

EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE OKLAHOMA
YOUTH EXPO'S MARCH 2020 COVID-19
RESPONSE

By

BREE ANNE ELLIOTT

Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

2020

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
May, 2022

EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE OKLAHOMA
YOUTH EXPO'S MARCH 2020 COVID-19
RESPONSE

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Quisto Settle

Thesis Adviser
Dr. Morgan Pfeiffer

Mr. Nathan Smith

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee for their wisdom and guidance throughout this process.

Thank you to my family and friends for their grace and support throughout my further education journey.

Name: BREE ANNE ELLIOTT

Date of Degree: MAY, 2022

Title of Study: EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE OKLAHOMA YOUTH EXPO'S
MARCH 2020 COVID-19 RESPONSE

Major Field: AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

Abstract: This study evaluates the perceptions of Oklahoma agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting at the 2020 Oklahoma Youth Expo (OYE). The COVID pandemic caused the 2020 OYE to cancel early as the pandemic posed many challenges for ongoing events across the nation. The study evaluates perceptions of the event through the lens of crisis communication as it relates to brand reputation and crisis management. The study is guided by situational crisis communication theory and organizational crisis management theory. From this research, OYE's brand reputation appears to have stayed intact throughout the 2020 crisis, and based on some responses, the OYE brand reputation may have gained more respect or value among agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting at the 2020 OYE, strengthening their relationship with OYE's brand reputation and brand loyalty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
About the Oklahoma Youth Expo.....	1
Show Structure & Background.....	3
COVID Background.....	5
2020 OYE.....	6
Purpose.....	9
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	10
Agricultural Industry.....	10
Agricultural Specific Crises.....	11
COVID Impact.....	13
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Situational Crisis Communication Theory.....	14
Organizational Crisis Management Theory.....	17
III. METHODOLOGY.....	20
Qualitative Research.....	20
Population & Sampling.....	21
Data Collection.....	24
Instrument Development.....	26
Data Analysis.....	27

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS.....	29
Introduction.....	29
The 2020 COVID crisis could not be foreseen.....	29
Uncertainty regarding the necessity of the show’s early shutdown.....	31
Participants perceived OYE was forced to shut down early.....	32
OYE did everything in its power to keep the show going.....	33
Factors that brought on concern prior to participants’ arrival at the 2020 show ...	39
The cancelation of the 2020 show has an emotional impact on participants.....	40
Show communication was timely and informative.....	43
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	45
Research Question 1	45
Research Question 2	47
Recommendations for Future Research	48
Recommendations for Practice	49
REFERENCES	51
APPENDICES	56

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Participants Descriptions	25

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study evaluated the perceptions of Oklahoma agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting at the 2020 Oklahoma Youth Expo (OYE). The COVID pandemic caused the 2020 OYE to cancel early as the pandemic posed many challenges for ongoing events across the nation. The study evaluated perceptions of the event through the lens of crisis communication as it relates to brand reputation and crisis management. The study was guided by situational crisis communication theory and organizational crisis management theory. This chapter will provide an overview about OYE, the structure of the show, the impact of the COVID pandemic and the affect it had on the 2020 OYE.

About the Oklahoma Youth Expo

The Oklahoma Youth Expo is a junior livestock show for Oklahoma FFA and 4-H youth, ages eight to 19, who show swine, sheep, goats, cattle, and/or participate in the agricultural mechanics show (K. Newell, personal communication). The show is a 10-day event that typically takes place during the Oklahoma public schools' spring break and is hosted at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (K. Newell, personal communication). Exhibitors from all 77 Oklahoma counties travel to attend the show each spring (K. Newell, personal communication). On a typical year, OYE awards

roughly \$2 million to exhibitors, over \$300,000 in scholarships, and has an economic impact on the Oklahoma City metropolitan area of \$25 million (OYE, 2022). OYE has coined itself as “the world's largest junior livestock show,” and its mission is to: “provide a program for the state’s 4-H and FFA exhibitors to display the finest quality agricultural products in the country that facilitates agricultural production projects and works to fund higher education opportunities for Oklahoma’s youth,” (K. Newell, personal communication).

In 2001, Bob Funk and Jimmy Harrel established a 501c3 non-profit, naming it the Oklahoma Youth Expo Inc. Funk and Harrel established a board of directors and an advisory committee (K. Newell, personal communication). Over the years, the OYE management and show facilitation team has expanded to include more personnel who operate in specialized areas of the show. The OYE office is located on the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds (K. Newell, personal communication). In 2012, Tyler Norvell was appointed to the role of president of the OYE and continues to lead in strategy development and fundraising for both organizations (OYE, 2022). To ensure the continued success of the OYE, Funk launched the Onward Campaign in 2016 (K. Newell, personal communication). Through the endowment fund, Funk pledges to match the fund dollar-for-dollar up to \$5 million (OYE, 2022). This is important to note as it provides context in regards to OYE funding and stakeholdership (K. Newell, personal communication). Stakeholders are defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman,1984, p. 508).

Show Structure & Background

Each March, the 10-day show typically starts the week before the Oklahoma spring break. The 2020 show had more than 22,000 entries (OYE, 2022). The show kicks off with the move-in of equipment for breeding livestock, the opening of the OYE marketplace, and the placement of entry structures for the agricultural mechanics show (K. Newell, personal communication). The OYE Marketplace is a small tradeshow composed of roughly 120 vendors (OYE, 2022). Typically, the third day of OYE is the first day of check-in for livestock shows and contests (K. Newell, personal communication). This would include the agricultural mechanics show and the turn-in of official weight cards for breeding and commercial heifers and gilts (K. Newell, personal communication). Heifers are female cattle that have not given birth to a calf. Gilts are female swine that have not given birth to piglets. The fourth day continues the breeding shows for heifers and gilts, and day five begins the sheep and goat breeding shows (K. Newell, personal communication).

This format ultimately devotes most of the first half of the 10-day experience to the breeding livestock shows and agricultural mechanics show (K. Newell, personal communication). The OYE Night of Stars gilt sale usually happens around day eight of the show (K. Newell, personal communication). The top gilts qualify for the sale each year. The second half of the show is predominantly devoted to the market livestock shows, sales, fitting contests, and other small events (K. Newell, personal communication). Typically, the showmanship show for each species signals the end of the said species breeding shows and signals the official start of the market shows (K. Newell, personal communication). “Market week” is debatably the most anticipated week of the

show (K. Newell, personal communication). This is primarily because of OYE's market show grand drive (K. Newell, personal communication).

What makes it unique compared to other shows is that for the last 20 years, with the exception of 2020, the OYE grand drive has quite literally placed exhibitors under the spotlight, (K. Newell, personal communication). Exhibitors whose animals earn the title of breed or division champion or were crowned the grand champions of the ag mechanics contest, partake in a special moment of the grand drive. On a typical year, the said champions are brought out in a limo during the grand drive ceremony, (K. Newell, personal communication). The ceremony starts with the scholarship presentations, where roughly \$300,000 in academic scholarships are awarded to FFA and 4-H students from across the state by sponsors and donors (OYE, 2022). After the scholarship presentations, the grand drive for market livestock exhibitors begins. After the champion exhibitors are recognized and the ceremony is over, the champion livestock exhibitors are dismissed to gather their livestock and return for their species' final selection for the grand champion animal of each species (K. Newell, personal communication).

The last day of the show is the premium sale. Exhibitors who qualify for the premium sale receive 100% of the money their animal sells for (K. Newell, personal communication). This is something the OYE prides itself on and one of the things that makes the show unique compared to other junior livestock shows across the nation, (K. Newell, personal communication). The 2022 sale awarded a record-breaking \$1.5 million to 212 sale qualifying exhibitors (OYE, 2022).

The Oklahoma Agricultural Leadership Encounter (OALE) is an educational leadership program facilitated by the OYE. The program promotes and encourages

members to learn about Oklahoma agriculture, showcasing various elements of production agriculture across the state, (K. Newell, personal communication). The program also exposes students to a variety of agriculturally based companies and organizations across the state. OALE also gives members the opportunity to meet and interact with members of Oklahoma legislation, promoting networking and engagement, (K. Newell, personal communication). As part of this opportunity, class members partake in the facilitation of livestock and events at the OYE. This opportunity is open to college juniors or seniors in the Ferguson College of Agriculture at Oklahoma State University. Students are subjected to an application and interview process in order to be selected. This information is important to help gain a holistic understanding of this study. This is important to note as it provides context to additional stakeholders in the study.

COVID Background

COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus disease 2019 is defined by the World Health Organization as:

a mild to severe respiratory illness that is caused by a coronavirus (*Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 of the genus Betacoronavirus*), is transmitted chiefly by contact with infectious material (such as respiratory droplets) or with objects or surfaces contaminated by the causative virus, and is characterized especially by fever, cough, and shortness of breath and may progress to pneumonia and respiratory failure (2022).

The COVID pandemic at large has impacted industries across the board, causing economic loss and supply chain disruption (Siche, 2020). COVID forced many events to

be cancel or postponed in the early stages of the pandemic, and research shows the event-planning and tourism industry lost more than \$660 million in the first few months of the pandemic alone (Madray, 2020). Livestock shows were among those events that were forced to come to a halt in late February and early March of 2020. Despite their best efforts, the 2020 OYE fell victim to the COVID crisis, forcing the cancellation in the middle of the show, leaving market exhibitors and their families devastated (K. Newell, personal communication). This ultimately put the OYE's brand reputation at risk.

The first reported COVID case was on December 31, 2019, at the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (WHO, 2022). The first recorded COVID case outside of China was reported in Thailand on January 13, 2020 (WHO, 2022). The Coronavirus continued to spread across the western pacific region throughout the following weeks and the first reported case in the United States was reported in the state of Washington on January 20, 2019, from a sample that was taken on January 18 (CDC, 2022).

