

MN 2000 ESUS 6

no. 6

june 1963

reprint

3

**extension studies series**

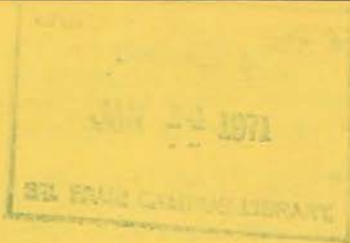
**PURPOSIVE COMMUNICATIONS**

a study of usage of county agents'  
educational material in Minnesota newspapers

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**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

U. S. Department of Agriculture

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## Summary

This study concerned selected characteristics of material appearing in newspapers from 81 Minnesota county agricultural agents over a 5-week period. The data suggest these conclusions:

- Weeklies favor events stories over subject matter stories in location to a greater extent, in percentage points, than dailies.
- Neither kind of paper greatly discriminates between events and subject matter stories in headline width.
- For both subject matter and events stories, agent attribution occurs more frequently in dailies than in weeklies. Also, for either kind of paper, subject matter stories contain such attribution in a greater proportion of cases than do event stories. Attribution is highest in subject matter stories appearing in dailies and lowest in events stories appearing in weeklies.
- Considering subject matter stories alone, nature of article is unrelated to headline width but is related to both location and attribution.
- Considering events stories alone, those on past events receive wider headlines in both weeklies and dailies. Weeklies do not discriminate between future and past events stories in location, whereas dailies give preference to past events. A greater proportion of stories in dailies contain agent attribution than do weekly stories. Neither kind of paper uses agent attribution in more than 5 percent of the stories on past events.
- About four-fifths of the pictorial items furnished by agents were materials prepared by the University; the rest was local material. About three-fourths of the pictorial items were displayed in spaces 2 columns wide or less.
- Only 11 cases of editorial comment concerning extension were found in Minnesota newspapers during this study period. These editorials were either in support of extension or did not evaluate extension in any way.

# Purposive Communications

a study of usage

of county agents' educational material in Minnesota newspapers

P. J. Tichenor, G. A. Donohue, and C. N. Olien

Even a cursory examination of the literature on social change discloses a fundamental shift in communication patterns. The tendency to rely on personal, primary information sources has largely given way to reliance on secondary communications through mass media. As a result, the purposive communicator plays an increasingly important role in maintaining communications efficiency.

This study was cast within the conceptual framework of a communications model originally developed by Newcomb and later expanded to the mass communications situation by Westley and MacLean.<sup>1</sup> The major elements of this model are:

1. Purposive communicators -- those who select messages for transmission with specific ends in mind.
2. Channels and channel roles -- those mediating agencies, between the purposive communicators and the ultimate receivers, who select, modify, and channel messages.
3. Behavioral roles -- the ultimate receivers or audiences.

This framework has utility in at least two forms. First, it allows one to separate conceptually the different elements in the mass communications situation. Second, it helps isolate the orientations in each element and facilitates consideration of how such orientations and relationships between orientations at different points affect the communication flow. For example, the extent to which purposive communicators and channel roles

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<sup>1</sup> B. H. Westley and S. MacLean, Jr. "A Conceptual Model for Communications Research." Audio-Visual Communication Review. Vol. 3, 1955.

have similar orientations toward messages and receivers should have certain consequences for message flow from purposive communicators through channels.

In fall 1960 a study was undertaken on factors associated with level of use of mass media by purposive communicators--specifically Minnesota county agricultural agents. The study attempts to relate certain factors to the level of use of agents' material in weekly, biweekly, and daily newspapers as well as on radio and through printed publications.

The main study concerns a detailed and extensive investigation on the purposive communicator's orientations toward channel and receiver. However, this report specifically concerns the relationship between the purposive communicator and newspaper channels. It is addressed to these questions:

1. How much information from county agents appears in Minnesota newspapers during a given time period? What editorial form does this information take?
2. What kind of editorial treatment does this material receive? What is the relationship, if any, between editorial treatment and other characteristics of the material?
3. How do dailies and weeklies differ, if at all, in editorial treatment given to material from county agricultural agents?

This descriptive summary provides information of value in several ways. First, it provides a benchmark in terms of actual observed usage of educational material during this particular period. It allows some observation of specific techniques of editorial treatment given agents' material by different editors in terms of display, location, and other characteristics.

