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Strength of Weak Ties Theory and College-University Marketing: A Case Study of ETSU's Clemmer College

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Strength of Weak Ties Theory and College-University Marketing: A Case Study of ETSU's

Clemmer College

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Media and Communication

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Brand and Media Strategy

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by

Sarah J. Nobles

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ABSTRACT

Strength of Weak Ties Theory and College-University Marketing: A Case Study of ETSU's

Clemmer College

by

Sarah J. Nobles

As scholarly institutions enter a new era of hyper-competition, seeking innovative ways to

engage with student populations has become central to social media marketing efforts.

Developing strategies and tactics to interact with existing student populations presents new

challenges for marketing departments, as well as the stakeholders who are often asked to provide

user-generated content. Strong ties among stakeholder relationships can enhance communication

with effective outcomes; however, it is the weak ties that may have the most impact. This study

draws on existing literature regarding Strength of Weak Ties Theory and faculty and student

surveys in East Tennessee State University's Clemmer College were conducted, to explore how

ethos, pathos, *logos*, and *kairos* can be leveraged in earned, owned, and shared media. This data

is then used to inform future marketing campaigns that use professor-student engagement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Support from Dr. A. Chase Mitchell began years before this thesis was conceived when I knew him as Chase, my friend and coworker at William King Museum of Art. As my chair, he generously offered his time, talents, and thoughtful suggestions to guide me through this journey. My gratitude to him is beyond the scope of this project. With that said, thank you, Dr. Mitchell, for all that you have done to make me a better student.

Dr. Pamela Mims is not only an accomplished faculty member at ETSU but a respected member of the Clemmer community. During a time of incredible challenges resulting from the pandemic, her encouragement, whether offered remotely or in-person, gave me the support to move forward. Additionally, I cannot thank her enough for challenging me on insecurities that have held me back for far too long.

Dr. Susan Waters oversees more than 30 Media and Communication graduate students. While juggling many of their needs, she also served as a committee member for this thesis. However, her support goes beyond these pages. Her kindness, humor, and prompt replies to my questions have been greatly valued.

The Clemmer Community has been instrumental in the success of this thesis. Thank you for allowing me to ask questions and engage in conversation that made this research possible.

Gregory Nobles, Web Stevens, Marilyn Nobles, Teresa Treadway, Laken Bridges, Jenny Lockmiller, David Lockmiller, Becky Parsons, and all my friends and family, thank you. Each of you have been there in ways that have guided or supported me these past couple of years.

Lastly, there is one final person I wish to acknowledge. After 43 years, I finally got out of my own way. The time had come to put a little faith in myself.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Rationale for This Subject

East Tennessee State University's (ETSU) Clemmer College is the subject of this study, due to its status as one of the discipline-specific colleges that comprise the larger University organizational model. A special interest in the marketing dynamics—between what the University provides and what the faculty, administrators, and students in Clemmer College expect–is explored. Granovetter's (1973) Strength of Weak Ties Theory is significant to this investigation because it can inform faculty and student relationships. Stakeholder relationships play a supporting role in a college and university's paid, earned, shared, and owned media. The stakeholders selected for inclusion in the research include staff, faculty, and student populations.

This thesis is designed to accompany a media management plan for Clemmer College. By conducting a review of existing literature about brand and media strategy in the context of college-wide marketing initiatives, administering faculty and student surveys within Clemmer College, and observing rhetorical solutions to the findings, best practices for moving forward are suggested, and insights with Clemmer stakeholders are provided. Survey results will show a current analysis of student and faculty/staff media use with expanded insight into where to distribute resources for effective communication with stakeholder populations.

Earlier studies advanced interest in marketing communication among institutions of higher education. Wertalik and Wright (2017), for example, investigated social media use among faculty, students, and various post-secondary stakeholders at Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business. Unlike their study, this research includes 1) ways to leverage the rhetorical triangle plus *kairos* to inform marketing the College, and 2) an investigation into the Strength of Weak Ties Theory in relation to various stakeholders.

Additionally, in an essay on scholarly communication, Schwartz (1994) suggested that literacy in electronic communication decreases scholars' willingness to integrate social media into their lives. Below, is a highlight of how Schwartz's concerns are still relevant for faculty on college campuses today. Furthermore, Oeppen Hill's (2020) research explored marketing university course descriptions and the language or rhetoric used in appeals. Through an evaluation of website content, Oeppen Hill looked for ways the institution used language associated with Aristotle's modes of persuasion–*ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. This study too will review the ways stakeholder language influences marketing appeals and how that may unknowingly affect external messaging.

The conversation progressed with the studies mentioned above; however, they are not specific to Clemmer College. The purpose of this study is to provide data that Clemmer College can use to inform its future media management planning.

