

# COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS: MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE EDUCATION INDUSTRY

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# Methodology

- This report analyzes coverage and branding efforts of four companies in the education industry: Coursera, KIPP Public Charter Schools, K12 and University of California
- Analysis looked at:
  - Media coverage
  - Social media coverage
  - Branding strategy
  - Public opinion of the four companies/industry
- For social media analysis, the following sources were used: Facebook and Twitter
- To analyze branding strategy, the following sources were used: social media efforts, traditional media, appeal of websites and presence of company spokespeople
- To analyze public opinion, a survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey, which was fielded between Feb. 2 and March 29, 2019 with 72 responses
  - A total of 200 articles were analyzed and retrieved from Google News
  - The date range of media coverage was June 2016 to March 2019

# Objectives

- Evaluate areas of differentiation among the companies in the education industry
- Assess how the brand is viewed by students, adults and traditional media
- Analyze each company's use of social media to inform brand messaging and engage with key publics
- Identify drivers of coverage to inform media strategy

# Companies to be Analyzed

- Coursera
- K12
- KIPP Public Charter Schools
- University of California

# Background: Coursera

- Founded in 2012 by Stanford University professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller
- Services include an online learning platform with courses, specializations and degrees
- As of June, had more than 31 million registered users and more than 2,600 courses



# Coursera

## Key Events

- Expanding into the healthcare industry with courses and specializations
- In March added six fully online degrees
- Providing artificial intelligence (AI) classes

## Brand Challenges

- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) like Coursera are seen as impersonal
- Lacks face-to-face format of traditional courses and degrees

# Background: K12

- Founded in 1999 by former banker Ronald J. Packard
- Became publicly traded company in 2007
- Services include charter management and curriculum for online and homeschooled children
- Offers homeschooling, private online K-12 schools and career readiness education





# K12

## Key Events

- Company plans to pivot toward career education programs
- Working to enroll more students across the country

## Brand Challenges

- Curriculum found not up to U.S. states' standards
- Students found to be behind in learning
- Several states are banning for-profit charter schools

## Background: KIPP Public Charter Schools

- Founded in 1994 by Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, two Teach For America Corps members
- Operates the nation's largest network of free college prep schools in low-income communities
- Students are admitted through a lottery and attended extended school days



# KIPP Public Charter Schools

## Key Events

- Organization begins micro-grant program to help students succeed in college
- Gates Foundation donated a large sum to charter network
- Opening new schools across the country

## Brand Challenges

- Co-founder Mike Feinberg fired for sexual abuse allegations
- Critics say charters do not have enough oversight
- Students struggle when getting to college

# Background: University of California

- Founded in 1868 by Gov. Henry Haight who thought every California should have access to a public university
- One of California's three systems of higher education
- Operates nine campuses with more than 200,000 students
- Services include higher education degrees, national labs, education outreach, hospital complexes and research centers



# University of California

## Key Events

- Received a \$9 million research grant for ongoing projects
- UC Santa Cruz campus looking for new chancellor
- Committed \$7 million to increase faculty diversity

## Brand Challenges

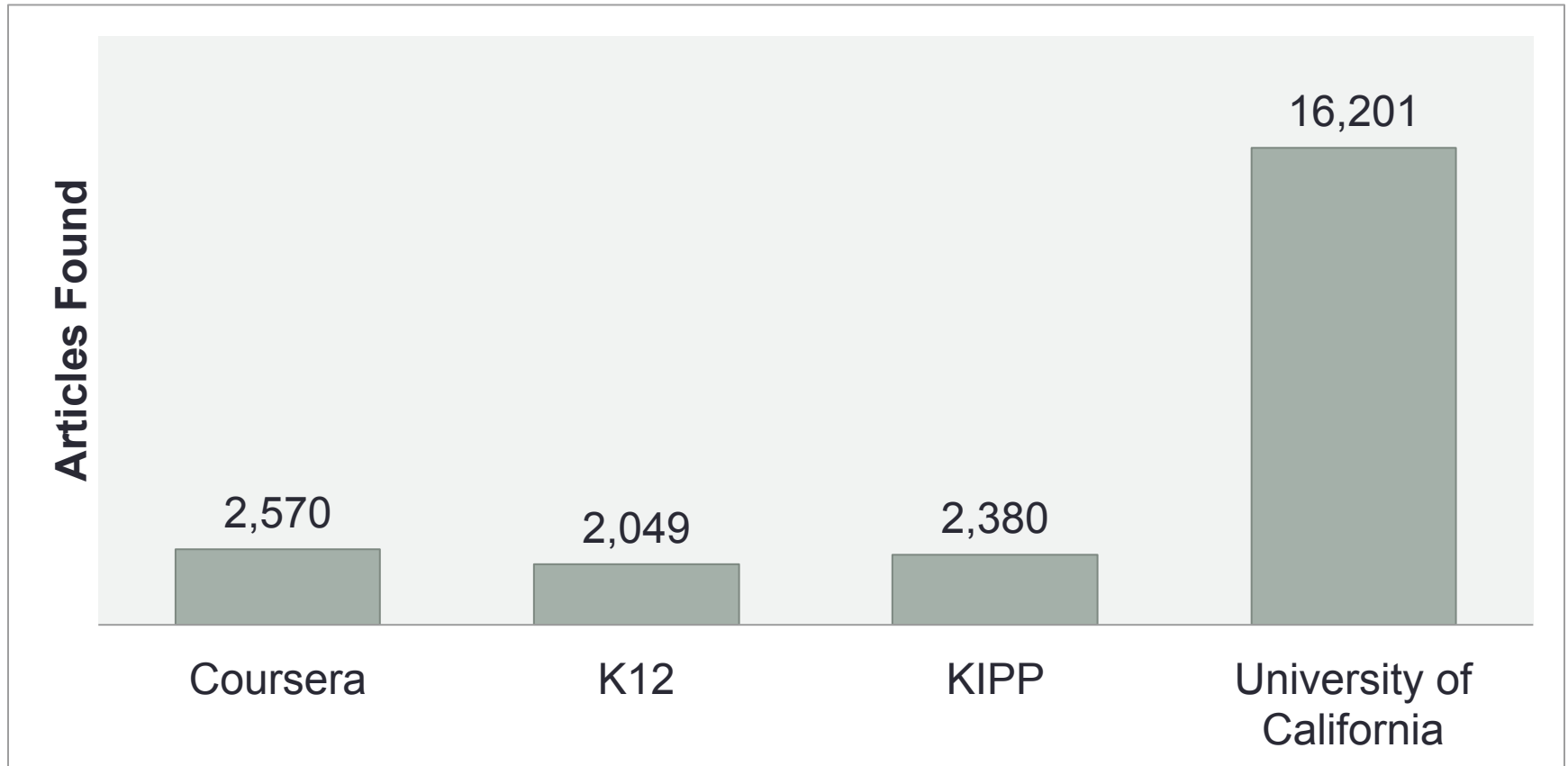
- Declining funding from the state
- Drop in enrollment from out-of-state students
- Increase in popularity of online education
- Implication in college admissions scandal

# TRADITIONAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

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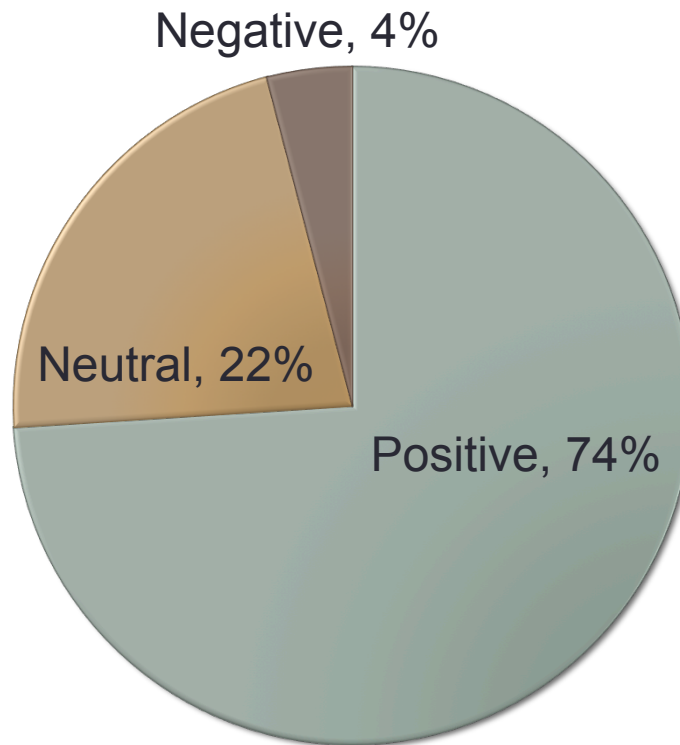
# Traditional Media: Volume

The University of California's media visibility towered above the other three companies due to outlets covering its main office as well as its individual campuses and medical center; its reach spread to local and national news sources. The other three companies' media coverage was more even as it was specialized toward each company's specific programs, course offerings or students.



# Traditional Media Tone: Coursera

Coursera benefitted from positive coverage due to its expanded bachelor's programs with schools like the University of London, specializations in the healthcare field and partnerships with companies. Neutral coverage focused on the expansion of online programs and did not highlight Coursera.

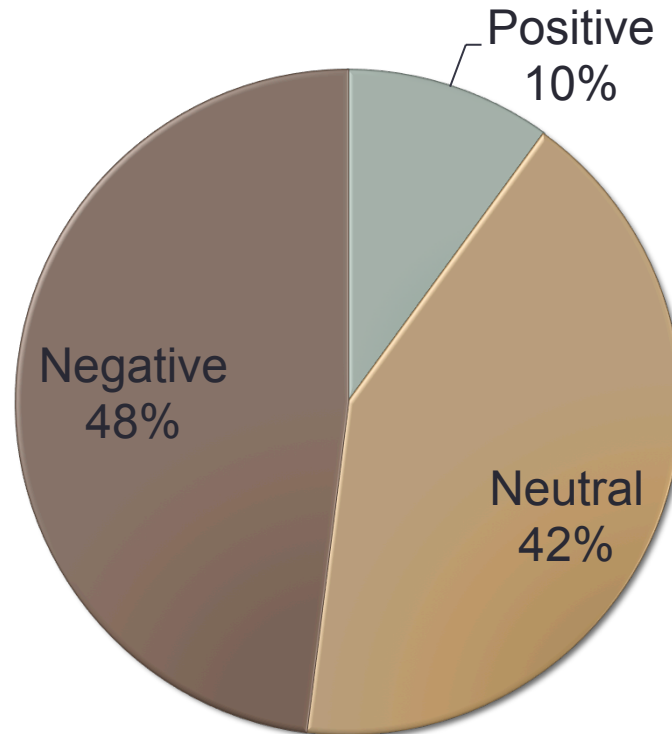


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# Traditional Media Tone: K12

