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Technology mediated recruitment: An exploration of how students used social media to choose college

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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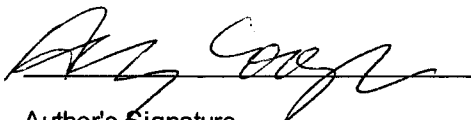
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Technology mediated recruitment: An exploration of how students used social media to choose college

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BY

Ashley Nicole Cooper

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF


Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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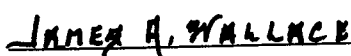
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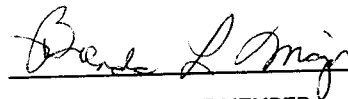
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the use of social media as a tool to recruit prospective college students. Social media was defined as any electronic media that serves as a networking tool with the ability to educate prospective and current college students about an institution of higher education (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, etc.). The researcher met with two focus groups comprised of current college students to discuss their use of social media during their college search process.

Recommendations were developed for student affairs professionals and for future research. General themes and categories from participant responses were evaluated. The findings suggest that social media is present during all stages of the search process and professionals should consider what tools work best for them and how to best utilize social media in their marketing plans.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my mom, Martha, dad, Sidney, brother, Dylan and sister, Skylar. They have always been there for me and pushed me to do my best in whatever I chose to do and encouraged me to think outside of the norm.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to Ms. Julia Awalt, as she has helped me through every step of this process and connected with many people across campus who could be of support to my work.

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I am grateful for several individuals who willingly sacrificed their time to help me complete this body of work. I would like to thank Dr. Roberts my thesis advisor who supported and challenged me throughout this process. I truly appreciate all of his mentoring and patience. I would also like to thank Director of Admissions Brenda Major and Dr. Wallace for serving on my committee and giving me their valuable suggestions.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

With all of the new technology that has been created in the past few years, there are innumerable ways for people to contact one another (e.g., Skype, Face to Face applications, Twitter, e-mail, Facebook etc.). However, marketing strategies among university admissions and recruitment offices continue to use the most traditional methods of communication with limited social media use. Several quantitative studies show that direct contact via phone calls and email are the most commonly used and preferred types of communication. However, statistical data provided by the PEW Internet & American Life Project (Lenhard, Madden, and Hitlin, 2005) following a national study on technology and social media shows that 87% of U.S. teens use the internet, 76% access news online, 89% send or read email, 75% send or receive instant messages, and 38% use cell phones to send and receive text messages. Because of technological capabilities, and the frequent use of so many devices, social media should be considered an important tool for recruiting prospective college students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was the opportunity to advance knowledge of social media as a recruitment strategy. The present research explores how students use social media to inform their decision regarding college attendance. Once admissions counselors understand which social media tools are most popular to prospective students, they can use those resources to connect and recruit students to their campus.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the present study and were designed to explore perceptions regarding social media and its influences in decision making processes among university undergraduates.

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of students concerning the usefulness of social media (in their daily lives)?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of students concerning how social media influenced their search for a college?

Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of students concerning how social media influenced which colleges to visit?

Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of the students concerning how social media influenced their selection of a college?

Research Question 5. How do current students perceive social media to have been utilized to assist them in their information search, campus visits, and ultimate selecting of a college or university for advanced educational attainment?

Emerging research regarding social media and its impact on the college selection process suggests a thorough understanding of how students came to a decision to attend their institution of choice may help with recruiting and retention processes. The present study utilized group interviews to obtain specific information on the use of social media and the college/university selection processes.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study is that it will provide Student Affairs professionals and other university personnel with insight into the daily concerns of non-traditional students. It is important to research the use of social media as a recruitment tool because higher education institutions are always changing and technological advancements often drive this change. Student affairs professionals must stay current with how students are spending their time and what types of technology they are using in order to cater their marketing strategies to attract prospective students. The goal was to find out how familiar students are with social media and how they utilized social media during their search process in choosing a college to attend.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the present study. First, some student focus group participants may have been reluctant to share certain information about their college decision making process (e.g., family concerns). Second, it is possible that after being in school for a year or better, students may not remember their decision making process, or their current institution may have been their only choice depending on factors such as affordability, admission requirements, scholarships, social opportunities, costs, location, etc. In addition to social media being a relatively recent phenomenon, decision making mediated by social media may not even apply to all students in the focus groups.

Definitions of Terms

For purposes of the present study, the following definitions will apply.

Flickr is defined as a social media site that houses solely pictures.

IMing is defined as sending messages between two people using an instant messenger portal.

Mentioning is defined as a way of identifying another person by using their account name in a “tweet”.

Newsfeed is defined as a wall that continuously updates statuses and comments from friend's walls on one's homepage.

Post or Posting is defined as a comment on one's Facebook status, wall, or photo.

Social media is defined as any electronic media that serves as a networking tool with the ability to educate prospective and current college students about an institution of higher education. Examples of such social media include, Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogs, search engines, and higher education institutions' websites.

Status is defined as a descriptor tool within Facebook to describe events of a person's day, feeling or emotions, or a quote among other things (e.g., “today has been a great day so far!”).

Tagging is defined as identifying another person within a Facebook status or photo.

Technology mediated recruitment is defined as the process of contacting prospective students via the use of social media tools that impact prospective students' decisions to apply to, visit, or attend an institution of choice.

Tweet is defined as a being a status on Twitter.

Twitter is defined as a social media site in which individuals interact with each other through status updates, and “mentioning” each other.

Wall is defined as a personal profile within a social media platform that other individuals may write, “post” or “comment” on to touch base with a friend.

Summary

Chapter One is comprised of an introduction to the present study, a statement regarding the purpose of the present study, the five research questions which guided the study, methods of data collection, and statements regarding the significance of the study along with possible limitations to the current study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The following literature review explored four major categories of research related to social media and choosing a college. They are as follows: 1) The Brain and choice theory, 2) Multitasking, attention and cognitive process, 3) Enrollment, recruitment and retention and 4) Preferred sources of recruitment.

The Brain and Choice Theory

Fuhrmans (2009) informed that the brain is wired with biases that keep people from making smart choices and that we are able to train the brain to make healthier choices for ourselves. Based on a company weight loss study, people are more likely to make healthier choices if there are incentives involved and if they have invested their own money. According to Fuhrmans, "behavioral researchers found that people often have irrational, predictable, biases that lead them not to act in their own best interests" (2009). They also found that small probabilities had a big impact on positive choice making. Through this company weight loss study, researchers found that participants lost more weight when they invested small daily amounts of their own money versus those who were enrolled in a lottery.

In 1989, Stage and Hossler were interested in the topic of student college choice and what admissions officers could do to attract high school graduates to their higher education institutions. Pre- and post- 1989 literature explored correlates of college enrollment and the influencing variables that caused a student to consider attending a specific institution (e.g., family influence being one factor). Stage and Hossler looked at several decision-making models to determine how and what influenced students to make their choices. These models included econometric models, consumer models,

and sociological models. They determined that most important to recruitment was the consumer model, which implied that college choice was based on a marketing view. The consumer model encourages the prospective students to view the pros and cons associated with enrollment. In general, a combination of the models can be important to the process of choosing a specific institution to attend. Stage and Hossler (1989) identified consumer models as having stages that students go through in order to make their college choice. These stages involve predisposition, search, and choice. This study involved 21 metropolitan high schools with participants who were administered a telephone survey to which 125 did not respond and were assessed by the researchers as less likely to be planning for education after high school. Those who responded to the survey were mailed a packet with two surveys, one for parents and one for students. Of those who met the criteria for inclusion in the study, a response rate of 78% was obtained. Results showed that parents' expectations were the strongest influence in student decisions in deciding to pursue higher education in preparation for their career path.

Betz (2008) reviewed advances in major theories of career development and vocational behavior and concluded that a good theory was defined as having clear, measurable constructs and testable interrelationships among those constructs. Betz explored several theories that could be related to career choices. Among those theories were trait factor theories, Holland's theory of Career Choice, the theory of work adjustment (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984), and Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognitive career theory. This latter theory is a model that reviews self-efficacy, interest development, choice making, and performance. However, the building blocks to this

theory were based on self efficacy expectations, outcome expectations, and personal goals.

Self efficacy expectations were defined as an individual's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. Outcome expectations were defined as beliefs about the outcomes or consequences of certain behaviors, and personal goals are defined as intentions to engage in particular activities or to work for certain goals. Personal goals were determined by two categories: choice content goals, which are the types of activities or careers that the individual wishes to pursue; and performance goals, which were the level or quality of performance the individual planned to achieve. Self efficacy expectations and outcome expectations were expected to be congruent with each other and influence interest development. Along with efficacy and outcomes, interests were found to influence choice goals, as well as choice actions.

Multitasking, Attention, and Cognitive Process

Wallis (2006) discussed the digital juggling of teens including: emailing, instant messaging (IMing), and downloading while writing papers. Wallis studied families who participated in an intensive four-year study of the modern family and described a picture of how families spend their time in the home apart due to digital gadgets. The research revealed that when people multitask, the number of errors naturally increased. Also discussed are cognitive processes and how multitasking affected the brain. Wallis concluded that for most people, the brain needs rest and recovery time to consolidate thoughts and memories. Due to the regular use of several types of social media by teenagers, habitual multitasking may condition their brain to an overexcited state, making it hard to focus—when what they really need is some relaxation and recovery

time (“mental downtime”). According to Wallis, a study by the PEW Internet and American Life Project, 82% of teens are online by the seventh grade and it has become routine for them to conduct multiple IM conversations while watching television shows and listening/downloading music, thereby constantly packing more media time into their daily lives (2006). As a result, today’s generations have a different set of cognitive skills and habits than in the past. Today’s teens are very skilled at analyzing visual data and images and manipulating information. Due to multitasking, immediacy, and simple answers of visual data, today’s students are less tolerant of ambiguity and expect clarity. According to Turkle (1984), technology and media are good fits in terms of social needs. There is less risk to those who are afraid of intimacy and online profiles allow for exploration with one’s own identity. Turkle stated that many psychologists and educators have found that students contend their overcommitted schedules drive them to multitasking.