Relationship to This Subject

Interest in this subject began after I accepted a graduate assistantship (GA) within Clemmer College under the direction of Dr. Pamela Mims, Associate Dean of Research and Grants for Clemmer College and one of my chairs for this study. As part of the GA position, my duties included an e-newsletter and short video clips focusing on student and faculty success. Issues surfaced at the onset of the position upon learning that the College received limited support from the University in finding software to host the e-newsletter. An additional dilemma emerged at what was a perceived reluctance from University officials to support Clemmer's video production. This resulted in a degree of confusion as to how exactly East Tennessee State University supports individual colleges and departments as they tackle marketing initiatives. As a result, this topic was pursued as the research for this thesis. The goal was to set out to discover

useful information for Clemmer College including ways in which they could implement this knowledge to better inform their marketing goals.

Key Concepts and Definitions

Some of the research evaluated in the literature review that follows investigates a consumer or customer journey. When mentioned in the context of this research, a consumer or customer is considered to be a student. Additionally, universities are not the same as colleges in this research. Colleges fall within a larger university setting with clarification on the point established in the literature review to follow.

Additionally, there are research questions posed throughout the paper. When referenced, research is abbreviated with an (R) and question is notated as (Q). A numerical designation is placed at the end of each question to keep order and aid in reference throughout the paper.

Framework for this Subject and Questions Asked

This section is appraoched in a comparable manner to Gablinske (2014). She moves through each chapter of her research study and gives a brief overview of the content within.

To begin, chapter one is an introduction to Clemmer College and this study's research design. An overview of definitions, rationale, and researcher motives is described.

Chapter two follows with a literature review. Brand management, social media use, and relationship marketing in college settings are researched and discussed throughout the chapter. At the chapter's close, a list of research questions is introduced.

Research questions that will be addressed are:

RQ1: How do Clemmer College students perceive the College's marketing tactics?

RQ2: Based on the faculty response, how do Clemmer stakeholders leverage the

rhetorical triangle plus *kairos* to address faculty concerns regarding college-wide marketing and branding?

RQ3: How do Clemmer stakeholders leverage the insights of Strength of Weak Ties Theory in reformulating the College's marketing strategy?

Chapter three introduces the methodology, sample population, methods of research, approaches in analysis, and a brief look at the concluding chapters.

Chapter four provides an analysis of the Clemmer media students engage with to stay informed about college affairs and the rhetorical triangle plus *kairos* is deployed to find solutions to concerns expressed by faculty and staff in their survey responses.

Chapter five discusses the relationship between college marketing and the Strength of Weak Ties Theory.

Finally, chapter six offers a conclusion and addresses limitations with research design.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Organizational Structure and Media Management Campaigns

Universities, post-secondary schools, and institutions of higher education are complex bureaucratic environments with layers of oversight and administrative procedure. Understanding the complexities of organizational management are paramount to effectively communicating objectives and desired impact the institution aspires to achieve. The organizational makeup is often a combination of the following elements: 1) a governing board of trustees, 2) president, 3) faculty senate, 4) college deans, 5) department chairs, 6) academic administration, 7) institutional administration, 8) students, and 9) prospective or incoming student populations (Pusser & Loss, n.d.). These separate entities may all have unique positioning within a university, but they share the common goal of student advancement and scholarly research.

The marketing arm of higher education falls under institutional administration. Licata and Frankwick (1996) illustrated the organizational elements to marketing a university, with the core or main communication, messaging, and branding originating from a centralized university relations department. They asserted that press releases, paid advertising decisions, and marketing guidelines originate from this branch. The layer furthest from the core marketing decisions consists of the individual colleges or departments who often contend for representation, resources, and outreach (Licata & Frankwick, 1996). This creates an environment prone to conflicting and competing interests. Maringe and Gibbs (2009) echoed this concern with their assertion that college and university marketing is often decided by administrators who are removed from the departments they are tasked to endorse. The authors suggested that this distance complicates the effectiveness of the messaging when the connection is strained and, in some cases, nonexistent.

Other scholars, while recognizing challenges like the one cited above, have suggested solutions to complicated institutional dynamics. Working as a team of communication advocates, assigned spokespeople with close connections to departmental mechanics can work in harmony with administrators at the root of university communication with the goal of advancing the mission, vision, and values of the individual colleges (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) emphasized cooperation among multiple stakeholders leading to the amplification of the messaging through joint ownership. Maringe and Gibbs (2009) stated, "Different faculties or departments operate in different environments or market niches, and they may therefore benefit more from the local autonomy to experiment, adapt, and evolve, as opposed to having a standard centralized approach imposed from above" (p. 10). In their study on stakeholder representation at the university level, Mainardes et al. (2010) contended that invested parties are often more easily identified at the departmental and faculty level since the university managerial or senior positions are removed from personalized departmental relationships.

