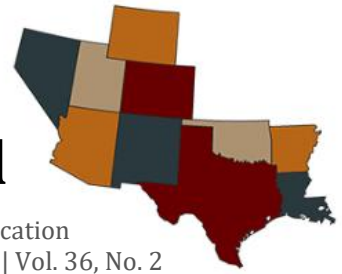


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## “Thoughtful, well-written and vital” or “Outdated, sensational, and biased”? A Longitudinal Case Study of Changing Readership Patterns at the North Texas Daily

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Using a mixed-method approach, this project examines whether readers’ tastes and attitudes toward the *North Texas Daily*, a campus newspaper at the University of North Texas have changed between 2013 and 2019 when the newspaper implemented digital-first strategies. Survey results indicate that perceptions of relevance of the content have remained the most significant factor for readership. Moreover, an in-depth textual analysis revealed themes of community engagement and alienation, which also affected readership. Normative and industry implications of the findings are discussed.

*Keywords: campus newspapers, readership, relevance, representation, perceived efficacy, campus involvement, and community building*

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**D**eclining newspaper readership rates among young people is well-documented (Atkins, 1994), but their media consumption habits remain important to study because they could shape future trends in the newspaper industry (Peiser, 2000; Collins & Armstrong, 2008). Much of the existing research examines levels of youth readership, demographics, and reasons for the overall decline in readership (Armstrong & Collins, 2009a, 2009b; Zerba, 2011). But given the shift in the media industry’s business model and news gathering routines, along with declining levels of media trust, it is important to examine attitudes toward newspapers in this context. This paper analyzes this issue in the context of campus newspapers, using a unique dataset collected in 2013 and 2019. We examine how reader’s tastes

have changed and the extent to which the paper helps or fails to create a sense of community on campus.

While university newspapers are small in comparison to large national and metropolitan newspapers, they are an important subject of research for a number of reasons. First, young people have the potential to obtain the habit and desire for newspaper readership through enculturation of reading their college newspaper (Schlagheck, 1998). Second, future journalists and editors who are producing college newspapers will soon enter the industry (Filak & Reinardy, 2011); they are learning about and adapting to reader preferences through college newspapers. This will impact how major newspapers are run in the future. Third, research suggests that small community and non-profit newspapers are thriving while large papers struggle (Hargrove, Miller, & Stempel, 2011). College newspapers are community newspapers in the sense that they target, adapt to, and influence a particular population (Collins, 2003) and it is necessary to examine how they could create a larger impact in the community they serve. Lastly, college newspapers, like larger newspapers across the country, are facing financial hardships and are often forced to cut back on print editions and expand online (Supiano, 2012). Understanding youth readership trends is important to continue the tradition and viability of college newspapers.

On a wider and perhaps more important level, understanding media, young consumers, and community engagement is important to building long-term civic and political engagement. Anxiety about community engagement, particularly civic and political involvement, is an ongoing impetus for media research (e.g., Putnam's (2000) notion of "Bowling Alone"). Previous research has found that there is a link between local media use, political participation (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999) and community involvement (Stamm, Emig, & Hesse, 1997). Media use, especially newspapers, is related to greater community attachment (Hoffman & Eveland, 2010; Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Ryu, 1996) and community integration (Neuwirth, Salmon, & Neff, 1989). Media consumption has also been linked with trust in civic institutions (Moy, Pfau, & Kahlor, 1999), and an increase in civic engagement and political awareness (Pasek et al., 2006).

This study uses data from a survey conducted in 2013 and 2019 at the University of North Texas, which is a large four-year public university in an urban setting. We draw a number of important conclusions from our analyses, and provide suggestions that can be used to make campus newspapers viable and increase readership. This project has three overarching focus areas. First, we examine how readership tastes at the *North Texas Daily* have changed over the years. Second, we examine four components that could affect readership: perceived relevance of the paper, perceived efficacy of readers, readers' involvement with the campus community, and readers' perception of whether the newspaper represents the community. Lastly, we examine the extent to which readers consider the newspaper an agent for building the campus community.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Changes at the North Texas Daily in 2013 and 2019

