

Reaching New Audiences: The Value of Public Relations to a University

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### **Executive Summary**

In an increasingly connected society, public relations serves an important role in connecting brands, organizations and movements with the communities they wish to attract. For universities, brand promotion via public relations can help in growing and/or bettering a university community by attracting students, faculty, staff and supporters with the promotion and maintenance of a positive public image. This research aims to investigate the value of a public relations department to a major university by looking specifically at its ability to reach new audiences outside of the direct university community by working with outside media outlets. By looking at the success and reach of the content distributed to outside media outlets by a university public relations department over the span of one month, results are hoped to not only identify potential patterns in successful content, but to indicate exactly how much the university has increased the reach of its promotional material by having a public relations department work with local, regional and national media outlets. This figure will help in defining the value of public relations to a university.

*Keywords:* public relations, media, university, reach, audience

### **Reaching New Audiences: The Value of Public Relations to a University**

This research will be conducted on behalf of the Office of Communications and Marketing at Texas Tech University, which spearheads the external communications, marketing and public relations efforts for the university. Founded in Lubbock, Texas, this department focuses on sharing Texas Tech's story with the public via media relations, broadcast, graphic design, marketing, photography, digital communications and web development. The communications team within the Office of Communications and Marketing focuses on two main operations: the maintenance of its website, Texas Tech Today ([today.ttu.edu](http://today.ttu.edu)), which is the official news source of Texas Tech and features all content developed by the office staff and shared via Texas Tech's official social media platforms; and the distribution of select content developed by the office staff to outside media outlets on scales ranging from local and regional to statewide and national media organizations.

The Texas Tech Today website and its featured content is targeted to a Texas Tech-connected audience, as the website's reach is extended via the main university homepage ([ttu.edu](http://ttu.edu)), a university newsletter distributed monthly to all registered students, faculty, staff and alumni, and the university's official social media platforms. Though the reach of Texas Tech Today content is great – its website had more than 940,000 visits in 2015 – its target audience does not much extend past those already connected with Texas Tech in some way. A more diverse and widespread target audience, however, is reached via the distribution of select content to outside media outlets, which they then may share (if chosen) with their particular audiences – thus expanding the reach of Texas Tech's content past those who already have a direct connection to the university.

Throughout the month of April, the Office of Communications and Marketing distributed an average of four pieces of content per day to various outside media outlets, including news releases, media advisories and expert pitches. This content is distributed with the purpose of being “picked up” by other media outlets, meaning these outlets share the content with their unique audiences via their organization’s platform(s). Though the distribution of material to the media is a large part of the department’s everyday operations, no data collection or records currently exist regarding the success or failure of distributed content in being picked up by the media organizations it is sent to.

The success of content featured on the Texas Tech Today website, however, is monitored closely and reported each week with analytics reports on the number of “hits” each piece of material has received on the website. Though these analytical records are useful in noting which content was most successful on the Texas Tech Today website, they offer no insight regarding the reach of Texas Tech’s message to audiences outside of the university community via the sharing of content by outside media outlets. As working with media organizations is a large part of the daily operations of the Office of Communications and Marketing as well as the main way it shares Texas Tech’s story with new audiences, it is necessary to establish a data collection method monitoring the outcome of distributed content.

By following up on all content distributed to media by the Office of Communications and Marketing throughout the month of April, the collection of data indicates exactly how many pieces of material were picked up by the media and to what extent the content was shared. Additional data including the date and time of distribution, the format of the material (news release, advisory or pitch), the subject of the content and the outlets sent to also helped to identify patterns regarding characteristics of successful content. By calculating the newly

expanded reach of successful distributed material based on the audience size of each outlet that shared the content (as compared to the reach of the Texas Tech Today website alone), an estimated number was derived indicating the growth of the content's reach after being picked up by media outlets. These numbers illustrate exactly how much Texas Tech's story is shared beyond the direct university community due to the collaboration of the Office of Communications and Marketing with outside media outlets. This information is useful in defining the value of public relations operations to a major university.