Higher education stakeholders represent governments, community leaders, parents, students, board of trustees, administrators, leadership, faculty, and donors (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Avci et al. (2015) applied stakeholder theory to university associates and found that individuals and organizational units take both active and inactive roles in institutional advancement. Segmenting these audiences to amplify communication and messaging, however, is as complicated as universities organizational charts. Stakeholder participation in university affairs at the individual colleges is a complex layer of connectivity— impartial, involved, or somewhere in the middle. Seres et al. (2019) found that universities are set apart from other business structures by the vastness of their stakeholder audience. They

asserted that attention focused on specific populations should be analyzed for their importance in advancing communication goals. Universities should consider that it is not possible to reach every one of their stakeholders due to expanse, however, carefully observing the importance of populations may result in a more successful approach to communication. Otherwise, attempts at reaching all stakeholders will fall short in messaging appeals.

Highly involved stakeholders consist of populations with active engagement through participation and financial obligation, such as students. Diversity within student populations is varied and encompasses international registrants as well as domestic and regional learners (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Anctil (2008) attributed an increase in international student representation as a response to e-learning opportunities and the evaporation of distance due to technological initiatives. Not only are colleges and universities attracting international learners, but an older demographic is joining the ranks of diploma seeker (Licata & Frankwick, 1996). Licata and Frankwick (1996) suggested the results of high divorce rates, a demand for managerial positions, and appeals within corporate settings for skilled labor pools, has created a trend in aging student populations. These stakeholders are just a few in the student body and are likely to have varied and diverse interests. The pursuit of education is the only similarity a marketer can rely upon when considering segmenting the audience for structured and effective marketing campaigns. A person who attends a university to work on a teaching degree may also pursue, for example, the tennis and debate clubs. An assumption that the average student will have multiple interests is within reason when considering segmentation and the issues of complex persona profiles (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Licata & Frankwick, 1996). Sommer and Marty (2015) agreed that audience segmentation into smaller and smaller targeted groups creates issues when marketing to specific interests.

Brand Management and Faculty/Student Expectations

Dynamics within a university setting are built on mutual relationships between various stakeholders. Myers et al. (2016) contended that an organization's identity is influenced by formative relationships throughout a student's time at school and can improve communication efforts as they journey from undergraduate to the alumni stage of their university involvement. Some of the most important associations develop over the course of a student's enrollment. In an analysis of student-professor bonds and similarities with parental figures, Lopez (1997) found significant influence on a student's success or failure based on the relationships formed with instructors during their time in school. He asserted that these supportive bonds with professors "facilitate students' academic performance by encouraging their intellectual exploration and risk-taking, reducing their performance anxiety, and promoting their overall social integration within the university community" (Lopez, 1997, p. 280). This reflection is seconded by Ansari and Khan (2020) in a study they conducted on social media and academic performance measures. The assessment they provided indicated students with greater social media engagement reflect positive achievements through collaboration.

To cultivate student-professor relationships and increase satisfied alumni, Gablinske (2014) encouraged professors, instructors, and educators to consider interactions that transcend the classroom and affect the personal lives of students. By investing in the particulars of a student's outside-the-classroom-experience, an instructor shows interest in their total development and bonds with them through a shared experience. El Bialy and Jalali (2015) asserted that social media provides students with information about advisors and instructors before they set foot in the classroom. With the majority of 18-to-29 year olds using social media in some capacity to share personal anecdotes and to learn about others prior to in-person

meetings, this outlet provides a platform for faculty to join the conversation and engage with student populations (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Wertalik (2017) agreed that a student who is highly engaged on social media presents an opportunity to cultivate relationships. Social media enhances the lives of students and faculty through mutual engagement, rewarding students with a well-rounded education (Wertalik, 2017). This suggests that a college and university presence on social media must expand to reach a student where they receive and send news about their academic careers and school pursuits.

In their study on social network sites, Robyler et al. (2010) suggested that student populations are more comfortable with social media; in contrast, most educators consider it merely another form of communication on par with email and have little interest in its potential to connect with students. Most students entering college as a freshman have familiarity with social media and a majority adopt it into their daily lives as integral forms of communication (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Concerns from instructor and faculty populations include social media literacy, overworked staffing concerns, and privacy (Gruzd et al., 2012; Schwartz, 1994). Asking teaching professionals to contribute content for blogs, posts, and news stories adds to their workload in what is sometimes considered a negative and unnecessary task (Gruzd et al., 2012). This is a complication for marketing and advertising specialists who see an opportunity to advance student and faculty interest through social media but find resistance to participation among key stakeholders. There is an opportunity to build conversations through user-generated content using emotional solicitations. This messaging builds faculty and student rapport that can have strong message appeal (Anctil, 2008).

