characteristics that determine trust among Texas cotton producers. Producers also identified their level of trust for the Texas newspaper media, while also stating the low utilization of the newspaper information regarding cotton and related issues. Finally, producers recognized their perspectives of other institutional specific information entities such as magazines, extension service publications, and other cotton-related publications.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Agricultural coverage in the media has historically suffered criticism for both lack of coverage and improper reporting of information. Casabonne (2004) examined emotional intelligence and level of bias of Texas agricultural reporters and found that readers' confidence was seemingly waning in reporters' ability to report information accurately and with low bias. The mass media in general has taken several blows in recent years, cited as being liberal and biased (Goldberg, 2001).

Since reporters and other journalists have great visibility, it is of little wonder why they endure intense review of their work (Wingenbach & Rutherford, 2005). When journalists do commit discrepancies in their reporting, it is very noticeable, and they are placed under scrutiny.

This scrutiny does not exclude any sector of the media, especially newspapers and other sources of print media. In a past Gallup Poll, results stated U.S. citizens held more confidence in TV news than in print form, and more trust was placed in nighttime news programs than in print news (Newport & Saad, 1998). Zacchino (2000) reported that readers express concerns of article and institutional credibility when anonymous sources are used, when bias is included in news coverage, and when advertising trumps editorial in allocated newspaper space, which is often referred to as the news hole. Readers and journalists alike were considerably upset, and the

author wrote, “[journalists] have a trust with our readers that can be easily broken by lapses in ethics that they hold as dearly as do journalists” (p. 29).

Newspaper journalists themselves may have trust concerns with regards to sources of information which they draw upon for story content. Wingenbach and Rutherford (2005) stated that even though a mismatch in beat reporting may have an influence on the outcome of a story, what is uncertain is the perceived trustworthiness, bias, and fairness reporters place in their reporting with the inclusion of information from some of their sources.

Trust is a significant factor in other sectors of the mass media as well. Advertising effectiveness is on such example. Irani & Sinclair (2004) analyzed trust, risk and credibility of plant biotechnology advertising. Trust was the one key predictor for every measure used to characterize effectiveness of the advertisements. Trust was found to be one of two predictors for attitude toward the advertiser and toward purchase intention.

In a study examining food ethics, the term risk was adjoined to trust, stating that even though there is certain risk in purchasing or familiarizing with certain subjects, or food products as was the case for this study, risk does not directly influence trust (Brom, 2000). “When we *trust* someone, we do not reckon with this possibility. Risk taking and trusting are on different levels. A trusting person neither actively thinks of trusting, nor about the risks involved in trusting” (Brom, 2000, p. 132).

Research does exist for producer trust in other institutions such as cooperatives. In a study by James and Sykuta (2004), soybean producers were found to place more trust into marketing cooperatives than in investor-owned entities. The authors described trust as the belief that one person would not take advantage of another, and that expectation was partly related to how those in which the trust is placed is distinguished as trustworthy and competent.

The Theory of Planned Behavior pulls together three primary elements that influence intention, the key component of the model predicting behavior. Ajzen (2006) stated that attitude toward the behavior is a combination of the strength of a certain belief and the evaluation of the behavioral outcome. Ajzen (2006) also presented subjective norm as “the perceived social pressure to engage or not to engage in a behavior.” Finally, he described perceived behavioral control as an individual’s acknowledgement of how well they can exhibit a particular behavior. However, Ajzen (2006) stated that this can be impacted by the actual behavior control which describes the requirements, combined with intention, to display a behavior.

For the purpose of this study, the Theory of Planned Behavior Model will be referenced in predicting influencing factors that affect trust as a behavior Texas cotton producer’s exhibit toward coverage of their commodity in state newspapers.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of trust Texas cotton producers place in the coverage of cotton and cotton-related issues by Texas newspapers and their trusts’ influence on the utilization of the information provided in the coverage. The following research questions were created to assist in supporting the purpose of this study:

1. What are the behavioral characteristics of trust as described by Texas cotton producers?
2. How do Texas cotton producers describe the level of trust they place in Texas newspapers and the amount of information they utilize from newspaper content?

3. How do Texas cotton producers compare the level of trust they place in Texas newspapers to the level of trust they place in other more industry specific entities such as magazine publications, organizational information, or cooperative extension service information?