### **Review of Business Operation**

The Office of Communications and Marketing operates within the industries of media and communication, higher education and brand marketing. The media and communication industry houses a variety of disciplines including journalism, public relations, advertising and digital communication, with the Office of Communications and Marketing focusing primarily on public relations, media relations and digital communication practices. The department operates within the higher education industry in that it was created to serve a public university and is governmentally funded.

A major strength of the Office of Communications and Marketing is its relative lack of competitors; it serves as the primary public relations department for the entire university, working in conjunction with the smaller communications departments belonging to various colleges across campus. This creates a streamlined outreach effort in which all official Texas Tech news, updates and announcements (with the exception of athletics) sent to outside media outlets come through this particular department. As the only Carnegie Tier One university in the South Plains region, Texas Tech does not compete against many other institutions of its caliber in order to share its story with local audiences. The general focus of this region on Texas Tech

and its happenings makes the communications received from the Office of Communications and Marketing more significant to media outlets in the area than they would be if they were in competition with the communications of multiple other large, local universities.

A weakness of the department is the difficulty it often has in maintaining a comprehensive knowledge of all campus happenings. Texas Tech is a large university, and it is often challenging for the Office of Communications and Marketing to keep consistent watch for potential newsworthy stories across all colleges and departments on campus. The Office of Communications and Marketing works closely with communication contacts and personnel from within various departments on campus, who contact the office directly with ideas for potential content. This method can result in some organizations being left out of coverage due to their lack of communication with the public relations department.

The consistent growth of Texas Tech University serves as an opportunity for the Office of Communications and Marketing to grow its audience and share the university's story with an ever-expanding community via its numerous story-sharing platforms (website, newsletter, social media platforms). With the introduction of a variety of new departments, centers and institutions across campus as well as the expansion and diversification of a growing student and faculty body, Texas Tech's growth ensures there are always new stories to be told.

In addition to this growth, the ever-evolving nature of the media and communication industry ensures that the Office of Communications and Marketing will continue to implement new ways to connect with its audiences, so long as it stays up-to-date with new technology and communication tools. Though the rapidly changing industry presents many new opportunities to connect with audiences, it also serves as a potential threat to the Office of Communications and Marketing if it falls behind the curve. It is important for the department to actively evolve

alongside the media and communication industry so that it stays relevant and aware of how people connect, receive and share information as society progresses.

### **Literature Review**

Since the official practice of public relations first began with mid-19<sup>th</sup> century press agents promoting heroes from Andrew Jackson to Buffalo Bill Cody, a wide range of approaches have emerged regarding how brands and organizations appeal to the public (Grunig, 1992). In one of the earliest attempts at defining the different types of public relations practices, Historian Eric Goldman described two main methods as “the public be fooled” and “the public be informed,” the latter of which has since been defined as the public information model (Goldman, 1948). The four primary models of modern public relations were identified by James Grunig and Todd Hunt nearly four decades later, which include the public information model as well as three additional models called press agentry/publicity, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This review will focus exclusively on the public information model, as it best represents the intent behind the operations of the Office of Communications and Marketing at Texas Tech.

The public information model first emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when journalists known as “muckrakers” published deliberate attacks on government agencies and other large corporations in an effort to expose corruption and other wrongdoings to the public. In order to counter these attacks, leaders from the slandered organizations reacted by hiring in-house journalists of their own to write and circulate information about the positive happenings of their respective organizations. These in-house journalists, who became some of the first public relations practitioners, were not creating propaganda as those following the press agentry/publicity model had done in the past – rather, they were writing and distributing truthful

and accurate information, even though they filtered their writing topics to only discuss positive happenings within the organization (Grunig, 1992).