Between 2013 and 2019, the *North Texas Daily* newspaper underwent several changes to keep up with readers' preferences. In 2013, the paper was published daily in print between Tuesday and Thursday for circulation on and off campus. In addition, the university distributed a weekend version of the paper in print format at various locations through the weekend and Monday. In summer, the university published another supplement once a month in print format. The *North Texas Daily* newspaper's website, which was created in the early 2000s was updated regularly, but the newspaper as a whole did not shift to a digital first publishing format until 2014-15. The website was optimized for use on mobile devices, and though the paper had a mobile app in 2013, it remained under-utilized. Social media presence was sparse, inconsistent, and unfocused. Lastly, in terms of distribution, 8,000-9,000 copies of the printed version of the paper were distributed daily at 70 on and off campus locations, regardless of the pick-up rates at these locations.

In 2019, the frequency of publication of the print version of the newspaper declined to once a week during the semester, on Thursdays, in addition to two print publications in summer. The paper greatly increased its social media presence adding thousands of new followers. It also increased digital offerings. The paper added a section on podcasts, and another on multimedia content. Reporters were expected to include multimedia elements in most published stories, and use apps such as Facebook Live to report live news. A new section called "The SSSS" was started in 2018 to cover movie reviews, video games, comic books, music, and trends in fashion. The website of the newspaper was completely revamped and redesigned in 2019. Today the *North Texas Daily* has the following sections: News, Sports, Arts & Life, Opinion, Events, and Multimedia, in addition to sections on classified ads and social media content. Lastly, in terms of distribution of the paper, the system was completely overhauled around 2016. By 2019, about 7,000 printed copies of the paper were being dropped at 81 strategic locations on and off campus. To better understand how news consumption habits are related to changes in the format and content of the paper, we ask the following research question:

RQ1: How have news consumption habits of the *North Texas Daily's* readers changed between 2013 and 2019?

### **Patterns and Predictors of Readership**

Readership of newspapers depends on five major factors: perceptions of relevance, representation, perceived efficacy, campus involvement, and community building.

**Perceptions of Relevance.** According to the uses and gratifications theory (Blumler and Katz, 1974) one of the reasons why people read the news is to satisfy their need for surveillance (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972), i.e., need for information that they find important and relevant to their daily lives. From the time humans are young, they learn that surveillance is important for survival, and this knowledge intensifies as they grow older (Shoemaker, 1996). College students in particular, are found to read the news more frequently as a result of their need for surveillance (Vincent & Basil, 1997). Young people are interested in keeping up with current events because they feel they "owe it to themselves to be informed citizens," "intelligently deal with the world around them," and "have basic knowledge to refer to in

conversations.” (Huang, 2009, p. 112). For a campus community, this means reading the campus newspaper and staying informed on the latest happenings on campus.

A link also exists between community-focused news stories and subsequent community satisfaction with the newspaper (Hansen & Hansen, 2011). For young readers, relevance of news stories is critical to readership – the more relevant to a reader’s life, the more likely they are to read (Zerba, 2011). Young adults feel that newspaper stories in general, are more relevant to older people; however, if they know someone featured in the newspaper, they are more likely to read it (Zerba, 2011).

With reference to *North Texas Daily*, it provides a mix of hard and soft news related to campus. Hard news includes topics that are highly newsworthy and timely, while the latter includes topics that are considered lacking in substantive information (Tuchman, 1972). Given readers’ need for relevant information and the slight shift in the *North Texas Daily’s* content from hard news to opinion-based pieces, we ask the following research question:

RQ2: How are perceptions of the newspaper’s relevance related to readership?

**Representation.** One of the main functions of news media is to ensure that it reflects multiple perspectives and acts as a platform for representing readers and their concerns (Gans, 2011). In his ethnographic study on news making, Gans (2004) suggested that readership and interest in national news could be boosted if the news focused less on Washington-centric events, and covered more “bottom-up” and “representative news” (Gans, 2011, p. 4) that focused on ordinary people’s concerns. Community news tends to reflect the community members’ perspectives and interests (Putnam, 2000), because its reporters are usually people from the community (Tezon, 2003). They tend to publish content tailored to a smaller local audience, focus on issues ignored by mainstream media, promote dialogue and debate among various community members, and empower communities (O’Brien & Gaynor, 2012). Whether a newspaper functions as a platform and voice for community concerns is likely to be critical in attracting readership (Yamamoto 2011). Given these findings, we ask the following research question.