Methods

Design / Data Collection

Data was collected using face-to-face interviews. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) state that interviews are a significant part of research in that it facilitates the verification or refutation of any perceptions a researcher has from observation.

Interview sessions were structured using a combination of a standardized open-ended interview and a general interview guide approach. This enables the researcher to provide consistency in the data collection, making the instrument highly visible, efficient, and easy to analyze. The researchers called for combining the general interview guide approach with the standardized approach. The general interview guide strategy provides a platform of general ideas and issues in which the interview is based on for the interviewer and interviewee (Patton, 2001).

In order to obtain demographic information from the interview participants, a short questionnaire was created. The surveys were sent to each interview participant either by e-mail or physical mail.

Population and Sample

The study participants were chosen among the Texas cotton producers in the Plains and Coastal regions of the state. Producers selected considered their cotton production practices the primary source of their income and have had experience with local and regional newspapers within the state, either through participating in the development of a story or through readership.

A purposive sample was drawn from recommendations from Texas Cooperative Extension county agents as well as cotton production and marketing organizations such as Plains Cotton Cooperative Association and Plains Cotton Growers.

Participants were selected from the Plains and Coastal regions of the state. Both areas are cotton-producing regions, and the Plains region is considered one of the most agriculturally intensive areas in the United States, primarily a result of cotton production.

The number of cotton producers chosen from each region was determined by the level of cotton production in each region. Six producers were interviewed from the Plains region while four producers were interviewed from the Coastal region. Pseudonyms were selected by the researcher for each of the session members.

Instrumentation

The researcher-designed interview protocol was founded by the Theory of Planned Behavior's (Ajzen, 1991) determinants of a particular behavior. As stated earlier, the design of the interview sessions was structured according to a combination of methods including a standardized open-ended method and a general interview guide approach, allowing for freedom of interaction among the interviewer and interviewee, yet if focus was lost or decreased, direction could be restored (Patton, 2001).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was conducted in the form of note taking and memo creation after each interview, however, coding and interpretation of the participants' responses was conducted after all interviews were completed. During each interview, notes were taken on information that spurred themes of consistency between each participant's responses, as well as information that may aid in future interviews. After each interview, time was spent reflecting on the information exchanged as well as establishing initial considerations for the research journal. From these notes, a researcher created journal was written in order to reflect the researcher's perspective of the interviews. After all of the interviews were completed, they were transcribed in detail.

Open, line-by-line coding occurred after transcribing each interview (Charmaz, 2006). Memos were developed in order for the researchers to note when certain codes occurred across several individuals. After initial coding, the researchers followed the process of analysis and implemented focused coding. Focused coding is referred to as a type of categorization and sub-categorization of initial codes that are used frequently or bear some importance to the study (Charmaz, 2006).

After coding, the researcher engaged in advanced memo development, a process in which the actual data was combined with the memos made previously, and themes of consistency were developed, as well as supportive evidence through the implementation of quotes within these memos. Findley (2007) suggested using quotations from participants in the advanced memos to strengthen the findings as well as provide depth to each category of raw data.

As a result of focused coding and the implementation of advanced memos, five focused codes were developed for research question one, four focused codes were identified for research question two, particularly in regards to producer trust in Texas newspapers, and four focused codes were identified for research question three. The three theoretical categories developed for this study include (1) behavior, (2) perception of Texas newspapers, and (3) stance on industry specific publications. An illustration of how the developed focused codes for this study were categorized theoretically is shown in figure 1.

Trustworthiness

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state in order for trustworthiness to be achieved, the study's credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability need to be sufficed as well. To accomplish this prior to data analysis, the researchers engaged in interview sessions with each individual participant. The researchers used multiple sources of data, and multiple forms of data were collected, including interview transcripts, the researcher's journal and the questionnaire sent out to each participant. An audit trail was created including original audio recordings of interviews, transcripts, interview notes, a researcher journal, and records of communication. Merriam (2002) states that in using transferability, interpretation and applicability of research results is left up to the reader.