Earned and Owned Media in University and College Settings

In a study on marketing influence, data showed that advertising, public relations efforts, and positioning were among the most valuable assets driving successful campaigns in organizations, agencies, and firms (Verhoef & Leeflang, 2009). Drawing on these findings, this section reflects on public relations and media management efforts through earned, owned, and shared media, with a focus on social media channels as a fundamental way to grow interdepartmental communication among students and their educational institution.

There are three types of relevant media discussed throughout this essay. Earned media is defined as social media comments, likes, word-of-mouth, reviews, and press communication. Owned media includes an institution's website, blog, and social media accounts (Lovett & Staelin, 2016; Mytton et al., 2015; Stephen & Galak, 2012; Xie & Lee, 2015). Stephen and Galak (2012) asserted that owned and paid social media is a controlled messaging source with oversight and maintenance under the curation of the organization. This is counter to earned media which is typically generated on behalf of an institution with no oversight as to the content or quality from the marketing team (Stephen & Galak, 2012; Xie & Lee, 2015).

Timke (2017) asserted that a brand's reputation is boosted when a user leaves a positive comment or review for a product. This behavior provides support and validity to the promoted content without an advertiser's influence and is an opportunity for marketers to integrate user-generated likes, comments, and shares to support the messaging without the appearance of a sales pitch. Lovett and Staeilin's (2016) research on television viewership suggested that paid media reached the greatest number of viewers but earned media had the most influence and provided the audience with greater brand association. The researchers maintained that earned media is a complimentary and impactful tool when used in combination with other media types.

One of paid media's advantages is that it has a reminding effect especially among populations who have yet to commit to a brand (Lovett & Staelin, 2016). This raises an important question for departments, programs, and colleges housed under an umbrella organization such as a university. Is it necessary to consider paid media when developing a social media campaign for the engagement and interest of existing student bodies within individual colleges or departments? Because paid media's primary function is—according to the research—to engage and remind *potential* consumers, and the primary interest in the present study is *existing* stakeholders, focus will only be on earned media, owned, and shared media.

Spotlighting owned media, social media is defined as a series of applications that bridge communication between two users—often familiar but sometimes dissimilar—who have a common interest (Timke, 2017). These social networking sites include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snap Chat, TikTok, and a multitude of others. Stephen and Galak (2012) asserted that social media reaches highly motivated and involved individuals who are more likely to share and spread information to their audience. Not only are users willing to share content, but its role in the user's life has evolved from an information gathering forum to a place where people carry out daily life experiences (Appel et al., 2020). This proclivity to share information informed Macnamara et al.'s (2016) observation that adding a fourth media type— shared media—in addition to paid, owned, and earned, is worthwhile. Shared media encourages users to like and comment on content that promotes subject matter that interests and engages them and their audience (Macnamara et al., 2016). Colleges should consider encouraging this two-sided conversation. Students and faculty, through social media, can strengthen ties that will prove helpful to both stakeholders as they form connections within the collegiate community and carry that forward upon a student's graduation into the professional world.

There are concerns with maintaining social media accounts and the resources needed to effectively communicate using these applications. Wertalik and Wright (2017) addressed some of the challenges with social media use in college settings when they asserted that the responsibility of owning an application and the content creation needed to generate maintained interest among stakeholders is made more complicated by finding an interested party or parties within the college to oversee the efforts. This can be an issue for postsecondary institutions when hiring an administrator is neither in the budget nor an interest of university administration. However, Maresova et al. (2020) put it succinctly when they posited, "Establishing and maintaining open, transparent communication with current and prospective students on social media channels is a complex task. However, these channels are so powerful in influencing users' decision that it is worthwhile to invest resources into an effective social media communication strategy" (p. 12).

Workarounds for social media administrative shortages include the use of graduate assistants enrolled in marketing, public relations, or advertising courses. Graduate assistantships present an opportunity to the student by advancing learning outcomes in real-world settings (Hephner LaBanc, 2010). There are concerns, however. Considering the theoretical framework of experiential learning, Hephner LaBanc (2010) questioned whether these administrative appointments are a structured learning experience or a means to an end for universities strapped with financial hardships. In the graduate handbook for East Tennessee State University (n.d.) an administrative graduate assistant:

…should provide the opportunity for the student to use knowledge of her or his academic field while enhancing skills relevant to the student's professional goals. The ideal graduate

administrative assistantship will provide the student with a broader and deeper

understanding of university function and, under the supervision of a mentor, enhance the

quality of information available to the University. (p. 6)

Fundamental communication from the university, college, and individual departments

depends on competent individuals to execute and perform at professional levels. As a learning

experience a graduate assistant could make costly mistakes—financial, social, and/or

professional—that affect an organization's reputation. To communicate and present the college

to stakeholders is a weighty enterprise. Administrators within the individual departments,

colleges, and university marketing should consider the feasibility of long-term social media plans

and their likelihood of successful outcomes before assigning the role to temporary assistantships.

