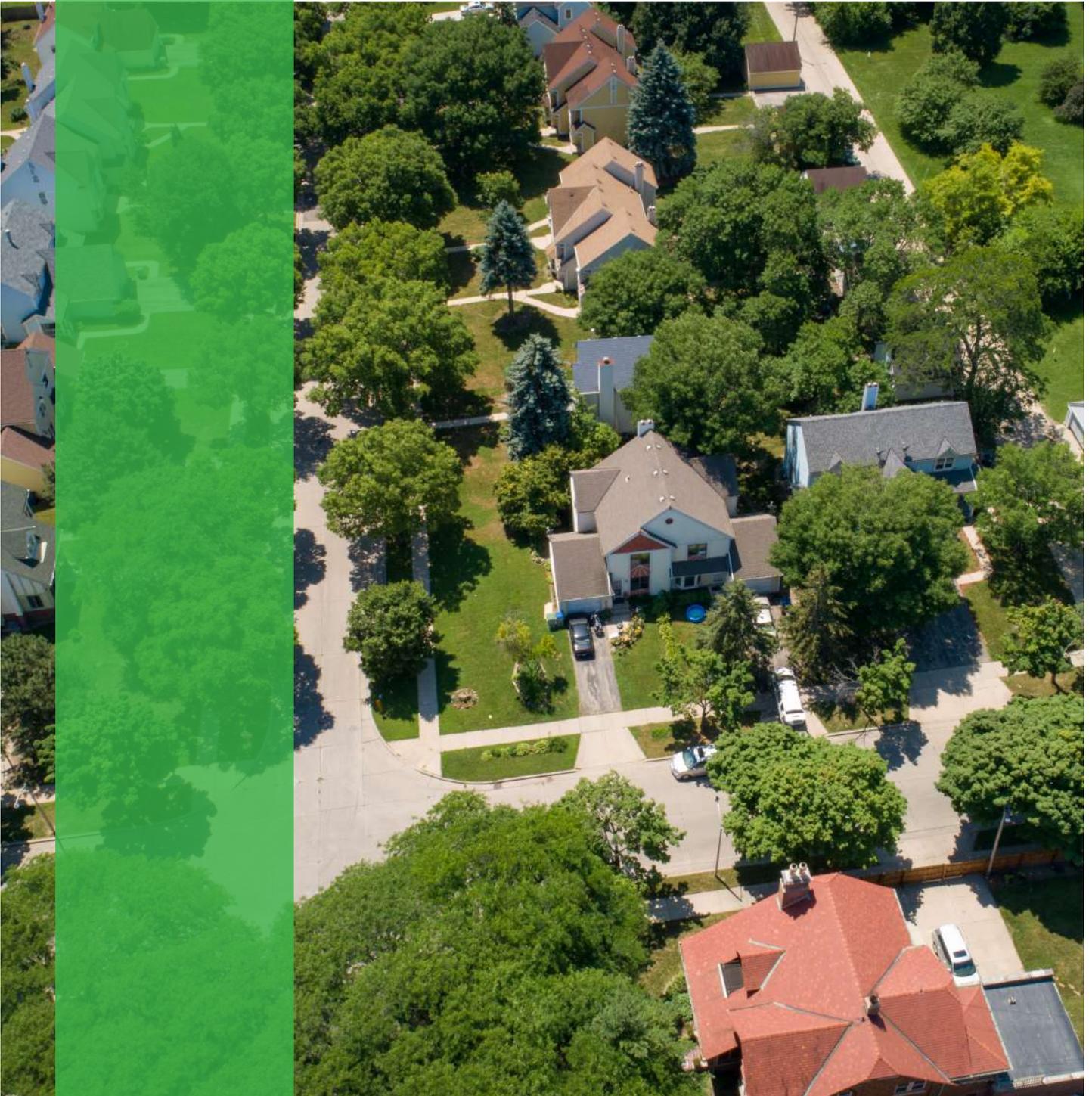


## Using Social Media to Connect Homeowners with Arborists: Results from a Paid Facebook Ad Test Campaign



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this brief, we describe and explore results from our field test of a Facebook paid advertising campaign, designed to connect homeowners and other urban landowners with a certified arborist in their local community. Our goal was to provide evidence-based recommendations to communities and public and private urban forestry professionals about which types of messages are most effective for generating landowners' interest in hiring a certified arborist to help them care for their trees. Ultimately by working with a certified arborist, urban landowners play a constructive role in supporting the health of the urban forest.