Second, such a summary may have implications for operational policies of communications training of personnel by the Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism. In recent years heavy emphasis has been placed upon the use of mass media by county extension personnel in advancing their educational efforts. Several communications training conferences were conducted and a number of communications publications were prepared to supplement this training. Emphasis has been placed upon personal news columns, "straight news" articles, features, and other forms of newspaper use. Similarly, emphasis has been placed upon extensive use of the electronic media and direct mail publications.

While the specific manner of mass media use by agents varies by counties and states, mass media are usually considered among the principal outlets for educational information

by extension. Attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of mass media efforts, however, have to date been few in number. It is hoped that results from these data, while limited to one state and one period, will have broader implications in terms of general journalism principles and will add to an expanding body of knowledge concerning the relationship between purposive communicator and mass media channels.

## **County Agent Information in Newspapers**

In reading and interpreting this summary, keep in mind certain characteristics of communications activity by Minnesota agricultural agents--they may or may not be similar to procedures followed in other states.

County agricultural agents in Minnesota provide local newspapers with a variety of information on subjects and events related to their educational programs. This information may be based on local sources of information, the agent's own reference material, or press releases supplied by the Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism at the University's St. Paul Campus.

Material from extension agents appear in newspapers in two general forms: (1) as individual stories and (2) as part of personal news columns. The extent to which one procedure or the other is used in Minnesota varies considerably among agents and newspapers. Some agents prefer a personal news column, regardless of whether the material deals with subject matter or events. Others restrict the personal column more to subject matter and submit events stories to editors as individual items. About a fourth of the agents do not have personal columns. Editors also vary in manner of treatment which they give this material. For example, a given item of information from an agent may conceivably appear in a personal column in one newspaper and as an individual story in another paper in the same county.

## **County Agent Personal Columns**

For this study, a personal news column is defined as any material appearing either under a standing column head, with the agent's name and picture, or under his name along, with or without a standing title. In other words, a personal column must have specific identification of the agent as author separate from the content of the column itself.

Use of the personal column has been widespread among Minnesota county extension agents in recent years; most

agricultural college information specialists believe this technique to be in line with good journalism principles. A personal column, as compared to straight news articles, is usually thought to give the writer more freedom in terms of style and personal approach. In recent years an increasing proportion of Minnesota agents have begun using personal column headings.

In Minnesota, the University's Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism has, for several years, assisted agents in planning and producing their column headings. These headings usually include the agent's name and title along with a picture and/or artwork. In some counties, different extension agents have individual column headings; in others, two or more agents may have a common heading containing pictures and names--or at least names--of all persons involved. The procedure used may be determined by the editors, by the agents themselves, or by some joint editor-agent agreement.

Whatever the content of the column headings, most of them are reproduced each week from castings which, in turn, are taken from mats. It is unnecessary for the editor to reset such headings each week since the castings may be used repeatedly. A few editors, however, set up column headings from their own type and engravings.

Routine observation of county agent columns indicated that the heading itself, as reproduced from a mat, is the major determinant of typographical and pictorial display given the column. That is, one rarely finds a photograph illustrating part of the column's content in a county agent's personal column even though this is feasible from an editorial standpoint. Secondly, one sees little use of separate headlines over personal column headings, such as are quite common among political columns on editorial pages of daily papers.

The tendency of editors to give county agent personal columns no extra typographical or pictorial display may be viewed as a matter of habit and not as a procedure dictated by any particular standards of layout or editing. Whether measures could be taken to modify this practice among some agents or editors may be a legitimate question. The reason for raising this point here is that the existence of this practice must be kept in mind when interpreting the following data. Measures of personal column display are limited to width and depth of column headings, simply because these are the major characteristics of pictorial display likely to show variation.

#### Authorship and Display Characteristics

"Authorship" in this study is defined in terms of the column heading or identification of the column as discussed above. If the column heading mentions the agricultural agent alone

(by name and/or picture), he is assumed to be the sole author. If the column heading also mentions at least one other agent, the column is assumed to have combination authorship.

Measures of display used in this study were: (1) depth of heading in column inches, (2) width of heading in numbers of newspaper page columns, and (3) format of heading in terms of pictures, art, and type. These characteristics for the entire 5-week period are summarized in table 1.

Of all 424 appearances of these personal columns during the entire study period, about 8 in 10 were authored by the agricultural agent alone, the rest being authored in cooperation with at least one other agent.