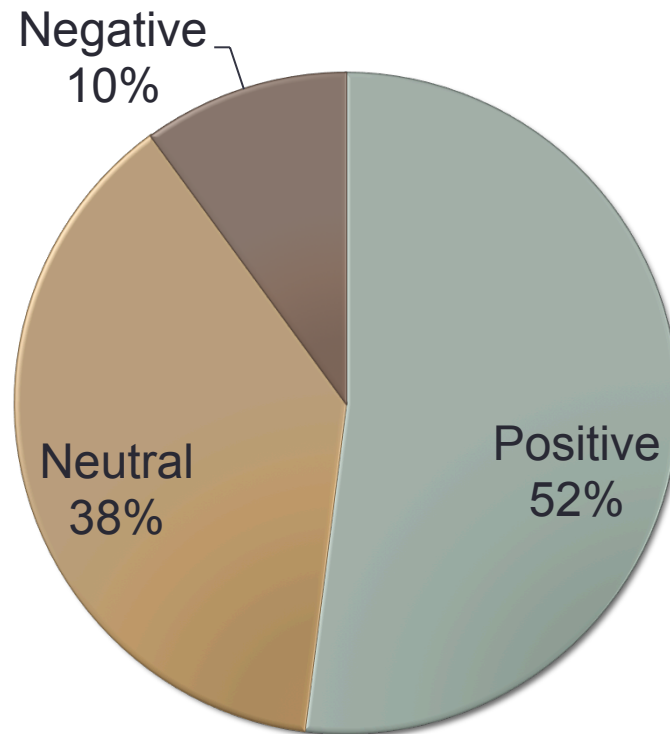
K12's negative coverage discussed the company's poor student outcomes, the public's concern toward for-profit education companies and government's increased regulation toward charters. Neutral coverage followed the expansion of K12's programs and the growth of online education. Positive coverage followed individual schools or students.



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# Traditional Media Tone: KIPP Public Charter Schools

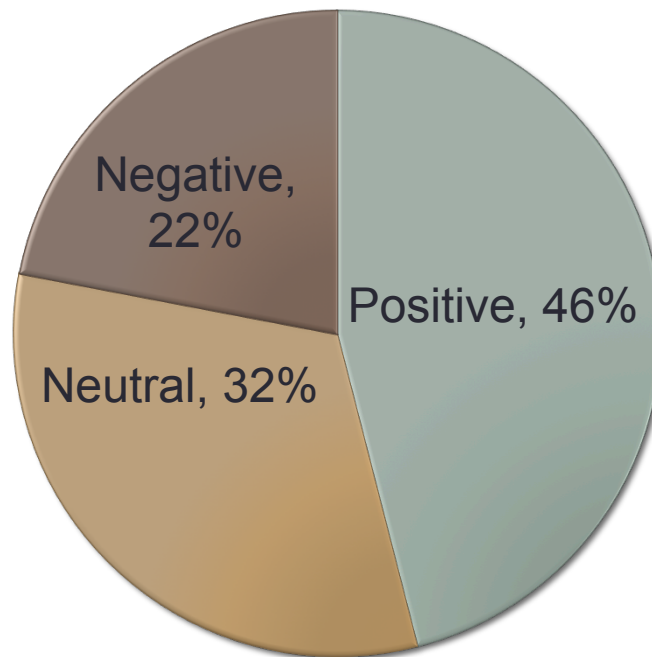
KIPP's positive coverage mentioned the company's unique curriculum, improved student test scores and efforts to support students in college. Neutral coverage did not focus solely on KIPP or discussed the pros and cons of the company expanding into new communities. Negative coverage followed the harassment allegations from the company's former executive.



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# Traditional Media Tone: University of California

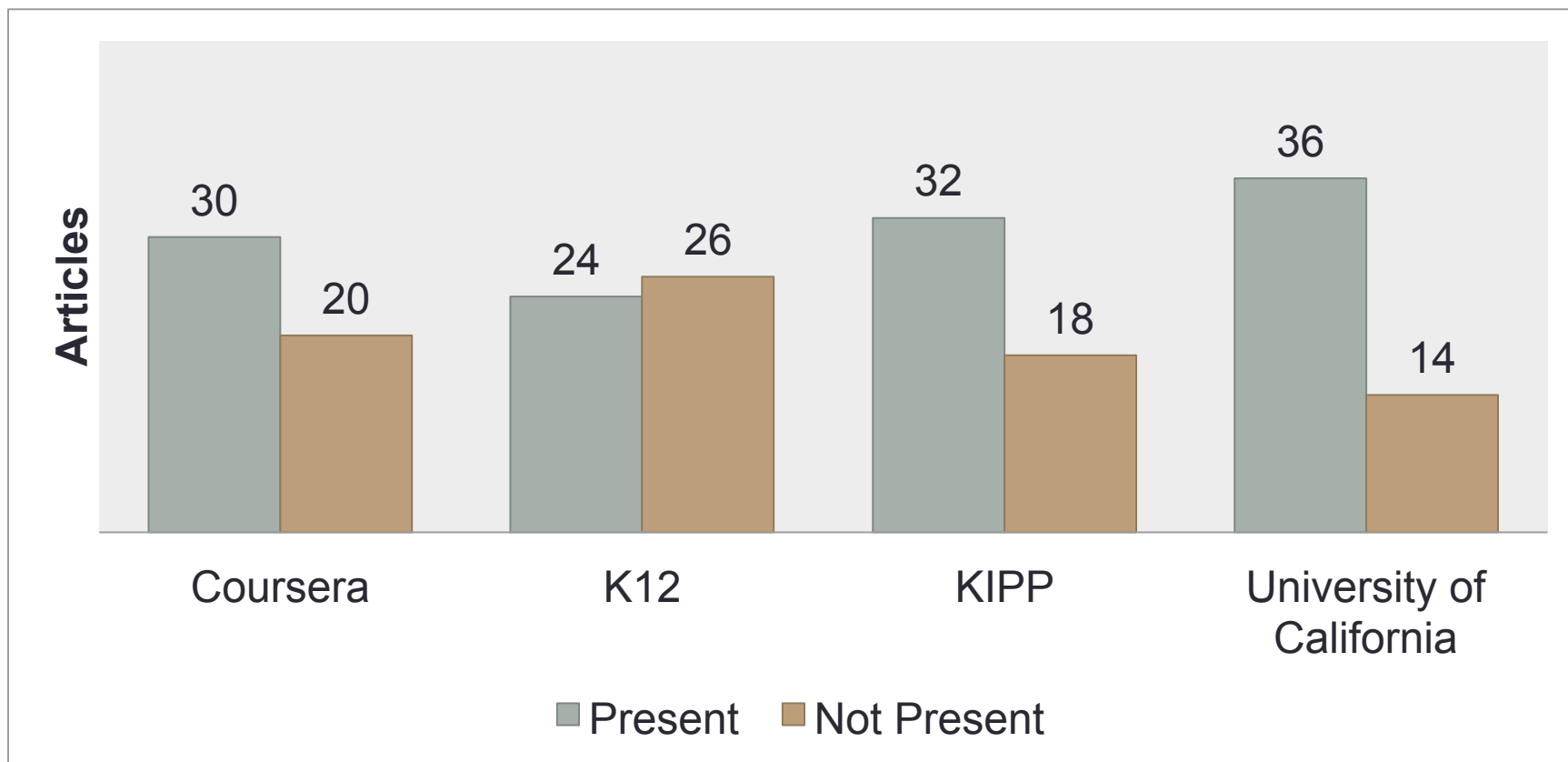
The positive coverage for University of California described the research successes at its campuses and the expansion of the school's programs; the coverage solely focused on the UC. Neutral coverage compared the UC to other universities or briefly mentioned the UC's research in a positive article. Negative coverage almost solely followed the recent college admissions scandal, grouping the organization with other universities and striking a negative tone with readers.



