

UC Davis Athletics Instagram Audit

The UC Davis Athletics organization was established to promote the NCAA Division 1 Sports teams at the University of California, Davis. The NCAA is the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and UC Davis' sports are in the highest division and tier of the NCAA. UC Davis Athletics oversees the coordinated coverage of all D1-level sports teams at UC Davis, consisting of twenty-five sports, with seventeen men's and eight women's teams. With over 50k followers on Instagram, X, Facebook, and YouTube, the organization's social media sites began in the 2010s and continue to promote UC Davis D1 athletics today. The majority of engagement from these social media sites is from UC Davis-related students, families, and alums, as UC Davis Athletics uses its platforms to foster its community at hand. There are many pros and cons to relying on student involvement; however, there are many ways that UC Davis Athletics can benefit from utilizing its small and broader community.

This audit focuses on the UC Davis Athletics Instagram account labeled @ucdavisaggies. The Athletics organization has other accounts on X, Facebook, and YouTube, but it is most active on Instagram, with the most followers among the media sites. The UC Davis Aggies Instagram has been active since January 2011 and has 3,604 posts. Their stakeholders are UC Davis students, D1 Davis athletes, and families of related athletes. Examples of their stakeholders are exemplified through comments on posts that consist of friendly compliments from teammates, congratulations from UC Davis students, and proud family members. The social media posts on this account are divided into original pictures, reels, and collaboration posts with individual UC Davis D1 Instagram accounts. At UC Davis, each D1 sport, such as Football, Basketball, and Tennis, has a personal Instagram account and brand that focuses on their sport and fan community. UC Davis Aggies posts about once daily, with the occasional

double post per day. These posts include photos of athletes, promotion of game times, and invites for the community to attend home games. In addition, the Instagram reposts an average of ten posts of UC Davis D1 sports team accounts on its Instagram story every day. From analyzing the @ucdavisaggies Instagram story for a week, each story contained a repost from a specific sports team. UC Davis Aggies Instagram has over 20k followers, with 68% of followers also following the official UC Davis Instagram account. Despite its high follower count, there is a lack of likes on the content posted.

From analyzing the Instagram account within two months of data, original picture posts receive a median between 100- 150 likes, whereas original reels receive 70-130 likes despite their viewership of 4k-5k plays. However, collaboration picture posts that either tag or co-author with other team Instagrams receive 300-500 likes, and collaborative reels gain viewership of up to 10k views and 150-200 likes. Both original and collaborative posts only receive up to five comments, and the accounts who actively comment are usually teammates of the respective sport. Within the last month, the highest "liked" posts are collaborative posts celebrating a specific sports member, announcing season tickets, or a win against another University. Posts collaborating with other UC Davis teams and professional organizations generate the most engagement on the "@ucdavisaggies" as they attract team-specific followers into a larger media collaboration account. For example, on April 5th, 2024, UC Davis Aggies posted, "Proud Aggie Moment. Way to represent UC Davis Elijah! #GoAgs," that highlighted Men's Basketball member Elijah Pepper's participation in Reese's Division 1 College All-Star Game. In this post, the account co-collaborated with the official UC Davis Men's Basketball, The Big West, and Elijah Pepper's Instagram accounts. The post gained 1k likes, doubling the engagement from the previous 500 likes of the Baseball Team's post.

The UC Davis Aggies Instagram utilizes the one-way communication model to send out information, as most posts inform audiences of sport-related events in a professional tone. However, there is no engagement within the comments or opportunities to prompt audiences to engage with the media. Given this dilemma, when accessing the six organizational-public relational maintenance strategies (OPR) from Hon and Grunig, the UC Davis Athletics Instagram lacks Receiver communication that would improve the account. Regarding Access, the account only promotes game days and wins- there is no interaction beyond informing and marketing events and successes. The lack of Access minimizes the opportunity for supporters to further their loyalty or excitement, possibly through comments, as they can only accept the information given to them. In addition, there is minimal Assurance as audiences are portrayed more as customers to buy tickets, promotions, or donors. Many posts encourage donating to the Athletics Department or purchasing season passes. Nonetheless, other OPR strategies are effectively applied to the account. Many of the photos posted celebrate the sports teams and create a Positive rapport among the Davis community. Since the account combines all sports, all "Aggie Fans" can increase school spirit and information from this singular account. By reposting stories and posts, the UC Davis Athletics Instagram can achieve the highest engagement by combining multiple account followers into one forum. Rather than being responsible as the sole media site for all 25 sports, this account acts as a melting pot for all accounts to boost individual activity.

