

LEVERAGING ATHLETIC SUCCESS  
TO GUIDE INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIC BRANDING DECISIONS:  
A CASE STUDY ON TCU'S HISTORIC 2022 SEASON

by  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the strategic utilization of athletic success in branding decisions at Texas Christian University (TCU) during its historic 2022 season. Through a detailed case study, this research explores how TCU leveraged its athletic achievements to enhance its branding strategy, thereby increasing the university's visibility, engaging stakeholders, and aligning with its broader academic and cultural missions.

The study employs qualitative methods, including interviews with key university stakeholders and analysis of TCU's branding materials and public communications. It investigates how the excitement generated by athletic success was integrated into a comprehensive branding strategy that not only celebrated sports achievements but also underscored the university's academic strengths and community values.

Key findings indicate that TCU's approach to leveraging athletic success involved capitalizing on media exposure, engaging alumni and donors, and utilizing social media platforms to amplify achievements. The research highlights the challenges of balancing athletic and academic priorities, stakeholder alignment and perception, rapid decision-making in a large organization, and maintaining authenticity to mission and values. It recommends best practices like proactively establishing partnerships, telling the story of students, anticipating triggers, leaning into the unconventional, finding experts, seizing the window of opportunity, and telling the broader story of the institution.

This thesis contributes to the field by outlining best practices for universities looking to harness athletic success for branding purposes. It provides insights into the complexities of balancing sports enthusiasm with educational objectives and offers strategies for other institutions to enhance their brand through athletic success. The study underscores the potential of athletic success to serve as a powerful tool for strategic branding, capable of fostering lasting engagement and enhancing institutional reputation.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The introduction commences the thesis and provides general information including a brief outline of the problem and gap in knowledge, overall purpose, and research question. The significance of the study is discussed, emphasizing its contribution to existing knowledge through identifying best practices and key challenges for institutions when leveraging athletic success to guide strategic branding decisions. The rationale for the study is provided, along with the definition of key terms, delimitations, and assumptions.

The literature review looks into existing knowledge on the topic, providing a comprehensive background. It explores the importance of athletic success, essentials of strategic branding, and presents an overview of university and higher education branding.

The methodology chapter outlines the research approach, explaining the choice of interviews, their relevance to the research question, and the breakdown of interviewees. Findings from the data analysis are presented, based on looking into TCU as a case study, connecting back to the research question.

In the discussion chapter, the results obtained from the data analysis are analyzed and interpreted. Connections are made back to the research question and literature review, and any results are discussed. The recommendations chapter provides practical suggestions for universities or institutions in similar situations based on the study's findings. The implications chapter explores broader implications for academia, practitioners, and stakeholders. Limitations in the study that may affect the results gathered are recognized. The potential areas for future research are suggested based on the study's limitations or new questions arising from the findings of this thesis. The

conclusion chapter summarizes key findings, revisits the research question, and discusses its address.

The appendix includes any additional materials or supplementary information relevant to the study, and the references list all sources cited in the thesis.

## **Problem Definition**

The problem definition in this thesis is the need to understand the implications of the relationship between athletics success and strategic branding decisions, using Texas Christian University (TCU) as a case study.

The problem definition involves analyzing how to balance athletic and academic priorities, stakeholder alignment and perception, rapid decision-making in the context of a large organization, maintaining authenticity to mission and values, and to understand the effectiveness of these decisions in achieving TCU's branding objectives.

Athletic and academic calendars are inherently different, often creating logistical challenges. For instance, significant athletic events can coincide with academic schedules, requiring the marketing and communication teams to adapt their timelines. Different stakeholders (students, alumni, staff) hold diverse perspectives regarding the prioritization of athletics. While sports successes generate excitement, there's a risk of overshadowing academic values. Maintaining a balanced brand image is essential to avoid alienating any group. Leveraging athletic success requires agility, particularly on social media. However, large institutions often have multiple decision-makers, slowing down responsiveness. Athletic branding must align with the university's core mission and values. Over-commercialization of sports can detract from educational integrity.

Therefore, this thesis aims to address these problems and uncover best practices by conducting a detailed case study that investigates into the specific examples of TCU during the 2022 historic season, providing insights that contribute to both academic knowledge and practical applications in the field of university, athletics, and strategic branding.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to look at the interconnection of athletics success and strategic branding decisions within the unique context of Texas Christian University's (TCU) historic 2022 season. The study aims to achieve a holistic understanding of how the accomplishments of TCU's athletic teams during this influential period influenced the university's branding strategies. Ultimately, more than how athletic success influenced strategic branding decisions, but also how responsive branding decisions were made that achieved award winning campaigns and best practices and how the barriers of balancing athletic and academic priorities, stakeholder alignment and perception, rapid decision-making in the context of a large organization, maintaining authenticity to mission and values were overcome.

Therefore, this thesis wishes to understand challenges related to successfully leveraging athletic success to guide strategic branding decisions and to identify best practices regarding strategic branding decisions based on institutional athletic success.

Overall, the purpose of the study is to contribute to the academic literature on the intersection and interconnection of athletics success and strategic branding decisions, while providing actionable knowledge that can inform strategic and implementation-based decision-making in similar contexts. The literature review has aimed to identify any gaps in academic understanding of the relationship between successfully leveraging athletics success to guide strategic branding decisions, as well as best practices.

## Research Question

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

*How can an institution leverage athletics success to guide strategic branding decisions?*

*How are some known or anticipated challenges overcome in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions?*

*What are some unknown challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions?*

*What are the best practices in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions?*

## Significance of the Study

This research question investigates the intersection of athletic success and branding, two areas that have become increasingly intertwined in today's world. Successful athletic performances often have a significant impact on the overall brand image and perception of an institution, such as a university.

By focusing on a specific case study of TCU's historic 2022 season, this thesis aims to provide practical insights for the university and for institutions in the nation. Understanding how athletic success strategically influences branding decisions can help TCU leverage its achievements for broader institutional goals (including recruitment, fundraising, and overall reputation enhancement).

While the focus of the case study is on TCU, the findings from this thesis and, specifically case study, can have broader implications for other institutions. The research could contribute to

the development of general principles or guidelines that universities or organizations can follow when making strategic branding decisions in response to athletic success.

Universities, athletic departments, and other organizations invest significant resources to ensure sports success of their programs and strategic branding efforts. Understanding how these elements interact and influence each other is crucial for stakeholders, including administrators, marketers, and decision-makers, to make informed choices and maximize the impact of their investments.

According to the literature review, there has been extensive research done on the impact of athletics success on universities and the importance of branding for institutions. The research questions contribute to literature by addressing and identifying best practices and key challenges of leveraging athletic success to guide strategic branding decisions, whilst utilizing a university as a case study. Addressing key challenges and highlighting best practices provides an opportunity to generate new knowledge and insights in the fields of sports management, marketing, and branding.

Answering the question of how an institution can leverage athletics success to guide strategic branding is relevant to a variety of stakeholders, including the institution itself, its students, alumni, donors, fans, and the broader community. Not only that, but marketing and communication professionals will also be able to leverage this thesis and gather best practices when making future strategic decisions based on athletics success. Additionally, this thesis could and should have implications beyond organizations that have a focus on athletic success; its findings and recommendations can be applied broadly to organizations that want to be responsive to any kind of positive news, event, or success related to their brand.

## **Premise and Rationale**

Focusing on the “Historic 2022 Season,” where TCU made it to the National College Football Playoffs, NCAA Basketball March Madness, and the Baseball World Series, indicates a temporal relevance to the research. TCU is the only institution who has made it to all three championships in a single year. Analyzing recent events allows for a timely investigation into the dynamics of how success in athletics can shape branding decisions, taking into account the most current strategies and reactions in the field.

## **Delimitations of the Study**

In the context of the study on how athletics success guides strategic branding decisions at TCU during the historic 2022 season, several delimitations are relevant.

First of all, this thesis is delimited to the historic 2022 season, during the 2022-2023 academic year, focusing exclusively on this specific timeframe. Therefore, events, athletic wins and losses, and strategies occurring before or after this period are not within the scope of the research.

The primary focus is on TCU, and the findings are specific to the experiences, examples, decisions, and dynamics at TCU. This study does not aim to generalize its conclusions to other universities without considering their unique contexts. The study prioritizes the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in strategic branding decisions at TCU, such as marketing, communication, and athletic directors and professionals.

The research focuses on the impact of athletics success on strategic branding decisions through selected communication channels, such as multimedia and marketing strategies. It does not extensively explore other potential channels like academic publications or internal reports. The

study places a particular emphasis on the role of digital marketing, social media, traditional media, and communication channels in the context of branding decisions influenced by athletics success. The research and data both focus on the roles of individuals within the marketing, communication, and athletics departments at TCU. While acknowledging the interdisciplinary nature of strategic branding decisions, the study does not extensively explore the perspectives of other departments. The study may not delve deeply into financial aspects or economic models related to the broader financial performance of TCU, especially regarding the ROI of the strategic branding decisions.

By explicitly defining these delimitations, this thesis aims to establish clear boundaries, providing focus and specificity to the investigation and understanding the areas that fall outside its scope. These constraints help ensure the research remains manageable, feasible, and targeted in addressing the research question.

## **CHAPTER 2: Literature Review**

### **PART 1: Importance of Athletics Success**

In the context of this thesis, athletics refers to the different sports at TCU. “TCU is proud to compete at the highest level of NCAA Division I sports as a member of the Big 12 Conference. We take part in nine sports for men and 13 for women.” (TCU Athletics, 2024).

Athletic programs can improve students' sense of community and emotional connection to the institution, which in turn enhances brand equity and student satisfaction (Hanson, Bryant, Lyman, 2020). Universities can maximize the benefits of athletic programs by emphasizing the emotional connection of the student body to the teams (Hanson, Bryant, Lyman, 2020). Intercollegiate athletic programs have various direct and indirect benefits for colleges and universities, including increased alumni donations, revenue, academic rankings, retention and graduation rates, and applications and enrollments (Hanson, Bryant, Lyman, 2020).

Firstly, evidence presented by Wilson (2003) shows that a successful season in big-time college sports can improve the number of applications a university receives the following year. This surge reflects a deeper perception of the university's quality and prestige. When a college excels in sports, especially in high-visibility events like big-time NCAA college sports, it becomes more than an educational institution; it transforms into a symbol of success and aspiration.

Building upon this, Heyman (2022) argues that athletic programs act as signals of a well-run, high-quality institution. This isn't just about sports; it's about the message it sends. A successful sports program implies strong management, strong leadership, and a thriving community, all attributes that prospective and incoming students and their families seek in an



educational establishment. It's a showcase of excellence that extends beyond the playing field and into the ethos of the university.

Carreno's (2011) research provides further support, emphasizing that schools with successful football seasons, particularly those making a Bowl Championship Series appearance, see an increase in admission applications over the following two years (Appendix O). This phenomenon suggests a sustained impact, one that goes beyond the win itself. It somewhat establishes a legacy, creating an enduring allure for the institution.