Businesses soon began to recognize the need to hire writers not only to defend themselves from bad reputations, but to explain complicated and frequently misunderstood facts about the organization and/or its operations to the public (Hiebert, 1966). The Office of Communications and Marketing, like many other departments of its kind, operates as an in-house public relations team for Texas Tech University and focuses its promotional efforts on sharing truthful and accurate, though exclusively positive, information with the public. This department operates with the public information approach, which refers to the maintenance and improvement of a brand's image by means of publicizing noteworthy information about the brand among its target audience (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The public information model emphasizes the importance of distributing content, often directed at the media, in stimulating the circulation of reputation-building information among the public. All materials distributed by the Office of Communications and Marketing fall into this image-enhancing category, including press releases, newsletters and announcements, all of which support the model's one-way communication standard (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This standard is defined as "the dissemination of information from organizations to publics, usually through the media," meaning information flows from the sender – in this case, the department at Texas Tech – to the receiving public audience, which it reaches through use of media outlets outside of the organization (Grunig, 1992).

The public information model, in addition to utilizing one-way communication techniques that share information in a manner more like a monologue than a dialogue, is also referred to as having "symmetrical" characteristics. The term "symmetrical," when referring to

public relations approaches, refers to the manner in which the communication is informative rather than persuasive. Instead of trying to change the public's opinion about their brand, symmetrical communications adjust the relationship between the brand and the public simply by providing straightforward, non-persuasive information that is filtered to include only positive facts (Grunig, 1992).

Though each of the four models of public relations have proven to be reliably measured, valid and prominent in real-world organizations, it has been noted that each model is usually not practiced "purely," meaning organizations frequently blend models together to create outreach plans or switch between models depending on the situation at hand (Grunig, 1992). For example, one study found that an organization that usually practiced the public information model actually switched to using the two-way symmetrical model in times of crisis (Cupp, 1985). Similarly, another observed organization was found to rotate between different models depending on which of several activist groups it was dealing with (Grunig L., 1986). These types of findings suggest that the models of public relations are not mutually exclusive, but can be used in correlation with each other or to respond differently to varying situations. Why, then, is the public information model selected for practice by an organization?

The answer to this question has been investigated following a number of paths, from the relationship between the organization's structure and the public relations model(s) used to trends in organizational sociology and environmental characteristics (Grunig, J. & Grunig, L., 1989) (Robbins, 1990). Grunig concluded, however, that the theoretical relationship between the models of public relations and an organization's environment and structure is more normative than positive, meaning decisions about models used are made subjectively, according to the values and opinions of those involved. This idea points to the importance of a powerful group of

leaders in each organization, called a “dominant coalition,” in deciding which public relations approach to take; this idea is known as the power-control theory. Even with the power-control theory in mind, however, the main question remains unanswered: why do these powerful groups select certain public relations models over others? Throughout his research, Grunig found three characteristics to be most important in making this decision: the organization’s culture, the public relations department’s potential and the schema for public relations within the organization (Grunig, 1992).

The culture of an organization can exemplify characteristics such as authoritarian, democratic, reactive, proactive, participative, etc. The differences between various professional cultures are mainly based on the numerous ways in which the leaders of each organization exercise their power. Power and culture within organizations lead a circular relationship in which leaders develop culture, but culture in turn influences who gains leadership (Grunig, 1992). One study looking at scientific organizations found that organizations who valued “knowledge of science” rather than “knowledge about science” were typically authoritarian cultures and used the public information model more frequently (Pollack, 1986).

The term “knowledge of science,” in this particular study, refers to knowledge coming from within the science system, which has more positive and reinforcing qualities. Oppositely, “knowledge about science” refers to information coming from outside the system, which is usually more critical in nature. These findings suggest that authoritarian-style organizations who seek to share positive and reinforcing information found from within their organization with the public are more likely to operate under the public information model (Pollack, 1986). The Office of Communications and Marketing values the “knowledge of science” idea in that their published content includes information gathered from within the Texas Tech University system,

whether it is collected by office staff writers or communication contacts from within various colleges and departments on campus. Additionally, this inner-system knowledge tends to be positive in nature, reinforcing the success of the university.