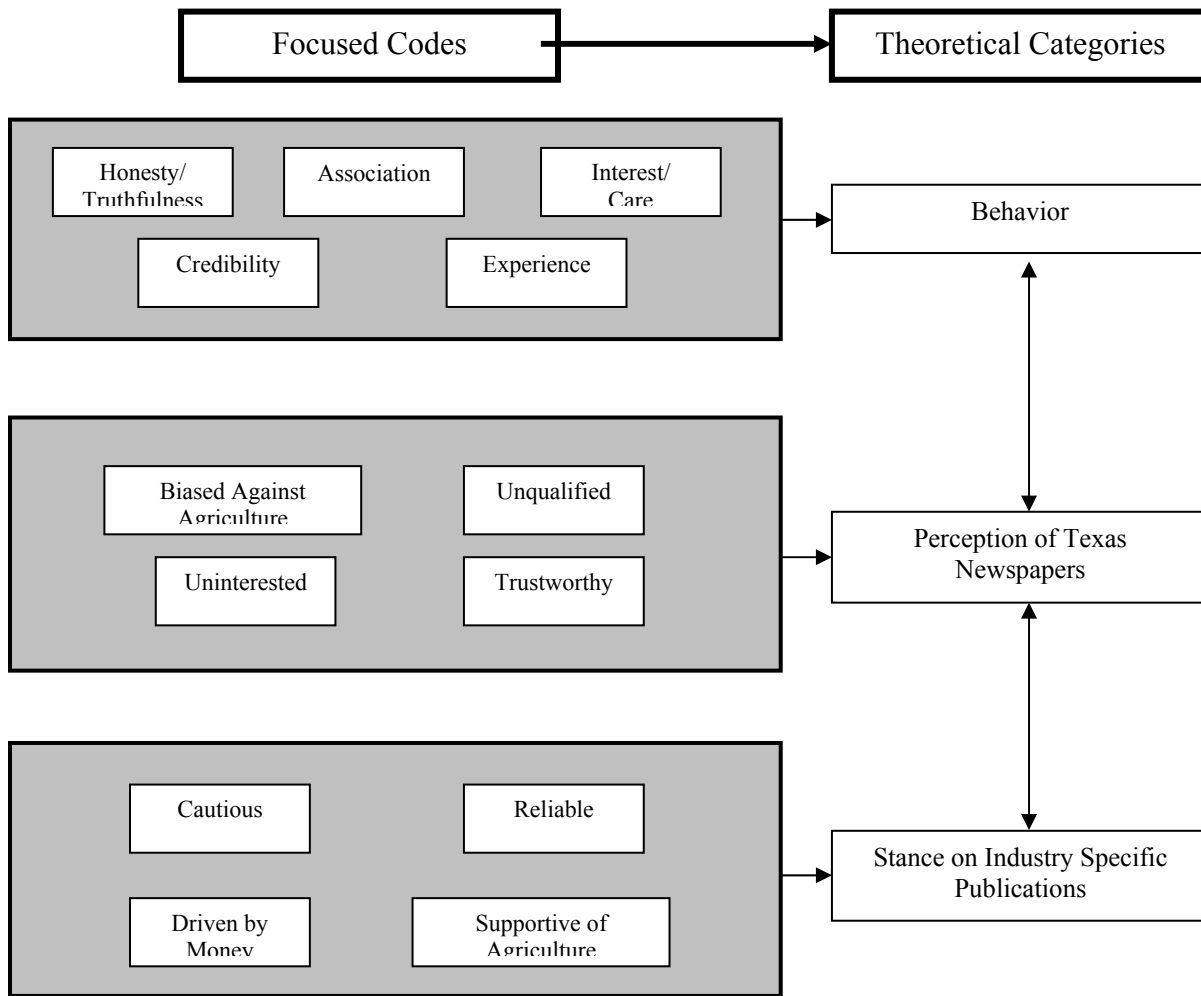


Figure 1. Shift from Focused Codes to Theoretical Categories Describing the Producer's Trust in Texas Newspapers

Findings

Characteristics of Participants

All ten producers that participated in the study were male and of Caucasian decent. The average age of the participants was 47.5 years, with the following categories representing the range of ages: three participants were between the ages of 30 and 39; one was between the ages of 40 and 49; five producers were between the ages of 50 and 59; and one participant was in his sixties.