There are other issues to consider when evaluating an owned, earned, and shared media

campaign. One such concern is observed by Xie and Lee (2015), who found that an increase in

social media exposure to newly targeted consumers leads to greater interest, but loyal consumers

showed no greater commitment. This could be cause for concern from college marketing teams

who discern no reasonable expectation to support social media accounts if engagement does not

advance their interests among existing student populations. But this perception would be

misguided, as Xie and Lee (2015) found that the interest of already invested stakeholders' was

sustained through entertaining content. Lovett and Staelin (2016) formed this very conclusion

when they argued that media managers create content that delights viewers rather than simply

inform them. They concluded that earned media has more power over the consuming public than

paid media due to enjoyment factor and should be considered more often when building media

management plans (Lovett & Staelin, 2016).

Brand Management and Social Media

To use social media in university settings, it is important to understand the defining characteristics. Carr and Hayes (2015) deconstructed and rebuilt earlier definitions of social media with the following interpretation:

Social media are internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others. (p. 50)

Their definition highlights several new considerations for understanding social media use and users, including: 1) interconnected computer activity; 2) reliance on computer-to-computer activity and not face-to-face activity; 3) proactive user engagement with like-minded messengers; 4) user-generated content and engagement with content takes priority; and 5) message pathways vary considering platform, audience, and receiver(s) (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Although kin to social media, social networking is not the application, but the user's activity on social media (Marketing Terms, n.d.), including meeting new people, connecting with old friends, and cultivating communities.

The Pew Research Center (2021) estimates that 96% of adults aged 18 – 29 use a smartphone with regularity. By some estimates, 84% of this age group use some type of social application to connect and network through online forums (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). With a large segment of university stakeholders using social media, it is important for marketers and communication specialists to meet these individuals in the forums they frequent. Dwivedi et al.

(2020) underscored the importance of social media in the consumer journey by remarking on the advantage users have through sharing news and information to a wider audience with greater efficiency and speed. Their assertion and that of others is that in the communication profession the consumer has an advantage in their decision-making with the almost universal adoption of handheld devices and portable computers (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2016). A study on media consumption and adolescent populations theorized that the adoption of mobile devices expands opportunities to students who are on the precipice of entering post-secondary institutions (Moreno et al., 2016). This is important considering that these tech-savvy students make decisions to attend or enroll in a university based on the social media presence and engagement level shown by their prospective school (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016). This harkens back to the importance of having a consistent marketing message using forums students engage with the most. The media that land them on college campuses through recruitment efforts should be used as an engagement tool throughout their studies. Taking students from curious freshman to satisfied alumni requires a commitment to follow the entire consumer journey.

Twenty-five years ago, Licata and Frankwick (1996) emphasized the internal demands within universities to cover a broad spectrum of communication requests, which leaves marketing departments struggling to meet expectations. Since their study, new media have increased the demand marketing departments are tasked with covering—everything from traditional media to social media advertising. Pierno (2019) emphasized this point by stating that, "most brands today have more owned media channels than there were media formats" (p. 86). Pierno (2019) reinforced Licata and Frankwick's (1996) early observations, citing issues with taxing workloads for communication specialists which has increased exponentially in less than 25 years. In fact, the challenge to post on social media can be exhausting when considering the

requirements needed to achieve positive results. A study on social media habits of 10 top

universities in the United States illustrated that successful account management needs habitual,

consistent posting, at least once per day (Maresova et al., 2020). Based on a survey of over 1500

marketers, 59% spend up to four hours creating a single piece of content (Loftis, 2017). Now

consider that a smart marketer will adapt that content to each individual platform. A social media

manager is a full-time position in many agencies. Considering the time it takes to build content

to populate platforms, this is a critical position to fill. Social media management can seem

daunting for an already overworked marketing team within a university setting.

Using social media to share information makes the marketers' job easier according to

Timke (2017), by capitalizing on word-of-mouth influence. Users are eager and willing to share

some of the burden communication experts experience (Timke, 2017). Stephen and Galak (2012)

shared this insight by attesting to social media's ability to reach highly motivated audiences who

use word-of-mouth to spread information reaching audiences who are less engaged but likely to

form ties through the influence of others. This interconnectivity reaches global and international

scale through shared user content and the willingness to spread information through various

applications (Appel et al., 2020). Using social media in university settings to communicate

academic affairs gives marketers the opportunity to connect with audiences in ways traditional

media—newspapers, television, radio, print—cannot.