A public relations department's potential, according to Grunig, is measured based on the knowledge and leadership style of the manager, the knowledge and training of department practitioners (public relations staff members) and the equal opportunity of all team members. Many studies have been conducted to determine the relationship between department potential and public relations models used, and results have indicated the importance of characteristics ranging from the manager's education level to office professionalism and participation. Most findings discussed by Grunig, however, pointed towards the use of models exemplifying symmetrical/asymmetrical and one-way/two-way qualities rather than specific models themselves, leaving specific prerequisites for use of the public information model unidentified (Grunig, 1992).

The way in which senior managers and other organization leaders understand and define public relations produces a "schema" for public relations within the organization. A schema is a large, integrated block of knowledge that people develop to make sense of how the world operates – in the case of public relations, organization leaders create schemas based on the way in which they conceptualize the practice of public relations. This leading group's definition ultimately dictates how an organization will practice public relations, and in turn influences which model of public relations is chosen to guide the organization's operations (Grunig, 1992). After identifying the organization's target audience, leaders select an approach to use based on the best way to reach this specific group. If the proposed model is compatible with the

organization's culture, potential and schema as well as the manager's knowledge and training, the model is implemented (Grunig, J. & Grunig, L., 1989).

When Grunig and Hunt defined each of the four models of public relations in 1984, they estimated that 50 percent of organizations operate under the public information approach. Of these organizations, they predicted the majority to be government, nonprofit, association and business organizations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Though they were correct about some of the types of organizations that use the public information model, they were quite inaccurate regarding the popularity of the model as compared to the other three. Further research found the press agency model to be the most widely used, with public information actually coming in last place (Grunig, 1984) (Ossareh, 1987) (Schneider, 1985) (Wetherell, 1989).

Grunig and Hunt were correct, however, in predicting the consistency of the public information model's use in government organizations. Within this category, the public information approach came in first place, especially in scientific organizations (Habbersett, 1983) (Pollack, 1986). The public information approach is used most commonly in government organizations because of historical restrictions placed on its practice there, as well as public relations practitioners having the most knowledge about this particular model due to their historically journalistic backgrounds (Wetherell, 1989) (Grunig, 1992). These suggestions are supported by the Office of Communications and Marketing's use of the public information model, as Texas Tech University is a government organization as well as largely scientific in nature, as demonstrated by the content of its public relations materials.

### **Methodology**

In order to investigate the value of the Office of Communications and Marketing to Texas Tech University, a month's worth of public relations data was compiled in order to analyze how working with outside media outlets increased the department's ability to reach new audiences outside of the direct university community. By quantifying the success and expanded reach of each piece of content distributed to outside media outlets throughout the month of April, the results roughly estimate how much Texas Tech has increased the reach of its promotional material by having a public relations department collaborate with outside media. This figure is intended to help define the value of a public relations department to a major university.

Data for this project was collected using three main software programs. The first, Basecamp, is a web-based project management and collaboration tool used by the Office of Communications and Marketing to schedule and keep track of the department's published and distributed content. By looking at all projects listed on Basecamp for the month of April, an accurate list was made including every piece of content the department distributed to outside media throughout April, starting on the 1<sup>st</sup> and going through the 29<sup>th</sup> (the last office work day of the month). Basecamp was able to supply information including the title, date and time of each material's distribution as well as a link to its online webpage. In addition, Basecamp indicated the "type" of each piece of content (news release, advisory or pitch) and a summary that helped categorize each piece of content into various topic categories including campus happenings, award, faculty, student, or achievement announcement.