One producer stated he has less than 200 acres of cotton in production, while two producers have between 501 and 1,000 acres in production. Four producers stated they have between 1,001 and 2,500 acres of cotton in production, and the remaining three have between 2,501 and 5,000 acres in production. In comparison, each producer responded to the question regarding average household income: one producer stated his household income being between \$30,001 and \$45,000; two producers stated theirs being between \$65,001 and \$80,000; one producer stated his household

income being between \$80,001 and \$95,000; and six producers stated their household income as being more than \$95,000.

One producer stated high school as being the highest level of education attained, while two stated high school and some college/university as the highest. One producer obtained an associate's degree, and two producers possess bachelor's degrees.

It is also important to have an understanding of the group's reading habits in regards to newspapers. Two producers subscribe to three different newspapers, while five producers subscribe to 2 newspapers. One producer subscribes to only one newspaper, and two producers do not subscribe to any newspapers. Of the ten producers, four spent less than 15 minutes of each day reading the newspaper, and one producer stated he spends 15 to 30 minutes a day reading the newspaper. Four stated spending 31 minutes to one hour a day reading the newspaper, while one producer spends 61 minutes to two hours reading the newspaper each day.

Characteristics of Trust Sought by Texas Cotton Producers

The final question in the interview process was "What is it that makes you trust?". The answers to that question help define research question 1. Difficulty in describing what made up their trust was not an inhibiting factor for the study's participants, nor was it difficult for several common themes to be identified within what was being stated. From the responses recorded, it was evident there were several areas of commonality between them, several of which could be combined into more focused codes. These areas make up the characteristics that comprise the behavior of trust in Texas cotton producers, as described in the remainder of this section.

Honesty

Several responded to the question with truthfulness or honesty being a large attribute in their ability to trust. One participant answered the question with only:

Ryan: Be truthful with me...being truthful and listening, I guess.

This short but to the point answer clearly stated what this producer's trust was made up of. Yet another described it as how it looks to others:

Gram: ...definitely truthful, tell you the truth. People start being untruthful with you...that's a big red flag.

This producer considered being untruthful a warning sign, whether you are a newspaper reporter or anyone else. Producers who boasted honesty as one of their main reasons to trust considered it one of, if not their largest, attributes of the behavior.

Association

The theme association refers to the ability of a relationship to be formed between the trusting and those receiving that trust. Several producers answered with this characteristic. The two primary characteristics that are categorized as subgroups to association are relatability and time, relatability being the degree to which one can relate with another about certain issues or experiences, and time being exposure, or as one participant dictates, face-time:

Kirk: Man, you really got to have some time to know them...Probably just face-time, I guess, is probably one of the biggest things on trusting someone.

This individual values time spent with an entity in order to form a relationship or association. Others feel as though a genuine tie has been established in general, as one producer stated:

James: ...being able to relate...when you feel like somebody's relating to you, then I form a pretty good trust in somebody when I feel they are relating to me...just in life in general...

Credibility

While this last statement is categorized under association, it also parallels with credibility. Credibility is defined as the ability to encourage belief or enact belief in another (*Credibility*, 2006). Credibility is often associated with being correct, but it also relates with status. For this reason, two subgroups exist within the theme of credibility: notoriety and rapport. Notoriety is the degree to which someone is known, while rapport is a device built within someone in order to enable trust. The following statement is made of credibility:

Kirk: That's probably the biggest thing for me is that you get to know somebody, or you heard about somebody through somebody else that you trust, that you would trust that they say they are pretty credible.

Experience

Experience was another theme found among the variety of characteristics. Under the umbrella of experience exists two subgroups: skill and knowledge. Skill pertains to one's ability to perform, and knowledge is related to those cognitive enablers that aid in being able to perform. One producer believes that while certain characteristics are hidden from the viewer, others can be noticed, such as knowledge, and a certain degree of judgment can be made as to whether that source could be trusted:

Gram: You can take a writer or a magazine for instance and read his work and form some judgments about him. But you probably don't know much about whether he's...you'd just be guessing about the honesty and character and all that stuff. But you could know about his knowledge.

Another producer spoke of other informing signs in which he refers to in order to attribute the cause of a degree of his trust in some person:

Peter: Probably a person's skill at talking...in conversation...eye contact...body language.