Lastly, Schmit (2015) adds that successful athletic programs can create positive brand associations, linking the university's name with qualities such as excellence, achievement, and prestige. These associations are powerful as they link the university's name with qualities that resonate with the aspirations of potential students. This isn't just about sports; it's about the narrative and image of the university being elevated in the public's eyes and consciousness.

In sum, the synergy between athletic success and the academic appeal of universities is unmistakable. It is a relationship that means more than the excitement of sports; it helps create a powerful and enduring brand for the institution, one that attracts not just sports fans, but students drawn to a culture of excellence and achievement. This not only enriches the university's athletic department but also helps increase the institution's academic reputation, making it a desirable destination for prospective students.

In this Part 1 "Importance of Athletic Success," a key unknown is "what are the most effective strategies and tactics institutions have employed to translate athletic success into strategic branding advantages?"

## **PART 2: Essentials of Strategic Branding**

Branding involves creating a unique identity and perception for a product or service in the minds of consumers (Chaudhuri, Holbrook, 2001). Branding goes beyond just a name, term, design, or symbol, and encompasses the entire experience and meaning associated with a brand (Conejo, Wooliscroft, 2014).

Identifying key unknowns in strategic branding, especially regarding leveraging athletic success, is crucial for comprehensive academic understanding and positioning of strategic branding initiatives for universities and higher education institutions. This involves exploring how institutions can use the success of their athletic programs to guide broader branding decisions. Addressing this unknown can reveal best practices and challenges not yet fully understood. Ultimately, the essentials of strategic branding might be all the things that are challenging about leveraging athletic success.

Given that universities need and seek to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive landscape, strategic branding has emerged as a critical tool for shaping institutional identity, attracting prospective and high qualified candidates, and fostering a sense of community (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). Organizations need to embrace adaptability and flexibility, especially in terms of marketing and branding, to thrive in the increasingly complex and competitive global market (Reinmann, Carvalho, Duarte, 2021). Branding stories can be told through the symbolism of archetypes, but updating and refreshing the narrative is an ongoing process (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). Therefore, in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education, universities need to be adaptive and flexible in their branding strategies.

Hanson, Bryant, and Lyman (2020) highlight the role of athletic success in shaping campus culture and community, contributing to the university's overall brand image and reputation. This

internal advertising effect underscores the importance of sports in building brand equity. Schmit (2015) echoes this, noting that media coverage plays a pivotal role in generating awareness and recognition for the university brand. Therefore, universities can leverage recent athletic successes to shape their strategic branding decisions as it helps them meet their goals.

In sum, it's important to connect the importance of being adaptive and flexible to athletics which, by definition, can produce unexpected – and potentially fleeting – successes.

In Part 2 “Essentials of Strategic Branding”, a key unknown is “Given the dynamic nature of sports, how can institutions remain adaptable & flexible in their branding strategies to capitalize on sudden athletic successes?”

## **PART 3: University and Higher Education Branding**

### **Authenticity to Mission and Values**

To leverage branding effectively, universities must initiate with a clear understanding of their mission and core values. Branding can be framed as a strategic approach to building a unique institutional brand identity (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). However, universities need to establish and communicate a compelling and authentic identity since effective branding not only attracts prospective students but also plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of community among current students, faculty, and alumni (Harris, 2009). Therefore, the formation of a brand must begin with the establishment and objectification of the university mission and core values (Moser, 2003).

A university's promise, as encapsulated in its mission, is the cornerstone of its brand identity. According to De Chernatony and Riley (1998), a brand is a promise. TCU's mission, “is to educate individuals to think and act as ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the global

community through research and creative activities, scholarship, service, and programs of teaching and learning offered through the doctoral level.” (TCU, 2024) The marketing and communications offices at TCU aim to make all their strategic branding decisions around living out and fulfilling the mission statement.

The concept of brand personality is pivotal in differentiating and positioning a university's brand in the minds of stakeholders as authentic. Brand personality has been proposed as conceptual framework that includes five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, which are relevant in measuring brand personality and their impact on various dependent variables and should be considered in brand positioning and marketing strategies (Davies, Mete, Rojas-Mendez, 2017). It is suggested that brand personality dimensions may vary across different markets, cultures, and time frames. It is essential to critically analyze the contextual factors that may influence the perception and evaluation of brand personality dimensions in specific contexts (Davies, Mete, Rojas-Mendez, 2017). Specifically, in this case, sincerity, which is closely linked to authenticity.

On the other hand, aligning branding campaigns with institutional values and principles is crucial for effective communication. Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill (2020) introduce an institutional brand communication management framework provides a comprehensive approach for planning a multimedia branding campaign that can be used by any type of institution and aligns with the institution's values. Guiding principles serve as a foundation for branding campaigns and help to authentically align with the institution's values and they provide a strategic direction.

For example, the University of Alabama's “Legends” Campaign is a comprehensive branding campaign that effectively communicates the essence of the university through a compelling story and discusses the use of personality archetypes and persuasive storytelling to emotionally resonate with key

stakeholders and prospective consumers (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). The guiding principles of the campaign were authenticity, aspiration, pride, boldness, and storytelling capacity. These principles were designed to connect with the past, present, and future of UA, resonating with the aspirations of students, parents, alumni, and fans globally (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). In developing the Legends narrative, the campaign aimed to capture the essence of the university and create a halo effect or feel-good factor about its achievements (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). This strategy leveraged the success of the football program to make a larger statement about the university's character, including transformational leadership, work ethic, and innovation in various fields like business and music (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020).

Addressing the challenges of aligning sports success with institutional values is essential for maintaining brand integrity. Harris (2009) points out that sports like football and basketball not only shape institutional identity but also enhance the institution's prominence and prestige. The popularity of college sports, especially football, offers a broad platform for institutional branding (Harris, 2009). This influence is particularly strong given these sports' powerful presence in American culture. Television broadcasts reach millions, presenting an ideal opportunity for showcasing institutional values.

In the article “From Chaos to Coherence: Myles Brand and the Balancing of Academics and Athletics” Thelin (2023) focuses on the challenges and dynamics of balancing commercial aspects of elite college athletics with the educational values of institutions. It highlights how, in the rush to adapt to changing commercial pressures (and financial landscapes), universities may risk deviating from their established brand messaging and academic values. The article explores the historical context of these issues, the impact of commercialization, and the efforts of individuals like Myles Brand in navigating these complex dynamics. The discussion includes the

increasing commercialization of college sports and its implications on the academic mission of universities. Therefore, the challenge lies in balancing the commercial aspects of elite college athletics with the educational values of the institution, ensuring that the brand promotion does not overshadow the academic mission.

Universities need to critically evaluate and ensure the authenticity of their brand identity amid uncertainties. Spry et. al (2020) discuss how it's uncertain if universities have established authentic and persuasive brand identities. This demands that institutions have a strategic approach to brand communication, ensuring consistency and authenticity in the portrayal of the university's ethos.

Furthermore, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of university marketing and branding efforts, specifically ads aired during college football bowl games, which include the focus on selling the private benefits of higher education (Harris, 2009). Harris' (2009) study reveals that these institutions prioritize showcasing aspects like campus life, academic excellence, and extracurricular activities to appeal to prospective students and external audiences and the messages are predominantly centered on individual success, portraying education as a commodity aimed at improving personal outcomes such as career prospects and social status. Therefore, Harris (2009) encourages institutions to reflect on the broader impacts of their marketing strategies. It is crucial for universities to contemplate the broader implications of their marketing strategies on societal perceptions of education.

In summary, effective university branding hinges on the alignment of brand identity with institutional values and mission, as highlighted by various scholars. The establishment and communication of an authentic brand identity are crucial, not only for attracting prospective students but also for fostering community among current stakeholders. Emphasizing a university's

unique brand personality, while ensuring that branding campaigns are congruent with institutional values, is pivotal. However, challenges persist in maintaining brand integrity, especially in the context of the commercialization of college sports. Ultimately, universities must strive for strategic, consistent, and authentic branding that resonates with their core mission and values, reflecting on the broader societal implications of their marketing strategies.

A key unknown is how universities can authentically align their athletic successes with their core mission and values without overshadowing their broader institutional identity. How can they balance commercial pressures with academic integrity while ensuring that branding campaigns reflect foundational values and remain persuasive and emotionally resonant? Universities must critically evaluate their strategies to maintain authenticity, especially given the strong commercial influence of elite college sports.

### **Stakeholder Alignment**

Understanding and leveraging brand meaning is essential for universities seeking to enhance their identity and reputation. Brand meaning is co-created through interactions between consumers and the brand, as well as various stakeholders such as family and friends, retailers, employees, regulators, and media (Baker et al., 2022). The scope of brand meaning is much larger than that of brand personality, as it encompasses a wide range of brand-related human characteristics (He, Zhang, 2022). Additionally, branding can be positioned as a crucial tool for achieving broader objectives such as student recruitment, faculty retention, attracting external funding (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020), and stakeholder buy-in. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy that considers these diverse interactions and perspectives is vital for successful brand management.

The foundation of successful university branding lies in effectively communicating its unique value proposition. Brand building strategies are used by universities to create and develop meaningful differences in stakeholder attitudes and perceptions (Hutchinson, Bennett, 2012). The brand image of a university has a profound influence on consumer behavior and how stakeholders perceive the institution (Hutchinson, Bennett, 2012). By strengthening the positive association of a university's brand, administrators aim to distinguish their institution from competitors and shape the perceptions of stakeholders (Hutchinson, Bennett, 2012). Effective communication and engagement are therefore crucial in reinforcing these desired brand perceptions and associations.

For universities, strategic branding is not just about differentiation but also about creating a lasting positive image in the minds of all stakeholders. Strategic branding, image, and reputation management are essential in the competitive higher education landscape. The goal is to create a standout image that resonates positively with internal stakeholders, external consumers, and constituents (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020). Nevertheless, catering to all stakeholder needs can be sometimes difficult. This necessitates a balanced approach that aligns the university's mission, vision, and values with the expectations and perceptions of its diverse stakeholders.

The study, "Stakeholder Evaluation of the Policy Effects of University Decisions Regarding Athletics," explores the differing perspectives of faculty and staff at Western Kentucky University (WKU) regarding the transition from the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) to the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and its effects on the university (Stinnett, Lasley, Knight, 2019). Faculty and staff held differing views on whether this transition positively impacted WKU as an academic institution and its athletics (Stinnett, Lasley, Knight, 2019). While staff generally viewed the transition favorably, a smaller percentage of faculty agreed (Stinnett, Lasley, Knight, 2019). The study also revealed a divide in opinions on university priorities, with significant



numbers from both groups believing that too much emphasis was placed on athletics at the expense of academics and the arts (Stinnett, Lasley, Knight, 2019). This research highlights the challenge of aligning internal stakeholder priorities in leveraging athletic success to benefit the university as a whole.