The second software program used to collect data was Meltwater. Meltwater is a media intelligence software tool with media monitoring capabilities that allows users to search for relevant keywords through news sources from around the world. With the help of this software, it was possible to use distinct keywords from each piece of content distributed by the department

to search for matches in all outside media outlets' publications throughout the month of April. These searches determined whether or not content distributed by the Office of Communications and Marketing was "picked up" by any outside media outlets. If content was picked up, Meltwater indicated each media outlet it was published by as well as a link to its publication and an estimate of that particular outlet's "reach."

Meltwater calculates a media outlet's reach based on the number of unique visitors to a media outlet's IP address over the span of one month, with each media outlet's reach number more or less representing the size of its audience. For example, Lubbock Online had a reach of 112,000 in April according to Meltwater, while KLBK had 30,000. Each reach number is an estimate, as it Meltwater rounds these figures to the nearest 1,000. Meltwater was able to provide data including whether or not each piece of content got picked up by at least one media outlet (yes or no), which outlets picked it up (divided into categories of local, regional, state and national outlets) and the combined reach of all outlets that published Texas Tech's content. This combined reach number, when compared to the reach of the Texas Tech Today website alone (which was calculated to be 58,000 based on the number of unique visitors to the website in April), demonstrates the growth of Texas Tech's content's reach due to the department's collaboration with outside media outlets. The audience expansion figures were calculated using the formula for percentage growth, in which the combined reach of outside media outlets is divided by Texas Tech Today's reach and multiplied by 100.

The final piece of software used was Microsoft Excel, which was used to compile and organize data collected from Basecamp and Meltwater. The Excel spreadsheet features the following data columns: name of story, date of distribution, time of distribution, type of story, type of content, secondary type of content, webpage link, picked up?, local outlets, regional

outlets, state outlets, national outlets, and combined reach of all outlets. This data was analyzed to determine the average extended reach and percent growth of Texas Tech Today content after it was shared with the media, as well as used to identify potential patterns in successful content. Figures calculated using Excel included how many pieces of content were distributed to outside media throughout April, the percent of distributed content that was picked up by media, percent of content picked up by local, regional/state and national media outlets and various figures representing the extended reach of content and the percent growth of its audience after being picked up by the media. These figures help to better define the value of the Office of Communications and Marketing to Texas Tech University.

### **Results**

Over the month of April, the Office of Communications and Marketing distributed 82 pieces of content to outside media outlets, sending out an average of four pieces of content per day. Of this content, 55 were news releases (67%), 24 were advisories (29%) and three were expert pitches (4%). Of the 82 materials distributed this month, 45 were picked up by at least one media outlet, meaning 55% of the department's distributed content was successful in reaching an audience beyond the direct Texas Tech community.

Of the successful content, 96% were picked up by at least one local Lubbock media outlet, the most common companies being Lubbock Online, KLBK and KCBD. In addition to local media, 38% of the department's distributed content was also picked up by at least one outlet outside of the Lubbock area (excluding those on a national scale). These regional/state media outlets range from nearby companies such as NewsWest 9 in Midland and other Texas community publications such as KSWO in Wichita Falls, to media companies in other states such as WMC-TV Action News 5 in Memphis, Tennessee. Lastly, of the department's successful

content, 9% were picked up by at least one national media outlet. These national media outlets included mainly financial, investment, business and insurance focused websites, but the list also includes Inside Higher Ed as well as the agricultural publication Cotton Grower.

With Texas Tech Today's audience consisting of about 58,000 unique visitors in April, the Office of Communications and Marketing was able to grow their reach substantially by distributing content to outside media outlets to share with their perspective audiences. When media outlets share Texas Tech's content, an "extended audience" is reached, which refers to an audience beyond Texas Tech Today's own 58,000. By adding these extensions, Texas Tech has an "expanded audience," which refers to the combined audiences of each media outlet that picked up Texas Tech's content plus the audience of Texas Tech Today.