Interest/Care

The most obvious theme found in asking producers what makes them trust is that of interest/care. Four subgroups exist within the theme of interest/care: awareness, eagerness, sympathy, and open-mindedness. Awareness was exhibited as a characteristic sought from one that was familiar with issues pertaining to the producer, while eagerness was portrayed as something one must have in order to be interested in a certain issue or topic. Sympathy, like relatability, is something sought by producers for individuals to have for them, while open-mindedness was categorized by the producers' desires to be heard without rejection. The following statements made by four producers after being asked the question of what makes them trust relate the producers' need for these characteristics to be present in order for them to exhibit trust:

Keith: There's a radio guy that does ag reports in the morning...you just get a sense that he cares about what he's doin'.

Stevie: Well, I think down here and speakin' of agriculture in general, we don't have anybody expressing an effort anymore in getting to know our situation which would help tremendously with the amount of trust they could build in regards to farmers.

Jack: You listening to my point of view and everything else without trying to interject and put something that you feel is right that is not necessarily a fact.

James: I think somebody that first of all is interested...you can tell that the very first time you sit down and visit with someone...whether they're interested in what's going on with your life...I tend to trust somebody who's actually interested and cares.

Utilization of Newspaper Information

The second research question this study poses asks: How do Texas cotton producers describe the level of trust they place in Texas newspapers and the amount of information they utilize from newspaper content?

During the interview process, a specific question was asked of each participant: How would you rate and describe the level of trust you place in the Texas newspaper coverage of cotton and cotton-related issues? The ten producers were evenly split on whether the newspaper media was more trustworthy or more untrustworthy.

One producer stated his distrust for his local newspapers:

Keith: I just don't trust many of my local ones or regional ones...I guess there's really no conspiracy goin' on against cotton with newspapers. It's just that I don't think they get the whole story.

While another producer describes the newspapers as being more trustworthy and reliable:

Gram: The local papers I have pretty good trust in them to cover an article factually and unbiased.

One particular aspect that was of note is that the majority of perspectives from the Coastal Region producers stated the newspapers to be more untrustworthy, while only fewer than half of the interviewees from the Plains region saw newspapers in the same light.

The one producer from the Coastal region that exhibited more trust in the newspaper media did so in a manner that was supportive of the newspaper, even though he realized there were times when the newspaper could improve its coverage:

Jimmy: Something like a six or seven or something on a one to ten (scale, one being most untrustworthy, ten being most trustworthy). Uh, I mean, they can only, depending on how the reporter, most of the time they report what they are told, but if they are totally ignorant about the deal, it's hard to get the right facts out there. They may slip something else in there.

One of the producers in the Plains region that felt the newspapers were more untrustworthy described the newspapers as reporting only what is pertinent to themselves:

Jack: But, sometimes I feel like they only report what they want to report. They don't report the whole story.

Newspaper Bias Against Agriculture

Several producers expressed their level of trust to be lower in Texas newspaper's coverage of cotton and cotton-related issues for a variety of reasons, one being their belief that the newspapers report with a bias against agriculture. While this is a stereotypical statement to make of the media, it is important to consider when analyzing how trust is distributed among newspapers. Many of the responses that dealt with newspaper bias against agriculture were given as seemingly uncompromising statements about the press, such as the producer that relates a story to his position:

Keith: I think our paper still has a bias against the farmer and for the little house on the corner that's getting sprayed. We're the big evil...spraying cotton left and right like it is goin' out of style, which is not the case...

A large concern among producers was how they perceived they were purposely portrayed in a poor manner. Another producer from the Coastal region feels the newspaper indeed exhibits a tilt against the industry, however, he believes the newspaper still believes they can come back to the same source after "burning" him/her on another issue:

Stevie: It's not on our side. It shows a bias and an agenda. They come to us next week and want to talk to us about another subject.

Another attitude was the perception of the newspaper media as viewed along side other forms of media:

Peter: I'm more conservative, and I think the paper is not any different than most news media...pretty liberal.

This producer, from the Plains region, spoke highly of the newspaper he was involved with locally; however, he felt that overall, the press followed suit with other forms of media in that it exhibited a more liberal point-of-view.

A reoccurring theme among why producers have little trust in the newspaper media as that of a bias the newspaper has against agriculture, it is obvious this is a heated area of inquiry, and for some of the producers, it seemed to be a statement they wanted to make. One producer from the Coastal region even mentioned before the interview began:

Stevie: I've got some opinions about it I guess is what I'm trying to say, too...It hasn't always been a good experience for me to be interviewed with a newspaper guy.