Athletic success can be a double-edged sword, impacting the university brand in both positive and negative ways. Hutchinson and Bennett (2012) emphasize the significance of brand building in intercollegiate athletics and its impact on stakeholder attitudes. This underscores that athletic success and the behaviors of athletic departments can profoundly influence the overall brand image of a university, aligning or misaligning with its mission and values. Leveraging athletic success may not align with the priorities of all stakeholders and such alignment or misalignment can either fortify or weaken the relationship with stakeholders, indicating that athletic departments must navigate these perceptions carefully. Nevertheless, leveraging athletic success may not align with the priorities of all stakeholders.

In summary, the successful branding of a university is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that hinges on understanding and leveraging the diverse meanings stakeholders attach to the brand. This process involves balancing the broad scope of brand meaning with strategic communication of the institution's unique value proposition. Universities must navigate the challenge of aligning their mission and values with the varying perceptions and expectations of internal and external stakeholders, including those related to the impact of athletic success. Effective branding in higher education requires not only differentiating the institution but also building a lasting, positive image that resonates across all stakeholder groups. This comprehensive strategy is crucial for universities to enhance their identity, reputation, and overall success in a competitive landscape.

A key unknown is how universities can effectively balance their mission and values with the diverse priorities and perceptions of various stakeholders when leveraging athletic success for brand building. How can universities navigate the differing expectations of faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders to create a lasting, positive brand image that resonates across all groups without compromising their core values or broader institutional goals?

### **Responsiveness & Rapid Decision Making and Implementation**

The field of higher education private and public has witnessed a paradigm shift in its approach to branding (Vincent, Lee, Hull, Hill, 2020).

The article by Wade, Joshi, and Teracino (2022) highlights the importance of strategic agility in times of crisis. It discusses how companies can navigate unpredictable challenges and opportunities and the authors emphasize the need for businesses to be nimble, robust, and resilient, referring to these qualities as the "Triple A's" of strategic agility. They illustrate this with examples of companies like Airbnb, which successfully adapted to the COVID-19 crisis by deviating from their strategic plan and responding to changing circumstances (Wade, Joshi, Teracino, 2022). This context reinforces the idea that in the rush to respond quickly, institutions must be careful not to stray from their core brand messaging and values, while still being adaptable and responsive to emerging challenges (Wade, Joshi, Teracino, 2022).

The article by Kumar and Ray (2023) emphasizes the importance of agile leadership in modern organizations. The rigid and hierarchical nature of traditional bureaucratic systems, which often lack the flexibility and adaptability essential for agility (Kumar, Ray, 2023). Bureaucracy in such institutions typically involves strict adherence to established procedures and protocols, which can be slow to change and adapt to new challenges or opportunities (Kumar, Ray, 2023). This can lead to a lack of

responsiveness and a slower pace of decision-making, making it difficult for organizations to keep up with the rapid changes and demands of the current market and societal expectations (Kumar, Ray, 2023). Therefore, bureaucratic processes, particularly in institutional settings like universities, can significantly impede the implementation of responsive and rapid branding strategies (Kumar, Ray, 2023). In contrast, agile leadership is characterized by adaptiveness, collaboration, and a focus on value creation over rigid planning and control (Kumar, Ray, 2023). Agile leaders are more likely to foster environments that encourage innovation and quick response to change (Kumar, Ray, 2023). Overall, the bureaucracy can slow down decision-making processes.

Rapid decision-making and implementation need to consider the diverse interests and expectations of all stakeholders, which can be challenging. Listening to and gathering input from stakeholders and employees can sometimes be difficult, but is essential (Kumar, Ray, 2023).

Beretta and Smith (2023) in the California Management Review discuss the implementation of agility in organizations, specifically through a case study of a large product manufacturer. It highlights the importance of agility as a crucial element in digital transformation (Beretta, Smith, 2023). The study reveals the challenges and adaptations necessary for implementing agile methods, emphasizing the need for continuous adaptation and local integration to address emerging challenges (Beretta, Smith, 2023). Nevertheless, there is the risk of deviating from established brand messaging and values in the rush to respond quickly (Beretta, Smith, 2023). This underscores the delicate balance between maintaining core organizational values while adopting flexible, agile practices.

In summary, recent studies in the field of higher education and business management collectively underscore the critical importance of strategic agility and agile leadership in navigating the rapidly evolving landscape of modern organizations. These emphasize the need for institutions to balance the dichotomy of maintaining core values and brand messaging while simultaneously adapting

to new challenges and opportunities with nimbleness and resilience. This balance involves overcoming the limitations of traditional bureaucratic structures and fostering environments that encourage innovation, adaptiveness, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. The overarching theme is the necessity for organizations to evolve continuously, integrating agile practices into their strategic planning to remain competitive and relevant in a dynamic and unpredictable market.

A key unknown is how universities can achieve strategic agility in their branding efforts while maintaining their core values and brand messaging. How can they overcome rigid bureaucratic processes to make quick, effective decisions that resonate with diverse stakeholders while remaining adaptable and resilient in the face of emerging challenges? Balancing these priorities remains a crucial but uncertain challenge, requiring universities to adopt agile practices while staying true to their institutional identity.

### **Implementation: Social Media & Digital Marketing**

The strategic use of social media significantly amplifies university branding efforts, especially when showcasing athletics. The integration of social media into university branding strategies, particularly through leveraging athletic success, offers a compelling avenue for enhancing institutional reputation and engagement. This approach aligns with the broader understanding of social media as a powerful form of "owned media" (Leberecht, 2009), enabling organizations to craft and disseminate their own branded content. This capability is especially significant in the context of higher education institutions. Thus, effectively employing social media strategies can considerably elevate a university's brand visibility and reputation.

Social media acts as a dynamic tool for universities to communicate their brand story and engage with diverse audiences. The role of social media in conveying specific brand messages

tailored to target audiences (Watkins, Lee, 2016) and stakeholders is crucial. Brand managers, as noted by Meng, Stavros, and Westberg (2015), recognize the potential of social media for furthering branding goals and fostering personalized communication with audiences. This observation is crucial for universities, as it underscores the potential of social media not just for broad-based branding but also for fostering engagement with various stakeholders, including students, alumni, and prospective students. Implementing targeted social media strategies can thus significantly enhance the perception and reach of a university's brand.

Harrison, Bukstein, Sutton, McArdle, Dickens, Lawrence (2019) explore the challenges in storytelling and translating academic and athletic successes into brand equity. Their study underscores the complexity of translating the multifaceted identities of student-athletes into a cohesive brand image that resonates emotionally with audiences, thereby building long-term brand equity. The findings suggest that effective storytelling in this context requires balancing the athletic and academic aspects of student-athletes' identities, highlighting their intellectual capabilities and work ethic alongside their sporting achievements. The study employs qualitative methods to delve into the perceptions and representations of academic and athletic brands, offering insights into how storytelling can effectively translate success stories in these areas into long-term brand equity. Thus, the challenges in storytelling include understanding how to effectively translate success stories, academic excellence, and sports achievements into long-term brand equity.

Universities can capitalize on social media's extensive reach and interactive nature to boost their brand presence and community engagement. Watkins and Lee (2016) emphasize the role of social media in increasing visibility and reaching a wider audience. For universities, this means leveraging their digital platforms to consistently share content that reflects their mission, values, and achievements, thereby building brand awareness. Moreover, the direct engagement with the

community that social media allows is a critical factor. Universities can utilize these platforms not only to respond to their community but also to foster a sense of belonging and loyalty among their stakeholders (Watkins, Lee, 2016). Effectively using these platforms can help universities create a vibrant and engaged online community, further enhancing their brand appeal.

Highlighting athletic achievements on social media can significantly enhance a university's brand reputation and attract potential students and supporters. Through social media, institutions can highlight athletics achievements. By showcasing success stories, academic excellence, and sports achievements, universities can enhance their brand reputation, particularly using visual-based platforms like Instagram for sports branding (Watkins, Lee, 2016). Additionally, these platforms offer a visual and interactive way to celebrate university milestones and achievements, connecting with audiences in a more personal and engaging manner.

While social media presents unparalleled opportunities for brand enhancement, it also introduces complexities that require careful navigation. The extensive use of social media for marketing and promotion by athletic departments (Sanderson, Stokowski, Taylor, 2019) complicates the landscape. While digital platforms offer immense opportunities for brand building and audience engagement, they also present unique challenges. Missteps in digital communication can rapidly escalate, adversely affecting the brand image. Thus, universities must be diligent and strategic in their social media use to prevent potential reputational damage.

The complexity of integrating athletic successes into broader university branding strategies on social media lies in the need to balance various identities and messages without alienating stakeholders or overshadowing core academic values. One unique challenge is finding a cohesive narrative that resonates emotionally with a diverse audience while accurately representing the multifaceted identities of student-athletes (Harrison et al., 2019). This narrative must not

undermine or overshadow the institution's academic reputation, which is fundamental to its identity. Additionally, universities must manage the rapid nature of social media communication, where a single misstep or off-brand post can quickly lead to negative backlash, damaging institutional credibility. Another challenge is the over-promotion of athletics, which may create perceptions that the university prioritizes sports over academics, alienating prospective students, faculty, or alumni who value scholarly achievements. Moreover, navigating platform-specific nuances and the intricacies of audience engagement across different channels adds to the complexity. Therefore, universities must maintain a delicate balance in their social media strategies, ensuring that athletic successes are celebrated in ways that align with their core values and broader branding objectives without compromising institutional integrity.

In summary, the dynamic nature of social media means universities must balance promotional strategies with genuine engagement to uphold their brand integrity. While leveraging athletics success through digital platforms offers substantial opportunities for strategic branding, it is fraught with challenges. The key lies in maintaining a delicate balance between promoting athletic achievements and upholding the university's core values and mission. Engaging in thoughtful and responsible social media practices is essential for universities to navigate these challenges and successfully harness the power of digital platforms for brand enhancement.

A key unknown is how universities can effectively leverage social media to promote athletic successes while maintaining a balance with their core academic values and brand identity. How can universities craft cohesive narratives that resonate emotionally with diverse audiences without overshadowing their academic reputation or risking missteps that could quickly escalate and damage their brand image? Finding the right balance between promoting athletics and maintaining brand integrity on social media remains a significant challenge.

## CHAPTER 3: Methodology

### Interviews

#### Relevance of Interviews

Conducting interviews is a crucial aspect of this thesis and serves as a valuable means to gain insights into the strategic and implementation aspects of branding decisions influenced by athletics success at TCU. The questions shed light on the decision-making processes within TCU's strategic branding decisions. Questions explore the extent of influence exerted by athletic success on branding decisions, as well as best practices and key challenges.