2020 OYE

The first official case of COVID-19 in Oklahoma was reported in Tulsa County on March 7, 2020. On March 9, 2020, the OYE staff started the show as they typically would, with the opening of the fairgrounds to breeding livestock tack, equipment, and agricultural mechanics projects (K. Newell, personal communication). Shortly after the start of the 2020 OYE, information began to spread the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, which was happening during the same time period in Texas, made the announcement the show, rodeo, and all related events had been canceled due to the COVID pandemic (Staff, 2020). The OYE show continued as planned with the start of

the breeding animal livestock shows. During this time period, concern for covid began to grow as positive cases began to rise across Oklahoma. Agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of exhibitors at the 2020 OYE became restless and concerned, (K. Newell, personal communication). OYE staff was faced with challenges in regards to the safety and facilitation of the show (K. Newell, personal communication). OYE staff worked closely with state officials, namely the state secretary of agriculture and the governor, to make adjustments to the show in an effort to continue the remaining livestock shows while still staying within state and health guidelines, (K. Newell, personal communication).

On March 14, 2020, OYE released an updated schedule that announced the remaining show events would be expedited (OYE, 2022). The new schedule packed the remaining livestock shows into the following four days. On a typical year, the shows would fill a seven-day span (K. Newell, personal communication). The new schedule also announced the cancellation of the following events: Night of Stars Gilt sale, Legislative and Celebrity Showmanship, skillathon, scholarship presentations, Sale of Champion, and the grad drive. Volunteers and OALE members were briefed and assigned roles and schedules as all-night move-in and move-out were established to help move livestock and people on and off the fairgrounds as quickly as possible, (K. Newell, personal communication). Exhibitors and stakeholders were directed to pay close attention to the OYE app as that is where the most recent information related to show updates would be placed first (OYE, 2022). On March 15, 2020, Oklahoma City government officials issued a State of Emergency due to the rising COVID cases (OKC-County Health Department, 2020). As a result, the Oklahoma Youth Expo canceled the remainder of the

2020 show. On March 16, 2020, OYE announced they would be offering 100 scholarships, in the total amount of \$100,000 to high school seniors who did not get to exhibit their market livestock to help with any financial hardship they may have faced (OYE, 2022).

As the COVID pandemic continues to disrupt conferences and events across the globe, the way in which organizations and businesses respond to those interruptions can be the make-or-break factor that can influence the future of the said organization or business. When dealing with a crisis, such as a pandemic, many factors come into play that can leave an organization's brand reputation vulnerable to public scrutiny (Coombs, 2002).

The way in which a crisis is handled can influence public opinions, make stakeholders uneasy, and put the brand's reputation at risk. Coombs's organizational crisis management theory claims that public perception and the perception of stakeholders are two key attributes in maintaining a company's brand reputation (2002). Therefore, it is imperative for an organization to have a crisis communication plan in place and to carefully evaluate each attribute in its response in a timely manner. Unsuccessful responses to crisis situations can result in irreparable damage to an organization's brand or to the organization as a whole, resulting in the loss of stakeholders, a restructure of the organization or a merger, loss of public trust, or ultimate loss of an organization.

In the realm of research relating to the livestock shows in general is limited, let alone as it relates to the reputation and brand management of livestock shows. When looking at the scope of literature as it relates to crisis management and brand reputation in youth livestock shows, the scope is narrowed to a greater extent. Therefore, it is

important to evaluate the perceptions of stakeholders from the 2020 OYE. This research should be used to determine the success of the OYE crisis response and evaluate what could have been or needs to be adjusted in the OYE crisis response plan. This research could prove to help in moving forward with future crisis responses at livestock shows.

The COVID crisis has and still is facing many challenges in relation to crisis communication and combating misinformation. However, this study is designed to look directly at the impact of COVID in its earliest stages as it makes its way across the U.S., and how it specifically affected the 2020 OYE.

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Oklahoma Youth Expo's crisis response to the 2020 COVID pandemic and its relation to the Oklahoma Youth Expo's reputation management.

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How did OYE's handling of the 2020 crisis affect OYE's brand reputation from the perspectives of agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents?
2. What type of impact, if any, did the 2020 OYE crisis have on agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, parents, and/or their exhibitors?

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

Livestock Industry

When evaluating the youth livestock industry, researchers are often looking to evaluate perceptions of those either directly involved with the industry or those who interact with it, but do not share direct ties, such as urban fairgoers (Clark et al., 2019). Most research, as it relates to the youth livestock industry, evaluates perceptions about the industry, the value youth can gain from the industry and animal health or welfare within the industry.

As agricultural literacy continues to decline, it is important to understand the public's perceptions in order to find where the knowledge gap lies (Frick et al., 1995). Fairs have become hubs for agriculturalists to share their message regarding animal agriculture (Holloway, 2004). Johnston and Cummings (2015) found that older generations of fairgoers look at signage relating to livestock at fairs in an effort to learn about the animal agriculture industry, while younger generations enjoy interacting with the animal itself. Longstanding research has found supervised agricultural education experiences (SAEs) for high school students have helped to bridge the agricultural literacy gap for students that come from non-traditional agricultural backgrounds,

or have no agricultural background at all (Cheek et al., 1994). Anderson (2010) used social representation theory to evaluate the perceptions of California fairgoers' attitudes toward fair exhibits and found, overall, participants have a positive view of youth livestock exhibits. The study also found fairgoers' attitudes toward the industry have a direct correlation to participants' experiences with the youth livestock industry as a whole, regardless of whether or not they come from agricultural backgrounds (Anderson, 2010).

Fairs are seen as a place where animals agriculture has the opportunity to share insights about the industry through educational exhibits (Avery, 2002). Fairs give the public an opportunity to meet face-to-face with young agriculturalist to learn about their livestock projects and how it relates to the animal agriculture industry and influences their day-to-day life (Avery, 2002). Outlets such as fair gives the public and opportunity to experience the youth livestock and animal agriculture industry firsthand, allowing fairgoers to accurately form their perceptions related to the industry based on their experience with it (Duncan, 2004).

Agricultural Crises

Research relating to the youth livestock industry is limited, much less as it relates from a crisis communications standpoint. However, the dairy and production agriculture industries has faced many challenges in the last decade related to alleged animal abuse and unethical practices (Schulze et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the majority of consumers are unfamiliar with modern agricultural production practices, especially those relating to animal agriculture, therefore, they rely on others to gain an understanding (Clark et al., 2019). This has caused a misinformation crisis within the industry, placing dairy farmers

and animal agriculture, as a whole, in an unforgiving light (Clark et al., 2019). To help combat the misinformation crisis, researchers have conducted studies that express the benefits and safeguards of modern practices (Cardoso et al., 2018). However, explaining the proven practices has shown to be challenging, as consumers have already had a negative experience with the industry (Whittlesea & Brooks, 1988). Therefore, the role of crisis communication has proven to be valuable in an effort to change the narrative (Yang et al., 2010).

Greenhouse gas emissions as it relates to animal agriculture has remained a hot-topic in the environmental climate change discussion, leaving producers to face a financial and technical crisis of their own when it comes to reevaluating their everyday practices (Friel et al., 2009). Researchers have found animal agricultural is responsible for roughly 10% of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, additionally, farming land use accounts for roughly another 12% of emissions (Friel et al., 2009). Counter to this augment, researchers have found that urban cities globally account for more that 60% of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide (Hoornweg et al, 2020). Regardless of who is at fault, the real challenge agricultural procures face is public a perception problem (Sathiendrakumar, 2003). Research has found public perceptions can influence the narrate of a crisis therefore, leaving producers vulnerable to public scrutiny (Jones, 2009).

The longstanding GMO debate has faced its own challenges within the misinformation crisis (Tourangeau, 2017). However, researchers have explored the possibility of using GMOs in Europe to help aid in the food supply chain shortage due to the COVID pandemic (Poort & Kortleven, 2021). This allowed government agencies to amend

regulatory guidelines for GMO production for as long as the World Health Organization views the COVID crisis as a pandemic (Poort & Kortleven, 2021). In result, this reignited the safety concerns surrounding the GMO discussion (Poort & Kortleven, 2021).

COVID Impact

COVID has strained many industries, and the hospitality industry, including event planning and livestock show, has arguably been impacted the most (Madray, 2020). Perceptions of the COVID virus and the pandemic at large have left event facilitators reevaluating the structure of events, with many moving to virtual platforms (Rahman et al., 2021).

With mixed views when evaluating COVID perception's, organizations have been forced to implement COVID standards and guidelines for employees in the workplace, this has caused strain among employees and their employer (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022). In a recent study, researchers have found a correlation between organizational trust and increased levels of stress and fatigue (Scandurra et al., 2021). Those who trust the decisions made by their organization leaders are less likely to feel stressed, and those who do not trust organization leadership decisions' feel the most stress and fatigue (Scandurra et al., 2021).

With added workplace and financial stress due to the pandemic, recent studies have shifted focus to evaluate the impact of workplace leadership from employee perceptions (Zhang et al., 2020). Researchers have found, employers who exhibit clear expectations and create an environment based on trust, have maintained employee retention as workers feel they are valued by the organization (Kelloway et al., 2012).

The uncertainty of the COVID pandemic has caused public perceptions to lose trust in more than just the workplace (Zhang et al., 2020). With a lack of reliable health information distribution regarding COVID, notably in the early stages of the pandemic, some consumers have lost trust in health and medical information (Fell, 2021). This has left those in the field of medicine battling a misinformation crisis (Fell, 2021). Researchers have found that social media and rumors are major factors in the distribution of COVID misinformation (Tasnim et al., 2020). Researchers evaluating causes for the spread of COVID misinformation found that information from former president Trump's tweets, as they related to COVID, was a leading factor in the spread of misinformation among consumers (Evanega et al., 2020). Researchers also found misinformation/conspiracies, infodemic coverage, and fact-checking to be contributing factors as well (Evanega et al., 2020). This aligns with existing research claiming that social media and internet technologies have served as the primary vehicle for the COVID misinformation spread (Barua et al., 2020).