Therefore, some came into the interview, once the topic of inquiry was established, with a mindset of how they are unduly represented by the media who in fact has an agenda with agriculture in general.

Newspaper Uninterested in Reporting

Another factor that played a strong role, in particularly the most evident, in factors contributing to the decrease of trust for the newspaper media among producers was the perception that the newspapers held very little interest in covering the cotton story, or the newspapers felt there was little interest to be garnered from their broader audience. One producer from the Coastal region made this statement, seemingly longing for someone that has an interest in coverage of their issues:

Stevie: We don't have the exciting person coming to see us who has a heart-felt interest in our situation...primarily wantin' to get the story and get it out...

One producer from the Plains region was very expressive in stating his area's non-interest perspective on agriculture in one of the more agriculturally intensive areas of the nation:

Jack: For the most part, I think there is a disinterest in any type of reporting pertaining to agriculture, and it doesn't matter if it's the reporter or these organizations to begin with, they are not really interested in any kind of a story that really pertains to us.

This disinterest in reporting anything agriculture, according to this particular producer, puts many people at a disadvantage knowledge-wise, and coverage falls victim to other pertinent stories:

Jack: Compared to the war in Iraq, I guarantee this farming thing won't even get a sentence. And I guess what they say sells papers, but I feel like it is a very big disservice for the general public, and especially our children, that they don't get any of this information, and what they get is very small bits of it.

Newspaper Unqualified

Several producers expressed their concern for the experience that many newspaper reports lack in regards to reporting on cotton and agriculture in general. One producer explained how the absence of an agricultural reporter can throw others with less experience into an unknown environment, resulting in misrepresentation of the interviewee:

Stevie: they're not educated in what they're asking...and they have to be told what questions to ask so they're not aware of the subtle things you might be assuming they understand when you're talking to them...you read your article in the newspaper the next day, it's just full of things you did not emphasize that they emphasized...inaccuracies...you get the attitude they're feeling "well, we got this recorded. It's behind us. We don't have to worry about it again, so the heck with it." Move on to it...but all your friends and neighbors read what you were quoted in saying. You spend the next week with friends having to say, "No, I didn't really say that."

Lack of reporter education seems to be a continuous factor that deems a newspaper unqualified to report on cotton. Educating the newspaper media about what is of concern for them and producers, according to a Coastal region producer, could help prevent situations as described below:

Mick: They don't know whether they're putting something in or out of context. And sometimes, what you say out of context greatly affects what it means...Lots of times, they make a statement that was made in the early part of the interview that is not relative where they put it in the article.

In some respect, this inexperience in newspaper coverage of cotton and agriculture, combined with the feeling that newspapers do not see the cotton story as interesting, seemed to provide encouragement to the feeling that the newspaper media is biased against the industry. However, those that did find the newspapers more trustworthy had the opposite to say.

Newspaper is Trustworthy

Jimmy: Well, a lot of times, I mean, when something big happens, they cover the story, and they do pretty good on it.

This statement made by a producer in the Coastal region, carries much of the sentiment the others have for their increased trust in the newspaper media as it covers cotton and cotton-related issues:

Gram: The local papers I have pretty good trust in them to cover an article factually and unbiased, in an unbiased manner.

This statement is made in a positive manner; however, there is a little hesitancy in the use of phrases such as “pretty good,” “usually pretty straight forward,” and “fairly good job.”

Kirk: Most of the time, they don’t try to sway it. It won’t be a bad article, they usually pretty much put the facts out there, tell it how it is, and it’s usually pretty straight forward.

Peter: I think they make a point to recognize the industry and recognize, “Hey, it’s cotton planting time,” or, “Hey, it’s harvest time,” so I guess they make it a part of the community...So they raise awareness of cotton and cotton production, so they do a fairly good job of that.

After realizing why several participants of the study do not see the newspaper media as trustworthy and how others perceive it as the opposite, better insight into whether or not those producers see the newspaper coverage of cotton and cotton-related issues useful in their own practice is evident. Below is one of the statements made by a producer who saw the information as useful and the newspaper media as more trustworthy:

James: I think that I have a lot of trust in it as far as what I read in there... I use it and apply it to my operations so I feel like I have a real good handle on that. They do a real good job of keeping us informed with what’s goin’ on...like the boll weevil.