From the 2017 Wisconsin Urban Landowner Survey, we learned that homeowners most trust private tree care professionals (such as arborists) for information and advice about caring for their trees (Thostenson et al., 2017). We also learned from the survey that over 80% of homeowners intend to prune their trees in the next five years, while fewer than 40% intend to plant trees in the next five years. To test these insights, we designed four Facebook ads to be hosted by the Wisconsin Arborist Association (WAA), a trusted message source, to explore the effectiveness of targeting homeowners with outreach messages related to pruning and planting trees.

To access the report on this statewide survey of urban homeowners, see [www.forestryinsights.org/urban-forestry/](http://www.forestryinsights.org/urban-forestry/)



### Our audience: All adults in four Wisconsin urban areas

For our message test, we kept our audience broad and inclusive rather than limiting our audience based on assumptions about who would respond to our ads. To obtain broad geographical representation throughout Wisconsin, the four ads targeted all adults 18 years of age or older living in both city and suburban neighborhoods across four urban areas in the state: Green Bay, Madison, Milwaukee and Wausau. We excluded people who already followed the WAA's Facebook page, in order to avoid their overexposure to our ads, to capture people who are not yet familiar with the WAA, and to avoid interfering with the WAA's ongoing "organic" posts directed at people who have already "liked" or followed their page. While we didn't specifically limit our ads to be shown to homeowners, our ad messages and photos were directed to homeowners.

## KEY INSIGHTS

- Women and older people (55+) were more likely to click on the ads, as compared to men and younger people.
- In Milwaukee alone, the most successful messages centered around avoiding problems related to *planting* new trees.
- In three of the four urban areas (Green Bay, Madison, Wausau), the most successful messages centered around *pruning* and avoiding property damage.
- Ads with loss frames (focusing on preventing and avoiding problems with trees) were the best performing ads, both in terms of total link clicks and cost per link click.



### Our “call to action:” Go to the WAA arborist-for-hire website to learn more

The Facebook ads encouraged our audience to “Learn more” and to “Contact a local arborist to help” by clicking on a link to the WAA’s certified arborist-for-hire webpage (<http://www.waa-isa.org/arborist-for-hire/>). The website (1) explains what an arborist can do for clients, and (2) provides a database to easily look-up a local certified arborist.

### Our budget and timeline: \$4,500 over 2 weeks

The ads ran for two weeks, from June 15 to June 29, 2018. To ensure a large enough response by our audience to compare the effectiveness of the four ads within each urban area, we spent approximately \$4,500. Each urban area had a different budget adjusted for differences in population size between the areas.

## THE FOUR ADS

### Using social science to design more powerful ads: Gain and loss framing

Framing effects refer to when people react to a particular choice in different ways depending on how the choice is presented to them (e.g. as a loss or as a gain). The idea of message framing is that the composition of a message influences how individuals process and respond to the message by making certain parts of an idea more salient (Cheng, et al., 2011). In goal framing, an issue such as “pruning a tree” may be framed to focus attention on its potential to provide a benefit or gain (gain frame) or alternatively to prevent or avoid a problem or loss (loss frame). Research suggests that a negative (loss) frame generally has a stronger impact than a positive (gain) frame (Rothman & Salovey, 1997; Chatterjee, Heath, Milberg & France, 2000), though results are variable and dependent on context. Generally, individuals are averse to taking risks, which is why loss frames are usually more effective than gain frames (Bertolotti & Catellani, 2014).

We tested four strategic communication messages to compare the effect of gain and loss framing on the success of our ads with our target audience. Based on insights from the Wisconsin Urban Landowner Survey, the messages focused on two broad, desired tree care behaviors: planting and pruning trees.



#### MESSAGE SOURCE

Wisconsin Arborist Association

#### TARGET AUDIENCE

Facebook users 18 years of age and older, who live in the four target WI urban areas, and who don’t currently “follow” the WAA Facebook page.