RQ3: How are perceptions of the newspaper’s representation of the community’s concerns related to readership?

**Perceived efficacy.** Efficacy addresses the feelings of being a valued member of the community. This factor addresses a person’s perception that they have a voice and power within a community and can bring about change if they so desire. Limited research has linked self-efficacy with readership. Jeffres et al. (2002) found a link between community newspapers and increased political efficacy and involvement. Moy et al. (2004) also found newspaper readership correlated with higher political involvement regardless of if people evaluated the newspaper positively or negatively. Tewksbury et al. (2008) found a link between newspaper consumption and social self-efficacy, with the increased readership correlating to higher perceptions of social self-efficacy.

Efficacy has generally been correlated with readership, but the direction of the relationship is unclear. It could be argued that individuals with higher efficacy and who view

themselves to be a valued member of the community will have a higher vested interest in reading about the community. In other words, those who feel they are a part of the community will consume news about the community more than those who feel less included. This would follow previous research linking readership with stories about the community (Zerba, 2011). On the other hand, efficacy is often a dependent variable in research about the effects of readership (Jeffres, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2002). Increased efficacy may be a result of readership, so it is reasonable to argue those lower in efficacy are seeking out newspapers as a tool of empowerment. Given this equivocal literature, we ask the following question:

RQ4: Will perceived efficacy predict readership?

**Campus involvement.** Research on readership and campus involvement is also rather limited. Collins (2003) examined the role of on-campus activity levels on newspaper readership and found that campus use, campus-based relationships, and campus activities are positively related to increased newspaper readership. Campus involvement captures aspects of a person's attachment and investment in a community. More than just showing up for class, campus involvement represents the amount of time people spend integrating and being a part of the campus. This includes activities such as being part of academic student groups, Greek life, and organizations related to sports, music, and other extra-curricular activities that meet on campus. It is argued that those who have a strong connection with the campus community will potentially have a greater interest in keeping up with campus news and will have easier access to the printed paper because of their frequent presence on campus. Thus, we ask the following question:

RQ5: How are university involvement and readership related?

**Community building.** We know that local news is instrumental in informing people and building a sense of community by reducing feelings of isolation and creating networks of community groups. (O'Brien & Gaynor, 2012). Local news also builds community by increasing community participation and political discussion (Paek, Yoon & Shah, 2005). The existing research on newspapers and community-building focuses on mainstream community newspapers, and is largely quantitative in nature. Given the limited research on community and readership in the context of campus newspapers, we take a qualitative, in-depth approach to understanding how a campus newspaper can build community. Thus, we ask the following question:

RQ6: To what extent do readers perceive the newspaper as successful in building a community on campus?

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

In both 2013 ( $n=1232$ ) and 2019 ( $n=953$ ), participants included students from across the university (including multiple satellite campuses) and a wide variety of majors. Of the respondents who took the survey in 2013, 35% were male, 65% were female, and the average age was 23. In terms of racial/ethnic makeup, there were 8.6% African Americans, 9.9% Asians, 1.4% Native Americans, 65.3% whites, and 14.8% mixed/other. Of these, 22.6% identified as Hispanic regardless of race. In 2019, 32.92% of the respondents were male, 64.59% were female,

and 2.5% identified as other. The average age was 28. In terms of racial/ethnic makeup, there were 8.3% African American, 6.7% Asian, 0.5% Native American, 57% white, and 9.1% responded with mixed/other. Of these, 18.6% identify as Hispanic regardless of race.

An online survey (utilizing Qualtrics) requesting feedback about the university newspaper was sent to the entire student population via university mass email. The survey inquired about readership preferences, readership rates, credibility, community engagement, efficacy, and attitudes about the newspaper. Demographic questions were also asked. Data was collected during the Fall 2013 and again during the Fall of 2019.