The majority of the sentiments expressed among the producers believed the information published in the newspaper pertaining to cotton was less useful, several of which saw no use at all. One producer who described the newspaper media as more trustworthy stated the newspaper was useful for human interest stories only:

Peter: Human interest. There’s really no education to the news reported here besides any meeting being posted or something like that.

While those that saw the newspapers as more untrustworthy initially described the usefulness of the information pertaining to their industry provided in newspapers was irrelevant and a waste:

Keith: My local paper...it’s a waste of a 75 cent paper...read the gossip...all it is is gossip about what’s goin’ on in the county.

Trust In Other Institutional Entities

In determining if the level of trust cotton producers have for the newspapers parallels with their trust of other institutional entities. The questions was asked: How do Texas cotton producers compare the level of trust they place in Texas newspapers to the level of trust they place in other more industry specific entities such as magazine publications, organizational information, or cooperative extension service information?

The producers were split evenly on whether they perceived the newspaper media as more trustworthy or more untrustworthy; however, the responses to this question varied more in form, and not every response answered the question very clearly. Several producers responded to the question by stating their level of trust has no relationship with their level of trust in other entities. Among these producers were those that were categorized as believing the newspaper media as more untrustworthy, while the others were categorized as perceiving newspapers to be more trustworthy.

While these several individuals responded with clear-cut answers, a few producers answered in different terms. The statements made by these producers were structured more as examples in which further questions were used to probe for a stable answer. Those producers were split in regards to trust in the newspaper; however, each of them gave their own unique answer. One producer, who perceived the newspaper media as more untrustworthy stated his trust in other entities as a result of the question:

Keith: What the newspaper prints up?.

Interviewer: Like if you had a negative feeling toward your newspaper...when more information comes out similar to that reporting, does your level of awareness become heightened?

Keith: Yeah, I would say it when they made a mistake...yeah, I can see that.

Interviewer: Do you trust newspapers more than magazines, industry specific magazines? If Progressive Farmer came to interview you, you'd be more for it than...

Keith: Somebody that was in the same boat as the farmer...I would.

The other producer that was categorized as perceiving the newspaper media as more untrustworthy responded by explicitly stating his increase in trust for magazines:

Jack: I'm more apt to believe the magazine just because, in my personal opinion, they have people that are supposed to really be involved in that area, or that's supposed to be their area of expertise...

While these two responses to the question were not as specific as those that stated whether it specifically did or did not affect their trust in other entities, they do give insight into how they compare other entities' information to newspaper coverage.

One of the producers categorized as perceiving the newspaper media as trustworthy, yet did not give a specific answer to the question regarding its effect on trust in industry specific entities, was positive in his remarks regarding those institutions, specifically magazines:

James: ...there's some good ones like the (organization magazine publication). I've been in several stories in that. The larger ones...I think they're an asset to agriculture as a whole. I don't know...they really can't pin point what's going on in this region...

This insight offers a small comparison between larger industry magazine publications versus smaller publications, yet has little to offer in regards to whether or not his belief that the newspaper media is more trustworthy helps predict his trust for other industry specific entities.

Overall, the majority of the producers that stated specifically whether their level of trust affected their level of trust in other institutions such as magazines, organization information, or cooperative extension information stated it did not affect their outlook on these entities in any way. Among these producers, the majority perceived the newspaper media as more trustworthy. As previously stated, a small number of the producers expressed their level of trust in newspapers had an effect on their level of trust in other entities. These producers perceived the newspapers as more untrustworthy.

Several of the participants responded to the question with other focused answers, a few of which categorized the newspaper as more untrustworthy, yet spoke more positive about other entities, magazines specifically. The other respondents with different answers to the question

believed newspapers to be more trustworthy, however, only one responded favorably to magazines specifically while the other responded unfavorably.

Recommendations

While this study contains a relatively small sample, and its perceived generalizability is low, it is still important to consider the findings relative to a broader base of representation. Several recommendations can be made for the newspaper media while other recommendations can be made for the producers. These recommendations will be made according to the relationships, processes, and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) the Texas cotton producers have and make about the Texas newspaper media. Finally, recommendations will be made for future research in the field of identifying factors affecting trust and the behavior's relationship with other variables of study.

