CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TALKING POINTS 
DURING THE 2010 GEORGIA BUDGET CUTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Alan Christian Morgan)

ABSTRACT

Georgia experienced a budget cut proposal affecting higher education in March 2010 and the media covered it extensively. In order to prepare for future situations, it is beneficial to be educated on parallel events of the past. Specifically, the research investigated if the talking points distributed by the UGA’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences’ Office of Communication were used in media outlets in the state. It was found that the talking point theme “higher education” was used most frequently, which included 4-H. Social media and quantitative analysis are also discussed.

INDEX WORDS: content analysis, Georgia budget cuts 2010
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BS, Oklahoma State University, 2009

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011
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May 2011
DEDICATION

To my parents, Tom and Mary; my sister, Kate; my brother, Thomas. I couldn’t have done it without their encouragement, love and support. We did it.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give a special thanks to Faith Peppers. She collected the articles and discarded duplicate materials. I thank my major professor, Dr. Morgan, for meeting with me for countless hours. He was there from start to finish. He was super patient with my questions and always had time for hall chit-chat. I thank my committee members, Dr. Rucker and Dr. Fuhrman. Dr. Rucker was always a refreshing ball of energy and kept an eye on deadlines. Dr. Fuhrman got me through many days with his contagious smile and laughter. He always had encouragement.

I thank Dr. Navarro for her questions on my progress and sanity. She was a great help with formatting. I have a great amount of respect and admiration for her.

I thank my parents, Tom and Mary; and siblings, Kate and Thomas for being there for me. My dad’s famous words every time we talked about school were “Just get it done.” My mom always had time to listen to me for countless hours. Kate always believed in everything I have done. She is the perfect older sister. Thomas was my comic relief. He never knew what his random text messages or phone calls did for my morale. I wouldn’t trade him for anything. I have the best family.

I thank my Athens crew, especially Amanda L, Antoine, Barlow, Bradley, Chris, Joey, Matt, Milton, Morlas, Melissa, and Susie. I’m not sure I would have made it out in one piece without our B.L.C. Grad school wouldn’t have been fun without them.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Land-grant universities were founded under U.S. Morrill Land-Grant College Acts of 1862 and 1890. The colleges established under these laws are required to teach agriculture and mechanical arts (Alberts, Wirth, Gilmore, Jones, & McWaters, 2004). Extension programs were subsequently established in land-grant universities through the Smith_Lever Act to share university research with the agricultural producers and residents of the state to benefit people’s everyday lives.

The Smith-Lever Act of May 8, 1914 states

An act to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several states receiving the benefits of an act of congress approved July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two and of acts supplementary thereto, and the United States Department of Agriculture (Smith-Lever Act, 1992).

The act is to aid in increasing knowledge in agriculture, home economics, and rural energy through practical applications of research (Smith-Lever, 1992). However, in recent years Extension has experienced substantial cuts to its budget.

The Extension service is responsible for America having the most productive agriculture in the world (ManagementWisdom.com, 2010). Extension is an ideal place for people to look for agricultural and environmental knowledge. Unfortunately, it has not been
given credit that it deserves. Extension delivers successful programs, but the program participants “never make known the value they place on [Extension] programs” (McDowell, 2004, para. 12). Extension has areas where improvement can be made. The potential improvements are “clients must attribute the benefits they gained to Extension” (para. 16) and Extension needs to be able to identify and communicate with participants in order to collect support from them (McDowell).

An argument for continued funding is that Extension’s services solve problems for common people; Extension needs funding for continuous success in reaching people who need their services (McDowell, 2004). In 1984 many states saw financial decline and cut back on Extension funding. Agents in one county in New York were reduced from nine agents to four. In order for Extension to receive more money, they needed to heighten their visibility and program understanding to legislations. Staff and volunteers went to the legislature to report Extension’s success in 1985, and their efforts were rewarded by a 2% budget increase. In 1986, Extension increased their media coverage, expanded outreach efforts, strengthened relationships with decision makers, and initiated a marketing plan (Graf, 1988). Dynamic marketing and promotion of Extension is needed because of decreased nationwide awareness of Extension (Baker, Abrams, Irani, & Meyers, 2009).