**Dependent Variable**

As shown in Table 1, readership for the newspaper, both online and print, served as the dependent variable and was measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1= not often, 7=often). The measures for print and online were combined and averaged in order to capture full newspaper readership regardless of technology platform. In a review of consumer preferences, Hsiang et al. (2010) found that readers rely on a hybrid mix of online and print newspapers considerably more than online newspapers only. Thus, combining online and print better reflects current consumer habits. Moreover, combining print and online also lowered the inherent bias of residential students versus commuting students who differ in access to the print edition. Reliability for this measure was acceptable. (2013:  $\alpha=0.60$ ,  $M=2.03$ ,  $SD=0.90$ ; 2019:  $\alpha=0.60$ ,  $M=2.03$ ,  $SD=0.90$ ).

Table 1  
*Descriptive statistics showing the main variables and their measurement*

Variable	Description	Measurement	2013	2019
Readership	Where do you get news about university and campus events? (This question was computed by combining 2 measures: readership of NT Daily website, and the paper version)	1=Never 5=All the time	M: 2.03 SD: 0.90 N: 1232	M: 2.03 SD: 0.90 N: 846
	Please indicate how you feel about the NT Daily? (This question was computed by combining 13 discrete measures of importance)	1=Strongly disagree 5=Strongly agree	M: 4.84 SD: 1.15 N: 1232	M: 3.57 SD: 1.03 N: 781

Efficacy	How do you feel about your ability to affect university policies? (This question was computed by combining 5 discrete measures of efficacy)	1=Strongly disagree 5=Strongly agree	M: 2.89 SD: 0.88 N: 1232	M: 2.79 SD: 0.92 N: 767
Representation	How do you feel about the NT Daily in terms of representing you? (This question was computed by combining 5 discrete measures of representation)	1=Strongly disagree 5=Strongly agree	M: 3.38 SD: 0.57 N: 1232	M: 3.33 SD: 0.79 N: 734
Campus involvement	How involved are you in the following campus groups and activities? (This question was computed by combining 13 discrete measures of involvement)	1=None at all 5=A great deal	M: 1.51 SD: 0.50 N:1232	M: 0.73 SD: 0.89 N: 953
News use: print	What sources of media do you use for news? (This question was computed by combining 2 discrete measures of print news use)	1=Never 5=Always	M: 1.71 SD: 0.77 N: 1228	M: 1.13 SD: 1.05 N: 953
News use: Broadcast	What sources of media do you use for news? (This question was computed by combining 3 discrete measures of broadcast news use)	1=Never 5=Always	M: 2.63 SD: 0.81 N:1226	M: 1.66 SD: 1.34 N: 953

News use: web	What sources of media do you use for news? (This question was computed by combining 3 discrete measures of broadcast news use)	1=Never 5=Always	M: 2.21 SD: 0.68 N: 1229	M: 1.81 SD: 1.40 N: 953
Need for university-related news	How important is it that you keep up with university news?	1=Very unimportant 5= Very important	M: 3.82 SD: 0.96 N: 1229	M: 3.90 SD: 0.97 N: 679
Gender	What is your gender?	-	Male: 35% Female: 65%	Male: 32.92% Female: 64.59% Other: 2.50%
Race	What is your race?	-	Black: 8.6% Asian: 9.9% Native American: 1.4% White: 65.3% Other: 14.8% N: 1232	Black: 8.3% Asian: 6.7% Native American: 0.48% White: 57% Other: 9.1% Latino: 18.6% N: 953

### Independent Variables

**Importance.** To evaluate the perceived importance of the newspaper, a scale was adapted from 13 media credibility measures (Kioussis, 2001). Using a 5-point semantic differential scale, respondents were asked about the newspaper’s perceived value, benefit, and significance to the community. Reliability was good (2013:  $\alpha=0.96$ ,  $M=4.84$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ; 2019:  $\alpha=0.97$ ,  $M=3.57$ ,  $SD=1.03$ ).

**Efficacy.** A participant efficacy scale was adapted from internal political efficacy scales previously used (Morrell, 2003). Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, questions inquired about perceived ability to impact university policy, whether the administration cared about student opinions, and whether student voices were heard in terms of impacting the university. The scale ranged from low power (1) to high power (5). Reliability was good (2013:  $\alpha=0.88$ ,  $M=2.89$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ; 2019:  $\alpha=0.88$ ,  $M=2.79$ ,  $SD=0.92$ ).