Research related to understanding perceptions about a topic can aid in providing a holistic view across a specific public (Flick, 2018). This understanding is imperative when it comes to understanding the way consumers perceive a brand's identity, especially as it relates to a crisis (Coombs, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

This study is designed to look at the handling of a crisis within the Oklahoma youth livestock industry. This study is designed to use a combination of Coombs's

situational crisis communication theory and organizational crisis management theory to evaluate the stakeholders' perceptions of the 2020 OYE admit the COVID crisis.

Coombs's situational crisis communication theory has served as a foundational guide to crisis response for more than a decade and has been instrumental in countless studies. Coombs (2007) defined a crisis as "a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat"(p. 164). Coombs' organizational crisis management theory claims that public perception and the perception of stakeholders are two key attributes in maintaining a company's brand (Coombs, 2007). This theory directly correlates with Coombs situational crisis communication theory, which divides crises into three categories: victim, accident, and intentional (Coombs, 2002).

Coombs' situational crisis communication theory identifies a crisis as "negative events that cause stakeholders to make 'attributions' (interpretations) about crises responsibility, affecting how stakeholders interact with the organization" (Coombs, 2002, p. 167). This theory breaks crises down into three categories: victim, accident, and intentional (Coombs, 2002, p.167). The victim is described as "where the organization is a victim of the crisis (e.g. natural disasters, rumors) – minor reputational threat" (Coombs, 2002, p. 176). Accident was described as "where the organizational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional (e.g. equipment or product failure, accusations from external stakeholders) – medium reputational threat" (Coombs, 2002, 167). Intentional is "where the organization knowingly took an inappropriate risk – major reputational threat" (Coombs, 2002, p. 167).

Situational crisis communication theory is a prominent guide throughout existing research related to evaluating crisis response. Jeong (2009) examined the handling of the 2007 oil spill in South Korea and was guided by Coombs' situational crisis communication theory when evaluating public perceptions regarding the handling of the oil spill and found management flaws that could have been avoided if a crisis response plan was in place. The study used a three-group experimental design to examine the perceptions of 180 participants regarding the crisis response roughly a month after the South Korean oil spill (Jeong, 2009). While applying attribution theory, the study found that distinctive or detailed information created a more negative relationship history and punitive responses from participants (Jeong, 2009). Whereas, when participants evaluated less detailed or low distinctive information it created a more positive perception of the handling of the accident (Jeong, 2009). This typically means that more general and consistent statements expressing that responders were doing everything they could to correct or get a handle on the situation was perceived better than detailed updates that contained technical terms and jargon (Jeong, 2009).

Similar case studies have been done evaluating crisis communications responses and organizational preparedness for a crisis. Irlbeck et. al. (2013). used the role of excellence theory and Coombs's situational crisis communication theory to evaluate objectives relating to the crisis response plan used in the salmonella outbreak. They found that the public perceived various miscommunications throughout the crisis and ultimately felt distrust toward the peanut industry (Irlbeck et. al. 2013).

When organizations are faced with a crisis, it is imperative the reputation of the organization is maintained, as well as the trust of stakeholders (Griffin, 2014).

Technology has restructured the way news is received, creating social pressures, and a need for stimulation within the news media (Pintér 2016). The development of social media has also added to the disruption of news media distribution with the evolutions of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Castells et al., 2006). Platforms such as these have forced news media coverage to align with consumers' habits of consuming media almost instantly (Anthonissen, 2008).

With an increasingly intense and competitive media market, crises have become a lasting topic within news media cycles (Zelizer, 2010). This can leave organizations susceptible to public opinion and scrutiny of stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2014).

Organizational Crisis Management Theory

Organizational crisis management theory defined an organizational crisis as “an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive—can threaten an organization’s goals and have profound implications for its relationships with stakeholders” (Bundy et al., 2017, p. 78). This theory uses the term organization instead of corporation because corporation signifies a specific kind of for-profit industry, whereas organization implies the theory is applicable to a variety of organizational forms (Coombs, 2007). This theory used situational crisis communication theory to evaluate the impact a crisis will have on an organization (Coombs, 2007). Crisis management theory evaluates how the organization’s management practices result in the outcome of an organization’s reputation (Coombs, 2007).

Situational crisis communication theory evaluates the crisis itself, dividing crises into three categories: victim, accident, and intentional (Coombs, 2002). This theory

evaluates the potential impact of a crisis which helps in determining a crisis response (Coombs, 2002). These theories are typically used together to help in tailoring a successful crisis response plan and execution (Bundy et al., 2017). Situational crisis communication theory explains the impact crises have on organizations and how the organization's response plays a major role in public perception (Coombs, 2013). These theories are used as the framework for this study.

Existing research has found organizations can benefit from understanding how stakeholders perceive an organization's response to a crisis which can lead to the organization reevaluating or ultimately building a new crisis response plan as a whole (Coombs, 2013). A crisis can place an organization's brand reputation at risk, ultimately leading stakeholders to doubt or lose trust in the organization (Julian et al., 2008). Stakeholders are defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 508).

According to Coombs (2007), a brand's reputation develops over a period of time, based on stakeholders' perceptions and experience with the brand and its ability to meet stakeholders' goals or standards. Perceptions of a brand's reputation can also be perceived through experiences related publics have with the organization (Kim et al., 2015). A crisis can give people reasons to criticize a brand and ultimately threaten an organization's brand reputation (Coombs, 2007). Existing research regarding Coomb's organizational crisis management theory has found "crisis handlers" approach in deescalating a crisis has a major impact on the relationship between organizational leadership, stakeholders, and public perceptions (Bundy et al., 2017, p. 1671). Coombs' situational crisis communication theory also emphasizes the relationship between an

organization's accountability related to a crisis and the reputational damage that could follow (Coombs, 2002). James et al., (2011) found when handling a crisis “focusing not just on the ‘tactical aspects of management during a crisis but also on the ‘responsibilities of leading an organization in the pre-and post-crisis phases’ helps to build or mend the relationship between organizational leadership, stakeholders, and public perceptions (p. 485).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is designed to explore and understand the worldviews and assumptions of participants from their personal settings or circumstances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Creswell claimed this type of research is helpful when exploring social relations and providing a platform that allows participants to be heard (2018). Gall et al. (2007, p. 416) defines qualitative research as

being a multimethod in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research is an “approach to inquiry that begins with assumptions, worldviews, possibly a theoretical lens, and seeks to understand the context or settings of the participants,” (Creswell, 2007, p. 51). For this study, it was important to gain an understanding of participants’ experiences and opinions, therefore a qualitative research approach was considered to provide the most insight (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is designed to give the most in-depth responses and allows research questions and discussion to guide the methodology (Flick, 2018). This type of research allows

researchers to make sense of and interpret participants' personal experiences and emotions, bringing meaning to the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Understanding social relations is a key component of this study and the qualitative method allows for specific and relevant information to be evaluated and discussed (Flick, 2018). With a lack of similar research relating to crisis management within the youth livestock industry, specifically COVID, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study in order to gather social insights and opinions about the topic. For this study, it was important to understand participants' perspectives of OYE's handling of the 2020 crisis in their own words. Using a qualitative approach fostered an environment for natural dialog with participants and allowed themes to develop naturally (Flick, 2018). Using a qualitative approach has proven to be useful for this study as it helps to provide context and emotion to the goal of the objectives required. Detailed and specific data gained using this approach will help provide a holistic view of participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the 2020 OYE (Flick, 2018).

When designing qualitative research, it is important the research perspective aligns with the theoretical background of the study (Flick, 2018). Therefore, the foundation that guides this study is situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2002). and organizational crisis management theory (Coombs, 2007).

Population and Sampling

Population characteristics, also known as demographics, describe how people act in a certain place regarding status, income, relationships, and individual attributes (Weeks, 2021). The population for this study included those who attended the 2020 OYE and were directly affected by the crisis. In evaluating participants who could provide the

most insight related to the crisis, youth exhibiting livestock at the 2020 OYE, Oklahoma agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting at the 2020 OYE, and OYE staff were identified. Youth participants were considered for this study, but existing research found qualitative research with children to be inconsistent and unreliable (Mason & Hood, 2011). This coupled with limited access to youth, as they do not act as free agents due to their legal age, deemed youth participants to be problematic for this study (Schelbe et al., 2014). OYE staff was also considered as possible participants for this study. However, to truly evaluate the success or failure of the handling of the 2020 crisis and its effect on OYE's brand reputation, looking at the crisis from the perspective of external stakeholders, such as agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting livestock at the 2020 show, was deemed as the most practical group of subjects to evaluate for this study.

Participants who aided in providing the best understanding of the crisis were those directly affected by it (Coombs, 2007). Those participants were identified as Oklahoma agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting at the 2020 OYE. Once the population was narrowed and identified, a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used to identify participants for this study based on certain criteria. The qualifying criteria for participants in this study included the following: They must have attended the 2020 OYE as an agricultural education instructor, Extension agent, or parent of youth exhibiting livestock capacity; willingness to participate in the study either via Zoom or over the phone; willingness to be recorded; and willingness to express their thoughts on the handling of the 2020 OYE guided by an interview guide. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify agricultural

education instructors and Extension agents. Names and contact information for agricultural education instructors and Extension agents were obtained using online directories. Parents were found using the snowball sampling method during interviews with agricultural education instructors and Extension agents. Snowball sampling is a commonly used technique when finding participants with a common relation to the study that are rich in information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The intention of this study was to gain a representative sample of participants throughout Oklahoma. To do this, location of the participant was also taken in to consideration for the study. Four agricultural education instructors were chosen to participate with one doubling as both a parent of a child who attended the 2020 OYE and an agricultural education instructor, and one instructor also oversees the local 4-H program. Their email information was found using Oklahoma's agricultural education online directory. Two Extension agents participated in the study with one doubling as a parent of a child who exhibited at the 2020 OYE. Their email information was obtained using the Oklahoma State University online Extension directory. Three parents participated in this study including a couple. Their email information was obtained through previous participants using the snowball method. A total of nine participants were interviewed for this study (Table 1). Data saturation began to occur after six interviews, however, planned research interviews continued. By the end of the data collection process, the depth of the research no longer expanded and new themes stopped developing, therefore data saturation has occurred concluding the data collection process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). It should be noted that difficulties arose in finding participants due to participant availability and willingness, particularly in the Extension sector.