N=50

# Traditional Media: Spokesperson Presence

University of California had the highest number of spokespeople present in articles analyzed due to its larger staff of designated PR practitioners that are readily available. It was surprising that K12 had the lowest spokespeople present because it also has a large staff; however, its spokespeople are difficult to get a hold of. The lack of spokespeople contributed to the negative tone of coverage for K12 as well.

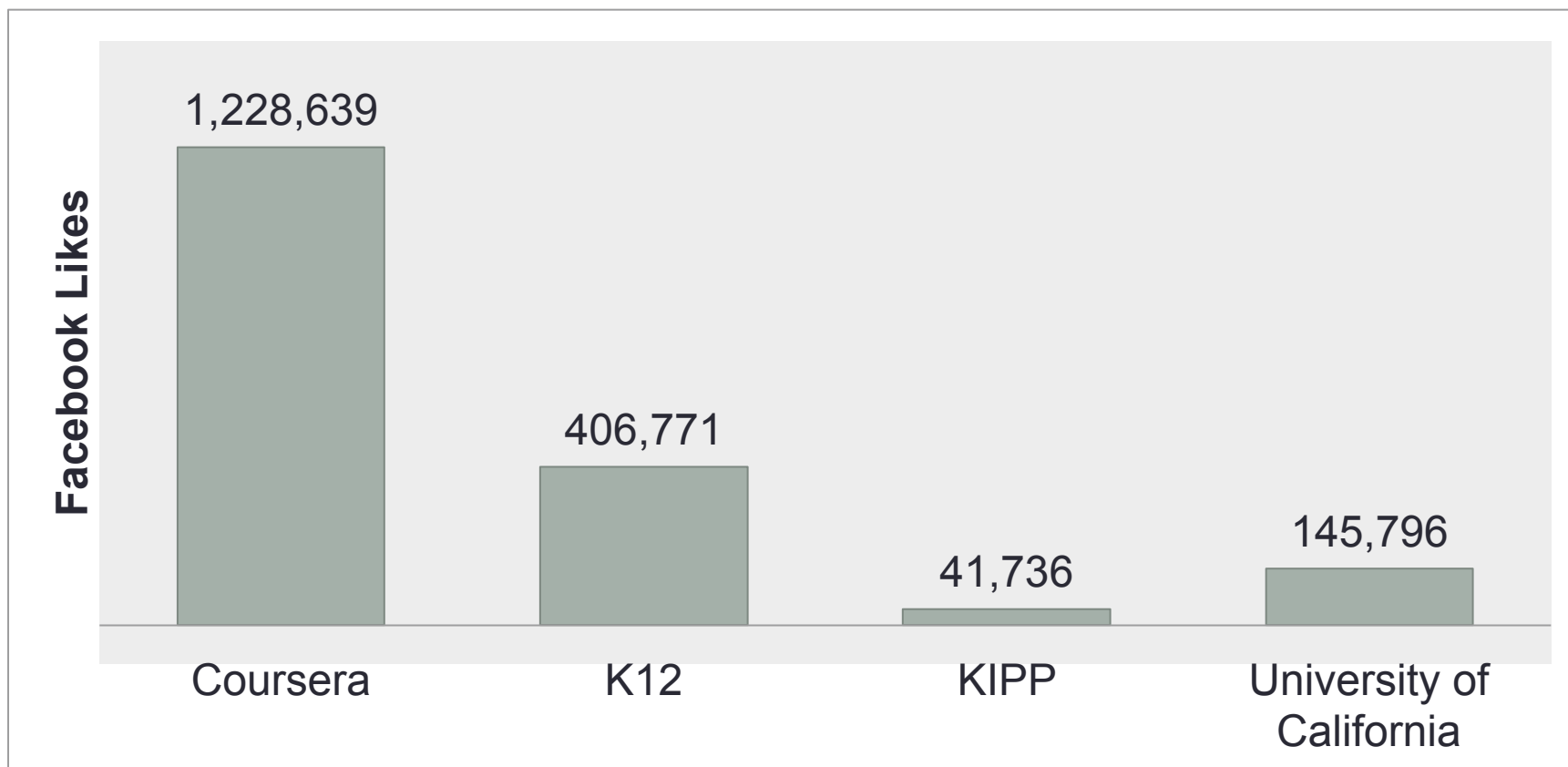


# SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

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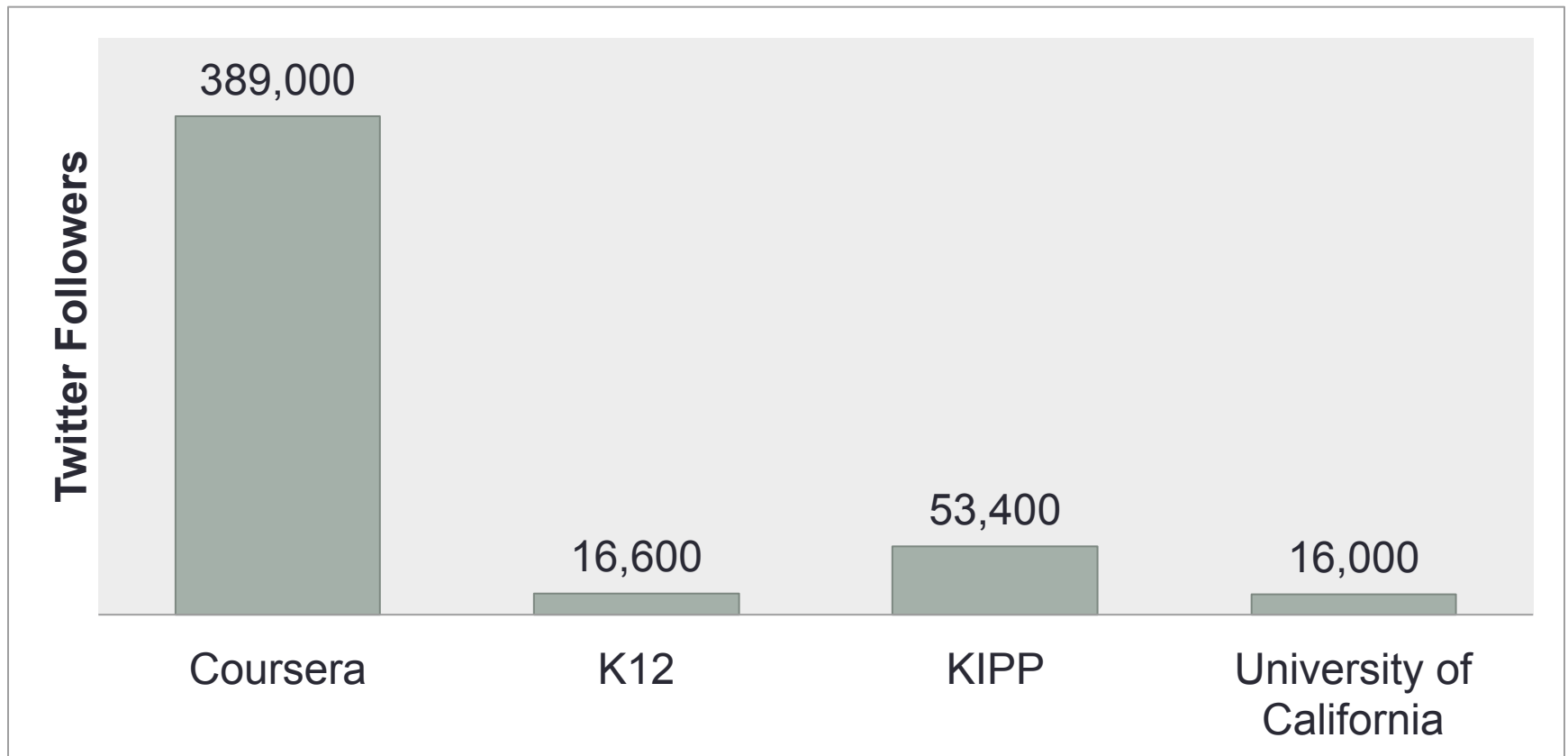