Levine, Waite, and Bowman (2007) focused on attention and how increases in multitasking of different activities, such as IMing and homework, impact the decline of reading among today’s youth. Their research discusses the idea that the more children use media, the more likely they will become media multi-taskers. According to Levine, Waite, and Bowman (2007), the nature of IMing suggests that multiple interruptions causing multitasking to put stress on cognitive processes. Previous research suggested that over the years technology has consistently advanced. However, people’s cognitive abilities have not consistently increased at the same rate. As a result, interruptions or distractions through multitasking have caused serious problems as well as a decrease in intrinsic motivation. The three objectives for this study were to examine the amount

of IMing done by college students compared to other types of media use, the nature of IMing among college students, and the relationship between IMing and distractibility for academic tasks. The researchers' hypothesis predicted that greater amounts of time spent IMing would be related to greater difficulty in concentrating on less stimulating tasks, such as reading textbooks for classes. The overall results showed that the amount of time spent IMing was significantly related to more distractibility from academics, which confirmed their hypothesis. Levine, Waite, and Bowman also found three ways in which IMing interferes with academic reading: displacement of time for study, direct interference while studying, and the development of a cognitive style of short and shifting attention. They concluded that brain development will be affected by frequent activity such as IMing and multitasking which will alter styles of attention focus.

Friedman (2006) discussed learned experience with social media and technology while visiting the Peruvian Amazon rain forest. He mentioned that the only time he could get on the internet or use his cell phone was when he traveled to the research center. He explained how his disconnect from the technological world was cleansing and a good experience to get away from "the disease of our age", continuous partial attention. He defined continuous partial attention as being on the internet or cell phone or blackberry while also watching television, typing on the computer and answering questions from others, constantly multitasking your way through the day, and continuously devoting only partial attention to each act or person encountered. Friedman spoke of generations changing from the Iron Age, to the Industrial Age, to the Information Age to the Age of Interruption. He predicted that the Age of Interruption will lead to a decline in civilization as ideas and attention spans shrink. He also discussed

the concept of connectivity = productivity and confirmed that there IS such a thing as being “too connected” in our society. Friedman, as a result of his time in the rain forest, was able to gain two new perspectives; the first on the violence in the Middle East and the second on the spread of the Internet.

Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention

According to Fusch (2011), social media is making its way through higher education, especially in the recruitment and retention world. However, Fusch (2011) stressed that it's important not to jump on the popular bandwagon of using all social media. Instead of investing time and money in something that is pretty new to higher education, he suggests that research be conducted to inform our options first and that we really get to know how to use these tools and the areas in which they are most successful. In addition, Fusch (pp. 9-11, 2011) discussed the myths of students and social media use, and posits several ideas on how to better understand both of those areas. The four myths shared are “sharing what they had for breakfast”, “youth use the same social media that older adopters do”, “youth use social media in the same ways that older adopters do”, and “social media is free”. The first myth contains the idea that students share more than just gossip through Facebook, MySpace etc., and that they actually share links, references, ideas, as well as, what the best colleges are to attend in their opinions. The second myth talks about the demographics of social media use. Twitter, for example, was found to be most used by individuals between the ages of 18-29, minorities, from urban areas, and have some college education. This description suggests that using alone would not be an effective recruitment strategy. Fusch (2011) further concluded it is a myth that social media is being used by youth in the same ways as older adopters because youth today use social media as hangouts rather than to

gather information or to stay in touch with contacts. Google and Monster, it seems are not the only websites being used as search engines these days, but YouTube is as well. The last myth discussed is that social media is free. This is not necessarily true because there is significant training, maintenance, management, and time being invested when using it.

Santovec (2005) discussed how IM in the recruitment world of higher education has not yet reached its full potential and many schools are not using it to their advantage. According to Santovec, approximately 75 percent of teens use IM consistently. However, not many teens have used it in their college search and many institutions have yet to use it in their recruitment. However, there are many positives to using IM as part of a recruitment strategy. For example, many families share more than one computer and teens have the option available to them to IM with others. A couple of advantages of IMing with prospective students include getting to know them better and updating applicants quickly on the status of their application, rather than sending information through traditional postal services. Since admissions officers are recruiting millennial students, this means they are recruiting their parents too. An advantage of having IM sessions with students who are being recruited is that parents tend not to mind if their students are communicating with them at a later hour after school, during extracurricular activities, and possibly dinner because it is less disturbing than a phone call or a personal visit. However, despite all the advantages of IMing there are still several limitations involved. These limitations include slow responses, problems connecting, computers crashing, as well as talking with students later through IM means admissions counselors spending longer hours working. Although IMing and using the

internet to recruit students represent more of an advantage in recruiting from different regions, admissions officers should also take into account the socioeconomic status of the regions in which they are recruiting because some students and their families may not have internet access; which in this case would make IMing impossible.

Hossler (1999) focused on the most effective types of recruitment including statistical technologies, student information systems, increased use of geo-demographic tools, and electronic media. When recruiting prospective students, it is important to take into account demographically who is being recruited, where they are being recruited from, resources available to them, and what types of marketing plans are going to be utilized. According to Hossler, when admissions counselors are hired they are expected to have great interpersonal communication skills so the stages of recruitment that most successful marketing plans have include developing an applicant pool, converting potential applicant pools into actual applicants, utilizing financial aid, guiding principles (e.g., personalization in contacts, timing, etc.), getting ready to recruit, and then tracking the results of the recruitment process. Hossler (1999) described electronic media as a growing development within admissions due to the use of institutional DVDs, interactive CDs, printed and on-line catalogues, websites with virtual campus tours and interactive campus maps. In making these electronic sources available, students from any region of the country and around the world are able to get a better grasp of what an institution might be like and if it is the best choice for them. Using electronic media as a marketing strategy helps expand recruiting to get the demographic of students wanted or needed on a college campus.

The goal of Lindbeck and Fodrey's (2010) research was to use the student perspective to discover whether colleges and universities are being as effective and efficient as possible with technology when recruiting prospective students. Prior literature reviewed the characteristics of the millennial generation, admission practices designed specifically for attracting the millennial generation, and technology and its use by members of the millennial generation. Literature on the characteristics states that millennial students have a constant need to be connected with each other while having access to unlimited amounts of information about their peers, as well as, using those connections to work with their peers. Millennial students are also very choice driven and enjoy keeping their options open; due to an age of advocacy and the push of social movements. Another important characteristic mentioned was that parents of millennial students expect to be updated and pursued just as much as their prospective student in order to gain as much knowledge about an institution as possible. According to previous research and the experiences of admissions officers, the best practices of recruitment of students involved the use of multimedia, simple web sites, personalized messages (print and electronic), and maintaining relevant, practical, individualized contact. Millennial students expect all of these tactics, as well as, great first impressions and personal relevance when choosing a college or university.

Preferred Sources for Recruitment

Grinter and Leysia (2002) conducted a qualitative study that focused on the emergence of IMing as a feature of communication in everyday teen life and compared the differences in use among high school and college students. The purpose of the study was to identify and understand the most salient attributes of teen IM use in order to understand their communication habits and predict their development as adults. The

study included 16 participants and was restricted to IM users only. The discussion on IM use was organized into the following categories: IM use frequency patterns, IM adoption factors and trajectories, IM cohorts, the nature of IM-based social congregation, and the relationship between IM technology and domestic environments in which it resides. IM use was defined by two patterns: discrete or continuous connectivity. Discrete was defined as users with dial up, a modem, or a shared computer. Continuous connectivity was defined as users having DSL or an Ethernet connection. Researchers realized through interpreting participant experiences that social relationships with peers were the main factor for IM use (especially for high school students). The desire to conform and have an increase in socialization opportunities was important to users as well as building rapport and maintaining relationships. Public chat rooms were of no use to these students due to the poor quality of conversation. In general, chat rooms were perceived as a waste of time, unless the chat rooms were organized around defined topics (e.g., a popular television show or video game).

For high school students, IM allowed them to chat outside of classes where socialization was limited, as well as it allowed them to make plans with each other. Among high school students who were found to have lifestyles more predictable due to class schedules, extracurricular activities, and family time, IM served as a constantly convenient socialization tool. College students, on the other hand, were found to have less predictable schedules and therefore left IM windows or old conversations open; informally socializing or making plans with each other and these were also used as spontaneous invites.

IM was a networking tool approved by most families due to its convenience. Parents who discipline their children with rules against things such as late night phone calls or visitors at late hours were found to take less notice of IM use because it does not disturb others, as well as teens can avoid trouble by IMing during time periods that their parents would not normally approve (Grinter and Leysia, 2002). According to Grinter and Leysia, the two primary reasons for teen IM use are the means and nature of privacy management, and the use of technology as a function of autonomy development. The researchers concluded that the desire to communicate with friends, build social relationships, sense of belonging, as well as the ability to socialize while not disturbing others were the primary reasons for teen IM use.

Goff and Jackson (2004) worked to understand the preferred information sources used by both community colleges and universities to effectively communicate with prospective students. There were differences for intent to attend two year colleges versus four year institutions based on race. However, based on their findings, Grinter and Leysia were able to identify media, social normative, and direct sources as effective recruiting sources for community colleges and four year universities looking to gain an advantage over competing institutions.

Concomitantly, researchers have revealed that minority students were more likely to choose community colleges over four year institutions due to their lower socioeconomic status and "inferior" information on academic options; thus, pushing community colleges to develop specialized marketing strategies towards that demographic. Previous studies also show that currently enrolled college and high school, friends, teachers, high school counselors, and websites were the main sources

of information about college to most high school students. Parents also relied on college publications and personal contacts; especially for information on community colleges. Research by Goff (2002), along with past literature, also stressed that media sources, such as radio, newspapers, and television were less important in the college search process.