Interviews are essential for gathering qualitative data because they offer unique insights that other methods often lack. They let researchers explore complex issues in depth, asking follow-up questions and getting clarifications that you can't obtain through surveys or forms (Kvale, 1996). This flexibility allows researchers to dig into the “why: behind responses, revealing motivations and beliefs that aren't always obvious on the surface. Creswell (2013) points out that interviews help researchers understand how participants make sense of their experiences, which is particularly useful when studying social phenomena. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) emphasize that interviews also shed light on the context shaping participants' views, enriching the overall data. By allowing people to share their personal stories, interviews uncover the variety of perspectives and experiences needed to provide depth to qualitative research.

Overall, the interviews aim to discover perspectives on how strategic decisions were made and implemented in the context of athletics success, offering valuable insights into the interplay between sports achievements and strategic branding efforts at TCU.



Given that the research involved interviewing human subjects, a proposal was submitted to be reviewed and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A).

### Interview Structure

The ten semi-structured interviews followed a predetermined protocol of six open-ended questions, with additional follow-up inquiries. The interviews aimed to uncover how TCU harnessed athletic success by gathering clear insights from participants. They ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. This semi-structured format provided a balance between structure and spontaneous conversation, encouraging discussion on the topic. Detailed notes were taken throughout the interviews. They were recorded, except when the participants objected, in which case thorough notes were taken and later verified with the interviewees. All conversations were conducted in English, typically in the participants' offices.

Afterward, interviewees were contacted again to elaborate on issues they mentioned or to clarify their comments. Responses were cross-checked with information from various sources (reports, case documents, website data, social media analytics, etc.) to ensure consistency.

### Interview Questions

1. In general, what is your job description?
2. What are the potential benefits and risks of aligning a brand with athletics success? What factors do you consider in making these strategic decisions?
3. Was your office part of making branding strategy decisions based on the success of TCU Athletics? In what way?
  - a. What branding strategies were made before?
4. Regarding branding strategy– what was the role of athletic success?
  - a. Which of those roles was the most challenging?

- b. What were the key decisions that you took that worked?
5. In your experience, what are the best practices you encountered in leveraging athletic success in branding decisions during the TCU 2022 Season?
- a. Are there new opportunities that have arisen as a result?
6. What did you do that didn't work in terms of leveraging athletic success in branding decisions and marketing implementation? Were the 3 main challenges?
- a. Did you see issues of balancing appeals to different stakeholder groups?
  - b. Was it challenging responsiveness and rapid decision making and implementation in the context of a large organization with multiple decision-makers?
  - c. Was there a challenge in being both responsive and yet aligned with core mission and authentic to TCU's brand values?
  - d. What were some specific implementation challenges?
  - e. What are some of the best practices in regard to challenges?
  - f. What were the creative challenges? What were the challenges in terms of implementation?

### Interviewee Breakdown

All experts were chosen based on the time of their tenure at TCU and their direct interaction with either strategic or implementation decision making during the 2022 season.

Interviewees were chosen based on the following factors:

*Direct Involvement in Strategic Branding Decisions:* Individuals must have been actively involved in the decision-making processes related to strategic branding, particularly during the significant season of 2022. This involvement could range from conceptualizing branding strategies to implementing and adjusting these strategies in response to evolving circumstances.

*Expertise in Strategic Branding:* Individuals are required to possess an understanding and considerable experience in the field of strategic branding. This expertise should be demonstrable through your professional achievements, roles, and contributions to successful branding initiatives.

*Experience with Athletic Success Leveraging:* The study specifically targets individuals who have experience leveraging athletic achievements for branding purposes. This includes strategizing how athletic successes can be utilized to enhance brand visibility, reputation, and value.










*Practical, Real-World Perspectives:* The study prioritizes individuals who can provide practical insights based on real-world experiences. Theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient; individuals must have firsthand experience in navigating the challenges and opportunities that arise at the intersection of athletic success and strategic branding.

The interviewees were interviewed, and they included TCU's university leadership, marketing and communications staff, and athletics directors. The interviews explored their experiences and challenges in aligning the TCU brand with athletics success.

1. Victor Boschini, Chancellor
2. Tracy Syler-Jones, Vice Chancellor of Marketing and Communication
3. Jeremiah Donati, Director of Intercollegiate Athletics
4. Mark Cohen, Associate Athletics Director, Strategic and Football Communications
5. Tiara Richard, Neeley School of Business Director of Communications
6. Bill Hartley, Associate Vice Chancellor of Marketing
7. Merianne Roth, Associate Vice Chancellor of Communications
8. Kris Copeland, TCU Creative Director
9. Amy Peterson, Assistant Director for Multimedia Strategy

## 10. Corey Reed, Web Management

*Overview of Interviewees*

University Leadership   President's Cabinet		Athletics		Neeley School of Business
				
<b>Victor Boschini</b> Chancellor	<b>Tracy Syler-Jones</b> Vice Chancellor, Marketing and Communication	<b>Jeremiah Donati</b> Director, Intercollegiate Athletics	<b>Mark Cohen</b> Associate Athletics Director, Strategic and Football Communications	<b>Tiara Richard</b> Neeley School of Business, Director of Communications
Office of Marketing & Communications				
				
<b>Bill Hartley</b> Associate Vice Chancellor, Marketing	<b>Marianne Roth</b> Associate Vice Chancellor, Communications	<b>Kris Copeland</b> Director, Creative	<b>Amy Peterson</b> Assistant Director, Social & Multimedia Strategy	<b>Corey Reed</b> Director, Web Management

Interview Analysis

In analyzing the data for this thesis on leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions, a thematic approach was employed to dissect the collected information comprehensively.

*Theme Identification:* The analysis began by identifying themes that emerged from the data. This involved a careful examination of the interviews and case studies related to TCU and how its athletic success influenced branding strategies. Themes were pivotal in understanding the broader implications of athletic success on strategic branding.

*Tagging Quotes and Ideas:* To manage and interpret the data effectively, quotes and ideas that multiple people shared were tagged. This method helped in pinpointing commonalities across different data sources,

ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the actual experiences and insights of the interviewees and case studies examined.

*Evidence Confirmation:* Both confirmed and unconfirmed evidence were scrutinized. This involved validating certain data points with existing literature and case studies, while also noting where discrepancies or new insights occurred. This step was crucial for establishing the reliability of the findings and understanding areas where TCU's experience might diverge from common patterns.

*Comparative Analysis:* The study also included looking at what other case studies have said about leveraging athletic success for branding and how those strategies were implemented. This comparison was essential to contextualize TCU's actions within broader trends and to identify unique or particularly successful strategies.

*Coding of Data:* Coding was an integral part of the analysis, where data was organized according to predefined and emerging categories from the literature review and the case studies. This systematic coding helped in structuring the analysis and drawing meaningful conclusions about strategic branding decisions.

By employing these methods, the analysis aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how TCU and similar institutions can leverage athletic success to enhance their strategic branding, addressing both known and unforeseen challenges in the process.

## **Other Case Study Data**

### University Data

For analyzing data related to Texas Christian University's (TCU) athletic performance and the corresponding strategic branding campaigns, a comprehensive collection of materials was gathered. This included reports and documents provided directly by interviewees who were closely involved in the strategic and implementation aspects of branding decisions at TCU. These individuals, ranging from university leadership to marketing and communications staff,

contributed firsthand accounts and internal documents which were crucial for an authentic and detailed analysis.

Additionally, relevant data was also extracted from online sources. This included official university publications, press releases, and digital marketing materials that documented TCU's campaigns and public-facing communications. The online materials provided a broader view of how TCU's athletic successes were presented to the public and how these presentations were designed to align with the university's strategic branding objectives.

These dual sources of data—from both personal interviews and online repositories—ensured a robust foundation for analyzing how TCU leverages its athletic achievements for strategic branding. This approach allowed for a multifaceted understanding of the strategies in place, capturing both the internal intentions behind the branding efforts and the external expressions of those strategies.

#### Documents & Reports Gathered

1. Case Circle of Excellence Category: Videos > Commercials | “Lead On 150”
2. Case Circle of Excellence Category: Marketing > Institutional Branding | Fiesta Bowl Campaign
3. Case Circle of Excellence Category: Marketing > Marketing Initiatives | A Hollywood Ending: CFP National Championship Game Campaign
4. Core Site Analytics: Fiesta Vs Big 12 Championship
5. Core Site Analytics: Fiesta Vs Christmas Eve
6. Core Site Analytics : Fiesta Vs Commencement
7. Core Site Analytics: Fiesta Vs Dec 10

8. Core Site Analytics: Fiesta Vs Prev Saturday
9. Core Site Analytics: Dec 1 22 To Feb 28 23
10. Core Site Analytics: Wednesday Before Fiesta To Wednesday After National Championship
11. Football Lookbook: Marketing & Communication Highlights – Athletic Support
12. Post Performance (Texas Christian University) January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022
13. Profile Performance (Texas Christian University) January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022
14. TCU Network from Dec 1 22 To Feb 28 23
15. TCU Network from Wednesday Before Fiesta To Wednesday After National Championship
16. TCU Social Media 2023 Report

Throughout the research process, the reports mentioned above were used to gather further insights into the inner workings of TCU throughout the 2022 Season, and to support claims and examples shared by interviewees.

## CHAPTER 4: Findings, Recommendations, and Discussion

How are some known or anticipated challenges overcome in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions?

### *Anticipating triggers*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions entails navigating various challenges, one of which involves anticipating triggers that signal opportune moments for campaign launches. Given the substantial effort involved in crafting campaigns tied to athletics, several interviewees mentioned that it's crucial to pinpoint the right triggers to maximize impact.

In the realm of baseball, for instance, an interviewee mentioned that campaigns typically aren't launched haphazardly. Instead, they await specific milestones, such as the World Series, before initiating promotional efforts. Similarly, in football, the pinnacle is making it to a Bowl game and to the National Championship, while basketball enthusiasts eagerly anticipate the Final Four.

Therefore, to streamline the process, organizations establish internal triggers, serving as markers for when to commence planning and execution. By doing so, they can allocate resources efficiently and ensure campaigns are well-timed for maximum resonance. For instance, ahead of the Final Four, meticulous planning includes identifying the location, determining available advertising opportunities, and setting appropriate budgets.

A prime example of proactive planning and understanding triggers occurred when TCU's Marketing & Communications team anticipated the potential for a National Championship appearance. They promptly flew to Los Angeles to scout locations and discovered an opportunity to place a strategic ad right next to the team's hotel (Appendix B). Once TCU officially secured



their spot in the National Championship, they were prepared to swiftly install a multistory billboard on the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown Hotel, where the team was staying. This foresight ensured TCU was able to maximize their brand visibility and capitalize on this prestigious opportunity.

Moreover, leveraging insights from previous events, such as the Fiesta Bowl, allows for even more proactive planning. By leveraging past experiences and data, organizations can stay ahead of the curve, ensuring their branding efforts align seamlessly with the rhythms of the athletic calendar. In essence, interviewees highlighted that by anticipating triggers and meticulously planning campaigns around key athletic events, organizations can harness the power of sports to drive strategic branding decisions effectively.