Social Media Types Useful in University Settings

A savvy marketer would not treat all social network sites the same. Smart communication

specialists understand the role these applications have in the lives of the users and the

populations who frequent the forums. Voorveld et al. (2018) discussed the strengths and

weakness of social network sites and the overlap that exists between the distinct types. Their

findings revealed individuality among the platforms giving credence to a marketer adopting content that varies from one social site to the next. Generating a post with business topics would be ideal for LinkedIn but less popular on Pinterest—a forum often used for entertainment purposes (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Consider the following social networking sites and how they apply to university and college communication.

LinkedIn is popular for professional and business posts with content that is topical and formal (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Voorveld et al., 2018; Wetalik & Wright, 2017). Research conducted by Aldahdouh et al. (2020) discovered increased interest in LinkedIn among faculty, a result of the possibilities the forum presents for scholarly publication and career opportunities. This platform is viewed favorably by individuals who gained degrees in higher education, which shows significant decrease in favorability with users who have obtained no greater education than a high school diploma (Wertalik & Wright, 2017). These studies suggest that LinkedIn can be an effective tool for engaging with faculty and administrators.

Facebook's large user-base considers this platform to be a valuable news resource (Aldahdouh et al., 2020). Additionally, communication is often listed as a favorable attribute of Facebook, which makes it a potential tool in sharing academic affairs and interests to the student body (Voorveld et al., 2018; Wertalik & Wright, 2017). In addition, Douglas et al. (2019) found that Facebook use among medical students supported teamwork and partnership opportunities.

According to Wertalik and Wright (2017), students and instructors use Twitter to share information about coursework. This suggests that Twitter could prove useful when applied toward education and instruction. Not only can faculty use Twitter as a tool for student connection, but they can also apply it to advance their career, share research interest, and even do

administrative work (Aldahdouh et al. 2020). Voorveld et al. (2018) considered this platform useful in news and information dissemination. Used as a tool for emotional support, Twitter proved valuable in a study on student morale, which provides a way to communicate with populations who are experiencing exam fatigue or a lag in semester enthusiasm (Douglas, 2019).

According to Voorveld et al. (2018), YouTube is not the place to share news, but instead to create entertainment and provide visual support for course instruction (Douglas, 2019). Like YouTube, Snap Chat has the power to entertain audiences through interaction (Voorveld et al., 2018). Matar (2016) found that student takeovers using Snap Chat was popular when student-related interests and activities were highlighted.

Instagram's photo and video-centric platform presents opportunities for educational experiences that rely upon visual curriculums integrating diagrams, graphs, or charts used for identification (Douglas, 2019). Carpenter et al. (2020) investigated Instagram's use in educational settings and discovered that the following reasons were highly linked to teacher social media engagement: "advice, examples of instructional methods, and examples of curricular or organizational materials" (para. 28). Collaboration, support, and awareness were motivating factors for Instagram use among professional educators (Carpenter et al., 2020). Auxier and Anderson (2021) reported that 76% of 18 – 24 year olds engage Instagram regularly. This positions the platform as a useful tool in connecting teaching professionals with college-aged students.

Van Den Beemt et al. (2020) proposed that communication and relationship building among faculty and students may be strengthened by thoughtful cultivation and deployment of social media policy. Furthermore, online participation through social media showed favorable impressions for both faculty and student (Ansari & Khan, 2020). Engagement with student

populations that have special challenges such as learning disabilities and issues adapting to structured social settings—a result of behavioral disorders such as shyness or anxiety—can sometimes be surmountable through social media adoption (Ansari & Khan, 2020). Using earned, owned, and shared media to like, comment, and promote content that encourages student growth can have a positive impact on a multitude of students whose needs vary in complex ways.

Knowing that students use social media not only to communicate but also to make life decisions adds gravity to Appel et al.'s (2020) assertion that these applications have the power to influence every choice a consumer makes. This leads to further discussion about its role in student affairs. Relationships with professors on LinkedIn can land a student their dream job. Facebook conversations encouraging improved academic performance or a Tweet from an instructor to a mentee creates opportunity through student-professor engagement that has the potential for lasting impact. This is worth considering when looking to build a satisfied alumni who can support marketing through positive word-of-mouth. These stakeholders have serious sway over community conversation and stakeholder interest. Maringe and Gibbs (2009) maintained that building advocates out of alumni has the potential for a lifetime of positive word-of-mouth. Alumni relations and social media presence are inadequately studied, according to Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2016). They maintained that the research is incomplete or limited in scope on the subject. Future studies should consider the importance of creating strong advocates in undergraduates resulting in an engaged alumni population and the influence this may have on marketing goals.