The purpose of the study conducted by Goff (2002) was to examine the relative importance of preferred information sources of high school students searching for higher education institutions. Participants included 813 high school seniors and juniors (mostly males) from 14 southwestern urban schools. Participants with no intentions of going to college were removed from the sample. Data were gathered through a survey and categorized into two groups, those planning to attend two year colleges and those planning to attend four year colleges.

The survey measured intentions to attend, choice of type of institution, and importance of sources for obtaining information about a school. Enrolment intentions were measured on a scale of zero to five: 0 being "definitely not" and 5 being "definitely attend" in response to the question "How likely are you to attend college?". Choice of institution was determined through a yes or no answer to the question "Do you plan to attend a two-year college?". There were 16 information sources that participants were asked to rate in response to the question "How important are the following sources for obtaining school information?". The rating scale of zero to five, 0 being "not important" and 5 being "very important", was utilized. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographics of participants. T-tests were performed to analyze the 16 information sources. The t-tests were performed separately in the categories of those planning on

attending two year institutions and those who planned on attending four year institutions. Both ANOVA and Tukey range t-tests were used to describe differences across racial groups.

Results by Goff (2002) included three components of information: media sources, social normative sources, and direct sources. T-tests revealed significant differences in the existing information sources used by those planning to attend two year schools versus those attending to plan four year schools. Results also found were that the most important sources of information for two year school attendees were scholarship resources, school counselor advices, parents and other family members, websites, college fairs, high school teachers, current and former college students, and college publications. Sources most important to those who had intentions of attending a four year school were scholarship resources, websites, school counselors, current college students, parents and family, college fairs, college publications, high school peers, friends, and library resources. The demographic results of the t-tests showed those who planned to attend two year institutions had lower GPAs, income, educational goals, and fathers with less education.

Vaillancourt (2011) in a presentation on social media and employment shared recommendations on how employers should utilize the content of social networking sites during the recruitment of employees. Several employers reported performing background checks using social networking sites and screened the information available to them. This research was a reminder to employers to verify that the information uncovered about candidates actually belongs to the candidates applying.

Walsh (2011) identified social media tools that were also good applications for the education world. Social media tools were defined as online networking tools that served as a platform for collaborative efforts between students, professors, and parents. Some of these social media tools included “Room 21”, “Edmodo”, “ePals Learning Space”, “Edutopia”, “TheSchoolsUnited”, and “Moodle”. These applications not only serve as educational networking tools, but also provide users with an opportunity for social learning and a sense of belonging.

Summary

Chapter Two provided a review of past literature concerning social media and technology use. The first section on the brain and choice theory demonstrated how the brain works and theories behind human choice making. This area of research included the Stage and Hossler (1989) model which is compared to current research in the discussion section. The second section of past literature on multitasking, attention, and cognitive processes provided readers with an understanding of millennial college students’ cognitive processes and abilities relating to technology. Prior research on enrollment, recruitment and retention, and preferred methods of recruitment demonstrated marketing plans for admissions departments along with research on recruiting and retaining college students through the use of several types of media. The research identified in Chapter Two provides a solid foundation and support for the current research.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Design

A qualitative research design was utilized to explore phenomenological experiences as they related to the college choice decision making process mediated by social media. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to collect a wealth of “narrative and visual data over an extended period of time” (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, p. 399, 2006). Through taking a qualitative approach the researcher has a deeper and more holistic understanding of how social media mediated the decision process of choosing an institution to attend.

Participants

Two focus groups were comprised of six to seven students that ranged from first year freshman students through seniors according to academic class rank. There were seven first year Freshman, four Sophomores, one of which transferred in the previous semester, and two Seniors. The students represented Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic races. There was also representation of both rural and urban/inner-city life experiences and high school attendance by both of the groups. The students were interviewed in person and audio recorded for one hour about their college search.

Instruments

Instruments included audio visual equipment to record interactions with focus group participants, writing utensils and paper to take notes and to record participant’s information in order to contact the gift card winner. The present study was guided by the following research questions (sub-questions can be found in appendix C):

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of the participants concerning the usefulness of social media?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of the participants concerning how social media influences their search for a college?

Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of the participants concerning how social media influences which college to visit?

Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of the participants concerning how social media influences their selection of a college?

Research Question 5. How do participants perceive social media be utilized to assist participants along the continuum of searching, visiting, and selecting a college?

Site

Focus groups were held on campus in a secure room located in one of the residence halls. The room was quiet enough to have discussion and also record responses within that discussion.

Data Collection

A convenience sampling technique was utilized in order to obtain data (i.e., the perceptions of participants regarding their use of social media in the decision making process for college selection.) and gain a general understanding of how college students chose their ideal institution and how social media impacted that decision. As an incentive, the participants had the option of entering a drawing for a Wal-Mart gift card upon completion of the focus group interviews.

Treatment of Data

All data collected from the focus groups including names, responses, and signatures on forms of consent were placed in a secure filing cabinet and are kept on file for a three year period.

Summary

Chapter Three contains the methodology used in the current study, as well as a description of the participants, research questions being explored, and methods of data interpretation and presentation. The questions used during the focus group are located in Appendix C. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the research findings as they relate to the research questions that drove the present study, conclusions drawn by the researcher based on participant responses in the present study juxtaposed against findings from prior research in this area, and recommendations for both student affairs practitioners and future researchers.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

An investigation into student perceptions of social media regarding university admissions was conducted utilizing qualitative research methodology. Two focus groups comprised of thirteen total students ranging from Freshman to Senior in academic class rank. The students represented both male and female populations, Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic races. There were also students representing experiences attending schools and living in rural and urban/inner-city locations. Each focus group provided audio-recorded data which was analyzed using a constant comparative method. The data are presented herein and organized around five research questions; followed by the presentation of additional thematic material.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of focus group participants concerning the usefulness of social media?

In responding to interview protocols designed to elicit data which permitted the primary researcher to engage in utilizing the constant comparative method for data analysis, participants discussed the types of social media they used and its importance to their lives. They also discussed how their use of social media has changed from high school to college and their current use of it now that they are established college students.

The majority of participants were familiar with a variety of social media including, Google Plus, Skype, YouTube, texting and university approved email programs. Social media such as Facebook and were more utilized by the entire group than other platforms. However, none of the platforms mentioned were unfamiliar to any of the

participants. The newer the platform, the less confidently the participants discussed it. For example, Google plus is a recently developed product and not all students used it, although all knew it was an emerging social media platform.

When the participants were posed with the question of what they perceived the importance of social media to be, the first theme identified was connections to other people. Initially, participants used social media to stay connected to close circles of friends and family back home. For example, while talking about Google Plus and how it is used to stay connected back home, participant A stated:

It's called "hanging out". You have to invite people to hang out with you. It's also cool because it's like Facebook, but you make circles. And in the circles, you can have a family circle and a friends circle. I have an Eastern circle of friends and I have my closest friends from home. I can post something and I can send it to only my friends at home or only my Eastern friends could see it [whichever one I choose to see it].

A second way of connecting through social media was by meeting new people, forming new friendships and thus creating a sense of belonging, which according to the students was easier using social media.

A third way participants connected using social media was by taking initial encounters with students they did not know, such as classmates, and making future connections more probable because personal information is shared electronically more quickly and efficiently than other modes of communication. Participant B stated:

I definitely think it expands your [social] circle, so to speak. If you meet somebody one time in a class or something, then you can get to know them as opposed to hoping you will have another class together or something like that, you know [you can arrange to have similar classes again in the future, and continue your friendship that way].

A second way social media was important was its use as a tool for expression. Participants utilized social media to instantly share their thoughts and feelings to others which helped maintain their sense of connection. As participant F stated:

I mean, to express yourself. I guess? I mean, I got a lot of friends, but everybody's going to have something, I guess. You post how you feel or what you're doing at the moment and then everybody else is like "Well, I'm doing this or I'm doing that" [or "I'm feeling this way"], and I guess you get friends [based on your mutual feeling about something].

A third way social media was identified as important was in the gathering of information. Students explained that information gathered could be about what was happening to your core group of friends, what was happening on campus or what was happening in the world. This was a useful tool for prospective students to gain insight to campus life prior to enrolling or for current students to stay connected to campus events. For participant H, along with other prospective students, group pages on were effective forums of social media that helped them gather information prior to their arrival on campus. Participant H explained how other students used group pages to gather

information about social life in college and how she used it to gather information about the campus where she was currently enrolled:

Yeah, there were a lot of questions towards the social aspect of college, like “Where is the nearest McDonalds?” and “Where is the first party going to be?”. I was asking actual questions like “Does anyone know when move-in day starts?”, “How do I get to my first class?”. I didn’t really have anyone when I came here. So, I was this little awkward Freshman wandering around having no idea where room 1770 was. It was really helpful for me to hop on and ask “Hey, anybody know where this is?” And, I would get a response.

Participant L talked about her experiences prior to arriving on campus:

I get more use out of the EIU housing Twitter because it goes straight to my phone. Like, I get a notification whenever it comes to that, because there was something the day before or two days before move-in. It was “subscribe to EIU housing and they’ll let you know about the stuff for move-in day”. So, then I got that and I was getting tweets the whole entire drive over.

Participant B explains how her newsfeed regularly informed others of what’s happening during the day with her organization and where people should be in between classes:

I think it’s probably an advantage more so. What I was talking about in terms of like buying shirts and things like that because you know somebody might “like” my status and then one of their friends will see that they “liked” it on the newsfeed or whatever, and like “Oh! Like this is happening at this time. I should check that out.” As opposed to, they might not take that path to class and so if

they see that on the newsfeed or whatever it might be, it might change their mind and they'll investigate.