The Instagram page has a consistent image that aesthetically aligns with and matches UC Davis' brand. By using the same font and navy and gold colors, the theme resembles the University's branding as an extension of UC Davis. The concept is familiar and supportive, conveying that UC Davis welcomes all followers and audiences. However, despite its great

efforts in creating a media site where supporters can collectively learn about all the sports teams, the Instagram page undeniably lacks engagement with its audience.

According to Hatfield and Green (2023), "About six in ten Americans (62%) say they follow professional or college sports not too or not at all closely. Another 21% say they follow sports somewhat closely, while just 16% follow them extremely or very closely, according to the August survey of 11,945 U.S. adults." The primary reason why many Americans do not follow sports is that "[they] are not that interested" and "think there is too much money involved in sports." Many UC Davis students do not attend UC Davis sports games other than football, basketball, and baseball. The lack of attendance is reflected in the engagement accounts of the UC Davis Aggies Instagram account, as most comments are from teammates, family, or alums players- rather than UC Davis students who are unaffiliated with sports. In addition, according to the Sacramento Bee, UC Davis students are against fees that fund sports programs and are voting against paying \$600 for sports per year. "UC Davis' \$39 million athletics budget is the highest among those schools. With 62 percent of its sports budget coming from student fees" (Sabalow & Davidson, 2022). This frustration can be a reason for the lack of attention and support from UC Davis Students, as they are either uninterested in sports or are against the organization that heavily depends on student funding. As UC Davis Aggies Instagram relies heavily on the engagement of students, it would be better if the account shifted its motive to gain a different audience. For example, UCD Athletics should adhere to older audiences who may have the money, time, and reason to watch and support the D1 sports teams. To reach this broader audience, UC Davis Athletics should focus on bettering its other media sites and tactics to gain new viewership rather than continuing to adhere to this age group and channel if there is no progression of engagement. From Pew Research, only four in ten Americans use Instagram, and

there is a higher percentage of YouTube and Facebook users among Adults (Schaeffer, 2021). More media content should be explicitly posted on Facebook and YouTube to gain support from this demographic rather than focusing on the UC Davis students, who are 19-29 years old and primarily use Instagram (Schaeffer, 2021).

The UC Davis Aggies Instagram has viewership but no likes or comments. Most followers or viewers are Spectators who view the content produced but do not interact with the media in a way that will benefit the organization. Despite no explicit malice, the interactions with the audience harm the brand, as UC Davis students rarely attend games or know of the sports given at their University. The brand is not personable, relatable, or open to any audience engagement outside its professional voice. Many of the "content" posted are collaborative posts where the main focus is that specific sports team. This account rarely creates separate content, causing a lack of community that can independently foster it and its media. Viewers and audiences cannot become emotionally persuaded, motivated, or inspired by this account if it only reposts informational content.

The UC Davis Aggies Instagram account was a great idea for promoting the 25 D1 teams at UC Davis as it uses its large platform and collaborative format to showcase various teams. One aspect of why this account is successful is that the reposts and stories are relevant, consistent, and easy to locate. However, the account heavily relies on its extensions and collaborative organizations. For a new account related to events, individual content such as photos and reels, must be created before depending on other accounts. Creating unique content that cultivates its community will result in higher engagement rates and influence broader audiences. Based on this audit, future accounts relating to the sports industry must ensure that their primary social media site creates strong content rather than relying on shared content.

References

Hatfield, J. (2023, October 17). *Most Americans don't closely follow professional or college sports*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/17/most-americans-dont-closely-follow-professional-or-college-sports/>

Sabalow, R., & Davidson, J. (2022, January 19). *UC Davis students rebel against fees for sports. as costs rise, should they bankroll athletics?*. Sacramento Bee.

<https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article257204677.html>

Schaeffer, K. (2021, October 7). *7 facts about Americans and Instagram*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/10/07/7-facts-about-americans-and-instagram/>