*Establishing partnerships before the chaos starts.*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions presents several challenges that institutions often face. Interviewees mentioned that one of the critical approaches to overcoming these challenges is by establishing partnerships well before they become essential during high-pressure periods. Such strategic timing allows institutions to be proactive rather than reactive, setting a foundation for success when the stakes are high.

Many universities benefit from having robust partnerships with their alumni and other schools, while others do not. This disparity highlights the importance of cultivating these relationships early. A successful partnership with alumni and other educational institutions can significantly amplify an institution's branding efforts through athletics. These relationships are particularly crucial because they can make or break an institution's ability to elevate its brand during pivotal moments.

Furthermore, institutions that foster good partnerships often find themselves at their best when working together, emphasizing teamwork and shared goals over individual achievements. This collaboration keeps the institution's objectives top of mind, ensuring that all actions are geared towards a common branding strategy.

One interviewer mentioned that it is important that these internal partnerships are established before pivotal moments, as if they are not, they can cause issues. For example, when Max Duggan was announced as a Heisman Finalist, TCU decided to launch a marketing campaign involving billboards in New York City, in Times Square (Appendix C). The marketing and communications team needed high-quality video content from the football program to include in their ads, but those partnerships were not fully solidified at the time. The person with access to this crucial content was traveling with Max Duggan, which created a significant logistical challenge. This lack of established partnerships almost prevented the billboard from being completed in time and showcased how important it is to have these collaborations in place to ensure the success of marketing campaigns and achieve organizational objectives. Being proactive with internal partnerships allows teams to seamlessly navigate challenges and fully capitalize on critical opportunities like a Heisman Finalist nomination.

Establishing external partnerships is another pivotal strategy that significantly bolsters an institution's ability to harness athletic achievements for strategic branding. For instance, TCU collaborated with Visit Fort Worth to enhance their mutual interests and strengthen the local community's connection to TCU's athletic successes. With their Visit Fort Worth Partnership for the "VRBO Fiesta Bowl/College Football Playoff" they used "In-game ribbon, digital billboards and digital display ads".

As highlighted in the “Case Circle of Excellence Category: Marketing > Marketing Initiatives | A Hollywood Ending: CFP National Championship Game Campaign” report collaboration was an essential part of the campaign. The TCU report cites that “Like football, marketing is a team sport. Not only did we rely on the resources of our internal team and agency partners, but we also collaborated with the Big 12 Conference and Visit Fort Worth, our city’s tourism office, to expand our reach and resources. The Big 12 shared costs that allowed us to place high-profile out-of-home video ads at the highly trafficked L.A. Live complex, while Visit Fort Worth co-branded a “swarm” of branded vehicles near the stadium, a full-page print ad in The New York Times and LA-area billboards. These partnerships kept costs down, built goodwill and extended reach.”

Specifically, for the CPF National Championship Game, TCU partnered with the Big 12 Conference marketing team to place video ads in L.A. Live, a sports and entertainment district in Los Angeles (Appendix D). As mentioned, TCU also leveraged relationships with Visit Fort Worth to place co-branded promotions like an ad in The New York Times and branded vehicles in Los Angeles (Appendix D).

These types of partnership allow both entities to benefit from each other's strengths, creating opportunities for cross-promotion and amplifying their reach. For example, by leveraging TCU's athletic success, Visit Fort Worth can attract more visitors, while TCU gains increased visibility and support from the local tourism network. Such collaborations showcase the importance of developing a diverse network of external partnerships early on, as they provide additional resources and perspectives that can help navigate high-pressure branding situations with agility and foresight.

On a separate note, interviewees emphasized how TCU has excelled at maintaining informal “partnerships” with fans and the local community even after the initial chaos and excitement of major athletic events subsided. Whether celebrating a win or reflecting on a loss, TCU consistently expresses gratitude by running heartfelt thank-you ads, reinforcing the bond between the university and its supporters (Appendix E). As the “2022 Fiesta Bowl Media Plan” highlights, these ads are run in a variety of local media, both in Fort Worth (where TCU is located) and where the games are taking place (Appendix E). This practice ensures that fans feel appreciated and valued, sustaining a strong sense of camaraderie and support. By recognizing the unwavering loyalty of their community regardless of the outcome, TCU fosters long-lasting relationships, creating an inclusive and encouraging atmosphere that resonates well beyond the stadium. These consistent gestures reinforce TCU's commitment to its fan base, bolstering its brand reputation as a community-focused institution.

In essence, the key to leveraging athletic success effectively for branding is to establish these critical partnerships well before (and even after) the chaos of athletic seasons and branding crises begins. This proactive approach involves having dedicated individuals who are ready to initiate and nurture these partnerships early on. Several university leaders mentioned that the early establishment of relationships ensures that when it's time to capitalize on athletic achievements, the institution is well-prepared and strategically aligned with supportive partners, leading to more effective and impactful branding outcomes.

*Social media is all about thinking and moving fast. Which is why having autonomy is so important.*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions can present several challenges, particularly in the context of a large organization with multiple decision-makers. One of the crucial

ways these challenges are overcome is by empowering specific teams or individuals with autonomy, especially in the realm of social media.

Social media demands rapid responsiveness and swift decision-making. The ability to think and move quickly is essential, which underscores the importance of having autonomy. For instance, during the national championship, a content team had pre-planned posts for both a victory and a loss. However, as the game unfolded differently than expected, leading to a heartbreaking loss, the initial celebratory graphic created for a win became inappropriate. The team member responsible for this content had to quickly rework the graphics to convey a more empathetic tone, aligning with what the audience needed at that moment. This new graphic now became a compilation of key moments of the seasons, highlighting fans and all supporters, and a statement of gratitude to the community (Appendix F). This quick adaptation was possible because of the autonomy granted to the team, allowing them to respond immediately without waiting for multiple approvals.

The rapid adaptation not only meets the immediate needs of the audience but also reflects the institution's core values, such as integrity, community, engagement, and excellence. These values are lived out through actions like quickly reworking content to maintain relevance and emotional connection with the audience. It demonstrates a commitment to integrity by ensuring that the messaging remains truthful and respectful to the situation, and it fosters community by sharing a united message that resonates with the audience's current feelings.

Moreover, this approach of using athletics to help tell a bigger story beyond just the sports achievement itself showcases the institution's dedication to excellence. The rapid iteration and continuous brainstorming that takes place behind the scenes highlight a commitment to delivering the best possible content under pressing circumstances.

Therefore, social media is vital for branding and engagement because it provides a direct, real-time platform to reach and interact with audiences, fostering deeper connections and amplifying an institution's message on a local, national, and international scale. And, as seen, athletics plays a crucial role in social media by creating compelling, high-impact content that drives engagement, rallying fans around exciting moments and team stories, which in turn boosts the visibility of institutional platforms and strengthens the overall brand presence online. As per the "TCU Social Media 2023 Report" (Appendix G) in TCU's case, 42.85% of major issues/events that impacted social media were related to athletic success (related to TCU's presence in the Fiesta Bowl, National Championship, College World Series, and March Madness Playoffs). Additionally, the total cross-networks measured year over year:

- Total impressions increased by 8.8% and hit over 79.3 million.
- Total engagements increased 28.7% and hit over 4.2 million.
- Post link clicks increased 67.3% and hit over 653k.

By leveraging athletics correctly on social media, TCU was able to see a significant on its net audience growth, total messages, follower counts, among others (Appendix H).

Not only on social media, but as interviewees mentioned, there is an "halo effect" of athletic success on brand visibility, which can be seen Appendix I, which showcases the Websites clicks post Fiesta Bowl and National Championships and its prolonged effects on TCU's website.

In conclusion, one of the effective strategies to overcome challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding is to ensure that those handling real-time platforms like social media have the autonomy to make quick decisions, but as the numbers and data shows, doing this correctly has significant positive impacts. This autonomy allows them to be highly responsive and

adaptive, essential traits in a dynamic and fast-paced digital landscape, thereby enhancing the institution's brand in alignment with its values and the immediate needs of its audience.

What are some unknown challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions?

*Leaning into the unconventional.*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding often encounters unexpected challenges, one of which can be the emergence of unconventional symbols or elements that resonate with the public in unforeseen ways. Interviewees highlighted that a perfect example of this is the phenomenon of the “Hypnotoad,” which organically emerged and became a cultural icon, despite not being a traditional university mark or logo (Appendix J).

The Hypnotoad story began almost by accident when a graphic associated with it caught the public's attention. Instead of resisting this unconventional symbol, the decision-makers chose to embrace and enhance it, integrating it into the branding strategy. This choice proved pivotal, as the Hypnotoad idea quickly caught fire, capturing the hearts of fans nationwide and even being incorporated into the back of the Fiesta Bowl championship ring.

Therefore, TCU's approach with the Hypnotoad demonstrated a strategic willingness to embrace and harness the unorthodox. First, the university recognized that unconventional elements could foster genuine connections with its audience. Instead of dismissing the Hypnotoad as irrelevant or incompatible with traditional branding, TCU embraced it, recognizing its unique power to engage the community and enhance the fan experience. Despite its non-traditional origin, the Hypnotoad became a significant branding element. It was not a formal part of the university's branding, nor did it generate direct revenue as it was not used for merchandise sales. However, its

impact was profound enough to influence the perception of the university's athletics and contributed massively to its brand recognition. The national love affair with the Hypnotoad, fueled by appearances like Sonny Dykes wearing a Hypnotoad hoodie, showed how powerful such unconventional elements could be in creating a vibrant and engaging brand identity.

Specifically, TCU leaned into the unconventional by acknowledging authentic popularity. TCU saw the viral popularity of the Hypnotoad and acknowledged it as a legitimate and powerful symbol among fans. Additionally, they creatively wove the Hypnotoad into broader branding efforts, such as integrating it into championship rings, using it in social media campaigns, and allowing coaches like Sonny Dykes to wear Hypnotoad-branded apparel publicly. By embracing a fun and whimsical image, TCU departed from its historically more serious branding. This pivot resonated strongly with fans, creating a closer bond between the program and its supporters. TCU stayed agile in its branding strategy, not hesitating to incorporate the Hypnotoad in significant ways when it became clear how much it resonated with the audience. They allowed it to naturally become a cornerstone of their marketing narrative.

The Hypnotoad's popularity demonstrates how unconventional elements can capture public imagination and loyalty, sometimes more effectively than traditional marketing strategies. Leaning into the unconventional with the Hypnotoad generated significant media interest as this phenomenon was so impactful that it received coverage in major publications like The New York Times and led to widespread media interest. This provided even more visibility and recognition, solidifying the brand's appeal, further cementing its place in popular culture.

In summary, one of the unknown challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions is the emergence of unconventional symbols like the Hypnotoad. These elements, while initially unexpected, can become powerful tools for engagement and branding if



embraced and integrated into the broader strategic framework. This approach demonstrates the value of flexibility and responsiveness in brand management, turning potential challenges into significant assets.