While several students saw the importance of social media as a resource to inform them of events around campus, others saw it as a news source to stay connected with global issues. Participant K discusses social media being his primary news source thusly:

Well, the only information that I really hear from the news or anything like that is from Facebook and statuses because I don't see the news. I know a lot of army people I guess, and they post stuff about education or other information or articles. So that's where I get my news from [and then I take some time to look at those].

Participant K was the only individual to bring up and/or social media being his only form of gathering serious news, but when he made his comment, many of the participants in the focus group claimed to use it for popular newsfeeds such as athletics, celebrity deaths, reality television shows, etc. Discussion around social media sites as primary news sources was limited. Participant G, however, made a comment giving the impression this was in fact true: "Well, there's no need to watch the news anymore, whether it's someone dying, the news, the weather—if anything really important happens, everyone knows about it right away [through Facebook statuses or some type of social media]." In general, focus group participants were simply stating that they were able to gather important information through others' statuses.

A fourth way social media was important was its efficient use of organizing academic work. Participants G and H described the effectiveness of social media as an academic resource to complete assignments in high school, as well as their ability to currently interact through social media to complete group projects in their college courses. Participant H discussed her experience with a research paper in high school, stating:

My senior year of high school, I had a huge research project, and actually my aunt helped me...She sat on the internet for like three hours searching for research and would just send me the links through Facebook chat. So, I didn't actually have to go on Google and type in what I was looking [for my project].

Participant G echoed this ideal: "My senior year, I used Facebook to study for a Trig test...we were just like back and forth on the chat, teaching each other."

Another theme that emerged as a result of participant responses to interview protocols regarding research question one was how participants' use of social has changed from high school to college. Participant H elaborated on how social media as an academic resource has changed since high school:

Like last week I was doing a group project, a group paper for English, and me and three other people, none of us gave each other our emails and when we got told on Friday that we had a group paper due and then Monday we found out what our groups were and then our draft was due Wednesday. So we didn't really [have a lot of time in class to talk about it], we just talked about our topic in that class [but did not outline anything]...so then we found each other on

Facebook and added each other as friends and did the chat to get each other's emails and all that, so it was helpful in that way.

Expression, as mentioned briefly before, is another way in which social media was used differently in high school than as currently used by college students. The majority of focus group members mentioned that while they were in high school, a lot of online conversation and status updates were full of drama they were experiencing at school or at home. Several of the first year participants have abandoned Facebook as a drama outlet and now primarily use it to stay connected to friends and family back home and at other universities. Participant G stated:

I have groups of friends that are far away. I have four friends that go to other in-state universities that are a long distance from here and some that are out of state, so we stay in touch [through Facebook].

Participant I discussed how she updates her statuses less often due to the time and focus demands of her major and career path. She is more thoughtful in what she posts:

I use Facebook now different from in high school. I'm not really big on posting stuff every day...I'm thinking more about what I post before I do it because employers see that stuff and with the economy the way it is, I don't want to take any chances, you know? Especially in a teaching position that's super hard to come by now.

Participant H actually posts more on Facebook now because she is sensitive to letting family and friends know she is okay and doing well. "It's the opposite for me from high school. I post all of the time now because my mom and brothers will like constantly

check my [pages and statuses] to see if I'm okay. In high school, I didn't need to make sure that people knew."

A third and final theme was how participants used social media now that they are college students. A majority of the participants affirmed that initially they used social media to establish a connection with their new roommate. Participants C, H, and K had strong feelings about how social media made meeting their new roommate and floor mates easier. Participant H shared the most commonly described experience: "I contacted my roommate through Facebook...The first thing I did was send her a message and then we started talking and got to know each other a little bit and then we exchanged numbers.". Although Facebook was participant H's preferred method for contacting her roommate, she and participant K agreed that social media can sometimes be a safety button for people. Participant C agreed and added:

There's none of that awkward "I'm sitting in my room by myself the first day because I don't know anyone." I met people on Facebook and then saw them in the hall and was like "Hey! What's up?"...I know we're older but my friends met on Facebook and they became roommates so they weren't random. So it was good because they weren't random [roommates].

Participant H was very frustrated and explained that some people do not understand how to make connections outside of the social media realm:

I see a lot of repetitiveness with the same people. Now, it's constantly "who wants to hang out?", "who wants to do this, who wants to do that?"... since like

the second week of school. It's like 'get off of your computer and walk outside and make some real friends, it's not that hard'!

When participants were asked why they thought it was so hard for people to make friends with Facebook connecting everybody, participant K replied with:

Facebook doesn't connect everyone. It just says, "Hey, I know who you are...". It's different than having personal interactions. You can lie on Facebook. It's too easy to be someone else.

After the group identified what they thought were the benefits of social media and how they utilized it as college students, their perceptions of social media while prospective students was the next area of inquiry.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of the participants concerning how social media influenced their search for a college?

For research question number two, participants discussed ways in which social media has evolved concerning college admissions and their overall college search experiences. Due to the range of ages and class rank among focus groups participants, junior and seniors recalled less social media interaction in their college search process than did freshmen and sophomores. Although both groups experienced social media differently when applying to college, all participants agreed that colleges were evaluated on how well their social media was managed. This meant colleges were expected to make the social media experience easy to use and immediate.

When questioned about the use of social media in their search for a college, both groups became animated. Most of their experiences consisted of talking with a high school guidance counselor or friends who had graduated. Participant B stated:

I don't think it [social media] really played a point in anything. I mean the only advertisements I really saw were hanging up in my high school guidance office....that and word of mouth, people that I knew that had graduated that I was still friends with that had come back and talked about their school.

This was a typical response from the few upperclassmen in the focus groups, as they did not really view social media as being a mediating factor in their search process. Most of the seasoned participants spoke about the fliers that they had seen posted around their high schools or meetings with their guidance counselors to talk about scholarships and fill out applications. They also mentioned their experience with using school websites to get information to help them make their decisions. One participant spoke about how frustrated she was with the school's website when she was searching for a college. Each time she visited the university's website the browser would produce a "pop up" window stating the website was under construction and would soon be fixed. Participant C stated she avoided one school because the website was inferior: "When I was looking at schools, I didn't go to a school because I didn't like their website."

All participants were frustrated with university websites that were neither current nor functional. In addition, those participants who were underclassmen agreed that the use of tools such as website information were important, but that the use of tools such as social media were more critical to their search process. Like their predecessors,

freshmen participants used predominantly their school counselors and websites. However, in just a few short years, the use of social media during their search process was much more prevalent. The groups were conscious of the difference a few short years made in terms of social media use and suggested universities must be more intentional and current in their utilization of these tools. Participant F stated the case most succinctly: "Whatever comes in style. I feel like is the school who's going to get more peoples' attention [will use these tools]. I mean that's what's hot and everybody's going to pay attention to it."

Participants also noted that social media was no longer static and that tools such as Facebook allowed friends to note "Status" markers and provide running commentary on what students who attend a particular university might be in for. Participant B stated:

I mean, you said it helped you out [Participant A]. I think it's a great idea in a reserved sense, not bombarding people. But, if someone "likes" their school, you know, and one of their friends is still trying to decide and they see all of these things, it could lead to another enrollment for that school.

Many of the participants were excited about this statement and there was a strong sense of agreement among the group. Participant H spoke about her experience when searching her current school and her thoughts were very similar:

I went on my friend's Facebook and looked to see who actually attended the school; saw what they were doing, and what their status updates were like. I saw the good and the bad without any censorship...I really wanted to know what people were actually thinking.

In the case of participant B, social media helped him make a quick decision due to his procrastination in the search process. He was looking to get involved in many different aspects of college life and for him, seeing several status updates throughout the summer sparked his interest in attending:

Like this summer, whenever I first started looking at the University, I “liked” them on Facebook ...They updated. Like their's updates every day and stuff, and that kind of made me want to come here because something was always going on.

Focus groups participants were split along class rank in terms of the general role advertisement played in their search process. Upperclassmen viewed advertisements for various universities but only the underclassmen experienced social media in their search process. Like the upperclassmen, they still saw posters, completed paperwork, and had conversations with their guidance counselors, but they also actively engaged in using social media. Participant F spoke about his experience with paperwork and social media and how they influenced his decision:

I mostly got mail, and emails too...they would send me stuff about activities and tell me what was going on. Even emails they would send me stuff like that; not just the “Hi, you’ve been accepted.” They sent me more emails. I guess that’s kind of what made me want to go here more too, because they seemed like they tried to really get you to go here instead of you just being another student at the school.

Social media added a personal touch to the admission process that let students know they were more than a number. Within a very short time, participants began to

rely on social media and it is now expertly used as a tool for personal interaction. Most all of the students expressed interest in a well-formed website that was user friendly and an application process that was immediate (i.e., very quick response time) in their experience.

Research question three moved beyond the search process for an institution and examined the perceptions of how social media influenced decisions to make a campus visit. Specifically, **research question three asked, “What are the perceptions of the participants concerning how social media influences which college to visit?”**

The responses of three participants to interview protocols were characteristic for all focus group members. The same gap between upper- and lowerclassmen ranking existed in the way they answered this question. Participants who had recently experienced the admission process spoke about reading status updates to see what was happening around campus and then determining if the campus appeared “exciting enough” to warrant further investigation. They were concerned about a campus being boring and not worth their time. Making decisions as to which campuses to visit were especially impacted by the visual presentations projected on websites (1.0) and (2.0). Participant I described the typical importance of images for most members of the focus groups when she said:

I feel like it’s all about the images that you see before you come...Because if you're seeing images that look really dull or not so fun or anything, people are not going to be willing to go because they don't want to have a boring time in college.