#### ACTION

Go to website to learn more about contacting an arborist to help with pruning / planting.

#### MESSAGE FRAME

Gain Frame versus Loss Frame

**Research suggests that a negative (loss) frame generally has a stronger impact than a positive (gain) frame.**

## Planting - Gain Frame:

Emphasized the positive outcomes that occur by working with a certified arborist: planting the right tree in the right location can keep a tree healthy and problem-free for generations.



The image shows a Facebook advertisement for the Wisconsin Arborist Association (WAA). At the top left is the WAA logo, followed by the text "Wisconsin Arborist Association" and "Sponsored". The main text of the ad reads: "Thinking about planting a new tree in your yard? A local ISA Certified Arborist® can help you pick the right tree for the right location, to keep your tree healthy for generations." Below the text is a photograph of an elderly woman in a light blue outfit kneeling on a grassy lawn, holding a small sapling, while a young boy in a plaid shirt and blue boots stands next to her. A shovel is visible in the background. At the bottom of the ad, the website "waa-isa.org" is listed, followed by the text "Contact an Arborist to Help" and "The WAA provides a list of certifi...". A "LEARN MORE" button is located to the right of this text.

## Planting - Loss Frame:

Emphasized the negative outcomes that occur by NOT working with a certified arborist: planting the wrong tree in the wrong place can result in future setbacks or failures.



The image shows a Facebook advertisement for the Wisconsin Arborist Association (WAA). At the top left is the WAA logo, followed by the text "Wisconsin Arborist Association" and "Sponsored". The main text of the ad reads: "Thinking about planting a new tree in your yard? A local ISA Certified Arborist® can help you avoid planting the wrong tree in the wrong place, preventing future problems." Below the text is a photograph of a man in a green t-shirt and brown pants standing in a yard next to a newly planted, somewhat sparse tree. A white house is visible in the background. At the bottom of the ad, the website "waa-isa.org" is listed, followed by the text "Contact an Arborist to Help" and "The WAA provides a list of certifi...". A "LEARN MORE" button is located to the right of this text.

## Reach

Reach refers to the number of people who saw the ad, whether it is clicked on or not. While reach is an effective measure of how many unique users viewed the ad, a higher number doesn't necessarily indicate better performance. The most effective ads may require fewer showings in order to prompt link clicks, and therefore reach fewer Facebook users more efficiently.

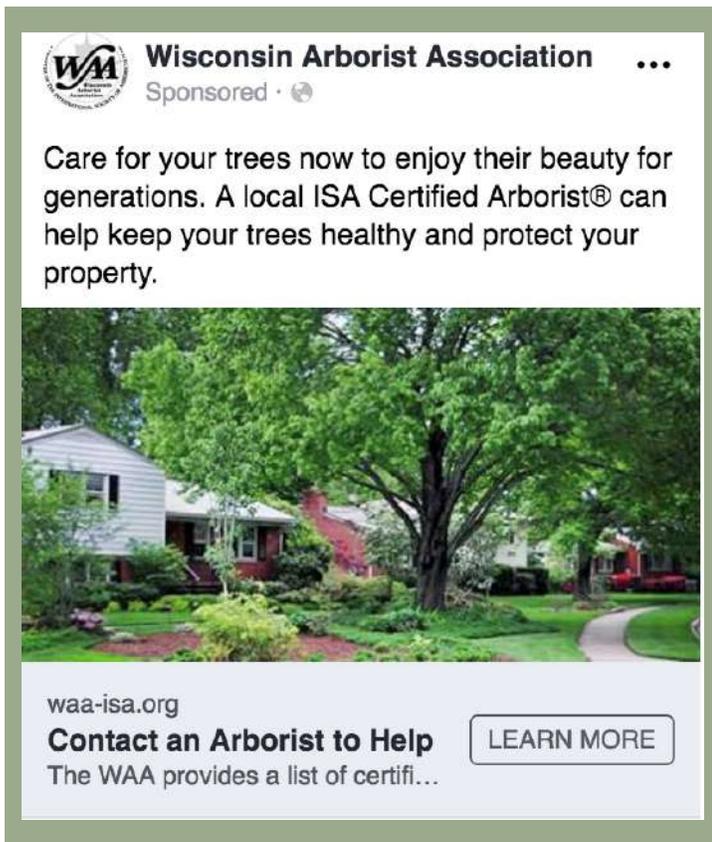
## Impressions

Impressions refers to the number of times an ad is displayed, whether it is clicked on or not. People may see multiple impressions of the same post. While each impression will not result in an action by a Facebook user, seeing the same message multiple times still builds awareness of your message.