From TCU's experience with the Hypnotoad, institutions can learn that embracing the unconventional requires flexibility, creativity, and a readiness to adapt quickly to changing audience interests. By leaning into what makes their story unique, universities can create stronger, more memorable connections with their audiences and use unconventional elements as powerful tools for engagement and branding.

*Finding experts. And if you don't have enough of them, outsource it.*

One of the lesser-known challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions is the difficulty in finding and engaging with experts who truly understand how to navigate the complex interplay between athletics and branding. This challenge often arises because the specific expertise required to maximize the branding potential of athletic achievements is not readily available within many organizations.

Interviewees mentioned that the key move in addressing this challenge is to identify and collaborate with experts who have a deep understanding of both sports marketing and brand strategy. This involves not only finding these professionals but also fostering a relationship of trust to ensure that their insights and strategies can be effectively integrated into the organization's branding efforts.

However, finding in-house expertise can be a significant hurdle, especially for organizations that are new to sports branding or who may not have the resources to hire full-time specialists. In such cases, the practical solution is to outsource this expertise. For example, during

the Big 12 Championship, the organization partnered with Ardent Creative, an agency that provided the necessary manpower to execute their strategic branding initiatives. This collaboration was crucial, and the agency was given a heads-up about the requirements ahead of time, which allowed for better preparation and implementation of the branding strategy.

Outsourcing allows organizations to tap into a pool of specialized knowledge and skills on an as-needed basis, which can be particularly valuable in a field where timing and market responsiveness are crucial. The reality of learning on the job can be impractical and inefficient, especially under the pressure of time-sensitive campaigns or during significant events like playoffs or championship games. In these high-stakes situations, there is little room for error, and the learning curve can lead to missed opportunities or missteps in branding efforts.

Therefore, as interviewees emphasized, to effectively leverage athletic success for strategic branding, organizations must proactively seek out experts who can navigate this specialized field. If the required expertise is not available internally, outsourcing becomes a strategic imperative to ensure that the organization can capitalize on the branding opportunities presented by its athletic achievements. This approach not only mitigates the risks associated with inexperience but also enhances the potential for successful and impactful branding initiatives.

*Understanding and adapting to the differences between athletic and academic calendars.*

One of the lesser known yet significant challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions is understanding and adapting to the differences between athletic and academic calendars. These two calendars often operate on different timelines and have different peak periods, which can complicate planning and execution of branding strategies.

Interviewees mentioned that the academic calendar is generally stable and predictable, driving the annual planning cycles of educational institutions. It is consistent year over year, with key events and timelines well-established in advance. In contrast, the athletic calendar can vary significantly, influenced by game schedules, playoff seasons, and unexpected successes, which may not align with the academic year.

For institutions like TCU, where athletics play a central role in campus life and culture, the planning process always considers the athletic seasons. This integration is crucial because athletic events generate significant excitement and community engagement, providing a welcome break from rigorous academic schedules. TCU strategically ensures student involvement in athletic events, even opting to forego potential revenue to guarantee student presence, which underscores the deep integration of athletics into the institution's culture.

However, this integration also brings challenges, especially in terms of timing. For instance, major athletic events can coincide with academic periods like the holidays, leading to logistical and operational challenges. The marketing teams, which typically work closer to the academic schedule, may find themselves unprepared for the intensive demands of a successful athletic season, such as the need for extended work hours during what is typically a downtime in the academic calendar.

This was exemplified during a particularly successful athletic season at TCU, where staff members were required to work long days, often sacrificing holiday breaks. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many, underscoring the unexpected demands that come with athletic success. The short turnaround times between events and the need for rapid completion of tasks added to the complexity, highlighting the critical need for flexibility and quick adaptation.

Thus, one of the unknown challenges in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions lies in the need to synchronize these two differing calendars. Institutions must develop strategies that accommodate both academic stability and athletic unpredictability, ensuring that marketing and operational plans are flexible enough to handle the dynamic nature of athletic schedules while still supporting the academic mission of the institution. This requires a delicate balance and a deep understanding of how each calendar impacts the other, ensuring that both academic and athletic achievements are celebrated and leveraged effectively for branding.

What are the best practices in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions?

*Seizing the window of opportunity.*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions involves seizing the fleeting window of opportunity that comes with high-performing seasons. This period of heightened visibility and excitement presents a crucial time for universities to engage in a variety of strategic actions that can have long-lasting effects on their brand and resources.

Interviewees said that one of the first steps in taking advantage of this window is to maximize media exposure and amplify presence on social media platforms. During peak athletic success, the attention from both local and national media, along with increased social media activity, can significantly raise the profile of the institution. TCU focused on being ultra-responsive and frequently distributing engaging content that highlights team successes, behind-the-scenes moments, and the vibrant campus life.

Being in the moment and turning around content quickly are essential. This means having a dedicated team ready to create and push content that captures and capitalizes on key moments as

they happen. The agility to respond to events as they unfold is crucial in maintaining the relevance and appeal of the content shared with fans and potential donors. Leveraging perfect timing is essential, and an example was the announcement of the new Athletic Performance Center (Appendix K) during the week of the Big 12 Championship. During TCU's season, the university managed to fundraise an impressive millions of dollars in just a couple of weeks to capitalize on the projects that would benefit current and future student athletes. This record fundraising achievement not only highlights the effective use of this window of opportunity but also sets a legacy for the season, enhancing the institution's branding and student resources for years to come.

Finally, the impact of such strategic use of athletic success extends beyond immediate financial gains or media buzz—it helps in building a lasting legacy. The benefits provided by new facilities and programs will support the athletic and academic excellence of future student athletes, ensuring that the successes of one season contribute to the sustainable growth and enhancement of the institution.

In conclusion, the best practices in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions center around effectively seizing the window of opportunity by enhancing media and social media engagement, doubling down on marketing efforts, boosting donor involvement, and focusing on creating a lasting legacy that will benefit the institution long after the cheers have quieted.

*Telling the story of students, like Max, who chose TCU for the education.*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions can extend far beyond the field, especially when it involves telling compelling stories about student athletes like Max Duggan, who chose TCU not just for its athletic programs but also for its educational offerings (Appendix L).

This storytelling approach can significantly enhance a university's brand by highlighting the integration of athletic accomplishment with academic excellence.

As interviewees shared, a best practice in using athletic success for branding is to emphasize the dual identity of student-athletes. Max Duggan, for example, became a national figure not only for his athletic prowess but also for his commitment to education. By publicly celebrating that Duggan chose to stay at TCU to complete his degree despite opportunities to transfer for more immediate athletic benefits, TCU showcased its dedication to the academic success of its athletes. This narrative is powerful because it resonates with prospective students and their parents, who are often concerned about the balance between athletics and academics.

Effective storytelling involves using language, social media campaigns, and every available opportunity to talk about student achievements both on and off the field. Celebrating moments like Duggan being a finalist for the Heisman Trophy not only during sports events but also at academic milestones, such as commencement, reinforces the message that TCU supports the holistic development of its students.

Interviewees mentioned that every time there is a significant achievement or a highlight moment for student athletes like Duggan, it's crucial to capitalize on these opportunities to reinforce the branding message. By celebrating these connections and individuals, TCU not only boosts its reach but also enhances pride among alumni and current students, demonstrating the university's commitment to celebrating its community members' successes comprehensively.

The strategy of uplifting individuals such as Duggan who embody the values and goals of the university can significantly impact the institution's reach and reputation. By showcasing that athletes at TCU prioritize their education, and by celebrating their academic and athletic successes

equally, the university sends a strong message that it values comprehensive excellence. This approach not only attracts prospective students who aim to balance sports with academics but also strengthens alumni loyalty by reminding them of the university's commitment to its values.

TCU's approach gives audiences a glimpse into how the university celebrates success, embodying the idea that when one succeeds, everyone succeeds. This collective success narrative is crucial in creating a sense of community and belonging among students, staff, alumni, and prospective families. It also underscores the point that most student athletes are at the university for both an education and athletic experience, with many not pursuing professional athletic careers post-graduation.

In summary, best practices in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding should focus on storytelling that emphasizes the educational choices and successes of student athletes. By doing so, universities like TCU can effectively use their athletic programs to bolster their academic reputation, creating a well-rounded brand that appeals to a broad audience.

*Telling the broader story of TCU.*

Leveraging athletic success for strategic branding decisions at TCU involves a strategic emphasis on telling the broader story of the university, not just its athletic achievements. A vast majority of interviewees highlighted that this approach is crucial in maintaining the balance between promoting sports programs and enhancing the overall academic reputation and appeal of the institution.

TCU recognizes that while athletic success can significantly boost a university's visibility, it is essential to integrate these achievements into the larger narrative of the university's values and offerings. This integration involves highlighting how TCU excels not only on the sports fields but

also in academic arenas. The university's messaging consistently communicates that it is an "everything school" where students can expect not only top-tier athletics but also excellent academic opportunities, great dorm facilities, and a vibrant campus life (Appendix M). This comprehensive approach is pivotal in attracting prospective students and their families who are looking for a well-rounded educational experience.

The primary goal in leveraging TCU's athletic success is to increase the affinity for the TCU brand among its constituents. This is often achieved by posting content that not only celebrates sports achievements but also makes the community feel proud of their institution's broader accomplishments. Sports success is used as a vehicle to enhance school pride and connect with a wider audience.

Simultaneously, a secondary goal is to elevate TCU's academic profile. By aligning stories of athletic and academic excellence, TCU ensures that the focus remains balanced, mitigating the risk of the university being perceived solely as a sports-oriented institution. This balance is crucial as it reflects the university's core identity as an academic institution first.

As another example, in for the Fiesta Bowl, to continue telling the broader story of the university, TCU used messaging like "Horned Frogs thrive in the desert – Actually, we do well everywhere" (Appendix N). Therefore, efforts to maintain this balance are visible in how the university plans and executes its branding strategies. TCU tries hard to ensure that the excitement around sports does not overshadow other important aspects of university life. This balance prevents potential negative implications where academic aspects could fall behind.

The challenge for many institutions is to find this balance without causing disruption to the cohesive presentation of their brand. TCU's strategic approach, backed by proof of return on



investment, demonstrates its capability to provide vast opportunities to students across various fields, not just athletics.

In conclusion, the best practices in leveraging athletic success for strategic branding at TCU revolve around telling the broader story of the university. This approach ensures that while athletics bring visibility and excitement, they also enhance, rather than overshadow, the overall educational narrative and mission of the university, thereby supporting a strong and balanced institutional brand.

## CHAPTER 5: Limitations & Future Research

### Limitations

This study, while comprehensive in its approach to understanding how TCU leverages athletic success for strategic branding decisions, encounters several potential limitations that could impact the breadth and depth of the findings.