Likewise, interaction with those pictures added the social media component important to new applicants. Participant H stated: "I went on my friend's [Facebook] and I looked at who went to the University and saw what they were doing... and liked what their status updates were like". This participant needed more than pictures that were not boring, as participant I had mentioned, but also needed commentary that confirmed or clarified what campus life was like.

Some of the participants touched on the fact that utilizing social media to decide on making a college visit depended on where they were with their search process. The search process began early in high school for several of the participants and for others it did not begin until later in their senior year of high school. The college search process for participants G and H began early. They spoke about how they met with their counselors, search and applied to several different schools to be accepted. Once they started to narrow things down, they began making visits. However, social media seemed to be most helpful in narrowing down that process. For example, participant H stated:

I didn't talk to a counselor because it was my junior year and nobody wanted to stress really getting into that college mode. But, I mean, I had looked up what the campus looked like on the school website or Facebook. Like pictures of people... I wanted to know what it was like without actually having to come here and experience it just yet because I still wanted to be a high school student.

Participant G was in agreement with this statement, and began talking about her experience with academics and what she had been searching for academically in an

institution. This provoked a conversation between participants G and H about academic and social needs that campuses had lacked or provided during their search process involving other institutions. During this conversation, participant H responded to participant G with: "If I wanted the academic side of it, I would have gone on the school website. Which I did, too."

There were several nods of agreement from the group in response to this statement. In listening to the general responses of each focus group, it seemed as though there were actually two search processes going on while looking at institutions. One part of fulfilling the college search process was to find out if the institution met the academic needs of the student; the other part of the search process was finding whether or not the campus met the social needs of the prospective students and if they were going to fit in with the campus atmosphere. Pictures and images found on Flickr and Tumblr seemed to be helpful social media tools that provided insight as to whether prospective students felt that they would fit in. Participants reported were more inclined to make a visit if their feelings resonated with emotions and activities in the pictures.

It was evident that for most focus group participants, pictures and images via social media were very influential in their decision regarding visiting campuses. The next question to be answered was whether or not those images were enough of an influence in selecting a college without having visited.

Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of the participants concerning how social media influences their selection of a college?

The majority of the participants felt that social media had very little influence in their decision to attend their current institution. While several spoke about pictures in terms of influencing their decision to visit the campus, the actual visit to campus is what seemed to 'seal the deal' for most as prospective students. Participant D talked about his observations of campus through the internet and through friends of his sister who would text him. He said that seeing the castle and having friends-of-friends is what made him attend the institution. Participant D may have been the only individual to talk about texting with his older sister's friends and lite social media being the major influence for him to attend. Many other students felt the opposite, for them it was their visit, not social media that helped them make their decision! Participant K stated: "I don't think it's based on social media. I think it's more based on you literally have to visit to understand if it's right for you."

The conversation between participants about their campus visits got very hectic and loud as many of them recalled their experiences to campus and their interactions with others. For participant A, it was all about meeting people from her department and student organizations that got her "heart pounding" to attend the institution:

I mean, I got emails for the Open House. But, it was at the Open House where they have all of the organizations and they were like, "you can come meet this person". I was also applying for the Honors College, so I got the chance to go meet with the Honors people and we had our own separate meeting [which made me feel important].

Participant H had a similar experience:

Well, that was the deciding factor for me...was coming to campus. I mean, I went to another institution before I visited here and their academic advisor told me that there was no way they could help me double major with special education and history to be a teacher. Then, I came here and I met ONE person and they were like" ABSOLUTELY! It might take you seven years, but we'll help you do it. We'll help you get whatever you need and help you create a resume too"...I was like, where do I sign up?!

The findings for research question four led to the conclusion that social media really did not have much of a role in participants' decisions to attend the institution. However, social media played a much bigger part in attracting the students to the campus and then getting them on campus for an actual visit to get the "real" experience. To wrap up the discussion with both focus groups, interview protocols related to research question five provided insight on what social media tools participants thought were important enough for institutions to make sure they were utilizing in their marketing plans when recruiting prospective students.

Research Question 5: How do participants perceive social media be utilized to assist participants along the continuum of searching, vising, and selecting a college?

After taking the time to speak with both focus groups and gain a better understanding of how social media was perceived to be useful in the college search process, participants were asked to reflect upon their responses during their group's

conversation and describe at what point social media was most vital in their search process. Most participants agreed with participant I who statement the following:

I feel like it would be one of the first things. You research the school and you find people who go there and get their feedback on it, and then you talk to an advisor. Then, based on your feedback, you apply. And then, once you're in, you come here [for a visit] and then go from there.

Again, there was a noticeable difference in terms of under and upper classmen status when it came to social media and their search processes. Even among the new students who utilized social media in their search process, there were responses that were different depending on how intentional they were in getting an early start to searching. For participants G, H, and L, social media seemed to be at the forefront of their search process. Their responses included that social media was most helpful in the beginning of their process when they were searching to learn about their institution. For participants D, E, and J, social media was most helpful to them because they did not begin their searches until late in their senior year. For them, choosing an institution was a last minute decision. They already had prior knowledge about their institution due to connections with family and friends who were already attending. Therefore, text messages from friends, conversations, and pictures helped move them toward accepting the invitation to attend.

Participants were also asked to comment on what social media tools universities need to use in recruit students. Several of the participants stated that YouTube videos or a YouTube channel would be something they would like to see. Many of them joked

about spending all of their free time watching funny YouTube videos. They suggested recording students hanging out in the quad, or recording events such as “first night fun”, “boat regatta”, and “homecoming”. Some of the students who were highly involved around campus suggested spotlighting registered student organizations and making videos of their events. The last suggestion made by one participant was to add links to the “class pages” where you could click on a high school and it showed students attending that institution from your high school. Interesting enough, this was stated as a helpful tool for rejecting a university because this participant did not want to attend an institution that had other graduates from his high school in attendance.

Summary

After spending time with both focus groups, several themes seemed to develop throughout their answers to the interview protocols for the five research questions. Two themes that seemed to be most obvious in both focus groups were using social media to gain a sense of belonging and also sharing and gathering information through social media. There were several statements made by participants concerning their connections made with people through social media. Many of these connections were made prior to coming to their institution and some of them were made upon their arrival during the first few weeks of living on campus. The other theme that seemed to emerge as a result of a lot of conversation in both groups was the idea of sharing and gathering information through social media and then making decisions based upon the information collected. Before coming to campus, most participants described their virtual interactions with the institution during the summer months. Many of them spoke about “class pages” and “statuses” and how those helped them form impressions of campus and other people, and they began making decisions of what they were going to

bring, who they were going to hang out with, and places to go and things to do before they arrived on campus. Making decisions through information from others' statuses also continued once the participants got to campus and has remained a mainstay for many of them throughout their semesters here. Other themes that came into play throughout conversations with both focus groups were ideas of cultural shifts in terms of what social media was being used, how user friendly something was and the impact it had on a society of immediacy, and identity and priorities prior to college having an effect on perceptions of social media usefulness.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Recommendations, & Conclusions

Discussion

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach to gain insight about the use of social media as a recruitment tool. Social media, as defined in the present study, was any electronic medium that served as a networking tool with the ability to educate prospective and current college students about any institution of higher education. Examples of such social media include, Facebook, Flickr, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Blogs, institutional websites, and higher education websites. The researcher met with two focus groups in order to gather data for five research questions. Themes found in the current study supported previous research on social media and recruitment with prospective college students. A sense of belonging, information gathering, cultural shifts, immediacy, identity, and priorities prior to college were six trends throughout the focus groups that are discussed in relation to the three stages of the Stage and Hossler (1989) Consumer Model; including, predisposition, search, and choice (for a visual representation of the model please see Appendix A). Responses from focus group participants also resulted in ideas for future research. A comparison of current research with prior research follows.

The first interview protocols posed to the focus groups concerned their perceptions of the importance of social media. Friedman (2006) discussed his learned experience with social media and technology while visiting the Peruvian Amazon rain forest. Due to poor receptivity, he was disconnected from technology, an experience rare to him. He believed most of us live in continuous partial attention, a state he refers to as “the disease of our age”. He defined continuous partial attention as being

dependent upon some form of technology while also watching television, typing on the computer and answering questions from children. Because of this, people are constantly multitasking through the day and continuously devoting partial attention to each act or person encountered. He predicted that we were entering the Age of Interruption which would lead to a decline in civilization as ideas and attention spans shrink.

Contrary to Friedman (2006) who anticipated many negative consequences from overuse of technology, participants in the present study found connections with others a positive asset as they experienced college life. Participants discussed three positive ways they used social media to make connections: 1) maintaining connections to friends and family back home, 2) meeting new people, and 3) forming new friendships; thus resulting in the development of a sense of belonging. Concerning the last type of connection, social media allows students to leverage initial encounters with students they did not know, such as classmates, into future connections through the electronic sharing of personal information which is quicker and more efficient than other modes of communication. As participant B stated:

. . . it expands your [social] circle, so to speak. If you meet somebody one time in a class, then you can get to know them as opposed to hoping we have another class together.

The participant's echoed this sentiment almost to a person and it was congruent with the findings of Lindbeck and Fodrey (2010) who found that millennial students have a constant need to be connected with each other, and have access to unlimited amounts of information about their peers, as well as, use those connections to work with

their peers. Concomitantly, a common theme among the current research participants was their effective use of social media to connect with peers, specifically to organize and execute academic work. Participant H's remarks about her experience with social media and group work were typical:

Last week, I had to do a group paper for English and none of us gave each other our emails and we were told Friday we had the paper due Monday. And, we were given our group assignments in class. So, we found each other through Facebook, added each other, and chatted about our paper that way.