## Pruning - Gain Frame:

Emphasized the positive outcomes that occur by working with a certified arborist: pruning a tree now can keep it healthy and protect the homeowner's property.



**WAA Wisconsin Arborist Association** ...  
Sponsored · 🌐

Care for your trees now to enjoy their beauty for generations. A local ISA Certified Arborist® can help keep your trees healthy and protect your property.



waa-isa.org  
**Contact an Arborist to Help** [LEARN MORE](#)  
The WAA provides a list of certifi...

## Pruning - Loss Frame:

Emphasized the negative outcomes that occur by NOT working with a certified arborist: ignoring problems with a tree now can lead to future bigger problems later, such as property damage.



**WAA Wisconsin Arborist Association** ...  
Sponsored · 🌐

Ignoring problems with your trees now will only lead to bigger problems later. A local ISA Certified Arborist® can prevent you from losing your trees and reduce risk to your property.



waa-isa.org  
**Contact an Arborist to Help** [LEARN MORE](#)  
The WAA provides a list of certifi...

### Link clicks

Link clicks or click-throughs refers to how many people followed up on the ad by clicking on it to learn more. Although total link clicks is a sound measure for how appealing an ad may be to a particular audience, this measure does not consider the efficiency of an ad, referred to as the cost per link click.

### Cost per link click

Cost per link click (i.e. the cost per result for our campaign) refers to the cost of getting each person to click on the ad to learn more. Cost per link click is the best indicator of how successful each ad was at reaching the target audience.



## RESULTS

Overall, from the 16 different ads we tested (four ads in four urban areas):

- 2,791 people clicked on one of the ads (link clicks)
- The average cost per link click was \$1.62
- 169,536 people were “reached” with the ads, at a cost of \$0.02 per individual reached. Each person reached was exposed to the ads an average of 3.45 times for a reported 585,385 unique “impressions.”
- As an added benefit, the number of “likes” or new followers for the WAA’s Facebook page increased from 1,005 to 1,143 during the two-week period.

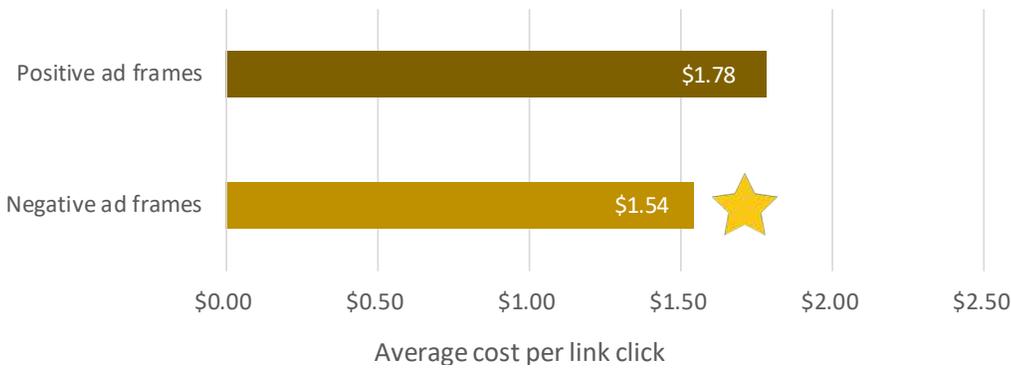
### Link Clicks

One of the primary metrics we used to compare the effectiveness of our ads was the total number of link clicks that each ad received. **In three of the four urban areas (Green Bay, Madison and Wausau), the *pruning - loss frame* (negative) ads had the most link clicks, making this ad the most effective overall.** In Milwaukee alone, the *planting - loss frame* (negative) ad had the highest number of link clicks. These results are consistent with past research that shows people are more receptive to loss frames as compared to gain frames.