In spring 2010 the proposed Georgia budget cuts included severe reductions to Extension service. Extension services include the 4-H program (University of Arizona 2005). To Georgia’s disadvantage, 4-H (nationally) has the most political pull of any Extension program, but receives the least amount of research base and support (McDowell, 2004). The United States has many; 4-H is just one of them. Although there are many organizations similar to 4-H that serve youth (e.g. Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl
Scouts, and recreational sports), it is one of the few with government-funded employees (Lamm & Harder, 2009). Under the Smith-Lever Act, which established the Cooperative Extension Service, “Federal funds would be matched by state and local funds, and used to support experiment stations and Extension offices, all operating under the auspices of the land-grant university in that state” (Alberts et al., 2004, para. 4). The purpose of the act is “to assist in diffusing useful and pragmatic information to the people of the United States” (Baker et al., 2009, p. 1).

Cooperative Extension has a unique contribution to make in enhancing the lives of all Americans. If we truly believe in ourselves and help others to recognize our strengths, there’s no reason we need to learn to get by with less. The need for our expertise in dealing with the issues facing people is greater than ever – we must do a better job of marketing ourselves and articulating that need to those people who can fund our work and benefit from our programs (Graf, 1988, para. 20).

Statement of the Problem

University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Office of Communications developed talking points to help guide Extension personnel through this time of budgeting challenges as they interact with the media and constituents. These talking points were distributed to the CAES’ Advisory Council, Extension Directors and other personnel. However, it is unknown if the talking points were effective in influencing the information reported by the media.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the talking points in web-based media outlets. To accomplish this, the following objectives guided this study:
1. Identify online media sources (i.e. radio, TV, or newspaper) in Georgia containing the topic of Georgia budget cuts in 2010.

2. Compare the talking points distributed by UGA CAES to the themes that were aired or printed.

**Budget Cuts**

Budget cuts are not always detrimental to an organization. This does not mean the cuts are easy, but it gives the organization time to evaluate their programs; it gives them the opportunity to close programs that are no longer needed and to redistribute resources (Acker, 2001). Land-grant institutions face challenges because Americans continue to move to urban areas (Baker et al., 2009). As this occurs, people lose a connection to agriculture. Extension has diversified programs in order to serve the urban and suburban populations, and expanded programs to meet the needs of these constituent groups, such as home horticulture, environmental education, families and consumers, sustainable living, disaster preparation and recovery, and youth development; however, even with the additional programs, the people’s awareness of Extension’s mission has dwindled (Baker et al., 2009).

In March 2010, the Georgia state legislature proposed a total budget cut of $1 billion; out of that, the university system would receive a $3 million cut. The system uses 12% of Georgia’s annual budget, but is absorbing 3% of the total budget deficit.

**Land-grant Institutions**

Land-grant institutions have three main goals: teaching, research, and Extension, and are continuously expanding and improving programs to fit the users’ needs (Baker et al., 2009). One of the ways that Extension tends to do this is to follow the public information model. Land-grant institutions try to develop public relations practice (positively increase
their public image), to get positive media coverage (media coverage can hurt an organization as much help it), influence the state legislature, and increase their brand name, reputation and credibility (Baker et al., 2009).

Extension also competes for participants’ attention from other similar organizations and nonprofits. Solid marketing can help Extension politically, increase funding and support; internal benefits, high performance and good staff; survival, compete for clients who have other sources at their disposal (Varea-Hammond, 2004).

**Media Awareness**

Using media to help bring brand awareness is not easy (Baker et al., 2009). To build positive relationships with the media, organizations must be honest and open, provide accurate information, be responsive and timely, reliable and consistent, and prepared (Desier & Bey-Ling, 2007). Land-grant institutions practice these areas in media languages, but it is still a challenge because the media is unaware of their functions and range of issues.

Just like it is important for the media to understand Extension functions and issues, it is important for individuals to know so they can have a belief about an organization and to know how it fits into their lives (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). If an organization has an established relationship with the media, it is easier to distribute information during a crisis (Telg, Irani, Muegge, Kistler, & Place, 2007).

**Assumptions**

The assumption for this research is that Google Alerts and Yahoo! Alerts flagged all media sources concerning the 2010 Georgia budget cuts. It is also assumed that the majority
of media sources, ones not written by journalists, were influenced by the talking points distributed by UGA’s CAES.

Limitations

The limiting factors of this research are as follows:

- The only media collection method used was Google and Yahoo! Alerts. Newspaper, radio, television, and social media archives were not viewed.
- Duplicate media stories were disregarded so the numbers are true to the article, but not true to the audience numbers reached.
- Media coverage in rural and urban areas could not be compared because all duplicates were disregarded.
- Two of the media sources identified were no longer on the web when the research took place.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents theories and other supplemental information so the research and results are better understood. The focus of this chapter is opinion leaders, two-step flow, goal achievement, social networking, media, agenda setting, and content analysis.

Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders are community members who have the respect of other community members, because of this they have influential power on other community members. Opinion leaders change public preference and alter behavior. It may change people’s opinions and actions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). Opinion leaders follow certain issues closely and act as a liaison between the information source and other community members (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009). These leaders influence others through different methods. Some will write letters to politicians or newspaper editors, call a radio show, sign petitions, and persuade peers (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2007). By doing these things they will try to get others to respond or act to the situation in a certain way (Weimann, 1994). In short, opinion leaders are influential in their communities: They share information, sway attitudes, and determine action. They are very effective with word-of-mouth support. By being independent of an organization, they can use their own judgment and do not directly benefit from others thought changes (Smith, 2009).
Two types of opinion leaders exist: formal and informal. Formal opinion leaders are elected or appointed officials or have a recognized position of authority with structured roles. The second type of opinion leader is informal. These people are influential because they are informed and recognized as knowledgeable leaders on particular issues. Both types are successful in influencing others because of the relationships they have with people (Smith, 2009).

Opinion leaders tend to engross themselves in the media in a way that non-opinion leaders do not. Those who view the media less and have less knowledge on the topic will turn to the opinion leaders for more information (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

Because of their influence, opinion leaders should be made aware of the organization’s mission and values. Different concepts, measures and strategies should be made known to the leaders so the opinion leaders complement the message the organization delivers. Opinion leaders should not replace other grassroots activities or media strategies, but rather compliment other strategies. These leaders can be identified, recruited and/or trained. The leaders should be trained to deliver beneficial messages (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

A study by the Cooperative Extension Service in Massachusetts illustrates the importance of opinion leaders and their use of formal and informal communication channels. It was found that people adopt ideas informally through opinion leaders. The opinion leaders gain information formally from the media, “… people were most influenced by informal leaders who are very much like the persons they influence” (Troldahl, 1964, p. 83).
Two-step Flow

Some suburban residents have indicated a need for Extension in their area (mainly horticulture and home economics). Traditionally, Extension gets their information out to urban and suburban clientele through radio, television, and other mass communication. However by using those communication methods, only a small percent of the suburban population are aware of Extension’s services (Troldahl, 1964).

Some studies have shown that the two-step flow method using opinion leaders is modified to what was the idea that was discussed above. Opinion leaders may only be advice-givers and those who gain information from them are advice-seekers. Opinion leaders may seek advice more than their followers (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954). Deutschmann and Danielson (1960) have reasonable belief that media information may go directly from the media source to the consumer. In this theory the opinion leader is bypassed (Troldahl, 1964)

Because two-step flow has flaws to the theory, mass communication may still be the best way to reach a magnitude of people. Extension does not have the number of agents and volunteers to reach everyone personally (Troldahl, 1964).

Two-step flow theory suggests that people who rely on the mass media have more influence on those who rely less on the mass media during conversations (Yang & Stone, 2003). Opinion leaders often gain their knowledge through the media. The leaders will relate it to the followers, thus creating two-step flow. People rely on their friends and family to gain information and for decision making (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999b).
Goal Achievement

Goals are met in organizations “when members share a vision of intended outcomes and collaborate to accomplish organizational objectives (Minarovic & Mueller, 2000, para. 2). It is crucial to understand how information relates to the organization’s mission, goals and values. Relation changes may occur because an organization needs to adapt and change for its clientele (Boone, 1985 as cited by Minarovic & Mueller, 2000).

Social Networking

Social networking has changed the way people communicate and form relationships by using the Internet to allow people to create a personal profile and relate to others with similar interests and experiences (Haythornthwaite, 2005). For teenagers, social networking, cell phones, and instant messaging are preferred methods of communication (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Organizations should use social networking sites because youth use them, but the sites need to be monitored because the social networking pages do represent their organizations. In Rhoades, Thomas and Davis’ study (2009), it was found that 71.8% of social networking pages that included 4-H and Extension were not created by an Extension professional or 4-H leader.