Table 1

Participants Descriptions

Pseudonym	Title	Area of Oklahoma
Dan	Ag Education Instructor	Southwest
Nick	Ag Education Instructor	Northeast
Sam	Ag Education Instructor/Parent	Southwest
Allen	Ag Education Instructor	Southwest
Kate	Extension Agent	Central
Lizzy	Extension Agent/Parent	Northwest
Ally	Parent	Northwest
Clair	Parent	Southwest
Tom	Parent	Northwest

Data Collection

Approval and permission was granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any data was collected. A copy of the IRB approval information is located Appendix A. Each participant received a recruitment email providing an overview of the study and the estimated time commitment. A copy of the recruitment email can be found in Appendix C. After committing to being interviewed, participants were emailed Zoom meeting information and a participant information form. Participants were asked to view the information form before the interview and the first question of the interview ensured

that the participant had read the form before the interview started. A copy of the participant information form can be found in Appendix B.

All but two interviews were done using the Zoom platform and the two exceptions were done over the phone. For the two phone interviews, participants preferred this method because it was more easily accessible for them compared to Zoom. All Zoom and over-the-phone interviews took place from my home office in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Two interviews had minor internet connection issues, but the overall interview was not impacted. The interviews began on August 11, 2021, and ended on February 12, 2022. Because interviews took place after the 2021 OYE, participants were prefaced with background knowledge reminding participants the idea of the study is to evaluate the 2020 OYE, not the most recent OYE. Doing interviews after most participants attend the 2021 OYE may have affected their responses. The interviews ranged from 17 to 29 minutes.

All interviews were recorded and hand-written notes were taken throughout the interview. After completion of the interview, I read a summary of my notes to the participant to ensure consistency and validity with each participant. This served as a member check. Once the interview was completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, which helps to ensure credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The Zoom interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom platform, and then I cleaned the transcripts from the Zoom interviews. I transcribed the over-the-phone interviews and validated both sets of transcripts with the interview recordings. Each participant's interview transcription was assigned a pseudonym to ensure participants remain confidential.

Instrument Development

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide offered two sets of similar questions that have been tailored to each demographic of participants. Semi-structured interviews allow for comprehensive and informative conversation among participants (Ruben & Ruben, 2012). Two interview guides were created with nearly mirroring questions. One was adapted to fit agricultural education instructor and Extension agent participants and the other was tailored toward the parent participants. The questions were open-ended and direct to gain an insight and understanding of the participants and those for whom they were responsible for experiences and perceptions of the 2020 OYE. The main topics included their perception of the overall handling of the 2020 crisis, how information was communicated and received, and the emotional impact of the crisis. Interview guides for participants were determined by the public facing role they held. For example, if a participant was a parent and an agricultural education instructor, then they were asked questions from the agricultural education instructor and Extension agent interview guide as it was determined they would likely answer most questions from a professional standpoint.

The interview guide was reviewed by the following individuals: Quisto Settle, chair of this thesis committee, who is an agricultural communications faculty member with experience in qualitative research, crisis communications, and livestock shows; committee member Morgan Pfeiffer, who has a meat science and agricultural production background and whose family operates a commercial goat operation where they breed, raise, and sells goats to breeders, FFA, and 4-H exhibitors nationwide; committee member Nathan Smith, a former Oklahoma agricultural education instructor; who has

supervised FFA at OYE. Audrey E. H. King who is a recent doctoral graduate who has an understanding of qualitative research; and Ruth Inman who is a former agricultural communications assistant professor who also has a swine and cattle production background, and her children are current Oklahoma 4-H members and who were affected by the 2020 OYE crisis.

Data Analysis

A combination of thematic analysis and Glaser's Constant Comparative Method (Glaser, 1965) was used to evaluate the data. The thematic analysis method allows participants to describe various aspects of a topic in detail and without restrictions (Braun & Clark, 2006). Using Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method, patterns were identified through what is referred to as incidents, and patterns in those incidents aided in developing themes (Glaser, 1965). Incidents were compared and sorted into themes and sub-themes. Creswell's method of "describing, classifying, and interrupting," was used throughout the coding and theme development process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After reading and listening to the interviews, sections of the interviews were sorted into codes, and the codes were later sorted into themes (Flick, 2018). The data was evaluated, sorted into themes, and coded using the MAXQDA software tool. Using the MAXQDA tool helps to ensure transparency, consistency, and organization when evaluating data (Trochim, 2020).

Meanings that are expressed verbally are known as semantic codes, which were sorted from the data first, and then underlying meanings, known as latent codes, were sorted (Flick, 2018). Some statements were coded using multiple codes. Glaser's constant

comparative method was used to evaluate the data (Glaser, 1965), and the interview questions guided and helped organized the analysis (Litoselliti, 2003).

After a thorough evaluation of the themes, a dependability audit was conducted by Katerina Weingarten, an Oklahoma State University agricultural communications graduate student. She reviewed the themes and confirmed they were representative of the interviewees' responses rather than my bias.

Subjectivity Statement

I am an agricultural communications graduate student. I received my undergraduate degree in agricultural communication at Oklahoma State University. I grew up in rural Oklahoma showing livestock at the OYE. In 2020, I was a member of the Oklahoma Agricultural Leadership Encounter (OALE) which is led by OYE staff. As part of their contract, OALE members are required to help with the show facilitation at OYE. My fiancée is the vice president of communications at OYE. I have a long-standing friendship with the OYE's Executive Vice President. I exhibited livestock at OYE. I have a sister that is still eligible to and continues to show at OYE. These things may have affected my interpretations of the data for this study, however, steps were taken to limit these influences.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting livestock were interviewed to gain a holistic understanding of the impact the 2020 crisis may have had on OYE's brand reputation. They were asked a series of questions relating to overall communication experiences regarding show updates and schedule changes; efforts to keep the show going; overall experiences, emotions, and impact; possible alternative options; and options related to the overall COVID-19 crisis.

The following themes resulted from the interviews: the 2020 COVID crisis could not be foreseen, uncertainty regarding the necessity of the show's early shutdown, participants perceived OYE was forced to shut down early, OYE did everything in its power to keep the show going, factors that brought on concern prior to participants' arrival at the 2020 show, the cancelation of the 2020 show had an emotional impact on participants, and show communication was timely and informative.

The 2020 COVID Crisis Could Not Be Foreseen

When participants were asked if they believed the 2020 COVID crisis could have been foreseen. Participants were quick to state they believe there was no possible way the

impact of the crisis could have been foreseen. Participants believed there was little to no time to prepare or make adjustments due to the abrupt manner of the crisis. Many participants alluded during the interviews that as a nation we are still going through the pandemic. Many people are still having to make adjustments on a daily basis nearly two years after the start of the pandemic. Ally, a parent, said, “You know, 95% of the people that were there have never had to deal with a pandemic before. So, I believe that nobody knew how to deal with it or prepare for it.”

Tom, a parent said,

No, because at the time, I felt it was so new at the time, and it was just really hitting all at once, nobody knew how to deal with it anywhere, you know it was just coming upon us so fast. I don't know if they could have prepared for it enough. That's my outlook on it.

Dan, an agricultural education instructor, said,

You know, in dealing with significant numbers of parents, and people, and exhibitors I gotta say, they handled it as well as it could have been. I'm saying no, I don't think anybody could have expected that or something like that.

One participant even said they believed OYE may have started the show to avoid being shut down, as it would be seen as an event and progress. Lizzy, an Extension agent said,

I don't. I mean, I think, by them starting the week out and going ahead and you know, bringing in the females [female livestock for breeding shows] and bringing in the exhibitors and everything else, I think that shows on

their part, their due diligence, to try to go ahead and have some sense of normalcy. And I also think that maybe their mindset was that if they kicked the week off and started OYE, we wouldn't be shut down because we'd be seen as an event in progress. So, I feel like they did everything they could have, and that it just couldn't have been avoided.

Uncertainty Regarding The Necessity Of The Show's Early Shutdown

When participants were asked whether or not they believed the cancellation of the remainder of the show was necessary due to COVID-19, they often provided mixed answers. Participants seemed to grapple with their own opinions of COVID-19, and if they believed it was necessary to shut the show down in order to achieve a greater good from a safety standpoint. Many participants would immediately answer the question one way, but after talking through the situation a little more with me, participants would often see the value in both sides of the argument, often ending their answers in a state of uncertainty or confusion. Clair, a parent, said, “Do I feel like they needed to shut down, no. Do I feel like they had to, yes.” Kate, an Extension agent said, “No. But at that time, everything was so unknown, and no one knew what the heck was going on. But [OYE] did what they thought was right at the time.”

Dan, an agricultural education instructor, said,

I think, at the time, I don't think we realized what the nation, the world, was going to face. So, at the time I questioned it, but it didn't take long to understand why it was done. And I think that can be a mixed answer there, at the time, maybe possibly no, but three days later yeah, had to be done or glad it was done.

Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said,

For OYE, I believe that it was necessary for them to stay within the law.

As far as the government shutting it down, I don't believe that it was necessary for the government to step in and shut it down.