# Social Media: Facebook Likes

Coursera's reach extends to the business community as well as those in education, which led to its surge in Facebook likes. K12 is a for-profit firm on the stock exchange and also has business interests in its activities. KIPP is more well-known in the south and its reach does not expand across the U.S. The University of California's likes are split among its other campuses, which all have higher overall likes than the UC's main page.



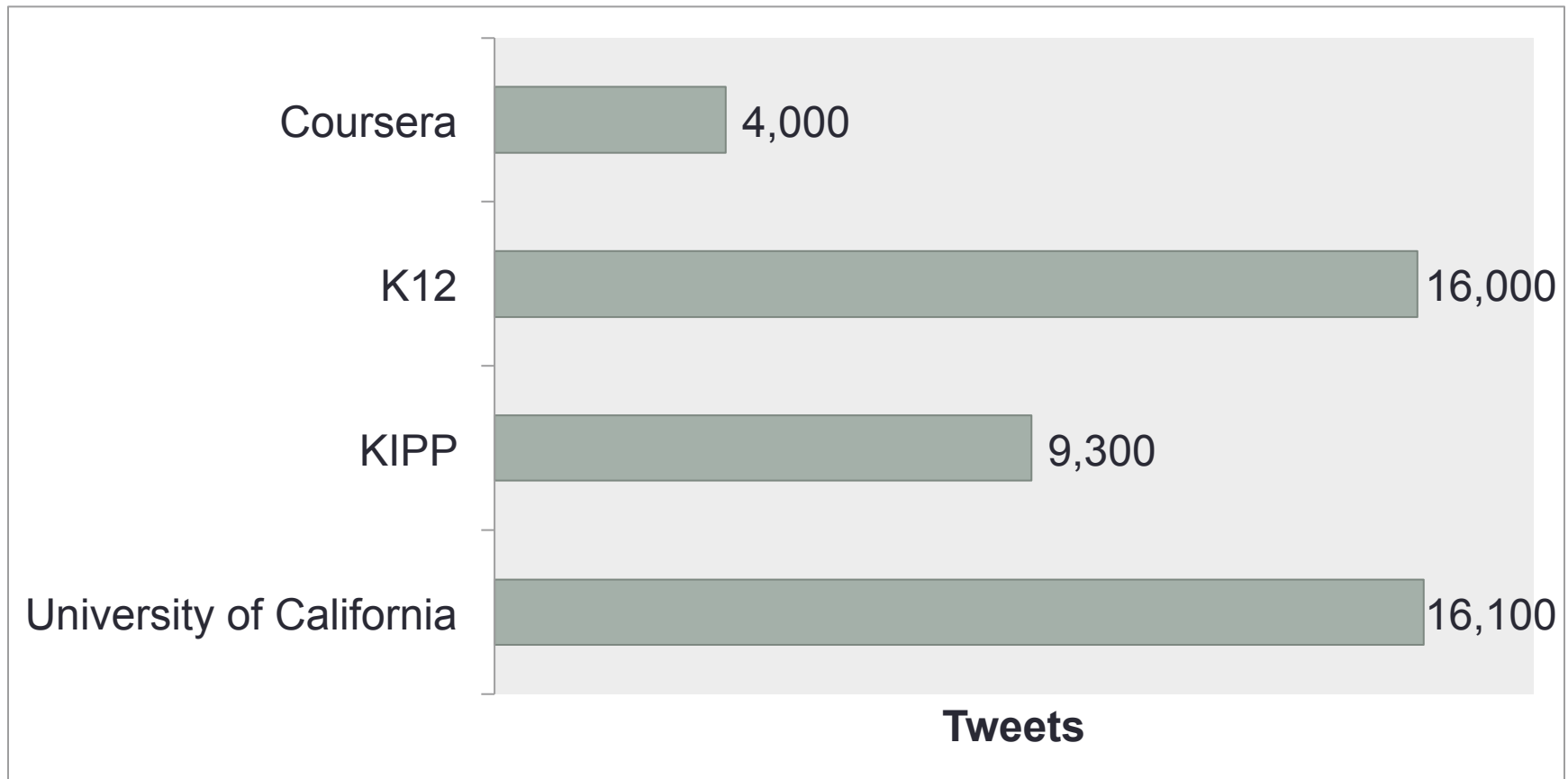
# Social Media Analysis: Twitter Followers