Social networking connects people to others in their community. It can spread ideas and community resources. Non-supporters including those who do not know of an organization can begin to support and become knowledgeable of an organization through social networks (Rhoades, Thomas, & Davis, 2009).
Media

Extension works with the media and communication professionals, so community members will be informed about their projects. Sometimes the organization’s leader will provide the media and communication professionals with resources that include background information and source information (Beesley, 2003).

Today, print media competes with television and the Internet, but “newspapers remain an important and reliable source for news” (Bonk, Griggs, & Tynes, 1999). In a 2008 study about newspaper coverage of cotton in Texas, it was found that articles that were published the most were articles that the agricultural organizations provided the media. It is good for organizations to continue or to expand their media-ready material. The researchers noted this method worked for situations outside of the cotton industry as well (Vinyard, Akers, Oskam, Doerfert, & Davis, 2008). Public and private organizations can send media sources information about their organizations to increase awareness of the organization and to inform the readers about topics such as nutrition.

In order to increase media coverage, a few measures can be taken:

- messages should be short, simple, interesting or surprising; “key players” should be identified so they can respond to media personnel in a well-thought-out and newsworthy fashion
- organizational leaders can work closely with the media to insure interesting and accurate stories are used (Keenan, AbuSabha, & Robinson, 2001).
**Agenda Setting**

Media agenda setting theory states that people who follow the media will have the same agenda as the media (Yang & Stone, 2003). This method of influence is the media’s most frequently used strategy (Stone, Singletary, & Richmond, 1999a). These topics receive the most air time and paper space. People who do not follow the media will have a different agenda. People receive information from other sources besides the media such as friends, family, neighbors and co-workers. Yang and Stone (2003) found opinion leaders generally get their information from the media and relate it to others:

Agenda-setting theory stemmed from Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* (1922) idea that the mass media connect “the world outside” and “the pictures in our heads.” Later, Cohen (1963) suggested that the press tells “its readers what to think about,” and McCombs and Shaw (1972) provided empirical evidence that the mass media structure the public’s perception of issue importance, a cognitive rather than persuasive effect. (p. 58).

Agenda setting can benefit or lose influence with interpersonal communication. If the interpersonal discussion is in the media, the agenda-setting theory is enhanced. If the issues discussed are not in the media, interpersonal communication topics compete with the agenda-setting (Wanta & Wu, 1992).

Typically, those who are media reliant have higher incomes and a higher level of education. It may appear that people with lower incomes and lower education levels are apathetic, but this is not true. They may possess the same will to get the information as those who are media reliant. The non-media reliant rely on interpersonal communication to
gain their information. Those who are non-media reliant, but still seek that type of information, will still be influenced from the mass media agenda (Yang & Stone, 2003).

According to the agenda-setting theory, the media is not powerful enough to change their audiences’ opinions. The media tells people what to think about, but not what to think (Smith, 2009).

*Figure 1: Theoretical Model for Information Transfer*
Content Analysis

Content analysis is defined as an “analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through a classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect” (Merriam-Webster, 2010, para. 1). Reliability and validity are especially important in content analysis because of the nature of the research. Content analysis relies on its coders to report accurate information. “Reliability in content analysis is defined as agreement among coders about categorizing content” (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005, p. 125). Categories and subcategories that are relevant to the study’s goals must be found and identified. Coders are trained to apply the concepts to the content being analyzed.

Summary

This chapter explored various communication channel theories and content analysis. Opinion leaders are community members who have a greater knowledge than most people in a specific area. Agenda setting is what the media chooses to be the “most newsworthy.” Because of the potential exposure in media, it can benefit or lose influence on interpersonal communication within residents. They have the respect of many community members and are able to influence their thoughts and decisions. Two-step flow allows information to travel to recipients via an additional outlet such as mass communication. Goal achievement is the projected outcome of an organization. Media is the channel that large sums of information are passed between organizations and town/state residents, especially those not closely connected to the organization. Content analysis is a type of research. It focuses on evaluation of key symbols or themes.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The reason for this chapter is to explain the way the research was conducted. It lists the objectives, the article sources, and the way the study was completed. This chapter shows the different steps it took to find the media sources through analyzing the results.

Purpose of Study

Georgia experienced a budget cut proposal affecting higher education in March 2010. The media extensively covered the cuts. In order to prepare for future situations, it is ideal to be educated on parallel events on the past. Specifically, the research sought to determine the effectiveness of the talking points in web-based media outlets. To accomplish this, the following objectives guided this study:

1. Identify online media sources (i.e. radio, TV, or newspaper) in Georgia containing the topic of Georgia budget cuts in 2010.
2. Compare the talking points distributed by UGA CAES to the themes that were aired or printed.