*Extended audience = combined reach # of all outside media outlets who picked up story*

*Expanded audience = (extended audience #) + (Texas Tech Today's reach #)*

Even the least successful of the picked up content – the stories which were only picked up by one local outlet and reached an extended audience of just 30,000 – still expanded Texas Tech Today's reach by 52% (58,000 Texas Tech Today audience + 30,000 extended audience = 88,000 expanded audience). The most successful of the picked up content, a release about Texas Tech's financial planning academy for teens, reached an extended audience of 76,757,000, growing the content's reach by 132,340%. This particular story, having been picked up by two local outlets, 54 regional/state outlets and 19 national outlets, was the definite outlier of this set of data – the second most successful story of the month had an extended reach numbering 981,000. Even this figure, however, still expanded Texas Tech's content's reach by 1,691%. On

average, the Office of Communications and Marketing's successful distributed content in April (excluding the outlier story) expanded the department's reach by 526%.

Predictably, content picked up only by local outlets had expanded reach numbers lower than those also picked up by regional and state media, which in turn were also lower than content picked up by national media outlets. On average, stories picked up only by local outlets grew Texas Tech's reach by 162%, while stories picked up by regional and state outlets grew the audience by 1,192%. Stories picked up by national media outlets experienced an expanded reach of 33,423% on average (this figure includes the outlier story).

As for the types of stories that were most successful, a few speculations can be made regarding what the media tended to pick up most in April. The most obvious pattern was the success of stories having to do with "campus happenings," a category generally referring to Texas Tech events including seminars, featured speakers, discussion panels, festivals, films, performances, exhibits, contests, fundraisers, ceremonies, etc. Of Texas Tech's content that was picked up by at least one media outlet, 51% were categorized under campus happenings. In second place was the "award" category, with 33% of successful content having to do with Texas Tech winning some kind of award or recognition, whether it be presented to a college, department, an athletic or academic team, a faculty member, a student, etc. As for secondary categories, the media tended to pick up stories regarding the Climate Science Center (7%), the Personal Financial Planning Department (7%) and spirit organizations (9%) more than other departments and organizations on campus.

## **Discussion**

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the Office of Communications and Marketing, by working with outside media outlets, is successfully able to share Texas Tech's story with audiences larger and more diverse than its own. Because the majority of the content distributed by the Office of Communications and Marketing is successful in being picked up by the media, an expanded audience is reached for over half of Texas Tech's stories. Even the smallest expanded audience grows Texas Tech's reach by more than 50%, meaning each story that gets picked up experiences significant audience growth, whether it is picked up by one outlet (the department's smallest success in April) or 75 outlets (the department's largest success in April).

While the majority of Texas Tech's expanded audiences are those of local Lubbock media outlets, a notable portion of the university's distributed content also reaches audiences outside of the Lubbock area and the state of Texas, some even earning the attention of national media outlets. Though an increasingly smaller portion of the university's content reaches increasingly larger outlets, the growth of the extended audience increases significantly the further stories move up the ladder. For example, even though only 9% of Texas Tech's content was picked up by national media in April, the content that did make it that far experienced an average audience growth of over 33,000%, reaching audiences numbering up to 76.8 million. This national attention is incredibly valuable to the university, even if only achieved by a few stories per month.

The growth of Texas Tech content's reach by working with outside media is heavy across the board, with an average extended audience size of over 300,000 and an average audience growth of more than 500% for each story picked up by the media. This data suggests that by working with outside media, the Office of Communications and Marketing is successfully able to

reach a significantly larger audience, and more importantly, an audience that is not already connected with the Texas Tech community. Reaching extended audiences beyond the direct Texas Tech community plays an important role in growing the university, as increased awareness leads to an increased reputation, increased applications, increased enrollment, increased faculty, increased research, increased endowments and eventually increased prestige for the university. Because of the ripple effect that occurs after Texas Tech's story is shared with new, large, widespread audiences, it is safe to assume that due to the tremendous success of the majority of its content, the Office of Communications and Marketing is incredibly valuable to Texas Tech University.