Table 1. Authorship, depth, width, and format of headings of county agricultural agents' personal news columns over a 5-week period (N:424)

Authorship	Percent	Depth	Percent	Width	Percent	Format	Percent
Agent alone	81	0.5 inch or less	8	1 column	75	Picture and art	18
		1.0 inches	15			Picture and type	33
		1.5 inches	15				
Agent and others	19	2.0 inches	43	2 columns	25	Art only	25
		2.5 inches	10			Type only	24
		3.0 inches	9				
	100		100		100		100

Slightly under a fifth of these columns had headings 2 inches or more in depth. The most common depth was 2 inches (43 percent). Those an inch or less made up 23 percent of the total.

The range of variation in depth, like many other characteristics, is probably determined largely by practice. Column headings could conceivably be deeper or shallower. The tendency for more than 4 in 10 to be characterized by one specific length may well be peculiar to these agents in this state, and may be a product of advice given by the Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism.

Data in the third section of table 1 show that three-fourths of the column headings were a single newspaper column in width. Of those which were wider, all except one were 2 columns wide.

As mentioned earlier, personal news columns may lend themselves to a variety of layout techniques. Editorial columnists, and others as well, often have their material in a

ruled box containing a headline 3, 4, or even more columns in width. These techniques, however, are almost nonexistent among personal newspaper columns written by county agents.

Roughly half of the column headings contained a picture. Of those which did, about two in five also contained artwork; the rest contained a picture and type. About a fourth of all headings contained art only (including a written title in artwork), and an almost equal proportion contained type only.

Relationship Between Authorship and Display Characteristics

In an attempt to account for some observed differences in display characteristics of column headings, these characteristics were cross tabulated with authorship (see tables 2, 3, and 4). The strongest association is that between authorship and width (see table 2). Nearly 9 in 10 of the headings of columns authored by agents alone were a single column wide, whereas only 1 in 4 of the columns with combination authorship was that narrow.

Table 2. Width of column heading according to authorship of personal news column

Width of column heading	Column authored by agents alone (N: 342)	percent	Column authored by agricultural agents in combination with others (N: 82)
1 column	87		26
2 columns or more	<u>13</u>		<u>74</u>
	100		100

According to these data, then, a column heading is nearly six times as likely to be 2 columns or more in width when authored by more than one agent as compared to when authored by a single agent. To the extent that a wider column heading can attract more readership, this relationship by itself argues for more use of the combination heading. However, there may be other considerations in an agent's decision as to who and how many will author a single news column.

Depth seems to vary more where a single agent is the author, compared to the combination situation. Table 3 shows a relationship between authorship and column heading depth, but the nature of the relationship is not as clear as the one above. About one in four headings written by agents alone was 1 inch deep or less, compared to about one in eight among those with combination authorship. However, slightly more

than half of the agent-alone headings were in the middle length category (1.1 to 2 inches) compared to 7 in 10 of the combination headings.

Table 3. Depth of column heading of personal news columns according to authorship

Dept of column heading	Column authored by agricultural agent alone (N:342)	Column authored by agricultural agent in combination with others (N:82)
	percent	
1 inch or less	26	13
1.1 to 2 inches	54	70
2.1 inches or more	20	17
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

One might assume that headings of columns authored by more than one agent would have a greater depth. Table 3 data tend to support this contention, with the exception that slightly more agents in the single authorship category had headings with a depth of 2.1 inches or more.

The association between authorship and the third display characteristic, format of heading, is presented in table 4. The "picture and type" format predominated among columns authored by agricultural agents alone, whereas the model type is "art only" for those with combination authorship. More than half of the column headings authored by agents alone contained pictures, compared to slightly fewer than 4 in 10 of those with combination authorship. About 1 in 5 of the single-agent headings had the "art only" format compared to 4 in 10 of the combination headings. Finally, about a fourth of the single-agent headings contained type only, while one in five of the combination headings had that format.

Table 4. Format of column heading of personal news columns according to authorship

Format of column heading	Column authored by agricultural agents alone (N:342)	Column authored by agricultural agents in combination with others (N:82)
	percent	
Picture and art	18	15
Picture and type	35	23
Art only	21	43
Type only	26	19
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

In general, there tends to be more turnover in home agent, 4-H agent, and assistant agent positions than in the agricultural agent position. Therefore, a heading containing a picture of someone besides the agricultural agent is likely to become outdated sooner. Artwork, however, can often be used by a succeeding agent with little or no change except in the name. Such typographical changes are much easier to accomplish than changes in pictures. Agents and editors may take these considerations into account when selecting formats.

The three preceding tables show differing results in terms of relationship between authorship and display. In terms of width, the combination authorship columns had more favorable display. Pictures were relatively more frequent in single-authorship columns and in terms of heading depth; the single-author columns varied more.