Cases and Study

To identify media sources in Georgia containing the topic of Georgia budget cuts in 2010, the web-based tools, Google Alerts and Yahoo! Alerts, were utilized. These tools allow users to enter a search term and when new search results are found, they are sent to the user’s e-mail. All sources were online. The alerts were set up to identify media sources
containing the terms “UGA,” “college,” “agriculture,” “4-H,” and “budget.” The alerts accounted for all media sources published, including duplicates (articles published in more than one source). The duplicates were deleted. Specific media sources were chosen based on their proximity to Georgia. The media sources used are dated between March 2, 2010 and April 28, 2010. These dates reflect the time period of when the proposed budget cuts were announced publicly.

Each media source was copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document and each article assigned a number. Each talking point on both Talking points for proposed budget cuts and Talking points for advisory council to regents was assigned a letter from A – L. Then information was entered into a Microsoft Excel document. The talking point themes were searched manually.

Established coding schemes, in the form of talking points, were used for content analysis. Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh (1996) address this, “Content analysis may … be done in a quantitative research framework with variables that are specified a priori and numbers that are generated to enable the research to draw conclusions about these specified variables” (p. 485), therefore, inter-coder reliability was not needed.

The source numbers were listed in columns and the talking point letters were listed in rows. The sources were assigned a number based on the order the CAES Office of Communications had them listed; the numbers do not represent any sort of order. The letters representing the talking points are presented in the order the CAES Office of Communications distributed them. Each talking point, for both Talking points for proposed budget cuts and Talking points for advisory council to regents, was assigned a letter from A – L (see Table 1). The number of times a talking point was used was tallied within each the media
source. A “1” was assigned if the talking point was mentioned in one paragraph; a “2” was assigned if mentioned in two paragraphs; etc. If it was a paragraph followed by a quote paragraph, it was counted as “1.” If it was two short paragraphs (one sentence each), it was labeled “1.” If it was a large paragraph (three or more sentences), it was labeled as a “2.” Data were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to use as a matrix for analysis. The results were analyzed to determine the frequency each talking point was used; number of media sources containing at least one talking point; and frequency of talking point mentioned per article were found.
Table 1

_Talking Points Themes_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Why we matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Responsibility to Georgia citizens e.g. devastate the organization, land-grant institution, vital programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Harm to higher education in Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Economic impact on Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Fair share e.g. previous budget cuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Accomplishments of what is being defended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Cut budgets for the past two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Devastate the organization, difficult to carry out our land-grant mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Not CAES’ plan; it is the universities attempt to respond to a significant budget reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Plan is terrible and will have short and long-term negative impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Comments and concerns directed to your local house or senate member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Encourage education of house and senate members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Summary_

The methodology steps are as follows:

1. Found media sources using the Alert systems, which searched the web for media sources containing specific, predefined text
2. Removed duplicate media sources
3. Pasted those media sources in a Word document and assigned numbers to each article and assigned a letter to each talking point

4. Searched those media sources for themes, based on “UGA,” “college,” “agriculture,” “4-H,” and “budget”

5. Devised and utilized a method to quantify (i.e. tally) the frequency the aforementioned key words were used in the identified media sources

The media sources were identified using the search system; all duplicates were discarded. The media sources were assigned a number. The particular number does not mean anything. Each talking was assigned a letter; the specific letter had no meaning. The media sources were copied and pasted into word and themes were searched. Each found theme was assigned a number to exhibit the extent the theme was displayed in the media source. The data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The results review and analyze the data that was collected during this study. It analyzes the results in relation to both objectives. Tables are displayed to supplement paragraph form analysis.

Purpose of the Study

Georgia experienced a budget cut proposal affecting higher education in March 2010 and the media covered it extensively. In order to prepare for future situations, it is ideal to be educated on parallel events on the past. Specifically, the research will find if the talking points distributed by the UGA’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences’ communication department. The study objectives are as follows:

1. Identify online media sources (i.e. radio, TV, or newspaper) in Georgia containing the topic of Georgia budget cuts in 2010.
2. Compare the talking points distributed by UGA CAES to the themes that were aired or printed.