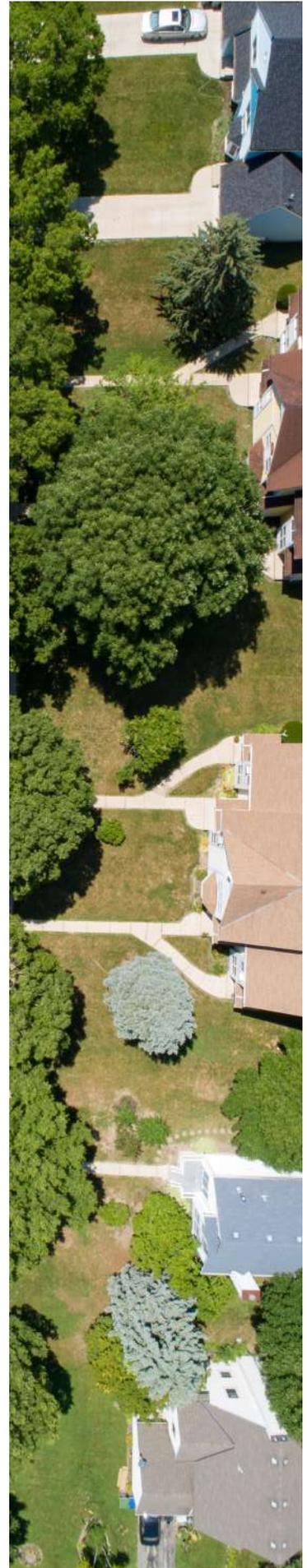
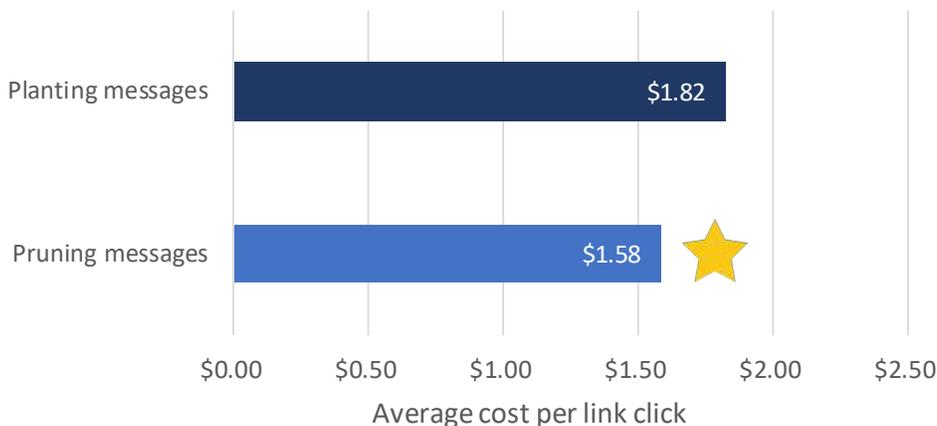
### Cost Per Link Click

Also consistent with past research, in three of the four urban areas (Green Bay, Madison and Wausau), the *pruning - loss frame* ads had the lowest cost per link click, making this ad the most effective overall. In Milwaukee alone, the *planting - loss frame* ad had the lowest cost per link click.

Overall, *negative (loss)* frames were most successful



Overall, *pruning* messages were most successful

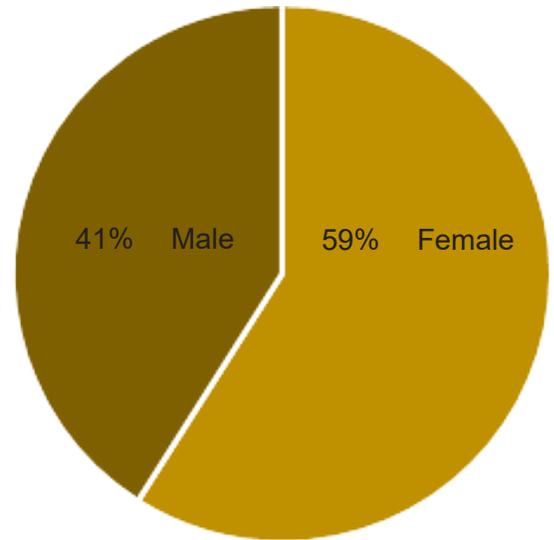


## Demographics

More women clicked on the ads (59% of all link clicks) as compared to men (41% of all link clicks), and people who clicked the ads also tended to be older, with the largest age categories clicking on the ads being people 55 to 64 years old (24%) and 65 years or older (37%).