Recommendations for Texas Newspapers

While each producer expressed his own perception of the Texas newspaper industry, it is appropriate to take those attitudes into consideration for recommendations of change, improvements, or elimination of certain activities that negate the quality of the newspaper coverage of the cotton industry. Several producers described the newspaper media as having a negative bias or agenda directed toward agriculture in general and cotton specifically. Newspapers hold that attitude and the discontinuance of that attitude in their own hands. They have the ability to search for those bias remarks in their editorial positions, as well as from the writer point-of-view. If the newspaper media is to report on any issue objectively, in this case cotton and cotton-related information, it is important for newspapers to eliminate the bias in their coverage from the inception of any article going to press.

Qualification was a characteristic of the Texas newspaper media that the cotton producers interviewed hope to see more of. Many of the producers believed the newspapers, particularly the reporters sent to cover cotton-related stories, did not have the knowledge or experience to satisfactorily report on the issues. This attitude transcended just the cotton industry as several of the producers interviewed were involved with other agricultural endeavors.

A recommendation to position those with more agricultural or scientific knowledge in those areas of coverage would greatly improve the communication between cotton producers and reporters. If that cannot be achieved, it is greatly recommended that reporters be required to do more in-depth research on the cotton industry prior to reporting on industry issues.

Many of the producers interviewed expressed concern that there was a decrease in the interest expressed in covering the cotton story. This attitude parallels with newspaper qualification in reporting on cotton and related issues. In providing more qualified journalists to report on the cotton industry, the interest level for reporting on the issue has potential to increase, and to the producer, this translates into more effort being shown to accurately and appropriately report on their industry and situation.

Another recommendation to make for the Texas newspaper media as it pertains to coverage of cotton and related issues is to make an effort to form more trusting relationships with the producers in their area of coverage. By doing so, producers will be more accessible for contact and to communicate with for information regarding their industry. Producers identified five characteristics that aided their ability to trust in another entity. These characteristics should provide a considerably strong stepping stone for newspapers to analyze how they are approaching cotton industry representatives, as well as the agricultural industry in general.

To achieve these recommendations, an inhibitor of change could come in the form of a media/producer training program. Media training programs exist for members of the cotton industry through a variety of organizations; however, it would benefit the coverage of their information if one was provided from the other perspective, that of the reporter.

Recommendations for Texas Cotton Producers

Just as it is important and obvious it is to make recommendations to the Texas newspaper media, it is also important that recommendations be made to those that provided the data for this research.

One evident recommendation was made by some of the study's participants themselves, in that if producers really wanted more information reported pertaining to cotton and the cotton industry, then many more members of that industry will have to become more proactive. One participant suggested that if one was to be an advocate for cotton, then that individual would indeed need to be an advocate. Another producer stated his belief on the issue as how agriculture in general has not yet realized how important it is to get good and accurate information to the newspapers.

By becoming a more proactive industry, cotton producers could potentially have more access to being more vocal and positive about the representation their commodity receives from other entities, particularly the newspaper industry. To become more proactive may mean simply become more *active* within the industry on a local, regional, or national scale, by having more representation within industry organizations and politics, or by becoming a more accessible source for the newspaper media.

Another recommendation to be made to the Texas cotton producer community, as a result of this study, is to make an effort in becoming better educated about the newspaper industry itself. Producing cotton gives the producer an inherent ability of knowing how the entire industry operates. In order for them to properly portray their industry to the press, it would be beneficial to have some knowledge of how the newspaper industry operates the structure of newspaper articles, the background of an average reporter, and other industry issues of interest and advantage.

In learning more about the newspaper media and how an article and why an article comes through development, cotton producers may stand to have a better understanding of how and why things appear biased or slanted toward a certain perspective.

In order for producers to become more aware of the newspaper industry, a media-training program could be put to use. During this media training, a certain section could be dedicated to how the newspaper industry operates as well as describe those characteristics of the medium listed previously. This training could also provide cotton producers information on how to speak to the media, how to be accessible as a resource for information, in order to avoid being misrepresented. Several regional, state, and national industry organizations currently offer such media training programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

An initial suggestion would be to replicate the current research study among production members of other commodities to compare the characteristics of trust each different commodity exhibits. By doing this, research could provide the similarities between members of different commodity groups, as well as direct future research recommendations in those respective directions.

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