Throughout the theme, the majority of participants had mixed feelings regarding the shutdown of the show, however, one participant said they believed the early cancellation was unnecessary. This participant alluded the actions of the city government had an impact on the show's cancellation. This is a recurring theme throughout interviews that are further discussed in this research. However, this quote specifically does relate to this theme and is worth mentioning. Tom, a parent, said, "I don't think it was necessary to shut it down. I think, we'll go back to I'm not too impressed with the city politics and Oklahoma City, so I'm blaming it all on them."

One participant also said they thought the cancellation of the show was necessary, not necessarily because they felt unsafe at the show, but because they believed the show had a moral obligation to protect the image of the youth livestock industry. Sam, an agricultural education instructor, said,

Yes, it was the right thing to do from an aesthetic standpoint for our community and industry. I just think where we were at with everything shutting down we were going to face too big of a battle if we didn't shut down. I just think it's the right thing to do or the responsible thing to do.

Participants Perceived OYE Was Forced To Shut Down Early

Throughout the interview process, the majority of participants alluded to or stated they believed OYE was forced to end the show early due to personnel outside of the

show's staff. Participants believed show officials were forced into making the cancellation by the Oklahoma City government or the mayor himself. The Oklahoma City mayor was mentioned several times throughout the interviewing process by multiple participants, as they believe he is solely responsible for the early cancelation of the 2020 show. Other participants would use terms like "government officials" or "the city government." Overall, it was apparent in this theme participants believe OYE did not make the call to end the 2020 show early.

Lizzy, an Extension agent said,

I feel like the show officials had no other choice but to cancel the show because of the enforcement of outside entities. And ultimately, like I said, you know, ultimately, the decision was unfortunately taken out of their hands, and you know, made by somebody else that maybe doesn't understand exactly what we do and why we do it. So no, I have no fault to them [OYE] whatsoever.

One participant mentioned specifically the state of emergency that was issued for Oklahoma county, ultimately causing OYE to cancel the remaining shows. Allen, an agricultural education instructor, said,

Then Oklahoma City canceled all events in Oklahoma City, and I think he [the mayor] issued something like a state of emergency or something like that. Anyway, it made it where the Oklahoma Youth Expo had to shut down, they didn't have a choice in the matter at that point.

Some participants said the Oklahoma City government was responsible for the early shutdown of the show. Clair, a parent, said, "everything was so new on all the

restrictions, and everything shutting down, and that a lot of hands were tied at higher, at the government level as far as what could happen.”

Tom, a parent, said,

I thought our state government was handling it properly, and I think they had the right decisions in mind. I think it was the city that, like I said, I’m not impressed with the city government, that ended the show.

Dan, an education instructor, said,

I mean that moment that day was real fluid, I mean there were many rumors going around, and again they (OYE) were just victims, in my opinion, I mean it was obviously the mayor, that is, in my opinion, who shut it down like the rest of Oklahoma City.

OYE Did Everything In Its Power To Keep The Show Going

Throughout the interview, participants were asked questions relating to OYE’s handling of the 2020 crisis and asked if they thought the staff could have done more, and many of them expressed they believed OYE looked into every option to keep the show going. Participants were also asked directly about their thoughts regarding OYE’s handling of the 2020 crisis as a whole. Participants at large believe OYE staff did everything in their power to keep the show going and were ultimately left in a no-win situation. This was the largest theme coded when analyzing the data and was broken into four sub-themes. The sub-themes are as follows: OYE offered good alternative opportunities after the cancellation of the show, OYE did an overall good job handling the 2020 crisis, considering the circumstances, and keeping the show going.

Sub-Theme 1: OYE Offered Good Alternative Opportunities After The Cancellation Of The Show

In this sub-theme, participants were overall pleased with the scholarship opportunity offered to market exhibitors, and the invitation for seniors who did not get to show at the 2020 OYE to have the option to do so the following year. Allen, an agricultural education instructor, said, “I think what they did was good, and giving those seniors the option to come back was also a really good thing I thought they did. A first-class thing.”

Participants said they were appreciative of the scholarship opportunity extended to high school seniors who did not get to show their market animals. Dan, an agricultural education instructor said,

I think that it was an opportunity that [the scholarship opportunity] was very appreciated. You know, I know that scholarships are very difficult for them, you know them and the majority of people to obtain money-wise, so you know there's a disappointment, they couldn't show, but I think that was very well received and an appreciative way to approach not being able to show.

Participants said the scholarship was a good opportunity for the exhibitors who did not get to show their market animals, but it did not make up for the memories and experiences that could have been made at the 2020 show. Lizzy, an Extension agent said,

I do think it was a good idea, but it doesn't account for all the experiences that could have come from that OYE, but it was a positive way for OYE to still recognize those students. And I thought it was really great of them to allow those seniors the option to come back the next year.

Though most participants agreed the scholarship opportunity was a good alternative opportunity, one participant said she did not know the opportunity existed. When asked about her thoughts on the scholarship opportunity during the interview, Clair, a parent, said, “I have to say I don't know a whole lot about it.”

Sub-Theme 2: OYE Did An Overall Good Job Handling The 2020 Crisis

In this sub-theme, participants overall felt OYE did a good job handling the 2020 situation, and the staff's actions continued to reflect that. Clair, a parent, said, “I feel like they handled it very well. Very professional and also supportive of the exhibitors and trying to find avenues or opportunities or safeguards should it continue.” Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said, “I can't find anything that I think they could have done better. I think that they handled it as professionally and as correctly as they possibly could.” Ally, a parent, said, “I thought it was handled, I mean, I honestly don't feel that they could have done anything more, in all honesty.”

The following participants said they believed OYE did everything they could to keep the show going. However, they were the only two participants who mentioned the idea of switching the order of the breeding shows and the market shows. The first participant believed switching the shows could not happen but acknowledged it was an idea he had heard, Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said,

I heard people saying they should have switched around the schedule and things but by the time– everybody started being put on the short timeline, breeding animals were already there and it was not feasible to switch out and get market animals there.

Sam, an agricultural education instructor, believed it may have been a plausible idea, but was not convinced it could have been feasible,

The only thing that I would have done differently is, or I would have tried, and I don't know that it could be done, but I would have tried to switch the market shows and the breeding shows to try to get those market animals in there and show them suckers instead of all the breeding animals. They showed almost all the breeding animals knowing that we could potentially have an issue. They may have tried, I haven't ever asked Tyler that, so I don't know that it was actually an option.

Sub-Theme 3: Considering The Circumstances

The phrase “considering the circumstances” and phrases very similar to it surfaced throughout many interviews when participants would describe OYE staff's efforts in keeping the show going. Tom, a parent, said: “Dealing with the situation that we dealt with, I don't think anything could have happened, I don't know what could have been done better considering the circumstances that we were under at the time.” Lizzy, an Extension agent, said, “I absolutely think they did what they could with the situation that they were dealt with.” Sam, an agricultural education instructor, said, “They handled it as well as they could have with the circumstances that were given. That was as good as it could have been done.”

Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said,

I thought it was very professionally done. And I think it was, with all the circumstances involved, I think that they executed everything to the best

of their possible ability. Just with unforeseen circumstances, and all that I think they tried to adapt the best they could.

Sub-Theme 4: Keeping The Show Going

Participants felt strongly OYE's staff looked at every alternative to continue the show and were ultimately forced to end the show early by outside entities. This was the overarching topic discussed throughout this theme. This sub-theme relates to the earlier discussed theme, participants perceived OYE was forced to shut down early. However, this topic is discussed in a different context throughout this theme. The theme, keeping the show going takes a holistic look at what participants perceived as OYE's efforts and goals were in the facilitation of the show. This theme discusses less about what or who was perceived to be at fault for the show's early end and focuses more on the perceived steps OYE's staff took to keep the show going.

Allen, an agricultural education instructor, said,

I think, in the end, they did what they had to do to keep it going the best they could. They ran the show as long as they could, but in the end, I think they had to abide by the city and cancel.

Participants said they believe their goals to finish the show aligned with the goals of the OYE staff. Dan, an agricultural education instructor, said,

I stated earlier, I feel like the staff, and our ultimate goal was to continue and have the show. And in a way, it became out of their control. They did all they could do. Yes, and again I think they handled the situation as bad as it was, as good as possible.

Participants said they perceived OYE staff worked hard to keep the show going and felt staff sympathized with exhibitors and their families. Ally, a parent, said, "Even though it is out of their control, I mean you could tell that this is something that you know they live for. They put a lot of work and effort into it and they knew what it was going to do to all the exhibitors and families."

Participants said they believed OYE staff worked with state government officials in an effort to keep the show going. Sam, an agricultural education instructor, said, "They handled it in a timely manner. I know they were in contact with the secretary of agriculture, the governor, and the mayor. I know for a fact that they were in contact with all of those people and I think that was a good thing. So, I would say overall it was handled well."

Kate, an Extension agent said, "Oh, I know they did everything they could. Just because the secretary of ag is from my county, and yeah when I saw her in tears, I knew they worked very hard to try to keep it going."

Factors That Brought On Concern Prior To Participants' Arrival At The 2020 Show

To gain an understanding of the mindset participants were in upon arriving at the 2020 show, they were asked if they had any reservations or concerns the show may face challenges in regard to COVID-19. Many of the responses included events that took place outside of the show that were affected or canceled due to COVID-19. Kate, an Extension agent, said,

Seeing all of the Houston livestock shows, and all of those [shows] get shut down, I knew it was coming. But I do appreciate the OYE staff, still trying to push through and get it done. I did have a concern just because you know, the Houston livestock show was shut down and we have a lot of kids that attend OYE so it was a little nerve-wracking.

Participants said the news media also aided in their growing concerns regarding the show's success. Tom, a parent, said, "Our concerns were that with everything that was going on in the news prior to the show and the way things were getting shut down, we were afraid the show might get shut down."