Cases

To attain the objectives, Alert tools were utilized to search the World Wide Web and identify news sources that contained specific text related to the state budget crisis in Georgia.
Media sources were found, duplicates were removed, and 39 news media sources were utilized for this study. The media sources came from a variety of online and print media, radio and television broadcast stories that had presence on the Web. The news sources were chosen from their proximity Georgia. All of the ones chosen were in Georgia except for one in Florida and one in Tennessee.

Results in Relation to Objective One

The media sources were located through Google and Yahoo search alerts. The alerts send results in an e-mail as media sources are released on the chosen topics. The key words used in this study for the search alerts are “UGA, college, agriculture, 4-H, and budget.” From the media sources that were sent to an e-mail using the search alerts for the duplicates were disregarded. Forty-one media sources were left to analyze. Two of these media sources were unavailable during the time the research was conducted, providing 37 to be analyzed for this study (see Table 2). The media sources used are dated between March 2, 2010 and April 28, 2010. These dates reflect from the time budget cuts were announced publicly to the time the budget was voted on in Georgia legislative session.

Results in Relation to Objective Two

After the media sources were analyzed for certain themes, the talking points distributed by the CAES Office of communications, and the frequency of these words/texts/themes were entered into a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet. The results were tallied to find three areas: (a) column sum, number of times the talking point was mentioned, (b) number of media sources containing talking points, (c) frequency talking point was mentioned in each article, column sum divided by number of articles.
Table 2

*Media Source Titles and Assigned Numbers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cleaning out the reporter’s notebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Editorial: UGA can’t abandon 4-H of decimate Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>UGA warns budget cuts could do ‘significant harm’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Your opinion: Support the industries that support Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lawmakers propose amendment to save 4-H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sylvia Dawe: UGA ‘should trim fat, not meat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Your morning jolt: Casey Cagle, David Ralston pitch a tax overhaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>C. Wayne Jordan: Adams abandoning UGA mission</td>
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<td>Your Opinion: Education an investment, not an expense</td>
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<td>Proposed 4-H cuts would affect thousands</td>
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<td>Georgia 4-H programs threatened by budget cuts</td>
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<td>State cuts would eliminate 4-H</td>
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<td>Your opinion: 4-H trains leaders</td>
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<td>Rants and raves for March 4</td>
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<td>Budget cuts may spell doom for school program</td>
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<td>4-H on the chopping block?</td>
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The maximum possible number of media sources found is 37 because of the unavailability of two of the media sources. No media sources matched talking point A “Why we matter” or L “Encourage education of house and senate members” (see Table 3).

Talking point B “Responsibility to Georgia citizens e.g. devastate the organization, land-grant institution, vital programs” has 16 as its sum (see Table 3). It is the second highest sum. B appeared in 13 media sources with a frequency of 1.2 per article. Talking points F “Accomplishments of what is being defended” and H “Devastate the organization and difficult to carry out our land-grant mission tie with B for the third highest frequency. Talking point C “Harm to higher education in Georgia” takes the highest column sum with 48. It appeared in 21 media sources and appeared in the highest number of articles. The talking points per media source is also the highest at 2.3.

Talking point D “Economic impact on Georgia” has the third highest column sum with 15 (see Table 3), appearing in 11 media sources, and a frequency of 1.4. Talking point E “Fair share e.g. previous budget cuts” has the fifth highest column sum with seven. It appeared in seven media sources. That is also the fifth highest. The frequency is one, which is tied for sixth with G “Cut budgets for the past two years,” I “Not CAES’ plan; it is the universities attempt to respond,” J “Plan is terrible and will have short and long-term negative impact,” and K “Comments and concerns directed to your local house or senate member.”

Talking point F “Accomplishments of what is being defended” has a sum of six and is sixth highest (see Table 3). It appeared in five media sources. That ties it for sixth with G “Cut budgets for the past two years” and K “Comments and concerns directed to your local house or senate member.” The frequency is 1.2. That ties it with B “Responsibility to
Georgia citizens e.g. devastate the organization, land-grant institution, vital programs” and H “Devastate the organization and difficult to carry out our land-grant mission” for the third highest frequency.

Talking point G “Cut budgets for the past two years” has a sum of five, which ties it for the seventh highest with K “Comments and concerns directed to your local house or senate member” (see Table 3). It ties with F “Accomplishments of what is being defended” and K for the sixth highest article appearances. Talking point G ties with E “Fair share e.g. previous budget cuts,” I “Not CAES’ plan; it is the universities attempt to respond to a significant budget reduction,” J “Plan is terrible and will have short and long-term negative impact” and K for the sixth highest frequency. The frequency is one.

