

**The Influence of Identity: An Analysis of an Agricultural Publication Readers' Perceptions
for Strengthening Connection to Davis College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural
Resources**

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Introduction and Need for Research

Magazines are one technique to bolster connection to alumni and university stakeholders. However, articles should include visually appealing images and graphics to position the magazine the best to meet stakeholder expectations. Understanding readers' perceptions on *The Agriculturist* can help identify what type of designs and compelling content readers are interested in. In order to deliver the best type of content to readers, it is critical to understand readers' perceptions and connection to the magazine (Herring et al., 2007; Wood-Turley & Tucker, 2003). Readership surveys serve this purpose, and they have been described as "market surveys try to identify who uses the product, but in this case, who reads the magazine. Demonstrating a valuable readership of a magazine can increase the value and advertising revenues" (Reichheld, 2003). Within Davis College, *The Agriculturist* was moved from the official publication of Department of Agricultural Education and Communication to the official publication of Davis College. Therefore, there was a critical need to assess how to more effectively deliver content to help drive the connection of the college to a variety of stakeholders including donors, alumni, potential students, and supporters. Different types of media can give individuals a variety of information, influencing their perceptions, attitude, and connection toward organizations (Wunderlich & Gatto, 2015). Because social media has forced individuals to change the way they communicate, it is important to identify identity and encourage a sense of belonging or connection to Texas Tech University (Munshi et al., 2020). Culture and social identity influence our behaviors and affect personal choices like what to eat, wear, and who we choose to surround ourselves with (Padilla & Perez, 2003). The purpose of this research is to evaluate how *The Agriculturist* represents the values and identity of Davis College, from the readers' perspective, to strengthen connection to the college and improve future content development. To do so, the following objectives guided the study. RO1: Describe words or emotions (themes) readers of *The Agriculturist* associate Davis College with. RO2: Analyze what readers of *The Agriculturist* value about Davis College. RO3: Identify if *The Agriculturist* represents the values and identity of Davis College.

Theoretical Framework

To better align *The Agriculturist* to its stakeholders, we applied the theoretical lens of social identity, which has been described as a technique to understand how individuals see themselves based on groups (e.g., schools, clubs, and communities) they belong to. Group identities have been found to shape how individuals think, feel, and behave (Hogg et al., 2023). Within the theoretical lens, individuals categorize themselves and others into a group, adopt the identity of the group by demonstrating its values and norms, and compare themselves to other groups to maintain or enhance self-esteem (Hogg et al., 2023). This study examined how to better connect readers to Davis College through *The Agriculturist* by appealing to their sense of group belonging.

Methods

We distributed a survey questionnaire via Qualtrics to readers of the magazine. To do so, multiple methods were employed in Spring 2025: emails to Davis College email subscriber as well as posts on Davis College and *The Agriculturist* social media platforms. In alignment with Dillman's (2014) tailored design method, we had three reminders to complete the survey. To incentivize participation, respondents were entered into a randomized drawing to win 5 football tickets for the upcoming season. We gathered 210 responses; however, after data cleaning (i.e.,

removing incomplete responses), 173 were deemed usable. The data reported in this poster were part of a larger study. However, for the purpose of this study, our questions were: “When you think of Davis College, what words or emotions come to mind?” (open ended question), “What do you value most about Davis College?” (7-item, 5-point Likert Scale), and “Do you feel *The Agriculturist* effectively reflects the values and identity of Davis College?” (Open ended). The participants ranged from 80% female ($n = 101$) and 20% male ($n = 25$). Participants' ages ranged from 18 years old to 74 years old. The majority of respondents were affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications ($n = 70$), followed by the Department of Animal and Food Sciences ($n = 13$), Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics ($n = 3$), while ($n = 17$) were not affiliated with Davis College. Quantitative data were analyzed in Excel using frequencies and percentages; whereas, the open-ended qualitative data were thematically analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Results

To assess objective 1, we thematically analyzed open-ended responses related to the respondents' words or emotions associated with Davis College. We found almost all responses included a word or emotion that was positive. Responses were recorded and placed into six different categories. Those themes include *community and belonging*, *education*, *quality and value*, *excellence*, *vision*, and *experience*. The *community and belonging* theme included words like *belonging and home*. The theme *education* included words like *hands-on and student-centered*. The theme *quality and value* included words like *committed and leadership*. The theme *excellence* included words like *champions and excellence*. The theme *vision* included words like *ground-breaking and impactful*. Lastly, the theme *experience* included words like *excitement and life changing*. Interestingly, most respondents reflected on their time at Texas Tech University, while current students or supporters framed their response based on their current experience.

Conclusions, Implications & Recommendations

The results imply readers perceive Davis College as a positive experience that has an impact on their lives. Findings also imply that 61% of readers strongly agreed *The Agriculturist* effectively represents the values and identity of Davis College providing a place to improve connection to the college. Drawing from the lens of the social identity theory, content should continue to reinforce group identification to improve loyalty and/or investment readers may have with the publication. To more effectively enhance social identity, magazine content (e.g., stories and visuals) should be developed to reinforce the themes of community and belonging, education, quality and value, excellence, vision, and experience. By building stories based on these themes, the magazine could provide a place to bolster social identity. For future editions of the magazine, we recommend continuing readership surveys before magazine creation. This would provide insight on what readers are looking for, as well as readers and stakeholders to voice their opinions and pitch story ideas. We also recommend utilizing future research to segment or group respondents based on characteristics (i.e., age) to determine how to tailor content to specific stakeholder groups needs and communications preferences. Also, content could be created to feature alumni spotlights who share their positive experience of Davis College. This type of content can reinforce readers identity and sense of belonging to Davis College by relating to alumni stories who are advocates of Davis College and express their identity and sense of belonging.

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