### **Limitations**

A noteworthy limitation of this study is the rounded, estimated nature of many numbers used to collect data. Meltwater, which was used to identify reach numbers for outside media outlets, rounds each outlet's reach number to the nearest 1,000, making calculations of extended audiences all estimations. Meltwater reach is calculated based on the number of unique visitors to an organization's IP address over the course of one month, which is not only an estimation but can very well vary from month to month. In an effort to balance the results of the data collection, Texas Tech Today's reach number was calculated using the same method as Meltwater, including rounding the number of visitors to the nearest 1,000 and using the month of April to determine the number of unique visitors to Texas Tech Today's IP address. Because of the rounded nature of these numbers, all extended audience, expanded audience and percent growth figures mentioned in the results section are estimates.

Another limitation of this study was the categorization of distributed content into categories, both primary and secondary, based on the themes present in each story. Stories often

fell into multiple categories, but were sorted according to the researcher's discretion, meaning figures mentioned in the results section regarding the success of certain types of content are slightly subjective and may vary. Additionally, the selection of the month of April for data collection should be noted as a possible limitation, as there are many variables that may change within the Office of Communications and Marketing from month to month, including but not limited to the amount of content distributed, types of content distributed, busy/slow times on campus, busy/slow times for outside media outlets, any significant happenings on campus or in the community that may affect readership, etc. April was selected because it is a relatively busy month for Texas Tech and the Office of Communications and Marketing, meaning a heavier, steadier stream of content was distributed throughout the month. However, as April could very well also be a busy month for many outside media outlets, this could mean they are less likely to pick up Texas Tech's stories due to an overabundance of other newsworthy materials. Possible variables affecting content distribution and success from month to month should be kept in mind when considering the results of this study.

### **Recommendations**

Out of all the content distributed to outside media outlets throughout the month, stories were more likely to be picked up if they focused on either things going on at Texas Tech (campus happenings) or things being achieved by Texas Tech and its people (awards). The Office of Communications and Marketing may experience an increased percentage of successful content if they focus their media distribution on stories within these themes, saving student, faculty and alumni profiles and feature-type stories for exclusive publication on Texas Tech Today's website. In addition, though not significantly more popular, stories focusing on the Climate Science Center, the personal financial planning program and Texas Tech spirit

organizations were slightly more likely to be picked up by the media, suggesting outside outlets may tend to favor content about programs unique to Texas Tech. The Office of Communications and Marketing may benefit from distributing more stories focused on unique, standout programs such as these that set Texas Tech apart from other universities.

Due to the descriptive nature of the data collected for this study, another recommendation for the Office of Communications and Marketing is to continue keep track of the success and expanded reaches of its distributed content. Following up on stories sent to media can be a relatively easy daily task for an employee, especially using Meltwater, and can support the weekly website analytics reports by providing additional information on the success of the department's content in reaching outside audiences. As working with media is a large part of the Office of Communications and Marketing's daily operations, it would be beneficial to continue monitoring this data so that the success of the department's content is known to influence not only a growing Texas Tech community, but extended audiences as well.

This study, though serving as only a brief look into university public relations, suggested that the value of these departments is significant to a university's reputation and growth potential. Because many universities thrive from successful athletic programs, it would be interesting for future research to explore the value of athletic public relations departments to universities. Is this value comparable to that of academic public relations departments? Could these two outreach programs be stronger together? Another interesting topic for future research would be to look at how public relations practices vary from large and mid-size universities to small universities. Are there any variations in the practices of different sized universities? What about public universities vs. private universities? Those in highly populated, urban areas vs. smaller towns? Analyzing the variations in how many different types of universities spread their

messages and attract new community members can be beneficial in improving and diversifying the efforts of an organization like Texas Tech University, for which the public relations department has proven to be extensively valuable but nonetheless improvable.

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