**Representation.** A measure was developed to gauge the extent to which readers perceived the newspaper as reflective of the community's interests. A 5-point Likert-type scale (1=disagree, 5=agree) asked about the newspaper as a platform, whether it reflected reader interests, and whether it was a powerful voice of the community. Reliability was good (2013:  $\alpha=0.87$ ,  $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ; 2019:  $\alpha=0.80$ ,  $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ).

**Campus Involvement.** An inventory of campus use was created and utilized a 4-point Likert-type scale (1=none, 4=a lot). Items included activities such as sports teams, academic groups, government, fraternities, art groups, and religious organizations. Reliability was good (2013:  $\alpha=.83$ ,  $M=1.51$ ,  $SD=.51$ ; 2019:  $\alpha=.83$ ,  $M=0.73$ ,  $SD=0.89$ ).

### Control Variables

**News Use.** This item measured the frequency with which respondents consumed local news from a number of local news media outlets. This item was measured separately for three platforms: web, print, and broadcast using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=never, 5=always). Reliability for all three measures were good. (2013: web:  $\alpha=0.63$ ,  $M=2.21$ ,  $SD=0.68$ ; broadcast:  $\alpha=0.67$ ,  $M=2.63$ ,  $SD=0.81$ ; print:  $\alpha=0.66$ ,  $M=1.71$ ,  $SD=0.77$ ; 2019: web:  $\alpha=0.87$ ,  $M=1.81$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ; print:  $\alpha=0.88$ ,  $M=1.13$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ; broadcast:  $\alpha=0.86$ ,  $M=1.66$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ).

**Need for University-Related News.** This item measured the need to keep up with *university* news. It was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=very unimportant, 5=very important). 2013:  $M=3.82$ ,  $SD=0.96$ ; 2019:  $M=3.92$ ,  $SD=0.95$ .

## RESULTS

The first research question examined the changes in the tastes of the newspaper's readers. Overall, we found that readership patterns remained the same. First, we found that in 2013, 14.61% of respondents reported using the print product often or all the time for getting university-related news and 7.55% said they used the website. In 2019, a slightly higher percentage—16.46% used the website and 15.08% used the print paper. Front-page news was most popular in 2013 with about 57% of respondents saying they read it often or all the time. The same pattern was repeated in 2019, with 60% of respondents saying they read it often or all the time.

With respect to readers' preference for the medium of delivery of the news, in 2013, 32.9% of respondents said, given a choice, they would prefer reading the paper online, and 33.63% said they would prefer the mobile version of *North Texas Daily*. In 2019, the pattern was the same, but the overall numbers preferring online and mobile media increased. While 42.49% said they strongly or very strongly prefer reading the *North Texas Daily* on an online format, 39.66% expressed a preference for reading the newspaper in a mobile format. Lastly, on the question of motivation to read the paper, in 2013 the largest number of respondents (68.66%) said they pick up the paper because they happen to be on campus on a given day. The same pattern persisted in 2019, with 70.67% saying the same.

Table 2

*OLS Regression models showing the factors that affected readership of the North Texas Daily*

Variables	2013	2019
Relevance	.20*** (.03)	.36*** (.15)
Efficacy	-.06* (.03)	-.07 (.04)
Representative	.11*** (.05)	.19* (.06)
Campus involvement	.16*** (.05)	.17 (.12)
News use: print	.23*** (.04)	.18*** (.04)
News use: web	.20*** (.04)	.16*** (.04)
News use: broadcast	-.08*** (.03)	-.02 (.04)
Need for university news	.11*** (.03)	.14*** (.03)
Gender	.05 (.05)	.03 (.07)
Race	-.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Constant	-.46* (.19)	-.77* (.22)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.28	0.44
N	1143	580

*Note:* The column represents the unstandardized B coefficients and the standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*=p<0.001, \*\*=p<0.01, \*=p<0.05