Utilizing social media to effectively organize academic work was a major theme of importance that developed during discussion. Wallis (2006) discussed an idea that many other researchers proposed, that is, when people multitask, the number of errors naturally increase. He discussed cognitive processes and how multitasking affects the brain suggesting that for most people, the brain needs rest and recovery time to consolidate thoughts and memories. Due to the abundant use of all types of social media that teenagers participate in, habitual multitasking may condition their brains to an overexcited state, making it hard to focus—when what they really need is some relaxation and recovery time (“mental downtime”). According to a study by the PEW Internet and American Life Project (Wallis, 2006), 82% of kids are online by the seventh grade and it has become routine to conduct multiple IM conversations while watching television shows and listening/downloading music, and teens are constantly packing more media time into their daily lives. As a result, today's generations have a more complex set of cognitive skills and habits than do past generations. Today's teens are skilled at analyzing visual data and images and manipulating information. Due to

multitasking, immediacy proclivities, and the simple answers of visual data, today's students are less tolerant of ambiguity and expect clarity.

The new set of cognitive skills and habits that Wallis (2006) discussed in his research were also found in the data from the focus groups. Participants discussed how they used social media to organize academic projects and intolerance of ambiguity, especially from their professors. Due to this decline in tolerance, students chose to use social media to connect with their peers and discuss what was necessary to complete their assigned projects. They thought professors took too long to provide details on assignments and required too little time to complete them. In spite of this complaint, students, using their heightened set of cognitive abilities in combination with their knowledge of social media, were successful in completing their projects.

Grinter and Leysia (2002) studied the emergence of IMing as a feature of communication in everyday teen life, while also comparing the differences in use among high school students and college students. The purpose of their study was to identify and understand the most salient attributes of teen IM use in order to understand their communication habits and predict their development as adults. They found that the main reason for IM use (especially among high school students) was to create and maintain social relationships with peers. The desire to conform, to increase socialization opportunities and to build rapport and maintain relationships were all important factors for high school users. IM use allowed them to chat outside of classes where socialization seemed limited, as well as allowed them to make plans with each other. Because high school student's lifestyles were more predictable due to class schedules, extracurricular activities, and family time, IM served as a constant

socialization tool. On the other hand, college students had less predictable schedules and therefore left IM windows or old conversations open, informally socializing or making plans with each other such as spontaneous invites. Responses from participants in the current research supported Grinter and Leysia's (2002) conclusions in a couple of ways. In regards to socialization, the process of making plans for high school students was more predictable than among college participants. The participants also claimed that since their schedules were less predictable in college, they used social media more often to alert friends and family back home that they were safe and living comfortably. This seemed to be helpful to 'helicopter' parents who consistently check-in on their children.

Hossler (1999) and Fusch (2011) provided insight as to how social media influences the search for a college, how it influences which college(s) to visit, how it influences final college selection, and how participants perceived social media be utilized to assist along the continuum of searching, visiting and selecting institutions for advanced education. Hossler (1999) focused on the most effective types of recruitment, including statistical technologies, student information systems, increased use of geodemographic tools, and electronic media. When recruiting prospective students, Hossler theorized it was important to take into account targeted demographics (i.e., where students are being recruited from), resources available to them, and what types of marketing plans are going to be put into place. Admissions counselors are expected to have great interpersonal communication skills, but they should also know how to communicate effectively across communication platforms (e.g., technical and non-technical formats). Lastly, Hossler outlined stages of recruitment that most successful

marketing plans should have, they included developing an applicant pool, converting the potential applicant pool into actual applicants, utilizing financial aid information early in the recruitment process, and developing guiding principles such as personalization, timing, et cetera. Once the recruitment process has begun, tracking the results of each recruitment component becomes critical to the successfulness of the marketing plan.

According to Fusch (2011), social media is making its way through higher education in the recruitment and retention world. However, Fusch stressed that it was important not to jump on the popular bandwagon of using only and all social media. Instead of investing time and money in something that is fairly new to higher education, he suggested specialists research options first and learn to effectively use these tools and where to target them. Fusch discussed four myths concerning students and social media use. First, they are “sharing what they had for breakfast”, “youth use the same social media that older adopters do”, “youth use social media in the same ways that older adopters do”, and “social media is free”. The first myth embodies the idea that students share more than just gossip through , Facebook, MySpace, etc., and that they actually share links, references, and ideas, as well as which colleges are best to attend. The second myth concerns the demographics of social media use. Fusch (2011) found that most users were (1) between the ages of 18-29, (2) minorities, (3) from urban areas, and (4) have some college education, suggesting that social media alone would not be an effective recruiting strategy. That social media is used by youth in the same ways as older adopters is a myth because youth today use social media as hangouts rather than to gather information and to stay in touch with contacts.

Responses from the current participants supported both Hossler (1999) and Fusch (2011) findings and confirmed that before recruiters use social media as a recruitment tool, they must understand who their audience is and what is available to them. Participant C discussed the advantages of having an audience of individuals who have social media tools available to them: "It's interesting but not always the best way to go about it. People who have iphones (or smartphones) are checking updates every few minutes, whereas people who do not have them cannot. The majority of the participants in the present study stated they had some ideas about what was important to them in selecting a school. This pre-knowledge was their main source in making a decision as to where to attend. Social media was used as an additional source for students to gather information on their priority needs. According to participants in the present study, the utilization of social media during their search process also was dependent upon their age. Even though participants were close in age, social media was more prevalent with the underclassmen participants. However, all of the participants claimed to have received help from guidance counselors, family, and friends who knew about the university. Participants also stated that depending upon the priorities of the students, social media would play a different role for each student in their search, visit, and selection process. They also all agreed that social media would be utilized as an initial tool at the beginning of a continuum for their decision-making process.

Another important theme that emerged from the present research was participants' use of social media to gather information. According to previous research by Stage and Hossler (1989), the interest in the topic of student college choice and what

admission officers could do to attract high school graduates to higher education institutions is one the increase. They examined correlates of college enrollment and the influencing variables that caused a student to consider attending a specific institution (e.g., family perceptions and concerns being important factors). Stage and Hossler examined several choice models to determine what influenced students to make their choices. The models included econometric models, consumer models, and sociological models. Most important to social media and recruitment were determined to be the consumer model, which implied that college choice was based on marketing influences. The consumer model also encourages prospective students to view the pros and cons associated with enrolling at a particular institution. Stage and Hossler identified consumer models as having stages that involve predisposition, searches, and choices students experience in making their college choice.

Stage and Hossler's (1989) model showed five groupings of extraneous factors that influenced college aspirations; thus making up the predisposition stage. The first group of factors was titled "Student Characteristics" that influence college choice. Of the eight characteristics listed by the researchers, five were discussed by the participants in the current study as being influential factors in their predisposition stage. Those five included family personal income, socioeconomic status, parent's education, family culture, and parent's personalities. Participant's aspirations seemed to be affected most by parent's personalities and education, and family culture. Participant B stated:

I honestly didn't really think of college as an "option" for me. It was always just the next step for me. Everyone in my family, including my parents, had gone to college before me. So in my head, it wasn't even an option NOT to go to college.

My family is pretty average but, I guess because everyone else had gone, I felt entitled to college.

Likewise, participant J stated:

I actually never wanted to go to college, growing up. My parents didn't go to college when they were young. My mother just began working on her bachelor's. The thing that got me most interested in college was hearing from my sister and seeing the things she did in college. It looked really fun and I learned that everyone meets so many people their age in college. I then knew that I must go to college and thought that everyone should go to college in their lives.

The participants spoke about their parent's and family's education being a source in weighing pros and cons of attending college. Several spoke about their family culture as well and why their current institution was the college of their choice. Participants D and E both had siblings and friends who attended their current university which helped them add to their "pros" list. Participant H discussed her parent's personalities and their concerns for her safety and well as living on campus. And, several of the students mentioned the institution's location being important to them and their parents.

Participants also commented on income and socioeconomic concerns as being factors in their predisposition stage of whether college would be an option for them. Participant D spoke of comparing his current institution to others and when thinking about attending college. He knew it would have to be a school that he could financially afford, if he chose to pursue college as an option. Participant L spoke of her family's

socioeconomic status and how that compelled her to think about attending college early in life:

I knew that I was going to go to college from a very young age. I had seen my father and mother struggle to find good, well-paying jobs and they always worked at jobs that they hated. I decided I didn't want to be like them. I didn't want to have to struggle to get by. I knew that the best way to prevent working a job I hated or having a hard time getting a job was to get into college.

Another set of factors found in the predisposition stage were "Personal Attributes" consisting of academic performance, self image, and personal benefits and values present based upon current and sought lifestyle. College aspirations in the predisposition stage were dependent upon what experience each student was looking for. The students in the focus groups talked about priorities prior to college and how those affected their decision to pursue a post-secondary education. Participants E and G discussed their abilities academically and athletically as personal attributes of importance during their predisposition stage. According to participant G, pros of attending college would be finding a school with a reputable academic program where he/she could continue to succeed: "I honestly only care about the academics and how I feel about the campus. If somebody told me not to attend here because the academics weren't good, I probably wouldn't have." Participant E was deciding on continuing his athletic career in football or having fun when he stated: "I chose between football or going to school to have fun. Ultimately, I chose to have fun. So, I went to a university instead of a small school and this is what seemed to fit me." These were personal values and benefits participants considered when deciding whether college was going

to be an option for them or not. Participants A, B, and E also talked about involvement, stating that upon graduation from high school, they wanted to participate in several student organizations and this furthered their decision to pursue attending college.

Participant B stated:

I think if our school had been on Facebook when I was coming here, I knew I wanted to get involved and so if I would have seen updates every day. And, I would have been like “There’s so much going on. There’s so many opportunities! But, if it’s someone that doesn’t want to get involved . . . constant updates are probably going to be more annoying to them.