Sam, an agricultural education instructor, said,

The news was pretty bleak about the virus amongst everyone, and then when we heard that the Thunder game had been canceled, that was when I really amped up my worry. I was pretty certain at that point that we were done.

Participants said another factor that contributed to their concern about the show were rumors and discussion throughout the barns at the show. Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said, "Just getting there and showing the breeding females, but not knowing once the rumbling started that they may cancel OYE and students may not get to show."

The Cancellation Of The 2020 Show Had An Emotional Impact On Participants

An overwhelming majority of participants expressed their feeling about the emotional impact the early cancellation had on themselves, their students, and/or their children. Participants were very descriptive when answering this question, using detailed

language to describe how they felt and the lasting impact it had on them. This theme is consists of two sub-themes: emotional disappointment, and sense of appreciation.

Sub-Theme 1: Emotional Disappointment

Throughout this sub-theme, participants expressed their overall disappointment with the show's rapid end and the impact it had on them financially, mentally, and emotionally. Allen, an agricultural education instructor, said, “There were kids and parents were upset all around you. That was probably the hardest part, seeing all those kids throughout the barn just in tears.”

Tom, a parent, said,

Just disappointment, that's something that these kids look forward to every year. You work your tail off all year long, and this is your reward is to walk down the ramp into the big arena. It was more disappointing for my son being his first year there and not being able to experience being so close to that experience.

Some participants also said there was a financial impact that was coupled with their disappointment. Dan, an agricultural education instructor, said,

It had an emotional and an economic impact, both. And elaborating on that, it was so sudden there were no forecasting ideas that was going to happen, so we had our animals in the trailers, we had them on the way you know, in the pens we had them ready for transportation to go away and then market value became the value of that stock as if it was market stock [instead of show stock]. Kids were disappointed. Families and ag teachers were disappointed.

Lizzy, an Extension agent, said,

You know that the financial risk that you took, it's not going to pay off.

The time and the effort and the dreams and all of that are put into that one time in the ring, and you know all of that is being taken away. I mean there were a lot of tears shed when that decision was made to shut it down.

I mean to see the heartbreak of my own personal kids, but my 4-Her's, as well that I love, just like my own, and then to see how they reacted, I mean yeah, it was absolutely heartbreaking.

One participant said there was a shock factor that came along with the cancellation of the show, but that factor eventually wore off. Kate, an Extension agent, said, "I would say, at first, yes, first shock, yes, but then, once OYE released that they were letting the seniors come back and they definitely were more at ease about it all."

Sub-Theme 2: Sense Of Appreciation

Throughout the interview process, participants indicated a deep value and appreciation for the OYE staff's efforts that expanded beyond interview questioning. This appreciation appeared to stem from the respect participants have for the OYE staff's understanding of the livestock industry as a whole. Participants said they were appreciative of OYE's efforts to keep the show going. Tom, a parent, said, "I appreciate everything they did to try to keep the 2020 show going."

When asked about their thoughts regarding the overall handling of the 2020 show, Clair, a parent, said, "[OYE staff were] very professional and also supportive of the exhibitors and trying to find avenues or opportunities or safeguards should it continue."

Participants said they felt compassion toward OYE staff. Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said,

After the announcement was made, I went into the office and spoke with Kass and gave her a big hug, and we both cried and then. I thanked Tyler for everything that he had done and tried to do to get [the show] to go off.”

Ally, a parent, said,

I could remember seeing some higher-up OYE officials that look very upset that they were having to make the decisions they were having to make. I know it really hurt a lot of those people that put the show on, I really feel that.

Show Communication Was Timely And Informative

Throughout the interview, participants were asked various questions relating to how they received information at the show associated with schedule changes and concerns. Overall, participants understood the COVID situation was very fluid in how it affected the show and therefore, said they believed communication was as timely and as informative as possible. Clair, a parent, said, “I think the information was filtered through to everybody pretty quickly. So, I really couldn't foresee anything being done differently on it.” Dan, an agricultural education instructor, said: “I thought OYE staff was as current as they could be and had some huge decisions to make and then all of a sudden, boom it's over we're done go home. Out of our control.” Allen, an agricultural education instructor, said, “I thought they did a very good job with it. I thought they were as timely and as detailed as they could be, considering.”

Some participants said they looked to social media for show updates. Ally, a parent, said,

I thought they did a very good job, communicating through social media with it. I mean I thought their response on decisions was given timely, you know I mean it wasn't a big way, [but] I thought they did very well with it.

One participant said they preferred to look at Facebook for show updates versus other platforms, as it was the platform they were most comfortable with. Nick, an agricultural education instructor, said,

I probably prefer Facebook, because I'm more familiar with it, but I thought that the information on the app was very useful also. It's just, I may have tried to go to Facebook, to the page first, and then followed up with the app to check to see if one was updated before the other.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

RQ1: How Did OYE's Handling Of The 2020 Crisis Affect OYE's Brand Reputation From The Perspectives Of Agricultural Education Instructors, Extension Agents, and Parents?

Participants were asked questions regarding their perceptions of OYE's overall handling of the 2020 crisis, their thoughts on OYE's efforts to keep the show going, and how they received information for show updates and schedule changes. The themes found for this research question included the 2020 COVID crisis could not be foreseen, OYE did everything in its power to keep the show going, show communication was timely and informative, and participants perceived OYE was forced to shut down early by outside entities.

Participants said they believed OYE looked into every option when it came to keeping the show going. Many participants said an example of their efforts showed in their communication updates and their schedule change attempt to condense the show while still allowing for all the livestock exhibitors to show their entries. This supports Griffin's claim of maintaining the trust of stakeholders is imperative when organizations are faced with a crisis, as it informs stakeholder that their goals and views align with the

organization (2014). Participants said the 2020 COVID pandemic was a new type of crisis that could not have been foreseen by OYE staff. This aligns with Coombs' situational crisis communication theory, which breaks a crisis down into three categories, resulting in the 2020 OYE falling victim to the COVID crisis (Coombs, 2002). To support this, stakeholders viewed the crisis as unforeseen and laid no blame to OYE for the crisis (Coombs, 2002). Participants said they felt the 2020 OYE was forced to shutdown due to the rising COVID case numbers and uncertainties that came along with the pandemic. Along with this, participants said they believed the Oklahoma City government played a role in the final cancellation of the 2020 OYE. Some participants blamed the Oklahoma City mayor specifically for the show's cancellation. Therefore participants' public opinions and scrutiny regarding the 2020 show was not directed toward the OYE brand, further concluding OYE fell victim to the 2020 crisis (Coombs, 2013).

Some participants believed OYE staff worked with state government officials to help guide them in the decision-making process, with the ultimate goal of finishing the show. This is worth mentioning as it helped to provide additional assurance in stakeholders' trust in OYE, aligning with existing research that supports the idea of maintaining stakeholders' trust helps maintain an organization's brand reputation (Coombs, 2007). Overall participants said communications regarding updates and schedule changes were timely and as informative as they believed possible, regardless of which platform participants looked to receive this information. The perceived show of timely and transparent communication with show participants aligns with existing research that claims to keep a relationship of transparency among crisis handlers, the

public and stakeholders can aid in escalating an organization's reputational threat during a crisis (Bundy et al., 2017). Participants said they believed OYE's actions, both during the show and after it was canceled, showed OYE's compassion towards exhibitors and stakeholders affected by the crisis, ultimately helping to maintain OYE's brand reputation (Coombs, 2007).

**RQ2: What Type Of Impact, If Any, Did The 2020 OYE Crisis Have On
Agricultural Education Instructors, Extension Agents, Parents, And/Or Their
Exhibitors?**

The theme associated most with this question was the cancellation of the 2020 show had an emotional impact on participants, which was composed of two sub-themes: emotional disappointment and sense of appreciation. Participants said the early cancelation of the show impacted them and those they were responsible for on an emotional level. Participants used words such as “devastation,” “disappointment,” and “heartbreaking” to describe their emotions after the 2020 OYE was canceled. Existing research has shown experiences with an organization can shape one's view of the said organization's reputation (Kim et al., 2015). However, this research does not support this claim for this because even though the crisis impacted them in a negative way, participants said they do not blame OYE for the cancellation of the show. While this theme had the opportunity to subject OYE to public scrutiny, as it resulted in a negative experience with the organization, participants did not find OYE to be at fault for these circumstances, therefore their blame was distributed elsewhere (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). However, participants do place their blame somewhere, but do not blame OYE.

Participants said they valued the OYE staff's efforts to keep the show going and felt the OYE staff was just as disappointed in the cancellation of the show as participants. This is worth mentioning as it helps to provide insight regarding participants' perceptions of OYE's brand before and after the 2020 crisis, which aids in gaining an understanding of participants' brand loyalty toward OYE (Samudro & Susanti, 2021). This supports existing research claiming a brand's reputation develops over time, and OYE's ability to meet participants' goals or standards has created a lasting trust within the brand (Coombs, 2007).

From this research, OYE's brand reputation appears to have stayed intact throughout the 2020 crisis, and based on some responses, the OYE brand reputation may have gained more respect or value among agricultural education instructors, Extension agents, and parents of youth exhibiting at the 2020 OYE, strengthening their relationship with OYE's brand reputation and brand loyalty.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research contributes to the role of crisis communication within the livestock industry, specifically related to youth livestock shows. It would be valuable to research the handling of other livestock shows that faced similar challenges related to COVID during the same time period, namely the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, San Antonio Livestock Show, and Rodeo Austin. More specifically, research should assess how the shows' crisis communication approach differs from the OYE, and how the COVID crisis affected their brand reputation.

It may also be valuable to expand upon this study to assess how the OYE approached the show in 2021 and 2022 to ensure it was completed amid the middle of the

COVID pandemic. It may be valuable in gaining insight regarding participants' expectations from the 2021 and 2022 shows regarding the 2020 show.