To answer RQ2-RQ5 we conducted two sets of OLS regression analyses, using controlled variables news use, need for news, gender, and race. RQ2 asked how relevance of a newspaper was related to readership. As shown in Table 2, we found that in both 2013 and 2019

it was highly significant. When readers perceived the content as relevant to their interests, they were more likely to read the paper (2013:  $B=0.20$ ,  $p=0.000$ ; 2019:  $B=0.77$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). RQ3 examined how perceptions about representativeness affected readership. The findings indicated that while in 2013 this factor was positively correlated and highly significant ( $B=0.11$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), in 2019, the positive correlation remained, but the variable was marginally significant ( $B=0.19$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), indicating its reduced influence on readership. RQ4 examined the impact of efficacy and found that both years they were negatively correlated, meaning, as the sense of efficacy among students rose, the less likely they were to read the paper. While this finding was significant in 2013 ( $B= -0.06$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), the variable was not a factor in influencing readership in 2019 ( $B=-0.07$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). This finding is unexpected, but shows that in campus contexts, students who feel empowered are not as likely to read the paper as compared to those who feel they are powerless and unable to bring about a change to campus. RQ5 examined how involvement in campus groups was related to readership. We found a strong positive correlation of this variable to readership in 2013 ( $B=0.16$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), but no connection in 2019 ( $B=0.17$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

Lastly, RQ6 explored the extent to which readers consider the paper as an agent in building community on campus. We conducted a thematic analysis of the comments gathered from respondents to the question on whether they thought the *North Texas Daily* is a strong voice for the students and whether it reflects the interests of the campus community. We used open coding to connect individual statements together in terms of similarity, tone of language used, and implied meaning. Categories were derived from the data. For comments that did not fit into a category, new categories were created. Both researchers analyzed the data and discussed coding disagreements until a theme consensus was reached. Two main themes emerged from this process: successful community engagement and community alienation. Community engagement included responses about the community having a positive perception of the newspaper, and enjoying the content it publishes. Community alienation comprised more pejorative remarks focused on how the newspaper is failing the community by publishing biased content and selectively representing campus populations. While the same themes appeared in 2013 and 2019, the latter year featured more comments on media bias. Below we discuss the themes in greater detail.

**Community Engagement.** The thematic category of campus community engagement was derived from responses concerning the newspaper's ability to represent students. Within this main category, two sub-categories emerged: positive impressions of the paper, and useful content.

Though several respondents mentioned that they were not aware of the existence of the paper or had not read it, they expressed faith in the paper's ability to represent the community. This opinion was based on respondents' impressions of the paper from other people and expectations that the newsroom staff would do a good job. Positive impressions of the paper were indicated in responses like, "*The North Texas Daily should certainly provide a strong voice for students because it is produced by students*" and "*Although the huge diversity of students at*

*North Texas poses a serious challenge for a single unified voice, the North Texas Daily will overcome this obstacle through its own diversity of its journalist and producers.”*

People who were satisfied with the content published in the paper mentioned this as a major factor that made the newspaper a strong voice in the community. Respondents evaluated content as useful when it featured student voices and topics of interest to members of the campus community. The following responses are examples of the useful content subtheme: *“It represents the students in a very empowered manner”* and *“They’ve done a story on my program and on recycling on campus and I appreciated that!”*

Respondents also evaluated the newspaper’s content positively when stories represented a wide variety of viewpoints. For example, respondents made the following comments: *“The articles always look from both sides of the story. It tries to not lean toward a certain side”* and *“It’s never going to explain every view, but it brings up good conversation that can translate to student activity.”*

**Community Alienation.** The thematic category of community alienation was derived from responses concerned with the newspaper’s failings in terms of reflecting the overall campus community. Within this main category, three sub-categories emerged: invisible, irrelevant, and exclusionary.

Respondents mentioned that the newspaper should be more easily accessible to the campus community as a whole—in an online rather than print format—so that people could read it and become aware of the issues that matter to the community. From the responses gathered, it was clear that people perceived a strong connection between accessibility of the paper, the number of people who read it, and the extent to which the paper was able to build a strong campus community. The invisible theme was indicated in responses like *“The North Texas Daily would be very strong if a majority of the students would actually take the time to read it.”*

Perceptions about the extent to which the newspaper was representative of the community depended to a great extent on the content. Respondents evaluated content on a number of factors such as types of topics covered, factual errors, and bias. Readers suggested that the newspaper should add more content that was relevant to readers. Examples include *“I would rather read about the news and events on campus more than hearing about and voicing student problems”* and *“I like to read real news. They only have fluff pieces.”*