A judgment by an agent as to whether he should author a column alone or in cooperation with another agent should be based on what he intends the column to achieve. If the intent is to achieve personal identification of the agent with his materials, these data suggest that such identification is more effectively maintained if each agent writes his own column. The single-author column is more likely to contain a personal picture and is less likely to be outdated by personnel turnover. If, however, the intent is to present extension information as the productive cooperative effort of two or more agents, the personal identification criterion (along with the importance of the picture) may need to be downgraded.

In deciding how to handle regular columns, agents may be forced to decide whether personal identification or an image of agent cooperation is the most important. Achieving both is difficult to do. In addition, the agent may need to consider the attitude of the editor toward structure of personal news columns.

## **Subject Matter and Special Events Stories**

By a "subject matter" story is meant any newspaper item which the reader could determine to have come from the agricultural agent but which does not appear as part of a personal column and is not concerned with any specific event, such as a meeting or demonstration. A total of 1,023 subject and 501 event matter stories from the 81 agents appeared during the 5-week period.

The subject matter story represents a traditional approach to extension education through mass media. Content may vary

widely--agricultural production techniques, research findings, advice for specific farm or home problems, public affairs information, or many other topics.

Subject matter stories are sometimes illustrated with pictures taken locally or with material prepared by the University's Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism and made available in mat form. The extent of use of such illustrations, however, is quite limited. As a general rule, fewer than 10 percent of county agent subject matter stories are accompanied by photographs or other illustrations.

Events stories are those items which could be determined to have originated from the agricultural agent and deal with some specific event, such as a meeting or demonstration.

The distinction between subject matter and events stories is maintained here so as to examine certain predictions which one would make in terms of principles of journalism. For example, it is commonly assumed that an educational message in a news story will attain higher readership if that message is linked to a specific event, compared to cases where no event is involved. Furthermore, agents are often advised to tie their mass media messages to events whenever possible. The reasoning behind this advice is that editors are more receptive to news items on events and are more likely to give such items preferential display, compared to subject matter items not associated with some event.

We can also examine such differences according to type of newspaper, so as to determine whether weeklies and dailies show such preferences in similar ways.

#### Display and Attribution of Subject Matter versus Events Stories

The two main measures of display used were width of headline and location of article, in terms of whether the article was placed on page 1 or not. Another characteristic studied for both kinds of stories was whether the agent was named as a source of information (see table 5).

Headline width is one display characteristic which, from these data, varied little according to type of story. About 3 in 4 of the events articles had single column headlines, compared with about 8 in 10 of the subject matter articles. In neither case did as many as 1 in 10 have headlines 3 columns or more in width.

This tendency for editors to give the single column headline to a majority of either type of story probably stems from another common editorial practice. That is, the narrow headline is frequently used for nearly all stories printed in many

small rural newspapers. This practice is sometimes facilitated by the linotype head--set at single column width by the linotype operator when he sets the rest of the story. This eliminates the necessity of handsetting a headline. And even where headlines are set by hand, the weekly editor may find it easier to set them a single column wide rather than get involved in the more complicated layouts which result with wider ones.

Table 5. Display and attribution characteristics of stories according to story type

Characteristic	Stories on special events	Stories on subject matter percent
<u>Width of headline</u>		
1 column	76	82
2 columns	16	15
3 columns or more	8	3
	100	100
<u>Location of story</u>		
On page 1	46	14
Other than page 1	54	86
	100	100
<u>Agent named in the story as source of information</u>		
Yes	25	40
No	75	59
Not ascertained	--	1
	100	100

Concerning location, a sharp difference emerged between subject matter and special events stories. Almost half (46 percent) of the events stories but only about one in seven (14 percent) of the subject matter stories were on the front page of the paper. With this measure, then, the general journalism principle receives strong support.

This difference presumably is consequential for reader impact. Readership studies of newspapers have consistently shown that apart from comics and sports, the front page receives higher readership than "inside" editorial matter. Since the events stories were more than three times as likely as subject articles to receive front-page play, the events stories probably averaged better readership.

Thus far, then, the data show that events stories received preferential display in comparison to subject matter articles,

but the preferential treatment tended to be manifested in location rather than in size of headline. Perhaps the reason for this pattern is that location is a matter on which the editor has more "freedom" to discriminate between stories; space is available both on front and inside pages, and some decision must be made as to what stories appear where. With headlines, editors may have themselves so restricted to minimum size for all articles that they have little room for variation according to a story's perceived editorial merit.