It is surprising that Coursera's following surged above others, especially since it joined Twitter two years after the other companies. K12's low following could be attributed to its limited communications outreach to the wider community as it mainly focuses on investors. KIPP's followers are mainly students, teachers and education leaders. UC's reach is again limited by other accounts it manages on its individual campuses.



# Social Media Analysis: Volume of Tweets

Coursera's low volume of tweets was surprising since the company now shares news on a daily basis, especially compared to University of California that also follows the same social media routine. K12 tweets fairly regularly with sporadic days of several tweets. KIPP, on the other hand, retweets other accounts that it agrees with politically or ethically.



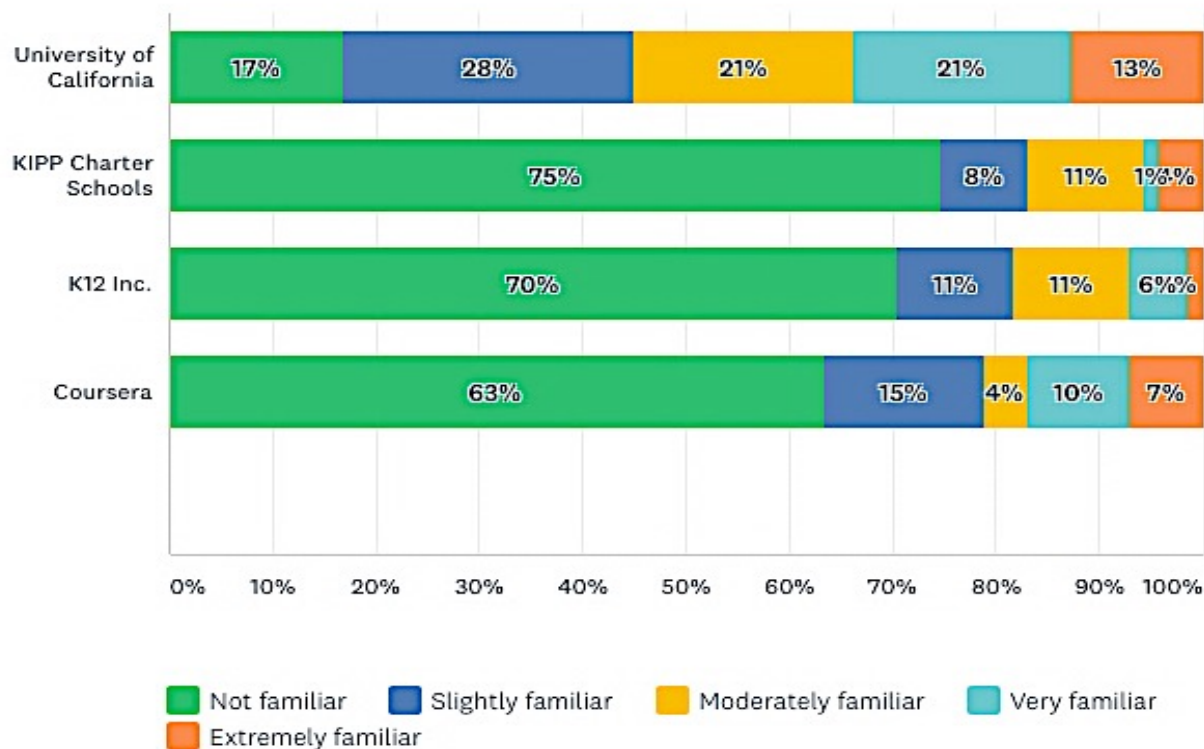


# PUBLIC AWARENESS

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# Public Opinion: Awareness

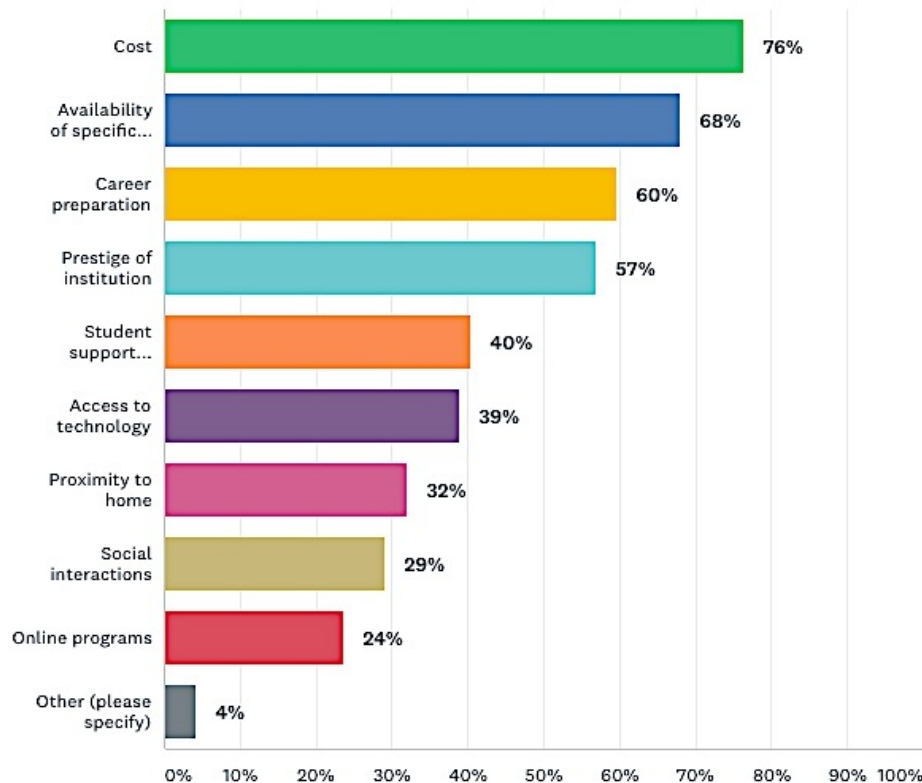
University of California is the most well-known due to its reach and notoriety with renowned schools such as Berkeley and UCLA. Coursera is rising in popularity due to its growing partnerships with universities, schools and companies. K12 and KIPP do not have as far of a reach, as the companies are limited to K-12 students and their parents.



***Q: How familiar are you with the following organizations?***

# Public Opinion: Drivers of Choice

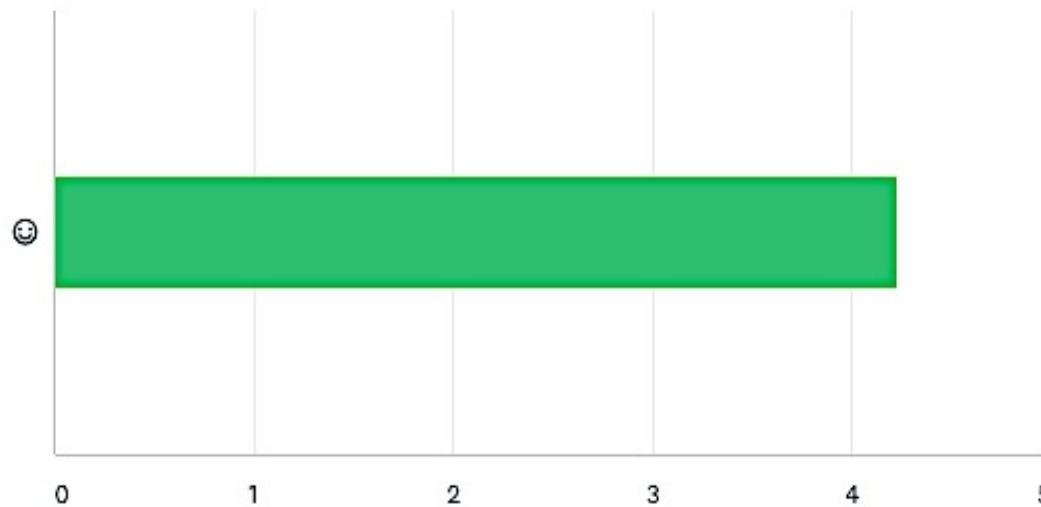
The rising cost of education and growth of student debt contributed to the priority respondents placed on cost. A majority of respondents were over the age of 25, which means they lived through the Great Recession. This factor could have caused respondents to prioritize career preparation and degree programs.