The results from this study align with existing research, indicating proper handling of a crisis can positively impact or maintain a brand's reputation (Coombs, 2013). Evaluating brand loyalty as it relates to livestock shows may prove to be beneficial to livestock show coordinators across the country as it could provide insight related to building trust and loyalty within a livestock show brand (Samudro & Susanti, 2021). Brand loyalty as it relates to a brand facing a crisis should be considered as guiding factors for further research. Additionally, brand loyalty can establish a lasting trust among stakeholders, ultimately establishing brand performance on a regular basis as it is evaluated through public perception (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Recommendations for Practice

Livestock facilitators should be aware of the role they play when managing a livestock show a large, let alone when affected by a crisis. The perceptions of their management skills are not only evaluated by stakeholders, but also the public at large. This research shows external stakeholders' perceptions can impact the brand reputation of a show, which could result in brand vulnerability if done without the alignment of the stakeholders' and organization's overall goals. Based on the results from this study, it is recommended livestock show coordinators should implement a crisis communication plan that not only holds safety regards, but also includes communication with external stakeholders.

This research revealed that stakeholders felt valued by OYE, as they perceived staff was transparent in their communication and outreach efforts both during and after

the 2020 show. Based on this study, livestock shows should evaluate their brand their brand reputation and brand loyalty among stakeholders to gain understanding of stakeholder perception's regarding the show.

This research provided further insight into the youth livestock industry and the role crisis communication can play. The youth livestock show industry should recognize the benefits of understanding stakeholder perceptions as it has the potential to add value to their brand.

REFERENCES

- About Us*. 2022 Oklahoma Youth Expo. (2022, January 4). Retrieved March 27, 2022, from <https://okyouthexpo.com/about-us/>
- Avery, J. (2002). Agricultural Fairs in america: Tradition, education, celebration. *The Annals of Iowa*, 61(3), 355–356. <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10618>
- Barua, Z., Barua, S., Aktar, S., Kabir, N., & Li, M. (2020). Effects of misinformation on covid-19 individual responses and recommendations for resilience of disastrous consequences of misinformation. *Progress in Disaster Science*, 8, 100119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pdisas.2020.100119>
- Bundy, J., Pfarrer, M. D., Short, C. E., & Coombs, T. (2017). Crises and crisis management: Integration, interpretation, and research development. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 43 (No. 6). <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1177/0149206316680030>
- Cardoso, C. S., von Keyserlingk, M. A., Hötzel, M. J., Robbins, J., & Weary, D. M. (2018). Hot and bothered: Public attitudes towards heat stress and outdoor access for dairy cows. *PLOS ONE*, 13(10). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205352>
- Castells, M., Cardoso, G., & Nitze, P. H. (2006). *The network society: from knowledge to policy*. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies Center for Transatlantic Relations.
- Cheek, J. G., Arrington, L. R., Carter, S., & Randell, R. S. (1994). Relationship of supervised agricultural experience program participation and student achievement in Agricultural Education. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 35(2), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.1994.02001>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, January 5). *CDC Museum Covid-19 Timeline*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html#:~:text=January%2020%2C%202020%20CDC,18%20in%20Washington%20state.>

- Clark, B., Panzone, L. A., Stewart, G. B., Kyriazakis, I., Niemi, J. K., Latvala, T., Tranter, R., Jones, P., & Frewer, L. J. (2019). Consumer attitudes towards production diseases in intensive production systems. *PLOS ONE*, *14*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0210432>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Coombs, H. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *management communication quarterly*, *16*(2), 165–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089331802237233>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2014). How publics react to crisis communication efforts. *Journal of Communication Management*, *18*(1), 40–57. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcom-03-2013-0015>
- Coombs, W. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *10*(3), 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049>
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Duncan, D. W. (2004). Knowledge and perceptions of Virginia secondary agriculture educators toward the Agricultural Technology Program at Virginia Tech. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *45*(1), 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2004.01021>
- Evanega, S., Lynas, M., Adams, J., & Smolenyak, K. (2020). Coronavirus misinformation: Quantifying sources and themes in the covid-19 ‘infodemic’ (preprint). <https://doi.org/10.2196/preprints.25143>
- Fell, L. (2021). Trust and covid-19. *Digital Government: Research and Practice*, *2*(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3428472>
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). The stakeholder approach. *Strategic Management*, 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139192675.003>
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research (6th ed.)*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Flick, U. (2018). *Designing qualitative research*. SAGE.
- Frick, M. J., Birkenholz, R. J., & Machtmes, K. (1995). Rural and adult knowledge and perceptions of Agriculture. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *36*(2), 44–53. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.1995.02044>
- Friel, S., Dangour, A. D., Garnett, T., Lock, K., Chalabi, Z., Roberts, I., Butler, A., Butler, C. D., Waage, J., McMichael, A. J., & Haines, A. (2009). Public health benefits of strategies

- to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions: Food and Agriculture. *The Lancet*, 374(9706), 2016–2025. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(09\)61753-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(09)61753-0)
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281>
- Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P., & Borg, W.R. (2007). *Education Research: An Introduction* (8th ed.). New York. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Griffin, A. (2014). Crisis, issues and reputation management: A handbook for PR and communications professionals. In *Crisis, Issues and Reputation Management*. Kogan Page, Limited.
- Holloway, L. (2004). Showing and telling farming: Agricultural shows and re-imaging British agriculture. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 20(3), 319–330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2003.10.002>
- Hoornweg, D., Sugar, L., & Gomez, C. L. (2020). Cities and greenhouse gas emissions: Moving forward. *Urbanisation*, 5(1), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455747120923557>
- James, E. H., Wooten, L. P., & Dushek, K. (2011). Crisis management: Informing A new leadership research agenda. *Academy of Management Annals*, 5(1), 455–493. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2011.589594>
- Jeong, S.-H. (2009). Public's Responses to an oil spill accident: A test of the attribution theory and situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review*, 35(3), 307–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.03.010>
- Julian, S. D., Ofori-Dankwa, J. C., & Justis, R. T. (2008). Understanding strategic responses to interest group pressures. *Strategic Management Journal*, 29(9), 963–984. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.698>
- Kelloway, E. K., Turner, N., Barling, J., & Loughlin, C. (2012). Transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being: The mediating role of Employee Trust in leadership. *Work & Stress*, 26(1), 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2012.660774>
- Kim, Y., Miller, A., & Chon, M.-G. (2015). Communicating with key publics in crisis communication: The Synthetic Approach to the public segmentation in caps (communicative action in problem solving). *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 24(2), 82–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12104>
- Kloutsiniotis, P. V., Mihail, D. M., Mylonas, N., & Pateli, A. (2022). Transformational leadership, HRM practices and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of personal stress, anxiety, and Workplace Loneliness. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 103177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103177>
- Litoselliti, L. (2003). Using focus groups in research. *Continuum*.

- Madray, J. S. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on event management industry. *International Journal of Engineering Applied Sciences and Technology*, 5(3), 533–535.
<https://doi.org/10.33564/ijeast.2020.v05i03.089>
- Mason, J., & Hood, S. (2011). Exploring issues of children as actors in Social Research. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(4), 490–495.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.05.011>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Covid-19 definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/COVID-19>
- Pintér, D. (2018). Media bias and the role of user-generated content in crisis management: a Case-Study about the Communication of the Hungarian Police Forces after 2016 Budapest Explosion. *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 9(1), 101–1025.
<https://doi.org/10.14267/CJSSP.2018.1.05>
- Poort, L., & Kortleven, W.-J. (2021). GMO regulation in crisis – the experimental potential of regulation (EU) 2020/1043 on covid-19 in addressing both a crisis and a pandemic. *Law and Method*. <https://doi.org/10.5553/rem/.000063>
- Rahman, M. K., Gazi, M. A., Bhuiyan, M. A., & Rahaman, M. A. (2021). Effect of covid-19 pandemic on Tourist Travel Risk and management perceptions. *PLOS ONE*, 16(9). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0256486>
- Revised proclamation of state of emergency*. OKC-County Health Department: Novel coronavirus. (2020). Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.occhd.org/COVID-19>
- Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Samudro, A., & Susanti, V. (2021). The model development of Industrial Brand Loyalty: Assessing the rational and emotional aspects as antecedents of loyalty. *Cogent Business & Management*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2021.1896871>
- Sathiendrakumar, R. (2003). Greenhouse emission reduction and sustainable development. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 30(12), 1233–1248.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/03068290310500643>
- Scandurra, C., Bochicchio, V., Dolce, P., Valerio, P., Muzii, B., & Maldonato, N. M. (2021). Why people were less compliant with public health regulations during the second wave of the COVID-19 outbreak: The role of trust in governmental organizations, future anxiety, fatigue, and covid-19 risk perception. *Current Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02059-x>
- Schulze, M., Risius, A., & Spiller, A. (2021). Public perceptions of undercover investigations in livestock farming: An end that justifies the means? *Animal Welfare*, 30(1), 39–47.
<https://doi.org/10.7120/09627286.30.1.039>