The difference in how men and women respond to tree care messages also resonates with our survey results: female homeowners rated the benefits from the trees in their yard as more important, in comparison to male homeowners. These insights suggest that women appear to be an important audience to target for tree care outreach and may be more likely than men to call an arborist to talk about tree care.

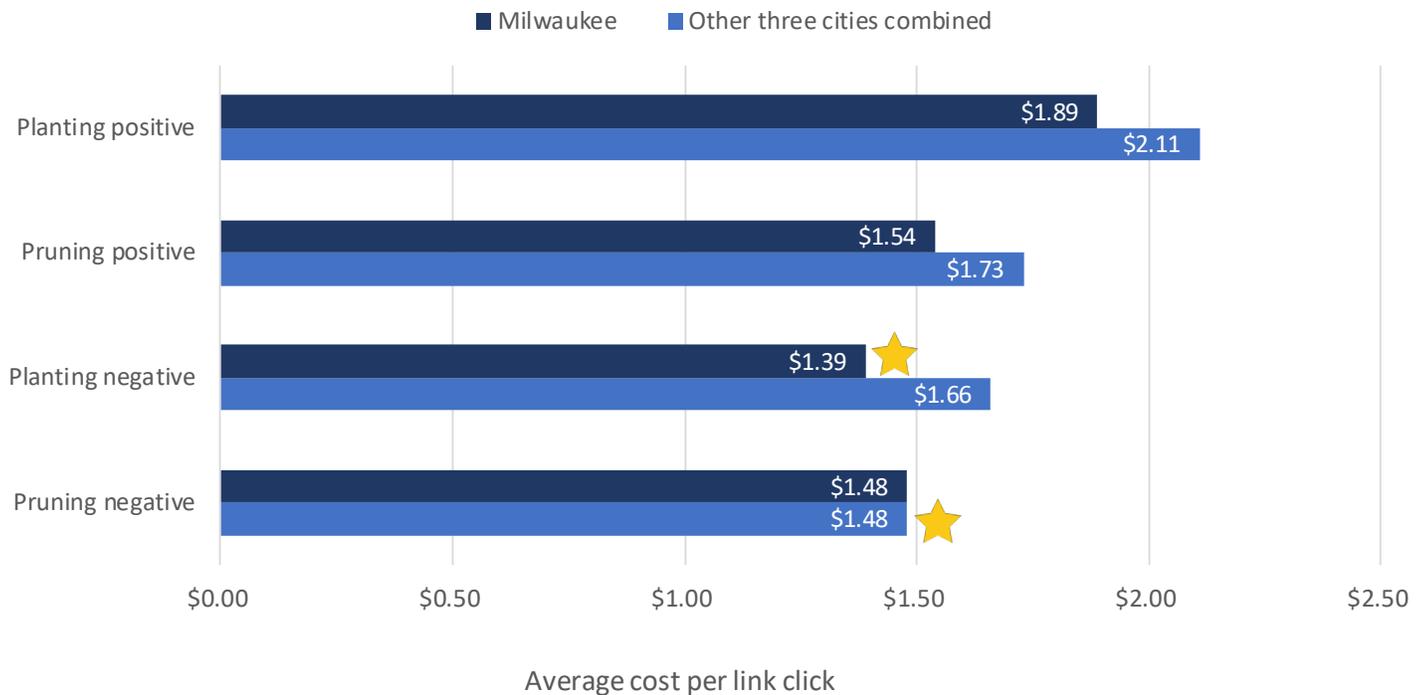
This study should help mitigate the notion that social media is not an effective means for reaching older people about urban forestry related issues. Indeed, people 55 or older were among the most responsive, and those 65 or older were the most responsive of all age groups to our ads. In terms of reaching millennials and younger audiences, future research should explore the use of Instagram or Snapchat as these are both social media platforms that are more widely adopted among younger age groups.