***Q: Based on your past experiences, what were the most important factors to you when selecting a school? (Check all that apply)***

# Public Opinion: Attitudes Toward Industry

Although respondents found the education industry to be valuable, more than a third expressed concerns about student debt and the rising cost of tuition. Funding was also a concern for a majority of respondents. So although respondents value the industry, they have not reached a consensus on the price one should pay for its products or services.



***Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highly valuable and 1 being not at all valuable, how valuable do you find the education industry as a whole?***

# BRAND ANALYSIS

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# Website Evaluation Methodology

**1 point**—Company puts no effort into updating its website or sharing original content on its web pages. There are no visual elements, the website is unappealing to look at and the site is difficult to navigate. The company does not have a newsroom that shares news and information with the public.

**2 points**—Company has a website that is updated once a year to add new content to different pages of the website. There is a newsroom on the site, but it is difficult to find from the homepage. Company updates the press center yearly with a “news dump” that is changed when other pages are updated.

**3 points**— Company has a website that is easy to navigate but could use some improvements to make it visually appealing and engaging, such as original photos and videos. The website has a newsroom that is updated monthly with several press elements.

**4 points**—Company has a website that features original content that is updated to fit the company’s priorities. The site’s newsroom is easy to find on the homepage and several press elements that are added to site once a week. The newsroom’s organization, however, has some room for improvement to make it user-friendly.

**5 points**—Company creates a responsive and visually engaging website that regularly includes new original content. Company has a press center that is updated at least two times per week that includes several press items. It has a search function that allows users to easily find what they are looking for.