Talking point H “Devastate the organization and difficult to carry out our land-grant mission” has the fourth highest sum with 11 (see Table 3). It appeared in nine media sources which puts it in fourth for the number of media sources. The frequency is 1.2 and is tied with B “Responsibility to Georgia citizens e.g. devastate the organization, land-grant institution, vital programs” and F “Accomplishments of what is being defended” for the third highest frequency. Talking point I “Not CAES’ plan; the universities attempt to respond to a significant budget reduction” has a sum of one. It is ranked tenth. The talking point appeared in one article, which is the tenth highest. The frequency is one which ties it for sixth highest with talking point E “Fair share e.g. previous budget cuts,” G “Cut budgets for the past two years,” J “Not CAES’ plan; the universities attempt to respond to a significant budget reduction,” and K “Comments and concerns directed to your local house or senate member.”
Talking point J “Plan is terrible and will have short and long-term negative impact” has a sum of four (see Table 3). It is ranked ninth. It has the ninth highest article appearance rate. It appeared in four articles. The frequency is one. It ties as sixth highest with E “Fair share e.g. previous budget cuts,” G “Cut budgets for the past two years,” I “Not CAES’ plan; the universities attempt to respond to a significant budget reduction,” and K “Comments and concerns directed to your local house or senate member.” Talking point K is tied with G as the seventh highest sum ranking. The sum is five. It appeared in five media sources. It ties with F “Accomplishments of what is being defended” and G as the sixth highest article appearance. It is tied for the sixth highest frequency with E, G, I, and J. The frequency is one.
Table 3

*Talking Points in Each Media Sources*

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### Conclusion

After the media sources were identified and duplicates were discarded, 39 media sources were left. Two of those were unavailable at the time of the research. The media sources were analyzed and the data was tallied. The results for the amount of talking points used had a top outlier, C “Harm to higher education Georgia.” Two talking points were never used, A “Why we matter” and L “Encourage education of house and senate members.” All other points fell within a few points of each other. Point C also had the highest frequency. The talking points were mentioned between 1 and 48 times with the exception of A and L; A and L were mentioned 0 times. The total number of media sources for each point ranged from one to 21 with the exception of A and L, which were zero. With the exception of A and L “Encourage education of house and senate members,” the frequencies are between one and 2.3; A and L had zero as their frequency.

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**Total Talking Points**

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CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter 1 explored various communication channel theories and content analysis. Opinion leaders are community members who have a greater knowledge than most people in a specific area. Agenda setting is what the media chooses to be the “most newsworthy.” Because of the potential exposure in media, it can benefit or lose influence on interpersonal communication within residents. They have the respect of many community members and are able to influence their thoughts and decisions. Two-step flow allows information to travel to recipients via an additional outlet such as mass communication. Goal achievement is the projected outcome of an organization. Media is the channel that large sums of information are passed between organizations and town/state residents, especially those not closely connected to the organization. Content analysis is a type of research. It focuses on evaluation of key symbols or themes.

Chapter 2 explored various communication channel theories and content analysis. Opinion leaders are community members who have a greater knowledge than most people in a specific area. Agenda setting is what the media chooses to be the “most newsworthy.” Because of the potential exposure in media, it can benefit or lose influence on interpersonal communication within residents. They have the respect of many community members and are able to influence their thoughts and decisions. Two-step flow allows information to travel to recipients via an additional outlet such as mass communication. Goal achievement
is the projected outcome of an organization. Media is the channel that large sums of information are passed between organizations and town/state residents, especially those not closely connected to the organization. Content analysis is a type of research. It focuses on evaluation of key symbols or themes.

The methodology steps are as follows:

1. Found media sources using the Alert systems, which searched the web for media sources containing specific, predefined text
2. Removed duplicate media sources
3. Pasted those media sources in a Word document and assigned numbers to each article and assigned a letter to each talking point
4. Searched those media sources for themes, based on “UGA,” “college,” “agriculture,” “4-H,” and “budget”
5. Devised and utilized a method to quantify (i.e. tally) the frequency the aforementioned key words were used in the identified media sources

The media sources were identified using the search system; all duplicates were discarded. The media sources were assigned a number. The particular number does not mean anything. Each talking was assigned a letter; the specific letter had no meaning. The media sources were copied and pasted into word and themes were searched. Each found theme was assigned a number to exhibit the extent the theme was displayed in the media source. The data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed.