The bottom section of table 5 also shows a difference between kinds of stories in extent of attribution--whether the agent was named as the information source. Such attribution occurred in 1 of 4 of the events stories, compared to 4 in 10 of the subject matter stories. This pattern would not necessarily follow from principles of journalism.

Both editors and agents may possibly believe that the subject story requires some "authority" for the information, whereas the agent writing an event story may think of himself as a reporter, allowing the "facts" to speak for themselves with no authority needed. A further factor may be operational procedures. Extent of attribution in subject matter stories may be influenced by the fact that some subject matter articles sent during the study period by the University's Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism contained "fill-in" blanks in which the agent could insert his name.

#### Editorial Treatment in Dailies versus Weeklies

The above data are for all stories regardless of the type of newspaper--weekly, biweekly, or daily--which printed them. For further analysis, results were broken down according to newspaper type. Since the number of stories appearing in biweekly newspapers was extremely small, those data were eliminated from the analysis. Only data for weeklies and dailies are presented in table 6.

Data on width of headlines suggest that weeklies and dailies differ in treatment given to county agent stories; they also tend to discriminate between subject matter and events stories in different ways. Among subject matter stories, less than one article in six appearing in weeklies had a headline more than a column in width, compared to more than two in five among those in dailies. For events stories, wider headlines were again more common among dailies compared to weeklies, but the difference was less marked.

In terms of location, slightly less than 1 subject matter story in 6 among those in weeklies appeared on a front page, compared to less than 1 in 20 among those in dailies. For

Table 6. Characteristics of county agents' newspaper material according to type of story and type of paper

Characteristics	Subject matter stories		Special events stories	
	Appearing in weeklies	Appearing in dailies	Appearing in weeklies	Appearing in dailies
percent				
<u>Width of headline</u>				
2 columns or more	15	43	22	32
1 column	85	57	78	68
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Location</u>				
On page 1	15	3	51	10
Other than page 1	85	97	49	90
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>Attribution</u>				
Agent named	39	50	22	37
Agent not named	61	50	78	63
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

events stories, about half of those in weeklies received front-page play, compared to only 1 in 10 among those in dailies. Another way to regard these figures is in terms of differential for each type of paper between treatment of events versus subject matter stories. That is, both kinds of papers gave more front-page treatment to special events articles, but the differential was 36 percentage points (51-15) for weeklies and 7 (10-3) for dailies (see figure 1).

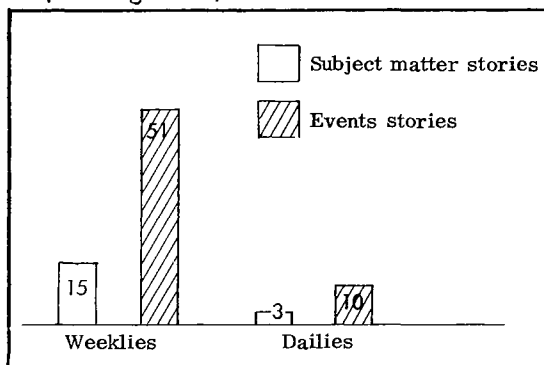


Figure 1. Percent of stories on page 1 according to type of story and type of newspaper.

Data for attribution show that in no category was the agent named as the information source in more than half the stories. Furthermore, for each type of story, agent attribution occurred more frequently in stories in daily papers than in weeklies.

The above results seem especially meaningful when considered in light of journalism training and advice given to extension agents. An agent is frequently advised of these principles:

1. An educational message is more likely to receive favorable treatment from editors and is more likely to attract readers if it is linked to some event.

2. Attribution to the agent in news articles on subject matter or events enhances the public image of the agent as an educator.

Data in table 6 suggest that, in terms of editorial treatment given to different kinds of stories, an agent's considerations may be somewhat different depending upon the type of newspaper involved. Where weeklies are concerned, data indicate that agents might achieve better location--and, presumably, better readership--if more efforts are made to connect newspaper messages with events. With dailies, however, whether a message is event-related may be of relatively minor importance as far as location is concerned.

The difference in discrimination between events and subject stories according to newspaper types may be due, partly at least, to the broad differences in content and format between the two kinds of papers. The weekly tends to be concerned primarily with information from local sources, is smaller in size, and has a greater proportion of its total content on page 1--often the only page completely devoid of advertising. The daily tends to be much larger and has a smaller proportion of its total content on the front page. So if location was merely a matter of random chance, a given article would have less chance of hitting the front page of the daily as compared to the weekly.