A fourth set of factors in Stage and Hossler’s (1989) predisposition stage were “High School Characteristics”. The pros and cons of high school characteristics seemed to remain important even after the transition to the search process for college. The characteristics discussed by the participants were curriculum and social composition. As mentioned previously, the idea of connectedness was very important to the participants in the present study. Being a part of an organization and experiencing a sense of belonging socially were two frequent needs cited among all participants concerning college. Participants D and E both had friends attending their institution and the possibility of obtaining social acceptance would be easier for some than others was a relieving pro. Participant D stated:

My sister, she’s the same age as me, but she goes to a larger institution and she didn’t have a “Class of 2015” page or anything like that so she had no way to meet people. She went there by herself and didn’t really know anybody, so she

had no way of making connections with people before she got there. I feel like I have an advantage in knowing people over her.

The curriculum in high school, along with student academic ability, also seemed to be relevant to the current participants in their predisposition stage. As participant L stated:

I knew that the best way to prevent working a job I hated or having a hard time getting a job was to work my ass off and get good grades. All throughout high school I took the hardest classes I could to ensure that I would be college ready. I found them to be helpful.

The final section of factors in the pre-disposition stage was titled "Environment". There were three conditions grouped under environment, including occupational structure, economic conditions, and cultural conditions. The cultural component seemed to be most comparable among the participants in the focus group. The participants were asked to pinpoint when they thought social media was most prevalent or helpful in their entire college search process -- from predisposition to making the choice. The majority of the participants agreed that social media was most helpful to them during the beginning portion of their search. They all agreed that the campus culture was most important when making their finalized decision. Therefore, a campus visit was necessary. Participant F brought up the point that there had been a cultural shift in social media. The shift was society switching from using MySpace to Facebook and Twitter. This shift is important not only for society, but for institutions of higher education to understand when assessing why the presence of social media is important

during the predisposition stage. As Participant H stated: using Facebook and other social media tools to view images of the campus as well as “comments” or discussion present online to better understand the campus culture. It can therefore be concluded that the social media use of a prospective student during the predisposition stage is helpful in weighing the pros and cons to further compel that prospective student to then transition to the second stage or “search process” of Stage and Hossler’s model.

According to Stage and Hossler’s (1989) consumer model, once prospective students have considered all or most factors within the predisposition stage, they will transition to the second stage identified as the search process. This area of the model includes sections of “Information Gathering”, “Influences/Media Use”, and “College Actions”. Similar to what Stage and Hossler (1989) found, focus group participants in the current study utilized social media to gather information about campus events. Participants stated it was important to gather information through status updates because as prospective students they wanted to understand the campus culture to know if there was anything exciting happening. Participant H stated the case for the majority: “I looked up people who went to the school and saw what they were doing and what their status updates were like. I saw what people were actually thinking. The good and the bad.” Using this strategy, the participants were able to view the pros and cons of the campus climate and decide whether or not it might be a good fit for them. This strategy of gathering information, discussed by the current participants, is also present in the predisposition stage.

However, the search process moves beyond the aspirations to attend a college into gathering information for attending a college of their interest. According to Stage

and Hossler, during the search process stage, information is gathered through “Influences/Media use” which includes: parents, counselors, peers, publications, and college officers. It is also gathered through “College Actions”, including recruitment activities, academic and admissions materials, and institutional policies listed in catalogs. Current participants supported Stage and Hossler by discussing all of the “Influences/Media Used” previously used during their search process. However, participants viewed social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, which were not examples given in the model, but were present in the discussion, as a tool of importance during their search process. Current participants explained that emails, group and individual comments, and timely updates were all helpful tools in gathering information. These tools can be categorized under “College Actions” as well as “Media Used”. Participant I discussed the assistance of social media tools during their predisposition and search process stages to gather information:

I feel like it would be one of the first things. You research the school and you find people who go there and get their feedback on it. Then, you talk to an advisor and based on their feedback, you apply and then you come here. You research, take in all this feedback, then you visit, then you apply. Or you research, apply, then visit.

According to participant I, her understanding of how she and others have utilized during the search process or will utilize social media to gather information in the future was identical to Stage and Hossler’s (1989) model. Once a prospective student has gathered the necessary information from “College Actions” and “Influences/Media Used”, they will then transition to the last stage of making their choice.

The third and final stage of the consumer model introduces three courses of action and characteristics; two of which rely heavily on institution actions. These courses include “Sending Applications”, “College Characteristics”, and “College Actions”. The action of “Sending Application” is the responsibility of the student and a choice made by the student after moving through both the predisposition and search process stages of the model. The “College Characteristics” represents the demographics of the institutions, much like the “Student Characteristics” present in the predisposition stage. During focus group discussion with current participants, it was noted that all “College Characteristics” were and could be viewed via social media tools, but were much more appreciated and necessary during an on campus visit. Participant I supported this idea by describing how social media was helpful in understanding university characteristics: “I think it’s helpful because you could view a lot images and comments, and get positive and negative feedback and fish through newsfeeds just to find what people are like.” Participant K, on the other hand, discussed how college characteristics are more appreciated during visits than through social media: “I don’t think it’s based on social media. I think you literally have to visit the campus to understand if the campus and the people are right for you.” The section on “College Actions” represents expressions of admittance, denial, aid granted, etc. All of the listed sections in this area of the model are taken into consideration, and based upon institutional feedback, the prospective student will make their choice.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals:

1. Student affairs professionals can help make connections using social media between prospective students prior to their attendance; specifically, during their predisposition stage, if possible. Many of the participants in the focus groups

spoke about establishing group pages so they could see who was considering or attending their institution. Many of them did not want to attend with high school classmates, while some wanted that familiarity. Student affairs professionals may be able to create interest groups and get prospective students to begin talking with each other as this interaction might give them a more accurate perception of whether the culture and student population are right for them which may help to facilitate a sense of belonging early on. These conversations could be facilitated by a student affairs professional or a student ambassador who has the responsibility of maintaining a social media account for the university.

2. According to previous literature and supported by the comments from focus group participants, it was suggested that making connections with others is an important use of social media among college students. In addition to establishing those connections with prospective recruits, student affairs professionals should work to maintain those connections even after students' arrival to campus, as many students are still looking to receive help from a mentor once they are enrolled.
3. Most admissions offices have certain months in which they are busiest recruiting prospective students. It is important for student affairs professionals working in admissions to keep those months in mind when utilizing social media in their marketing plans. However, from gathered responses, it seems that social media is most prevalent and useful to prospective students during the pre-disposition stage of the search process. Therefore, it will be important for professionals to keep thorough records of where individuals are in their process and use this

information to determine how much social media is necessary, rather than bombarding individuals which could result in frustration and feelings of intrusiveness on the part of prospective students.

4. Hossler (1999) stated when recruiting prospective students that it is important to take in account who is being recruited, where they are being recruited from, resources available to them, and what type(s) of marketing plan(s) should be pursued. It is vital that Student Affairs professionals keep specific audiences in mind when creating a model for recruitment. They should continue to educate themselves on theories and practices relevant to their focus. When working with prospective individuals of the social media “age”, they should keep in mind identity theories that will help them to understand the people with whom they are interested.
5. During the “choice” stage of Stage and Hossler's (1989) model, there is an empty oval representing the time between the two processes of “sending applications” and “enrolling”. It is important for student affairs professionals to consider how to best utilize social media at every stage in the process, but especially this point in the process. Previous literature, along with responses of current participants, depicts immediacy as being important when using social media as a communication tool with millennials. Suggestions might be to “Tweet” the application or admissions status of a student, or “Tweet” reminders about checking financial aid or completing certain paperwork, and use invitations for Open House dates or campus events that prospective students could attend.

Recommendations for Researchers:

In the process of gathering data, much of the findings supported previous research. It was especially helpful to compare the findings to Hossler and Stage's model. Although the data gathered in the present research study echoed previous research findings, the qualitative nature of the project yielded several ideas that could be researched in future studies concerning social media.

1. As mentioned in the recommendations for student affairs professionals, identity is an area to focus on concerning social media. Future research might discover the impact of social media on identity development among college students. There are many vectors or phases that students experience in figuring out their individual identities, in addition to their identities in relationships with others. As Wallis (2006) concluded, technology and media are a good fit in terms of social needs. There is less risk to those who are afraid of intimacy and online profiles allow for exploration with one's own identity. Researches may want to explore whether social media is helping or hurting the social needs and development of college students as well as their overall transition to college.
2. A concern presented by the focus groups was socio-economic status and social media tools such as smart phones, applications, etc. There were frustrations expressed with being able to gain access to information during a campus wide event, depending on whether or not the students owned a smart phone. Geoff and Jacksons (2004) stressed that media sources, such as radio, newspapers, and television are less important in the college search process. Researchers could further explore the advantages and disadvantages of social media use when recruiting populations from areas of lower socio-economic status.

Advantages and disadvantage of social, academic, and intellectual development of students who can afford the latest technology versus those who cannot should be explored.

3. Many of the participants talked about their academic work and the advantages of using social media tools such as emails to complete their assigned work.

Suggested areas for research concerning social media and academics could be the following: How social media effectively impacts group work to complete assignments, how social media is being used as an academic resource and redefining academic dishonesty, social media's impact on the expectations of faculty members and students concerning coursework.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to explore technology mediated recruitment to gain a better understanding of how social media impacted the search process of a prospective college student. Student affairs professionals should be concerned and eager to learn about related studies as recruitment and retention are vital components for any institution to function. It is also important to understand how relevant technology (i.e., social media) can enhance the strategies of an institution or single department to successfully market themselves. Another importance recommendation resulting from the findings in the present study for professionals is helping them understand the relevance of the role social media plays in a prospective student's search process and how prevalent or necessary it is to them.