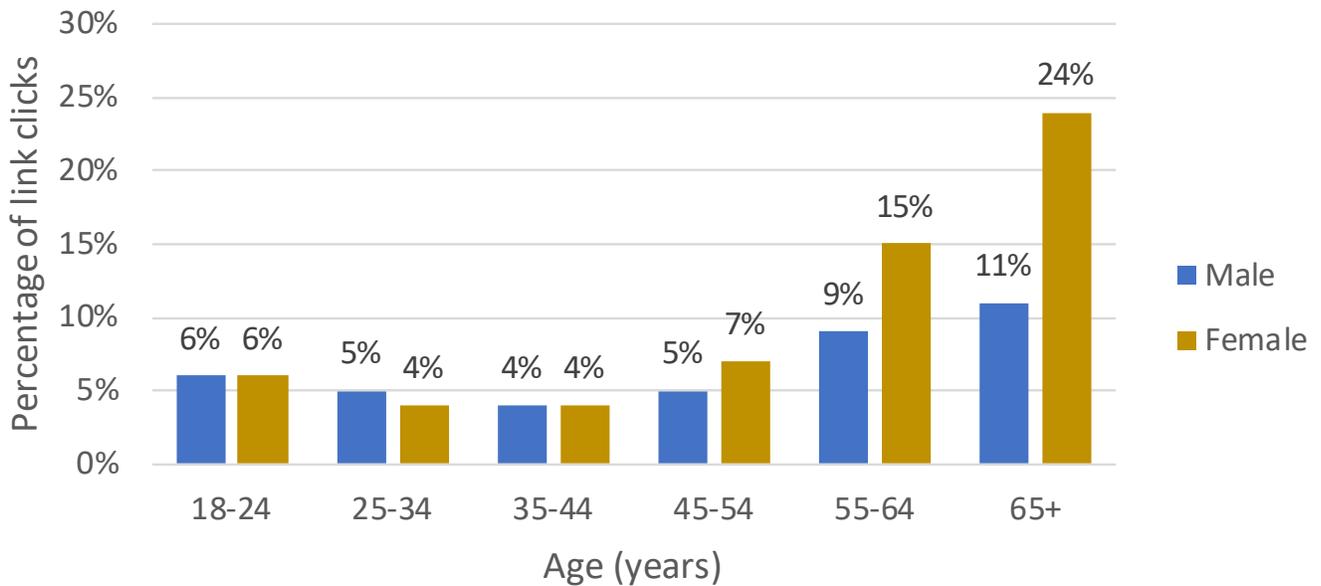
### KEY INSIGHTS:

Our data suggests that for future social media outreach using Facebook, targeting older individuals, especially those 55 or over -- rather than the more general audience of all adults 18+ in Wisconsin that were targeted in this study -- may be a more cost-effective way to reach new prospective customers. We intentionally made our sample inclusive of all age groups but this also allowed us to track which age groups were most receptive to our ads. If we targeted our ads more precisely (e.g., toward homeowners, women only, or older age groups only), our cost per link click likely would have gone down, as it would require Facebook to show the ad to fewer people to obtain the same results.

### In three of four cities, the *pruning negative* ad was most successful



## Among people 45 years of age and older, women clicked on the ads more often than men



COST PER RESULT		REACH		LINK CLICKS	
Male	\$1.65	Male	77,664	Male	1,125
Female	\$1.60	Female	90,144	Female	1,651

### Limitations

*Finding powerful photos:* It's surprisingly challenging to select photos that capture the 'essence' of a message frame. Future outreach studies should examine a wider range of images than the ones we compared in this message test to determine which images are most effective.

*Comparing planting and pruning messages:* It is also difficult to determine from our data whether planting or pruning contexts are more effective for garnering interest on social media, because both of our planting ads had people in the photos, whereas both the pruning ads did not. This difference was because we had a difficult time finding appropriate images related to pruning for both positive and negative frames that also had people in them.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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