Secondly, the daily contains state, regional, and national news which often takes location priority over educational material of the type agents submit. And thirdly, many outstate rural dailies have special farm pages in the back sections where all extension material, regardless of its nature, is printed. Such farm pages are less common among weeklies. Perhaps, then, the weekly editor tends to consider the extension article as an item competing for location with all other editorial material available for the issue, while the daily editors consider such an item competing for location only within a more strictly defined section of the paper.

The attribution data raise some issues relevant to communications practices and training among extension agents. The highest frequency of such attribution is for subject matter stories in dailies, where an even half of the stories in this study contained the agent's name. At the other extreme are the events stories in weeklies in which agent attribution was contained in only a little more than a fifth of the stories. A further analysis (data not included in tables here) showed that when events stories were broken down according to whether the event is one in the future or one that already took place, such attribution occurred in fewer than 5 percent of the articles on past events.

Presumably, any event story which the agent provides involves extension sponsorship or cooperation; this fact is usually appropriate and newsworthy enough to be mentioned. While it is understandable from an editor's point of view that a story on an event may "stand alone" (without mentioning the authority sponsoring the event), agents may be overlooking one way to keep themselves identified with their own events. Citing the agent in such articles wherever possible would seem to be extremely helpful in developing his public image as an organizer of educational programs.

#### Editorial Treatment According to General Nature of Subject Matter Story

Subject matter stories were classified according to general nature. Categories used were not intended to represent a finely differentiated content classification, but were designed to answer some specific questions relating to policy of the Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism at the state level. These questions concerned the proportions of subject matter stories being used which dealt with:

- Results of agricultural research.
- How-to-do-it advice.
- More general discussions of farming problems.

As the study progressed, it became clear that much subject matter material did not fit well in any of these three categories but could be classified in a few topical categories. The nature of the article categories which were used, and the percent of all 1,022 stories in all papers which fell in each category, are contained in table 7.

Weeklies and dailies did not differ significantly in proportions of stories in different categories. The distribution of articles in the different categories (see table 7) is of considerable interest from a descriptive point of view. Only 6 percent of the entire volume of subject matter stories was devoted to

Table 7. Percent of subject matter stories in different nature of article categories

Research report (N:63)	How-to-do-it (N:44)	DHIA report (N:150)	Safety (N:68)	4-H (N:183)	Outlook (N:166)	General discussion (N:305)	Other (N:43)	Total
6	4	15	7	percent 18	16	30	4	100

research--including results from local field demonstrations and reports from the Institute of Agriculture's St. Paul Campus.

An even smaller percentage (4 percent) of the stories was classified in the how-to-do-it category. However, this category may be misleading because some material classified as "safety" might also be of a how-to-do-it nature. Nevertheless, even if all safety material was so classifiable, still little more than 1 subject matter story in 10 deals with specific practical advice.

Of considerable interest is the percent of subject matter stories on Dairy Herd Improvement Association reports--other than from DHIA meetings. These articles accounted for 15 percent of the subject matter articles (almost as much as research, how-to-do-it advice, and safety put together). However, they almost certainly accounted for a much greater percent of the agent's time in preparing news material, since the DHIA reports are based largely on local data (as from records of local DHIA organizations), whereas much in the other story categories could come from University-supplied releases.

The relatively high use of DHIA reports (compared to research) may illustrate: (1) the use of local, current agricultural data when possible, and (2) the ready availability of one particular kind of data. DHIA summaries are furnished for each county through a computer service coordinated at the state level, making the data available in a form which is easy to put in a routine news article. Perhaps agents would use more local information in other areas of extension education if they had a regular system for obtaining it.

Stories on 4-H (other than events) and agricultural outlook each accounted for a proportion of the total subject matter stories similar to that for DHIA reports (18 and 16 percent, respectively). However, much of the 4-H material and all of the outlook were based upon University-supplied releases. The study period was at a time when the University provided agents

with a series of agricultural outlook articles that are usually written at that time of year and at that time only. Therefore, as far as the outlook content is concerned, these data are definitely not representative of other times of year.

Slightly less than a third of the subject matter articles were classified as general discussion--the material related to a variety of topics without reporting specific research or specific advice but taking a broader explanatory approach to the problems involved.

#### Editorial Treatment According to Subject Matter Topic

The three characteristics of headline width, location, and agent attribution were cross-tabulated with nature of article for the subject matter material (see table 8).