The following was presented in Chapter 4. After the media sources were identified and duplicates were discarded, 39 media sources were left. Two of those were unavailable at the time of the research. The media sources were analyzed and the data was tallied. The
results for the amount of talking points used had a top outlier, C “Harm to higher education Georgia.” Two talking points were never used, A “Why we matter” and L “Encourage education of house and senate members.” All other points fell within a few points of each other. Point C also had the highest frequency. The talking points were mentioned between 1 and 48 times with the exception of A and L; A and L were mentioned 0 times. The total number of media sources for each point ranged from one to 21 with the exception of A and L, which were zero. With the exception of A and L “Encourage education of house and senate members,” the frequencies are between one and 2.3; A and L had zero as their frequency.

**Conclusion**

Talking points A and L are the only two talking points that did not have an article that corresponded with it. Talking point A says “Begin with accomplishments that will matter to them personally and professionally” (regents). Talking points A - E were intended for the Advisory Council to write to the Regents. Although most of those points (A - E) have potential to overlap with public stories, A is too specific. A is designed to make an impact on an individual person and not a group of people. Since the only evidence we evaluated were published pieces, something as specific as A, would not be printed.

Unlike talking point A, L was distributed to Extension Directors and other personnel for the purpose of writing to newspapers. Talking point L is “Encourage education of house and senate members.” K is closely related to L, “Comments and concerns should be directed to your local house or senate member.” Some of the media sources had content that letters were written to state legislator house or senate members. This type of sentence was not categorized as L or K because it did not encourage a certain behavior. When the
news media author asked the reader to write to his house or senate member, it was
categorized as K. In a way, asking them to write letters to a house or senate member is
educating them on the passion and stories about CAES. It can be argued that K and L or
interchangeable. It was characterized as K. In a respect, asking the readers to write letters
to a house or senate member is educating them on the passion and stories about CAES. It
could be be argued that K and L are interchangeable. It was characterized as K because it
said “comments and concerns should be directed …”

Talking point C had by far the highest sum and appeared in the most media sources.
C includes the 4-H program. 4-H touches many lives and many of its alumni credit 4-H for
leadership skills, life-long friends, job areas, confidence and more. Many of the authors and
sources in the media sources experienced 4-H. Their passion for 4-H was evident. Some of
these people might have done it without seeing the talking points. That may be an
explanation why it is significantly higher than all other areas.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The information in this study is beneficial to other states because budget crises
continue across the United States. The results can help other organizations understand crisis
communication so they can become better prepared if it happens to them. It should be
noted that the top talking point mentioned was “Harm to higher education in Georgia.”
Because this talking point included 4-H, many of the media sources might have been
influenced on other factors besides talking points. If the UGA CAES had sent talking
points to chosen alumni of 4-H, more talking points may have been utilized. Organizations
should include current and past members to increase influence on budget situations.
One of Extension’s faults is that the audience does not understand or appreciate the value its programs (McDowell, 2004). Georgia Extension reaches beyond the rural communities. The talking points were distributed to be used in hopes that the points would reach other community members, regents and legislatures. According to this study, with the exception to the 4-H program, the focus was not on specific Extension programs. A recommendation for future talking points is to put focus on certain programs. Target on specific programs brings awareness to people who are unaware of a program or do not associate a program with Extension.

During a previous study about cotton coverage in the media, it was found that newspaper journalists accept industry information. If the newspaper is offered print-ready material, it has a better chance to be printed (Vinyard, Akers, Oskam, Doerfert, & Davis, 2008). If an organization has a reputation with the media of having quality sources, it increases the chance the organization is publishable.

**Recommendation for Research**

The influence of social media on the 2010 Georgia budget cuts was not analyzed. The impact and value of social media should not be discounted because it is not considered “formal,” i.e., presented through traditional channels such as radio, TV, newspaper, etc. (Roades, Thomas, & Davis, 2009). Opinion leaders often emerge in this setting. Some people do not read the newspaper or watch the news anymore, choosing to learn about current events through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Extension can capitalize on this by using these outlets to promote their message to people who have not heard about the programs through traditional outlets, and reinforce their message among existing supporters (Roades, Thomas, & Davis, 2009).
Duplicate media sources were discarded for this study. Future research should analyze these additional sources so the target audience of media sources can be determined, such as rural, suburban, or urban. This could provide additional information that may be beneficial to Extension.
REFERENCES