Respondents also mentioned the need for correcting misquotes and bias as a way to build community. Respondents who took the survey in 2019 also mentioned that the staff was very liberal, and that the opinion columns promoted liberal agendas. Examples include *“I’ve heard that the North Texas Daily misquotes interviewees and slants the story to best suit their view”* and *“You need to check your facts.”*

Perceptions that the newspaper is exclusionary was another subtheme. Respondents who perceived the newspaper as focusing on selective student population of the university were not likely to consider it a strong voice for the community. Respondents from non-traditional student groups pointed out that the newspaper’s content was irrelevant to them, while others pointed out that as readers of the newspaper, they should have a chance to contribute their views. Examples

included *“For commuters it is mostly non-existent” and “I do not think that it actively seeks out a response from the student readers/writers. I’m not aware of an opportunity for guest writers to submit articles for consideration. If that existed, I would feel a bit better represented because there would be an opportunity for people not associated with the paper to participate.”*

## CONCLUSION

This paper examined the news consumption habits of *North Texas Daily* readers and examined the factors that affect readership. First, we find that the campus population’s tastes have not changed drastically in the past five years, but there has been an increase in consumption of digital content; therefore, it is essential for the paper to have a strong digital presence via the website and social media channels. While people expressed interest in reading the paper on mobile formats, given the shoestring budget that most papers operate on, investing in an app might be difficult. We believe optimizing the website for mobile devices is a useful strategy. Despite this push toward digital, we find that from a visibility and accessibility perspective, it is useful to have a print version of the paper. This is because readership rates are linked with ease of acquiring and using a newspaper (Zerba, 2011). Those who can easily find the paper will likely read it more often. In conclusion, it is beneficial to strategically distribute the print version of the paper in heavily-trafficked sites and promote the website more aggressively to readers via direct distribution such as emails or notifications on course management systems.

In both years we found relevance of the paper to be significantly and positively connected to readership. The newspaper should make sure the content is comprehensive and useful for a variety of students on campus. Since relevance and community-building are closely related, we expand more on this idea in our section below in the lessons from the respondents’ comments. Next, we found that while readers in 2013 considered it important that the newspaper represent their concerns, it was not a very significant factor in 2019. This could be a result of expansion of the internet, where students do not feel the need to rely on a newspaper to act as their representative. With the easy availability of social media tools, students might feel empowered to represent their concerns themselves. Our finding about efficacy helps add nuance to this idea of campus newspapers as representatives of students’ concerns. We find that as efficacy increases, readership declines. Thus, students who have high efficacy and feel they do not need the newspaper to represent them or help them bring about change, are not as likely to read it as those who feel less empowered and require an advocate in the news media. Another factor, campus involvement, was significant in 2013, but not in 2019, indicating that students involved in various groups might feel a sense of solidarity and community, but this is stronger for members of the group, and does not extend to other aspects of the university, such as the newspaper. It is likely that the information needs of students who are actively involved in campus activities are focused on specific topics related to the group’s interests. Since the newspaper is meant for the broad campus audience, students with niche interests do not feel the need to read it. If the newspaper started a special topics section on covering campus groups, it might be able to interest

these readers. Tagging these groups on social media to informing members about coverage that relates to them or their areas of interest would also help build readership.

The qualitative comments about community-building indicate a few areas that the newspaper could build on to increase readership. While the newspaper enjoys the advantage of being run by a staff of student journalists who are broadly perceived as being trustworthy, the readership evaluates community-building primarily on the basis of the newspaper's content. The increased mention of content bias in 2019 could be partly attributed to the general trend of media distrust in current times, but it could also relate to changes in the paper's content and the move from hard news to more opinion-based news. We suggest the inclusion of more hard news stories as well as expanding the range of news to include topics of interest to non-traditional students or graduate students in order to create a sense of community on campus.

Another suggestion is to expand and diversify staff writers by recruiting from non-journalism majors and soliciting occasional pieces from readers. These steps could help readers feel more positive toward the paper. Lastly, to combat the perception that the paper is ineffective and lacks readers, it might be useful to run social media campaigns highlighting the most impactful or most-read stories done by the paper. To increase credibility and transparency, the staff should promptly correct errors, and consider doing behind-the-scenes stories that show how news is created or how a particular story was reported.

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