Relationship Marketing and Strength of Weak Ties Theory

Treating the student experience as a commodity rather than the development of critical thinking skills through engagement, support, and mentorship, according to Maringe and Gibbs

(2009), results in negative learning outcomes. "Students lives," they observed, "risk being untouched by their exchanges with the academy as they progress rapidly through their program" (p. 5). This is the antithesis of relationship marketing. The Association of National Advertisers (n.d.) emphasized several foundational elements at the core of relationship marketing, including consumer trust and willingness to share positive word-of-mouth securing brand positioning. Word-of-mouth marketing encourages and relies upon the interaction of connected individuals to share and generate interest in a product, brand, or institution (Word-of-Mouth Marketing, n.d.). Appel et al. (2020) asserted that social media is used to share information via word-of-mouth with diverse groups of users who experience varying degrees of relatedness—both strong and weak ties having a significant role in content dissemination.

Granovetter (1973) introduced the Strength of Weak Ties Theory, which advances the conversation around connections formed and the links that build communication within communities. Granovetter's theory defined tie strength as "a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (1973, p. 1361). His theory suggested that strong ties are formed in concentrated groups of like individuals while weak ties exist in the periphery using their place in the hierarchy to bridge communities. Granovetter's theory established that weak ties construct a sense of cohesion in a community and cultivating them can add dimension to established groups. Weimann (1983) affirmed this position with the assertion that weak ties serve as connection between two unrelated groups with the purpose of transmitting ideas and knowledge unavailable without the connection. A weak tie serves as an acquaintance or coworker while a strong tie exists as a close friend or relative (Lee & Kronrod, 2020; Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

Hu et al. (2019) suggested that weak ties share information that is not redundant, which gives it more meaning and impact. The authors contended that strong ties are bound by familiar relationships that result in shared posts having less influence. This is a classic example of miscommunication or missed opportunities in communication. The familiar relationship expects the information's redundancy and therefore does not share the news. Support for this research and Granovetter's (1973) hypothesis comes from Weng et al. (2015), who confirmed that weak ties supply unique information to the receiver. Bolstered even further is Tümen's (2017) research on tie strength, and how it relates to younger workers on the precipice of defining future career moves. Their findings showed that an individual was more likely to secure a stable position in the workforce directly connected to a weak tie relationship. Weak ties in their research provided a prospective job applicant with leads that offered novel and unique information unavailable to them when the tie's strength was strong. This is an important topic for consideration in collegiate communities as ultimately goals for students lie in their progression from student to graduate to employed individual. Success for students moving through these milestones may exist in the faculty-student relationship and the bonds that connect them.

Considering tie strength between faculty and student in a university setting is worthy of consideration and one explored in the data to follow. Additionally, the following chapters address three questions adding to college marketing research.

RQ1: How do Clemmer College students perceive the College's marketing tactics?

RQ2: Based on the faculty response, how do Clemmer stakeholders leverage the rhetorical triangle plus *kairos* to address faculty concerns regarding college-wide marketing and branding?

RQ3: How do Clemmer stakeholders leverage the insights of Strength of Weak Ties

Theory in reformulating the College's marketing strategy?

Answers to these questions can guide the Clemmer College marketing team when tasked with making strategic decisions about the development of persona profiles and campaigns with specific populations in mind.

Chapter 3. Methods

Sample Population Using Clemmer College

The students and faculty enrolled in or employed by Clemmer College during this study in the fall of 2021 were an ideal population for this project. This group of participants were selected out of interest for the dynamics that shape their Clemmer College experience. Their insights are important to building a successful media and brand strategy. Below, outlines the methodology applied to this present study, as Hahn Fox and Jennings (2014) found that doing so provides valuable insight into the research questions and findings.

Study Design

The preliminary planning for the study began in May of 2021 with a discussion among key stakeholders, including the Dean of Clemmer College, Dr. Janna Scarborough, about the appropriateness of this project. The meeting concluded with an agreement that the study would be beneficial and came at a time when they were considering novel approaches to marketing the College.

A mixed-methods inquiry specifically designed by deploying two surveys—one for students and one for faculty—was administered at the start of the 2021/2022 school year. Justification for this timeframe was the newness of the semester, and the possibility of eliminating the issue of student and staff/faculty fatigue that could limit survey response. Warner (2018) suggests that both students and faculty experience a lag in semester enthusiasm as the school year progresses. For this reason, surveys were administered three weeks into the school year beginning September 13, 2021. Because the survey respondents were Clemmer College stakeholders, this study uses a non-random convenience sample (Hahn Fox & Jennings, 2014). This sampling method was employed because the respondents are also stakeholders that will

potentially benefit from the subsequent marketing plan presented to the College at the conclusion of this study.