Participants in the current study indicated that making connections through social media was the most important aspect to them; whether those connections happened prior to or after being on campus. They also spoke about the relevance of social media

in assisting them in the completion of their course work. Perhaps the most helpful information provided by the focus groups was that they utilize social media as a source to gather information. This is helpful to know since a search process for college contains gathering enough information about a school to enhance an interest in a particular institution. Something for professionals to continue broadening their knowledge on is what information to provide prospective recruits using social media. The bit of information that the participants provided for the present study was that social media tools were most prevalent in the beginning of their college search process to gather information about an institution and its campus culture without the filtered conversations with an admissions representative or a student leader.

It is important that student affairs professional research the impacts of social media on college students and prospective students as social media is a trend that is going to change the future of society in several ways. It is important for administrators to understand how social media is being used by students in regards to making connections, resourcing information, and applying it for academic use in order to recruit and retain them, as well as help them to be successful holistically. Effectively and efficiently using social media is not an easy task and requires departments with vision to collaborate across campus. Fortunately, there are professionals who have the ability and are capable of meeting students' needs through both personal interactions and social media.

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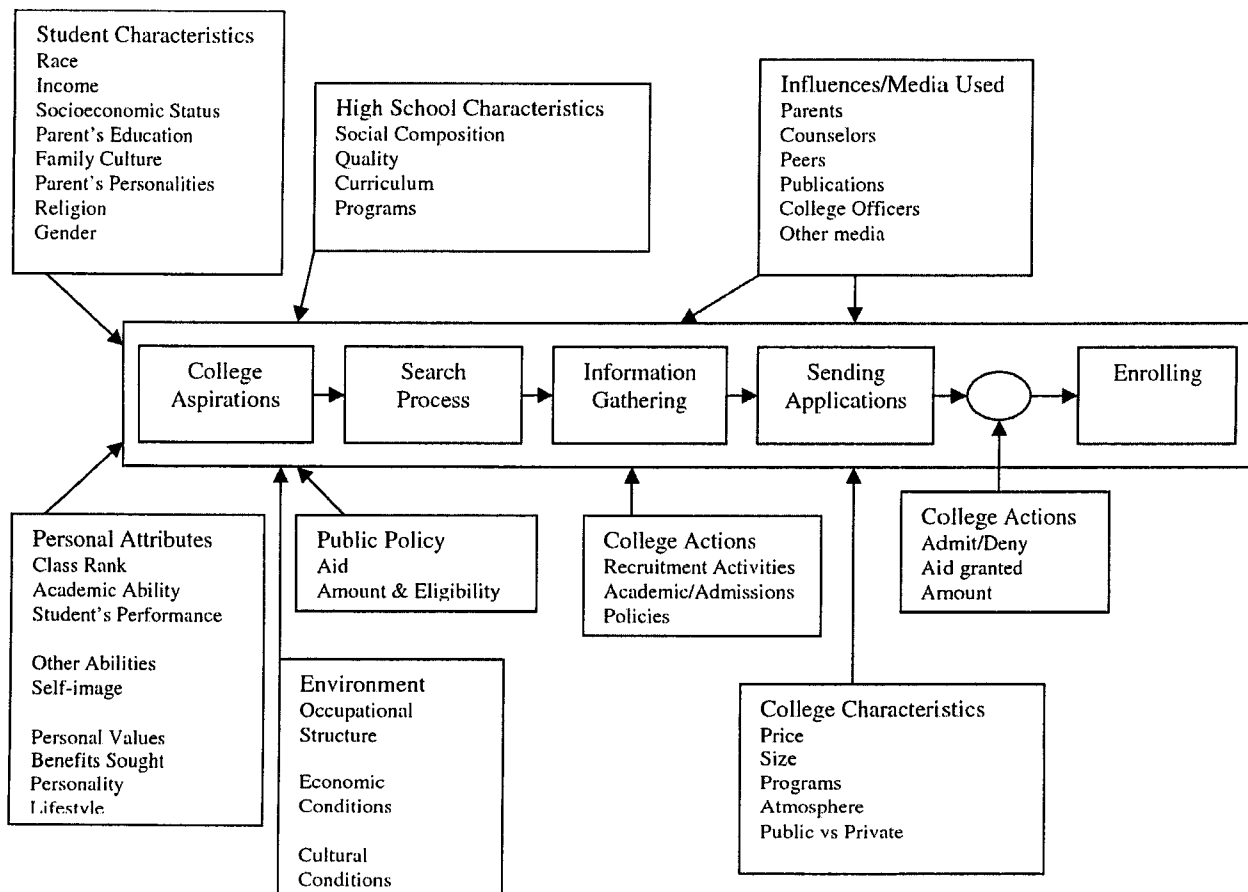
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Appendix A

Stage & Hossler's Consumer Model of Choice



Appendix B

Figure 1

Stage and Hossler Consumer Model (1989) In Comparison To Focus Group Responses

Figure 1			
<i>Stage and Hossler Consumer Model (1989) In Comparison To Focus Group Responses</i>			
	Predisposition (College Aspirations)	Search Process	Choice
Stage and Hossler	<p>Student Characteristics (race, income, SES, parent's education, family culture, parent's personality, religion, gender)</p> <p>Personal Attributes (class rank, academic ability, student's performance, self-image, personal values, benefits sought, personality, lifestyle, other abilities)</p> <p>High School Characteristics (social composition, quality, curriculum, programs)</p> <p>Public Policy (aid, amount & eligibility)</p> <p>Environment (occupational structure, economic conditions, cultural conditions)</p>	<p>Information Gathering Influences/Media Use (parents, counselors, peers, publications, college officers, other media)</p> <p>College Actions (recruitment activities, academic/admissions, policies)</p>	<p>Sending Applications</p> <p>College Characteristics (price, size, programs, atmosphere, public vs. private)</p> <p>College Actions (admit/deny, aid granted, amount)</p> <p>Enrolling</p>
Focus Group	<p>Student Characteristics (Identity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability • Parent's lacking education • Parent's struggle due to no post-secondary education • Family tradition to attend college <p>Personal Attributes (Priorities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Ability • Athletic Ability • Involvement & Experience <p>High School Characteristics (Sense of Belonging)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Aspects/Belonging • Challenging classes to prepare for college <p>Public Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Responses <p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus culture-people, activities, etc. • Social media culture <p><i>*Note:</i> Utilizing social media to weigh the pros and cons of attending and searching for college. Participants used to experience as much as they could of the campus atmosphere in an uncensored manner. Learning about campus culture via social media was helpful to participants in this stage.</p>	<p>Information Gathering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status updates/"Tweets" • Pictures • Comments <p>Influences/Media Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselors • Peers • Admission Reps • Advertisements Paper/Electronic <p>College Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails • Pages <p><i>*Note:</i> Social media was most useful to participants in the earlier stages of their search process. Many of them spoke about their experience with emails, pages, and tweets after a visit or acceptance. Social Media they did not use, but thought would be helpful was YouTube</p>	<p>Sending Applications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Responses <p>College Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant's viewed these via social media, but were happier with experiencing these in person <p>College Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congratulations emails • Campus activities emails • Invites to join pages/groups <p>Enrolling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most social media experience after enrollment was with other departments (i.e. student programs and housing) <p><i>*Note:</i> Participants received a lot of information via social media after their acceptance to the university</p>

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. Can you tell me about the types of social media you are familiar with?
2. What do you perceive as being the importance of social media?
3. What do you see as the benefits of social media as a prospective/college student?
4. How often do you utilize social media?
5. How do you currently utilize social media as opposed to when you were in high school?
6. In what ways is social media useful to you as a college student?
7. In what ways do you feel social media influenced your college search process?
8. Can you think of some ways that social media may have influenced your decision to visit a college campus (any college campus)? (e.g. Facebook pages or Twitter updates with events happening on campus.)
9. Thinking back on your college selection process, how did social media influence your decision to attend this institution?
10. Reflecting on this conversation, what social media tools would you suggest to prospective students that might be helpful in their college selection process?

Appendix D

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study related to social mediated recruitment during the college search process for a graduate student thesis in the College Student Affairs program. As the principal researcher, I hope to gain an understanding of your perceptions and use of social media while searching for your college choice. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you fit the general criteria for students I am evaluating (age, gender, social media use etc.).

If you decide to participate, I will be conducting a 1 hour to 1 ½ hour interview session with small groups to gather your perceptions and use related to your experiences with social media and your own college search process. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions in which responses will be audio and video recorded during this time, and will be encouraged to give your honest answers in all situations. The risks associated with this study are no greater than those associated with daily life.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be viewed only by the principal researcher and thesis advisor for the study.

If you decide to participate your name will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win a Wal-Mart gift card. However, your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relation with Eastern Illinois University, or the department of Counseling and Student Development. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have any additional questions later, please contact Ashley Cooper at ancooper@eiu.edu who will be happy to answer them.

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write: Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920, Telephone: (217) 581-8576, E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the above information provided and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be entitled after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature _____

Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____

Date _____

Appendix E

Copy of IRB Approval

June 20, 2011

Ashley Cooper

Counseling and Student Development

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "Technology Mediated Recruitment: An Exploration of How Students Used Social Media to Choose College" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has approved this research protocol following an expedited review procedure. IRB review has determined that the protocol involves no more than minimal risk to subjects and satisfies all of the criteria for approval of research.

This protocol has been given the IRB number 11-089. You may proceed with this study from 6/16/2011 to 6/15/2012. You must submit Form E, Continuation Request, to the IRB by 5/15/2012 if you wish to continue the project beyond the approval expiration date.

This approval is valid only for the research activities, timeline, and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any changes to this protocol be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board

c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Telephone: 581-8576

Fax: 217-581-7181

Email: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

Upon completion of your research project, please submit Form G, Completion of Research Activities, to the IRB, c/o the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Thank you for your assistance, and the best of success with your research.

Robert Chesnut, Chairperson
Institutional Review Board
Telephone: 581-2125
Email: rwchesnut@eiu.edu