*Limited Scope Due to Specific Time Frame:* The study is primarily focused on TCU's strategic branding initiatives during its historic 2022 season. Consequently, the data and conclusions drawn are specific to this period and may not necessarily be applicable to or reflective of other time frames or situations. This delimitation restricts the ability to generalize the findings to other contexts or institutions without considering their unique circumstances.

*Impact of Concurrent University Milestones:* During the period under review, TCU was celebrating its 150th anniversary, a milestone that was marked with significant events such as ringing the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) closing bell, numerous mural openings, and the announcement of surpassing the Billion Dollar Mark in the Lead On fundraising campaign. These events themselves likely influenced the university's branding and marketing strategies significantly. It can be challenging to disentangle the effects and impact of athletic successes from these celebratory events, as both were prominent in TCU's strategic branding during the same period. This overlap might have amplified the visibility and effects of the branding strategies beyond what could be attributed to athletic success alone.

*Data Collection Biases:* While efforts were made to collect comprehensive data through interviews and online resources, the study might still face limitations related to data availability and transparency. Some of the insights and internal documents provided by interviewees could reflect

a positive bias towards the university's initiatives or omit less favorable outcomes and challenges. Furthermore, public-facing materials available online are often designed to portray the institution in the best possible light, potentially overlooking issues or less successful aspects of the branding strategy.

*Reliance on Self-Reported Data:* The study extensively uses interviews as a primary data source, which inherently includes limitations such as subjective interpretations, recall bias, and the potential for interviewees to provide socially desirable responses. Although these insights are invaluable for understanding the internal perspectives on TCU's branding efforts, they may not always objectively reflect the effectiveness of these strategies.

### **Future Research**

To address these limitations in future research, it would be beneficial to expand the study to include multiple academic years and compare periods of athletic success with ordinary years. Additionally, incorporating more quantitative data and third-party analyses could help mitigate biases and provide a more balanced view of the impact of TCU's athletic successes on its strategic branding efforts. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, subsequent studies can further refine our understanding of how universities can effectively leverage athletic achievements for broader branding objectives.

## CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

The exploration of Texas Christian University's (TCU) historic 2022 season through this thesis has provided comprehensive insights into the dynamic interplay between athletic success and strategic branding decisions. The study's findings underscore the significance of leveraging sports achievements to enhance the university's overall brand, contributing to a more robust engagement not just with the current university community but also prospective students and broader stakeholders.

This research illuminated the profound impact of athletic success on TCU's strategic branding efforts, particularly highlighting the effectiveness of integrating these successes into the broader narrative of the university's mission and values. The ability to capitalize on the heightened media exposure and the emotional engagement that comes with sports victories has shown to offer a critical window of opportunity for enhancing TCU's brand reputation and affinity.

The study also confronted the challenges inherent in aligning the athletic triumphs with the academic calendar and the broader educational objectives of the university. It shed light on the delicate balance required to ensure that the enthusiasm for sports does not overshadow the academic integrity and the intellectual contributions of the institution.

Moreover, the celebrations surrounding TCU's 150th anniversary, including significant events like ringing the NYSE closing bell, the unveiling of murals, and the milestone of passing the Billion Dollar Mark on the Lead On campaign, have also played a substantial role in shaping the strategic branding decisions during this period. These concurrent celebrations were both a boon and a challenge, amplifying the university's visibility while also demanding careful integration into the athletic branding strategy to maintain a cohesive and comprehensive university image.

Moving forward, this thesis suggests that universities should continue to explore and refine strategies that not only react to athletic successes but proactively incorporate these into a larger, well-planned branding and marketing framework. This approach ensures that the excitement generated by sports is effectively utilized to bolster not just the athletic departments but enhances the educational values and commitments of the institution.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to both academic knowledge and practical applications in sports management and university branding, offering a roadmap for other institutions aiming to harness their athletic achievements for broader strategic objectives. The case of TCU during the historic 2022 season exemplifies a well-executed integration of sports success into a comprehensive university branding strategy, providing valuable lessons on maximizing the impact of such moments for institutional advancement.

# Appendix

## Appendix A: IRB Approval

Approved

IRB#2024-16 HOW CAN AN INSTITUTION LEVERAGE ATHLETICS SUCCESS TO GUIDE STRATEGIC BRANDING DECISIONS? A TCU CASE STUDY OF THE HISTORIC 2022 SEASON

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Approval Date: 03-07-2024	Expiration Date: N/A	Organization: Marketing, Residential Life	Active Submissions: N/A
Admin Check-In Date: 03-06-2025	Closed Date: N/A	Current Policy Post-2018 Rule	Sponsors: N/A

Key Contacts Attachments

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4 ?

## Appendix B: Billboard on The InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown Hotel



Appendix C: The Heisman Trophy Announcement Billboard

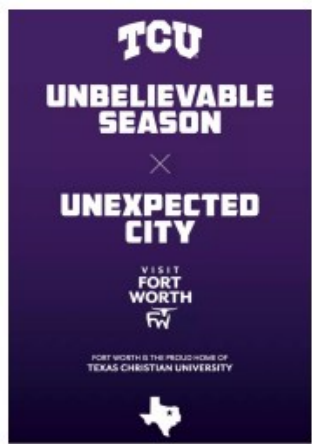


**NYC Times Square**  
 12.10.22 | 9-10 p.m.  
 Full motion digital displays  
 300,000 est. impressions

Appendix D: Community Partnerships



**Visit Fort Worth**  
 In-game ribbon, digital billboards and digital display ads



**Visit Fort Worth**  
 Printed and digital billboards, digital display ads, "swarm" of branded cars, New York Times print ad and spots on the KABC Morning Show

Appendix E: Thank You Ads & Post Game Ads







# TCU

**THIS ISN'T THE END  
OF OUR  
INCREDIBLE STORY.**

In a journey beyond our wildest dreams, we couldn't have asked for a better place to make history as the first team from Texas to play in the CFP National Championship.

And now it's time to go home.

In our historic 150th year, TCU will continue doing what we do best: creating the dream journeys we send our students on every single day. Through a culture of personal conviction and an empowering academic environment, herald to the successes that await every Horned Frog.

Thank you, Las Vegas, for the warm welcome and for your part in this unforgettable story. And we meet again.

Because what's a Hollywood ending without a sequel?

Learn more about how TCU creates leaders in — and on — many fields.



**2023** NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



## 2022 Fiesta Bowl Media Plan

2022 FIESTA BOWL MEDIA PLAN		
Medium/Outlet	Quantity	Impressions
<b>Out of Home</b>		
DFW Airport	243 Boards	716,049
Love Field Airport	38 Boards	1,160,000
Sky Harbor Airport	4 Boards	1,250,000
DFW Digital Billboards	16 Boards	11,000,000
Phoenix Digital Billboards	11 Boards	2,574,315
In-Game Jumbotron Ad (State Farm Stadium)	1 Board	60,000
Phoenix Digital Displays (Shopping Malls, Charging Stations, Etc.)	45 Boards	579,081
<b>Print</b>		
Fort Worth Star-Telegram	1 Ad	50,000
Dallas Morning News	1 Ad	133,650
The Arizona Republic	1 Ad	139,950
Fort Worth Star-Telegram	1 Ad	57,000
Dallas Morning News	1 Ad	169,140
The Arizona Republic	1 Ad	135,950
Fiesta Bowl Official Program	1 Ad	50,000
<b>Digital</b>		
Fort Worth Star-Telegram Native Display Banners	N/A	100,000
Dallas Morning News Native Display Banners	N/A	600,000
<b>Social</b>		
Primary TCU Accounts	N/A	1,478,721

*Appendix F: Thank You Ads & Post Game Social Media*





## ***METRICS***

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Total cross-networks measured year over year:

- Total impressions increased by 8.8% and hit over 79.3 million
- Total engagements increased 28.7% and hit over 4.2 million
- Post link clicks increased 67.3% and hit over 653k

TikTok measured 2023 compared to July 2022–December 2022

\* Full 2022 not available\*

- Total followers increased by 66% and hit over 18k in net growth
- Total engagement increased by 85% and hit over 266.7k likes
- Total reach increased by 83% and hit over 2.8 million views

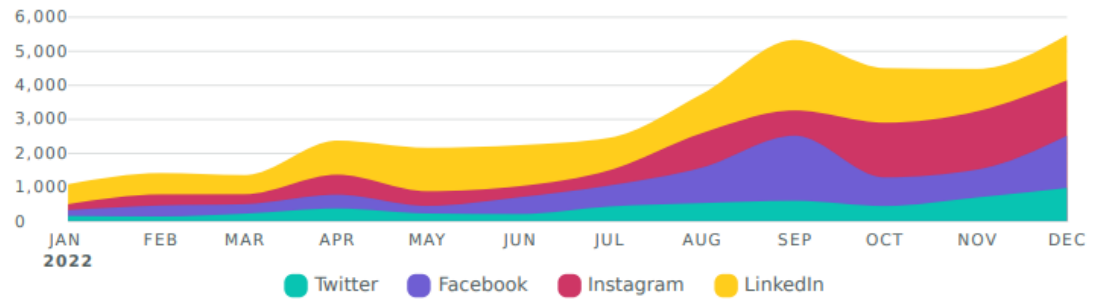
### **In-depth metrics:**

Across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and LinkedIn reporting metrics, we saw increases in these main categories— impressions, engagements, and post clicks. The growth in these categories was likely driven by the increase in content, increased ad dollars spent on boosted posts, and high-profile events like TCU's 150th year and the success of TCU athletics – especially football going to the National Championship which led to increased visibility and audience engagement across platforms.

YouTube also saw an increase in its main categories – views, watch time, and subscribers compared to last year. The growth in these categories was likely driven by the increase in content and TCU's sesquicentennial year.

