

Media and Information Channel Preferences of College Freshmen in  
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

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### Introduction

According to the Spectator News (2005), college students' buying power has reached billions, and advertisers are now searching for ways to connect to the high-spending age group. Be it through television, magazines, billboards, radio, or Internet, advertisements targeting college students are everywhere. College students use different forms of media every day, but because they use such a variety of media, they can be a difficult audience to reach. However, college students are an audience worth reaching with almost \$200 billion in spending power each year (Spectator News, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to assess current media preferences of college freshmen enrolled in agricultural sciences and/or natural resource classes to more effectively target this market.

### Methodology

The survey population was first year agricultural science and natural resources students at a Texas university. The population at the time of the study was 236 students.

An Internet survey was used and followed a modified version of Dillman's Tailored Designed Method (2000). Zoomerang.com, an online survey administrator, hosted the instrument. A pilot test was administered to help minimize instrumentation error by determining if questions were easy to understand. Non-freshman undergraduate and graduate agricultural students who were not part of the sample participated in the pilot test; 35 surveys were e-mailed to the pilot test group, and 25 students completed the test. Adjustments to enhance the clarity of questions were made based on feedback from the pilot subjects.

Survey links were then e-mailed to all the freshman agricultural sciences and natural resources students. Students' names and university e-mail addresses were obtained through the agricultural sciences and natural resources dean's office. Generalizations will not be made to populations outside the studied population; however, assumptions can be made that these students can identify with other college students on preferred media.

### Findings

The response rate for this survey was 34% ( $n = 81$ ). The researchers found students prefer the Internet for information, yet results show that they are also a television-savvy audience. Students were asked about their viewing habits of 10 television networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CW, CMT, ESPN, MTV, TBS, and VH-1. They reported a minimum weekly viewing of all but one network (VH1). ABC and FOX were the preferred networks; however, CBS showed some very loyal viewers.

Respondents read the newspaper more than expected, with 43% reading weekly and nearly 20% reading daily. The most convincing media data came from students' listening patterns. More than 50% of survey respondents said they listen to country music radio daily. Sports radio was not as popular with the sample, with 50% saying they rarely listen.

Students were given the opportunity, in a fill-in-the-blank format, to list other television networks that were not mentioned in the survey. Students named 24 different networks. Comedy Central, FX, and TNT were the most frequently mentioned followed by Discovery, HBO, and Disney. The other named networks only had one or two mentions.

Respondents were also asked to name any magazines they frequently read; 22 students reported a total of 27 different magazines. *Cosmopolitan* had the most readers (13) followed by *Sports Illustrated* (7), and *Seventeen* (4).

Internet was the preferred medium for information. Students could list any favorite Web sites; 37 students listed 22 Web sites, with [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) being the overwhelming majority with 23 listings. MySpace was next in popularity with 12 respondents followed by Google (6), and Yahoo! (5).

### Conclusions

Based on the data, we can assume that advertisements on Facebook and MySpace would efficiently reach these college students. Country radio stations and the ABC, FOX, and CBS television networks are also very effective mediums to reach the target audience.

### Implications/ Future Plans

The findings show that college students have diverse preferences for media. It is necessary to further examine student media preferences. An additional study is needed with specific questions to determine exactly which television programs and networks are the most popular among college students and which time of day students listen to radio. Future research should also study the types of Internet advertisements that attract college students. A broader sample of college students should be used in future research.

### References

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