# Website Evaluation: Coursera

- Coursera's website is visually appealing and responsive on desktop and mobile
- The press page includes photos, background information, announcements and insights with infographics and surveys
- Coursera's page has a list of recent news reports on Coursera
- However the company's press page is only updated once a month



# Website Evaluation: K12

- K12's website is nice to look at with photos and graphics
- It is difficult to find K12's press page
- K12's press page does have a section that stands out to subscribe to or to contact spokespeople
- There are company bios and press releases that are updated once a week




4 out  
of 5



# Website Evaluation: KIPP Public Charter Schools

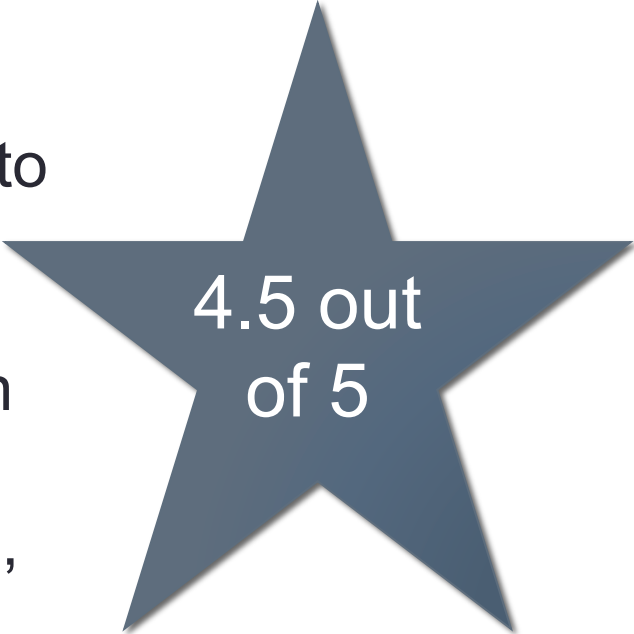
- KIPP Public Charter Schools' website includes videos and photos, and responds rapidly on devices
- The press center is very easy to find
- KIPP's "In the News" section with articles about the company is updated weekly on the site
  - The items can be searched through
- Press releases are updated more sporadically, about once every few months



3.5 out  
of 5

# Website Evaluation: University of California

- University of California's website includes photos, but it is bit confusing to follow when scrolling through the homepage
- Press center has a prominent focus on the website
- UC's press page has links to podcasts, blogs, press releases, fact sheets, reports, videos and photos
- UC's press releases are shared weekly with the site updated twice a week
- It is easy to find press rooms for UC's specific schools



4.5 out  
of 5

# Key Insights: Coursera

- Despite the growth of online education, most consumers were not familiar with Coursera's programs or its partnerships.
- Although Coursera benefitted from positive news coverage, most of these articles were published in specialized education and business outlets.
- The company's website and press page was well designed, but it was not updated often resulting in sporadic press coverage.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Coursera should work to extend its reach beyond the education and business spheres by strengthening its online presence through its press room communications and social media postings.

# Key Insights: K12

- K12 faces challenges due to its poor student outcomes and organizational ban in several states; nearly every neutral story mentioned K12's tumultuous history.
- Traditional media's struggle to reach K12 spokespeople contributed to negative articles written about the organization; many see "no comment" as worse than a response to criticism.
- K12's website was updated often with new information; however, this news was not always shared through social media resulting in disjointed communications.

**RECOMMENDATION:** K12 should revamp its corporate policy related to traditional media communications and make spokespeople more available to comment on common criticisms and to answer the public's questions. This policy should extend to social media to create a consistent strategy that reaches consumers on all outlets.

# Key Insights: KIPP Public Charter Schools

- KIPP faces the lowest amount of awareness among the general public, meaning it is operating in siloes in those communities it serves.
- The company's large spokesperson presence contributed to its positive and neutral coverage, especially in a time when charter schools face greater scrutiny.
- Although it posts on social media often, KIPP has a limited following due to its content, which is specialized toward students, teachers and education leaders.

**RECOMMENDATION:** KIPP should work to become a leading voice in the charter school debate by forming a strategic communications plan directed toward new communities through traditional media. The action will help the company develop a brand voice that positively shapes public opinions of charter schools.

# Key Insights: University of California

- The University of California faces a unique challenge following the fallout from the college admissions scandal; the organization is being reactive instead of proactive with its communications about the incident.
- The company's social media presence is split between its other campuses and institutions, resulting in a small reach despite ongoing postings.
- Despite being well known by the general public, the UC faces barriers in the industry as it is costly to attend and does not have online programs.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The University of California should proactively reach out to journalists to generate positive traditional media coverage about the steps it is taking to curb cheating. The organization should also drive conversations online that discuss the value of the UC's on-campus programs, career preparation and face-to-face instruction.

# APPENDIX

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# Definition of Tone

- For this project, coverage will be considered positive if it meets one or more, or all, of these requirements:
  - Contains more positive than negative information about the organization
  - Focuses solely, or largely, on the organization's mission and vision
  - Published in a major print, online or broadcast publication
  - Contains outside data or research that reinforces positive information about the organization and its values
  - Company name is mentioned in the headline or lead paragraph of an article that contains positive information
  - Dispels common misconceptions or concerns about the organization
  - Contains multimedia elements that feature the organization, its leaders or its customers
  - Written by an independent reporter and not by an organization's member
  - Gives the average reader of the publication a positive impression of the company



# Definition of Tone

- For this project, coverage will be considered neutral if it meets one or more, or all, of these requirements:
  - Presents a balanced view, neither positive or negative, of the organization's mission or values
  - Features the organization alongside other comparable companies in the industry
  - Includes quotes from top officials or organization members that convey general information about the organization
  - Company is mentioned by its full name in the first two to three paragraphs in the article
  - Uses a generic multimedia content that does not represent the organization
  - Appears in a mid-sized publication that would appeal to a diverse audience
  - News was driven by a public relations push from the organization
  - Gives the average reader recognition of the company's name, with no opinion on whether it is positive or negative

# Definition of Tone

- For this project, coverage will be considered negative if it meets one or more, or all, of these requirements:
  - Contains more negative than favorable information
  - Company is mentioned in the middle or at the end of the article
  - Uses data and information that is negative and/or does not source the information
  - Gives the average reader a negative impression of the organization
  - Does not allow the company to provide its perspective on a controversial issue
  - Published in a small outlet that would not reach a broad audience
  - Features quotes from third party sources that hurt the organization's brand
  - Gives the average reader of the publication a negative impression of the company