Appendix H: Social Media Impact

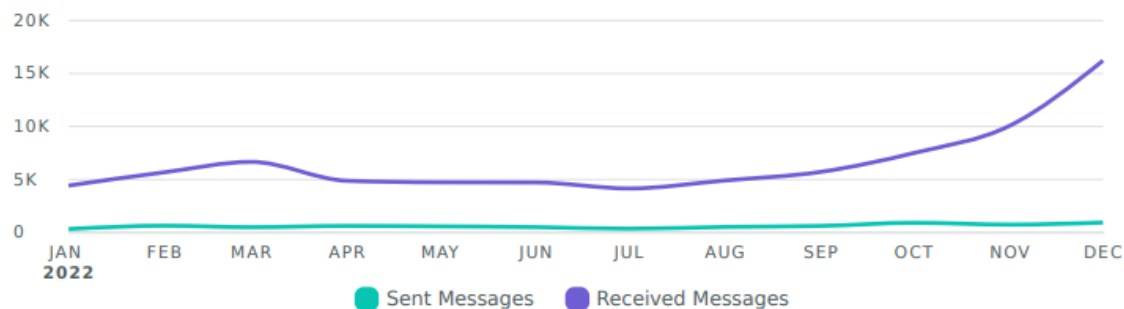
Total Net Audience Growth



Audience Metrics	Totals	% Change
<b>Total Net Audience Growth</b>	<b>36,452</b>	<b>↗ 181.9%</b>
Twitter Net Follower Growth	4,898	↗ 155.6%
Facebook Net Follower Growth	8,666	—
Instagram Net Follower Growth	9,277	↗ 12.6%
LinkedIn Net Follower Growth	13,611	↗ 390.7%

## Total Sent Messages

Messages per Month



Sent Messages Metrics	Totals	% Change
<b>Total Sent Messages</b>	<b>6,516</b>	<b>↗ 132.3%</b>
Twitter Sent Messages	779	↗ 21.9%
Facebook Sent Messages	2,053	↗ 175.6%
Instagram Sent Messages	3,288	↗ 131.5%
LinkedIn Sent Messages	396	↗ 39,500%

## Comparison of TCU Social Media to Previous Years

Profile ▲	Audience	Audience Growth	Published Posts	Impressions	Engagements	Engagement Rate (per Impression)	Video Views
<b>Reporting Period</b>	<b>447,636</b>	<b>36,452</b>	<b>3,972</b>	<b>72,929,577</b>	<b>3,297,486</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>5,166,436</b>
Jan 1, 2022 - Dec 31, 2022	↗ 103%	↗ 181.9%	↗ 59.7%	↗ 31.5%	↗ 35.8%	↗ 3.3%	↗ 423.8%
<b>Compare to</b>	<b>220,475</b>	<b>12,932</b>	<b>2,487</b>	<b>55,465,077</b>	<b>2,428,784</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>986,363</b>
Jan 1, 2019 - Dec 31, 2019							
@TCU	150,215	4,898	760	8,583,426	304,352	3.5%	227,849
TCU - Texas Christian University	104,499	8,666	776	24,647,459	1,264,943	5.1%	1,090,562
Texas Christian University	95,234	13,611	392	4,014,342	364,590	9.1%	136,466
texaschristian university	97,688	9,277	2,044	35,684,350	1,363,601	3.8%	3,711,559

### Current Social Media Follower Count

**531,760 followers** across all platforms



**FACEBOOK**  
TCU - Texas Christian University  
**113,000 followers**



**LINKEDIN**  
Texas Christian University  
**104,000 followers**



**INSTAGRAM**  
@texaschristianuniversity  
**110,000 followers**



**YOUTUBE**  
@TCUTexasChristianUniversity  
**7,760 subscribers**

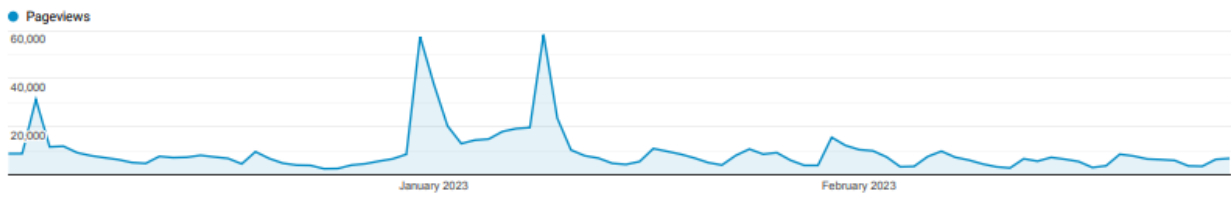


**TWITTER/X**  
@tcu  
**154,500 followers**



**TIKTOK**  
@texaschristianuniversity  
**42,500 followers**

### Appendix I: Prolonged Effects on Website Clicks



Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Bounce Rate	% Exit
Core Site <b>856,766</b>	Core Site <b>749,557</b>	Core Site <b>00:02:01</b>	Core Site <b>74.22%</b>	Core Site <b>67.48%</b>

**The New York Times**

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ON COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## All Glory to T.C.U.'s Meme Mascot

Officially, the Texas Christian University mascot is the Horned Frog. But the team's real hero is the Hypnotoad, a "Futurama" gag of mesmerizing power.

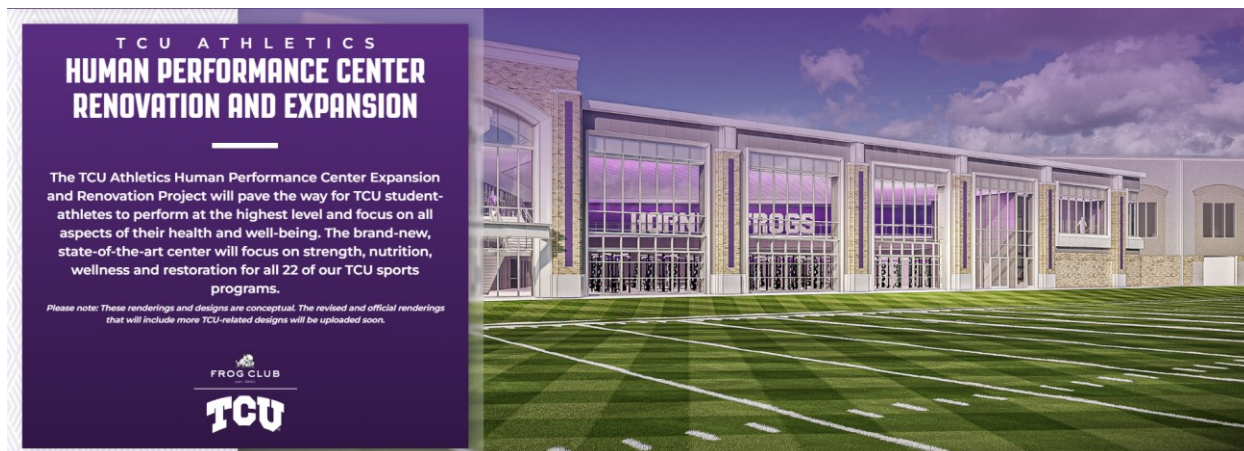
LOCAL NEWS

## Hypnotoad creator says it's 'awesome' TCU players and fans embrace his creation

"The Hypnotoad is like a strange angel, that's what I would say," Hypnotoad creator Eric Kaplan said.



## Appendix K: Athletic Human Performance Center



## Appendix L: Max Duggan Articles

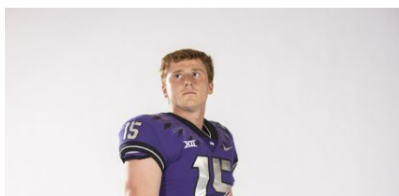
# Why Max Duggan Chose TCU

**The quarterback from Council Bluffs, Iowa, led TCU to its first College Football Playoff appearance and is a finalist for the Heisman Trophy.**

The senior is the winner of the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award and semifinalist for the Davey O'Brien National Quarterback Award and Walter Camp Man of the Year Award. He led TCU to its first 12-0 start since 2010.

### Why TCU?

Football was a big part of it.



But outside of football, I wanted to go somewhere new. I wanted to meet new people from all around the country, see new things, gain new interests, and I wanted to go to a school that would set me up for the future. TCU is highly regarded around the country. It's in the DFW area. And, since it's a small school, you're able to form relationships with people — students, alumni and professors who will help you in the future.



*Appendix M: TCU Social Media Messaging: Everything School*

 **TCU** @TCU · Jun 15, 2023 ...

We've got it all. From top-ranked academics to athletic excellence, TCU is the **EVERYTHING** school. #GoFrog #LeadOnTCU [tcu.edu/everythingscho...](https://tcu.edu/everythingscho...)



Appendix N: Messaging In Arizona

**TCU**

**HORNED FROGS  
THRIVE IN THE  
DESERT**

**Actually, we do well everywhere.**

Like our feisty little mascot, TCU is proof that you don't have to be the biggest to do great things. Our graduates take the lead wherever they go, finding success in (and on) many different fields.

For 150 years, we've built a path to the top of our game, creating leaders ready for the future in every corner of the world.

Check out some of our stats. You'll discover why Horned Frogs don't just adapt to change — **we make it.**





**TCU**

**HORNED FROGS  
THRIVE IN THE  
DESERT**

**Actually, we do well everywhere.**

Like our feisty little mascot, TCU is proof that you don't have to be the biggest to do great things. Our graduates take the lead wherever they go, finding success in (and on) many different fields.

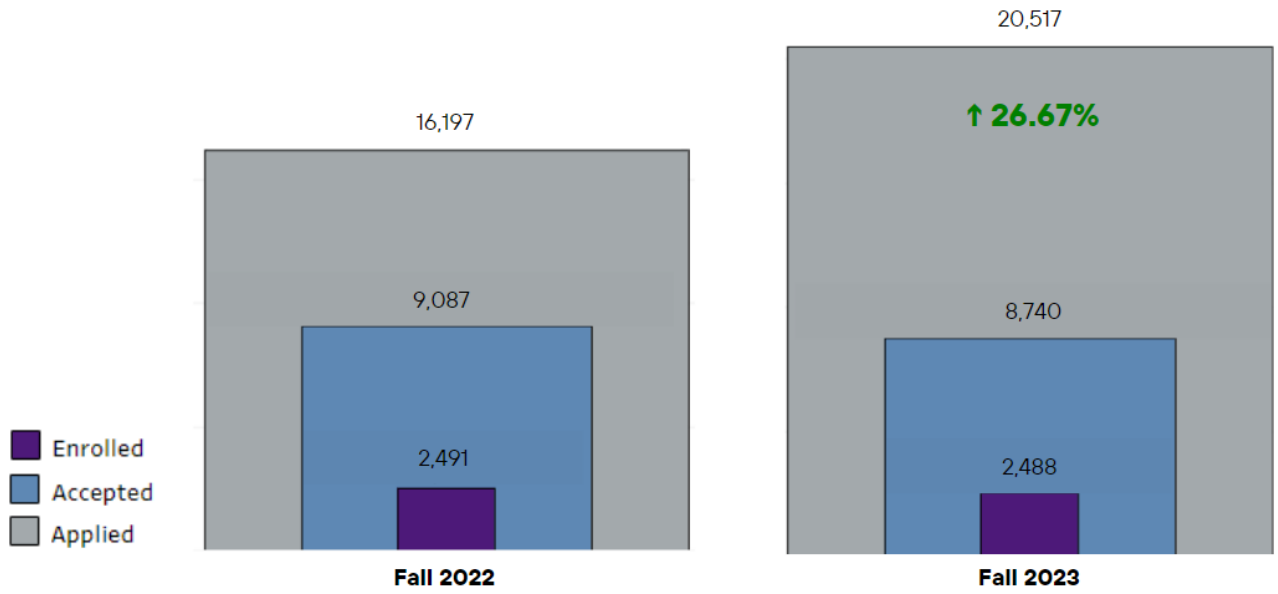
For 150 years, we've built a path to the top of our game, creating leaders ready for the future in every corner of the world.

Check out some of our stats. You'll discover why Horned Frogs don't just adapt to change — **we make it.**





Appendix O: Admissions Growth 2022-2023



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