Differences in headline width according to nature of article were not significant. At least three-fourths of all subject articles--regardless of nature--received the 1 column headline. For the other two characteristics, however, the chi-square tests of association with nature of article were significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 8. Characteristics of county agents' newspaper material according to nature of article

Characteristics	Nature of article							
	Research report (N:63)	How-to-do-it (N:44)	DHIA report (N:150)	Safety (N:68)	4-H (N:183)	Outlook (N:166)	General discussion (N:305)	Other (N:43)
<u>Width of headline</u>	percent							
2 columns or more	24	20	19	17	20	18	13	26
1 column	76	80	81	83	80	82	87	74
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<u>Location</u>								
On page 1	10	2	19	10	22	6	12	44
Other	90	98	81	90	78	94	88	56
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<u>Attribution</u>								
Agent named	38	21	15	32	37	90	36	29
Agent not named	62	79	85	68	63	10	64	71
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The articles most frequently appearing on the front page were those classified as "other." They received that location in more than two cases in five. Next highest frequency was for 4-H stories, of which one in five appeared on the front page. How-to-do-it articles were given front-page treatment least often - only 2 percent.

The sharp difference in location between the "other" articles and the rest of the categories merits careful examination. "Other" included the lowest frequency of all categories--stories that did not fit any other form or topical category of this study and yet dealt with subject matter rather than events.

These items had very specific messages--such as a "timely tip" on a cropping situation, a notice of a new bulletin available, an announcement of forms requesting trees from the state nursery, and brief filler items. The fact that a relatively high proportion of these items appeared on front pages may be due to their extremely timely nature, and, frequently, because they offered some specific service to the reader.

After the "other" items the two categories with highest proportions on the front page were the 4-H and DHIA reports. They may have received preferential treatment due to their specifically local content--including, in many cases, local names. It is a standard principle of journalism that stories with local names receive preferential editorial play.

The extremely low front-page play given the how-to-do-it stories, along with the infrequent appearance of such articles, raises the question as to whether such an approach is evaluated in a negative manner by agents and/or editors. These articles (many or most of which, in this study, came from University releases) tend to be concerned with highly specific farm situations, minimizing the analysis of the situation but emphasizing the specific steps to be taken. This is the most direct action-oriented approach used in news writing, and receives a good deal of attention in much agricultural journalism training. These results, however, suggest that this approach might profitably be reevaluated and perhaps questioned strongly in terms of journalistic merit.

#### Characteristics of Future versus Past Events Articles

Table 5 contains data on display and attribution characteristics of events stories as compared to subject matter articles. Another question presents itself in terms of the events articles themselves:

How do articles on future events (announcements, promotion) fare in editorial treatment in comparison to articles dealing with past events (coverage)?

Here, predictions from general journalism principles are not as straightforward as those dealing with the subject matter-events difference. In general, one would expect specific educational messages from events to be presented in coverage rather than in announcement or promotional stories. Suppose an eminent authority is to address a local meeting on dairy economics. The fact that such a speech will take place might receive good editorial play. But agent and editor will find it difficult to print much about what that authority has to say until the speech has been given. So, in terms of presenting actual educational information, the story about the future event tends to be instrumental to the presentation of information,

whereas the coverage of the past event is more appropriate for actual presentation of some of the information itself.

One finding of considerable interest in this study was the relative proportions of stories dealing with future and past events. Extension agents are frequently urged to give more attention to coverage--the implication being that many events are well publicized in advance with little or no attention to "follow-up" or reporting what happened. To the extent that follow-up is ignored, agents are overlooking a fruitful opportunity to reach larger audiences with their educational messages.

In this study about two-thirds of the events stories dealt with future events, the other third reported events that already occurred. If one assumes that the coverage stories were adequate in terms of what was available to report, these proportions would speak well for the agents' efforts. It is often feasible to promote an event with a series of many different articles over an extended time period. With a past event, however, there tends to be a single coverage article, if any, confined to one issue of the paper--the one most immediately following the event.

Table 9 compares stories of future versus past events on several characteristics. The data are also broken down according to type of newspaper.

In headline width there was little difference between weeklies and dailies in treatment given stories on future events. About one story in six or less received the wider headline in each kind of paper. For stories on past events, however, two things are readily apparent: (1) The event coverage story was more likely to get a wide headline, compared to an announcement or promotional story, in either kind of paper, and (2) dailies were nearly twice as likely to put the wider headline on the coverage story as were weeklies.

In location the major difference was between kind of newspaper rather than between future versus past events. Weeklies did not discriminate according to temporal nature of the event, putting about half (51 percent) of both future and past events articles on the front page. Dailies put little more than 1 in 20 of the future events stories on the front page, compared to about 1 in 5 of the coverage stories.