- Siche, R. (2020). What is the impact of covid-19 disease on agriculture? *Scientia Agropecuaria*, 11(1), 3–6. <https://doi.org/10.17268/sci.agropecu.2020.01.00>
- Staff, A. K. H. O. U. 11. (2020, March 11). *Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo canceled amid coronavirus concerns*. khou.com. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.khou.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/2020-houston-rodeo-canceled-amid-coronavirus-concerns/285-f8db6b30-d464-486b-a484-b225c6317910>
- Tasnim, S., Hossain, M. M., & Mazumder, H. (2020). Impact of rumors or misinformation on coronavirus disease (covid-19) in social media. *Journal of Preventive Medicine & Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/uf3zn>
- Tourangeau, W. (2017). GMO doublespeak: An analysis of power and discourse in Canadian debates over Agricultural Biotechnology. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur L'alimentation*, 4(1), 108–138. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v4i1.208>
- Trochim, W. (2020). Qualitative Validity. <https://conjointly.com/kb/qualitative-validity/>
- Weeks, J. R. (2021). *Population: An introduction to concepts and issues*. Cengage.
- Whittlesea, B. W., & Brooks, L. R. (1988). Critical influence of particular experiences in the perception of letters, words, and phrases. *Memory & Cognition*, 16(5), 387–399. <https://doi.org/10.3758/bf03214219>
- WHO. (2022). *Archived: Who timeline - covid-19*. World Health Organization. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>
- Yang, S.-U., Kang, M., & Johnson, P. (2010). Effects of narratives, openness to dialogic communication, and credibility on engagement in crisis communication through organizational blogs. *Communication Research*, 37(4), 473–497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210362682>
- Zelizer, B. (2010). *The changing faces of journalism: tabloidization, technology and truthiness*. Routledge.
- Zhang, J., Xie, C., Wang, J., Morrison, A. M., & Coca-Stefaniak, J. A. (2020). Responding to a major global crisis: The effects of hotel safety leadership on employee safety behavior during COVID-19. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(11), 3365–3389. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijchm-04-2020-0335>

APPENDICES

Appendix A – IRB Approval Letter



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 07/09/2021
Application Number: IRB-21-292
Proposal Title: Taking an external look at the Oklahoma Youth Expo's crisis response to the COVID-19 crisis during the 2020 livestock show

Principal Investigator: Bree Elliott
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Quisto Settle
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

Appendix B – Participant Information Form



DEPARTMENT OF
**AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION,
COMMUNICATIONS AND LEADERSHIP**
Ferguson College of Agriculture

Participant Information Form: Taking an external look at the Oklahoma Youth Expo's crisis response to the COVID-19 crisis during the 2020 livestock show

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study exploring external perceptions of the Oklahoma Youth Expo's crisis response to the COVID-19 crisis during the 2020 livestock show. You were selected as a possible participant because you are involved with Oklahoma's youth livestock industry. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore FFA advisors, extension agents, and parents' perceptions of the Oklahoma Youth Expo's crisis response to the COVID-19 crisis during the 2020 livestock show.

What to Expect: Participation in this research will involve answering questions asked by the interviewer in a virtual or by phone setting.

Duration of Participation: 1 hour

Significant Risks: There are no risks associated with this project that are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about effective crisis responses and how they can relate to the youth livestock industry.

Compensation: None. You will receive no payment for participating in this study

Appendix B – Participant Information Form Continued

This study is being conducted by: Bree Elliott, Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership, under the direction of Quisto Settle, Department of Agricultural Education Communications and Leadership.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: participate in an interview to answer questions related to your perceptions of OYE's crisis response to the 2020 COVID-19 crisis and allow audio taping of your interview with the researcher.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss the group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for this research oversight will have access to the records. You will not be identified individually; we shall be looking at the group as a whole. The research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider privacy policy at <https://zoom.us/privacy>.

The researchers will not be able to remove your data from the dataset once your participation is complete. This informed consent form will be kept for three years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Bree Elliott Agricultural Hall, Dept. of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, Email: bree.elliott@okstate.edu, or Dr. Quisto Settle, Agricultural Hall, Dept. of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, Email: qsettle@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

By continuing with this research, the participants have consented to voluntarily participate.

Appendix C – Recruitment Email

Recruitment email

Hello!

My name is Bree Elliott, and I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University. I am conducting a research study through the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership exploring agricultural education instructors, extension agents, and parents' perceptions of the Oklahoma Youth Expo's crisis response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

This study is designed to evaluate OYE's handling of the 2020 crisis as a whole in an effort to determine the impact this event had on OYE. Participants in this study will partake in an interview process via zoom or by phone that will be guided by a list of questions pertaining to the 2020 event.

I think you would make an excellent candidate for this study, so I am reaching out to ask, would you be willing to participate in this study? Please let me know either way, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bree Elliott
Graduate Student
Oklahoma State University

Appendix C – Agricultural Education Instructors and Extension Agents Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Questions for Ag Teachers and Extension Agents

1. Have you had an opportunity to read the participant information form?
 1. You acknowledge that this interview will be recorded and information from this interview will be used for research purposes only?
 2. Do you agree to participate in this study?
2. What is your full name and title?
3. Where do you teach or what programs are you responsible for?
4. What are some general details about your 4-H/FFA program?
5. How many club/chapter members do you typically take to OYE?
6. How long have you been attending OYE?
 1. Check if they were at their current program in 2020.
7. Going into the 2020 OYE, did you have any reservations or concerns that the show may face challenges in regard to COVID-19?
 1. If so, what were they?
 2. If not, why not?
8. From your perspective, can you explain to me the events that unfolded during the 2020 OYE?
9. During the 2020 show, where did you look to receive information about show updates and schedule changes?
 1. Follow-up about what they thought if they listed non-social media/online
10. What social media sites did you use?
11. What did you think of the Oklahoma Youth Expo's use of social media and online platforms in regard to schedule changes?
 1. Where did you look for recent updates and information regarding the show schedule?
 2. What would you have liked to have seen done differently?
12. Did you use the OYE app?
 1. If so, did it have useful and timely information?
 1. Can you describe the type of information you gained or looked for while using the app?
 2. If not, why not?
13. Did you have any face-to-face communication with OYE staff?
 1. Can you describe what face-to-face interaction with staff was like?
 2. Can you explain your level of satisfaction with face-to-face communication with staff?
14. Can you explain to me whether or not you believe OYE staff did everything in their power to keep the show going?
 1. Do you think OYE could have done more to keep the show going?
 1. Why or why not?

Appendix C – Agricultural Education Instructors and Extension Agents Interview Guide Continued

14. Can you explain to me whether or not you believe OYE staff did everything in their power to keep the show going?
 1. Do you think OYE could have done more to keep the show going?
 1. Why or why not?
 2. What were your thoughts about how staff communicated issues or changes?
15. Do you think the OYE being shut down early because of the COVID-19 crisis could have been foreseen?
 1. If so, how do you think the OYE could have better prepared for this crisis?
16. Did the cancellation of the market shows have an emotional impact on you or your 4'-H'ers/FFA members?
17. What were your thoughts about the OYE scholarship opportunity for those students who did not get to show their market animals?
 1. Do you think it was a good alternative for those exhibitors?
 2. If not, what do you think would have been a better option?
18. Do you think the cancelation of the 2020 market livestock shows was necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 1. Why or why not?
19. Overall, what were your thoughts about OYE's overall handling of the 2020 situation?
20. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to discuss or think I should know?
21. Is there anyone you think I should reach out to that may be a good candidate for this study?
22. I'm going to read back a summary of our interview (read a summary of your notes). Is this an accurate summary of our discussion? Anything you want to add/clarify?
23. Thank you for your time, and please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or would like to add any additional information.

Appendix D – Parent Interview Guide

Questions for Parents

1. Have you had an opportunity to read the participant information form?
 1. You acknowledge that this interview will be recorded and information from this interview will be used for research purposes only?
 2. Do you agree to participate in this study?
2. What is your full name and how many kids did you have showing at the 2020 Oklahoma Youth Expo?
 1. What species do your kids show?
 1. Are they breeding or market animals?
 2. How long have you and your kids been attending OYE?
3. Going into the 2020 OYE, did you have any reservations or concerns that the show may face challenges in regards to COVID-19?
 1. If so, what were they?
 2. If not, why not?
4. From your perspective, can you explain to me the events that unfolded during the 2020 OYE?
5. During the 2020 show, where did you look to receive information about show updates and schedule changes?
 1. Follow-up about what they thought if they listed non-social media/online
6. What social media sites did you use?
7. What did you think of the Oklahoma Youth Expo's use of social media and online platforms in regard to schedule changes?
 1. Where did you look for recent updates and information regarding the show schedule?
 2. What would you have liked to have seen done differently?
8. Did you use the OYE app?
 1. If so, did it have useful and timely information?
 1. Can you describe the type of information you gained or looked for while using the app?
 2. If not, why not?
9. Did you have any face-to-face communication with OYE staff?
 1. Can you describe what face-to-face interaction with staff was like?
 2. Can you explain your level of satisfaction with face-to-face communication with staff?
10. Can you explain to me whether or not you believe OYE staff did everything in their power to keep the show going?
 1. Do you think OYE could have done more to keep the show going?
 1. Why or why not?
 2. What were your thoughts about how staff communicated issues?

Appendix D – Parent Interview Guide Continued

11. Do you think OYE being shut down early because of the COVID-19 crisis could have been foreseen?
 1. If so, how do you think OYE could have better prepared for this crisis?
12. Did the cancellation of the market shows have an emotional impact on your children?
13. What were your thoughts about the OYE scholarship opportunity for those students who did not get to show their market animals?
 1. Do you think it was a good alternative for those exhibitors?
 2. If not, what do you think would have been a better option?
14. Do you think the cancelation of the 2020 market livestock shows was necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 1. Why or why not?
15. Overall, what were your thoughts about OYE's overall handling of the 2020 situation?
16. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to discuss or think I should know?
17. Is there anyone you think I should reach out to that may be a good candidate for this study?
18. I'm going to read back a summary of our interview (read a summary of your notes). Is this an accurate summary of our discussion? Anything you want to add/clarify?
19. Thank you for your time, and please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or would like to add any additional information.

VITA

Bree Anne Elliott

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE OKLAHOMA YOUTH EXPO'S
MARCH 2020 COVID-19 RESPONCE

Major Field: Agricultural Communications

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Agricultural Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2020.

Experience:

Oklahoma State University, digital and social media specialist, August 2020 – May 2022

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food, and Forestry, communications and public information assistant, April 2019 – July 2022