From another perspective, these data indicate that stories on future events in weeklies were more than eight times as likely as those in dailies to appear on the front page. Stories on past events were about 2.5 times as likely to appear on front pages of weeklies, compared to dailies.

Table 9. Display and attribution characteristics of events stories according to temporal nature of event and type of newspaper

Characteristics	Stories on future events (announcements, promotional)		Stories on past events (coverage)	
	Appearing in weeklies (N:272)	Appearing in dailies (N:47)	Appearing in weeklies (N:140)	Appearing in dailies (N:21)
<u>Width of headline</u>	percent			
2 columns or more	15	17	36	67
1 column	<u>85</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>33</u>
	100	100	100	100
<u>Location</u>				
On page 1	51	6	51	19
Other	<u>49</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>81</u>
	100	100	100	100
<u>Attribution</u>				
Agent named	33	51	1	5
Agent not named	<u>67</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>95</u>
	100	100	100	100

In terms of display, both kinds of papers discriminated between future and past events in headline display but only dailies discriminated in location.

In announcement and promotional stories, the agent was named in a third of the stories in weeklies and in half of those in dailies. But in the coverage stories, agent attribution almost disappeared - 1 percent of those in weeklies and 5 percent in dailies contained such attribution.

## Pictorial Content

During the 5-week study period, 122 pictorial items in newspapers were coded as being furnished by certain agents among the 81 included in this study. All except one (a line drawing) of these illustrations were photographs. Descriptive information on this pictorial content is contained in table 10.

The subject matter categories used in the study did not account for much more than two-fifths of the pictorial items. The soil-testing material was straight promotional material designed to influence farmers to test soil in the fall, and was part of a rather extensive agent program at the time. The beef tour and 4-H achievement awards categories were included to evaluate the pictorial coverage of an extension activity common around the state during the autumn of the study.

Table 10. Characteristics of pictorial items from county agents appearing in newspapers

Subject of pictorial item	Source of pictorial item		Width of pictorial item	
	percent		percent	percent
Soil testing	10	University's	11 column	36
Beef tours	2	St. Paul Campus	2 columns	40
4-H awards	29		3 columns	22
Other	59	Local	4 columns	2
	<u>100</u>			<u>100</u>

The "other" category included a variety of items - livestock show winners, pictures of speakers appearing at future events, county demonstration plots, other 4-H events, etc.

The center section in table 10 indicates that a little more than two-fifths of the pictorial material was supplied by the University's Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism. Included in this category were some soil-testing promotion and pictures of University persons speaking at local events. The soil-testing illustrations were part of a state-wide program coordinated at the St. Paul Campus by the extension soils specialists in cooperation with the Department of Information and Agricultural Journalism.

Data in table 10 show that a little more than a third of the pictures were a single column in width, two-fifths were 2 columns wide, and not quite a fourth were 3 columns or more. While more detailed information was not coded, at least a majority of the 1 column pictures were of speakers for local events. Pictures involving soil testing, livestock shows, beef tours, and other local events were usually 2 columns wide or more.

No attempt was made to determine whether, for non-University pictures, the photograph was taken by a newspaper reporter or by the agent himself. Experience indicates that

daily papers are more likely to take their own pictures, whereas weeklies, especially smaller ones, lean more heavily on the agent for whatever pictorial content they use concerning extension.

## **Editorial Comment Concerning Extension**

Past observation and experience suggest that newspapers rarely mention agricultural extension education in their editorial columns, but the limited comment they do make is favorable. Data from this study tend to reaffirm such a conclusion; only 11 cases of editorial comment concerning extension were found in Minnesota newspapers during the 5-week study. Eight of these clearly supported extension and three avoided evaluation of any kind.

More recent experiences have indicated, however, that editorial comment is more frequent among editors receiving extension information on public affairs issues. In none of these 11 editorials were there any indications of editorial opposition, or suggestions for alternative approaches, to extension programs.

These findings must be viewed in light of a general tendency for outstate newspapers to avoid extensive editorial comment on local affairs. Many writers--including newspapermen, academic journalists, and political scientists-- have noted the tendency for rural newspapers to confine their editorial pages to more distant concerns without coming to grips with issues nearer in time and space to their readers.

In any case, findings from this study suggest that the county agricultural agent's role in local journalism is largely that of either a news and feature source or a reporter. Apparently only a few editors view extension as an institution whose functions are open to editorial scrutiny. When an editor does mention extension on his opinion page, he is apparently concerned more with reinforcement than with critical comment.

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