The survey design was informed by existing data about university/college marketing cited above, as well as my research questions. During my time as a graduate assistant issue with marketing Clemmer College arose which informed the survey questions. Inquiry into the types of media channels, platforms, and content that Clemmer College students, faculty, and staff consume was pursued. Additionally, responses about the relationships between Clemmer marketing, future employment, and tie strength were explored.

Surveys were conducted using ETSU's free-to-students program, Qualtrics, to solicit and record responses. Qualtrics has an intuitive design, and its ease-of-use simplified the process. This program is commonly used at East Tennessee State University to conduct research, and therefore is familiar to faculty, staff, and some student populations.

Below, survey questions are referenced this way: Question is abbreviated with a Q, students with S, and faculty with F. In addition, a numerical designation is placed at the end of the question ID to indicate which question number. For example, QS7 indicates a survey question (Q) for students (S) marked as 7 in the survey questionnaire. See Appendix A and B for a complete list of survey questions.

Answering Research Question #1

The first research question is concerned with how Clemmer students perceive the College's marketing tactics. To elicit relevant responses, the student survey consisted of Likert-scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions that address student perceptions of Clemmer's existing marketing tactics. Questions ranged from general interest to specific topics about media use. An example of a general interest question is QS2, which asked about a pupil's place in the

hierarchy—freshman, sophomore, and so forth. A student in their first semester as a freshman had the potential for a unique perspective, as opposed to a senior. This line of inquiry is counter to a study conducted by Myers et al. (2016), who intentionally excluded students in their freshman and sophomore years. Their justification for this exclusion assumed that a student's recent enrollment in collegiate life would be marked by a naiveté about college marketing appeals. In contrast to the Myers et al.'s study, a decision was made that the research should consider the perspectives of all students and therefore surveys were administered to the entire student population. This can be useful in building media management campaigns that incorporate all stakeholders—freshman through graduate students. Furthermore, this study's research is designed to understand current Clemmer positioning and how students perceive these appeals.

Other questions were designed to give a base overview of student perspectives on professor engagement. QS8, for example, provided the students with an opportunity to describe professors in their own words—positive, negative, or neutral.

And finally, other questions, such as QS10, asked for responses to multiple-choice questions. Students were asked to check all that apply. Although the simplicity of the question appeared straightforward, the details provided nuanced clues about a student's marketing comprehension and Clemmer College's current use of media.

Answering Research Question #2

While the first RQ is concerned with how students perceive Clemmer's existing marketing tactics, with the second RQ the purpose is to gauge faculty's ideas regarding Clemmer's strategy going forward. To elicit relevant responses, the faculty survey consisted of primarily open-ended questions. This design provided a bank of qualitative data that was drawn on, below, in a rhetorical analysis. More emphasis was placed on open-ended questions in the

staff/faculty survey than the student survey with an expectation that these responses would be well-informed due to greater familiarity with the Clemmer community. The staff/faculty population was likely to have more to say on the subject and would provide greater insight into the marketing of Clemmer College due to increased interest.

Considering the effects persuasion has on brand communication, an analysis of responses to the open-ended survey questions had the potential to yield important clues into stakeholder relationships and the influence they had on Clemmer College communication. Important to the research was the use of open-ended survey questions allowing faculty/staff the opportunity to express their opinions about Clemmer College students, marketing, social media, and content contribution. Bazerman and Prior (2004) said of the writing process, it is "a complex literate activity that includes reading and writing, feeling and thinking, speaking and listening, observing and acting" (p. 7). Survey questions designed to accommodate the act of writing created an opportunity for faculty and staff to reflect and share in nuanced ways. The resulting responses, in light of Bazerman and Prior's claim, are more illuminative. With access to this kind of data, rhetorical solutions are suggested to address faculty/staff concerns, which is more informative than mere quantitative data in answering RQ2. In this way, the survey was deliberative and intentional.

This project is designed to reflect upon faculty survey responses and to apply *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and/or *kairos* to solve a Clemmer College marketing issue if one exists. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) say, "The central concern of rhetoric has always been method and manner: how to discover the most effective ways to express a thought in a given situation, and how to alter its expression to suit different situations" (p. 242). Reviewing survey response and interpreting meaning from them is important to answering RQ2.

Ethos, Pathos, Logos, and Kairos in Methodology

Here, a brief review of the three components of the classical rhetorical triangle—as well as a fourth type of appeal, *kairos* –is explored.

Ethos. *Ethos* is to "understand human character and goodness in their various forms" (Aristotle, 2001, p. 1330). Freese understood Aristotle's writing to mean that *ethos* is born of morality and integrity central to a person's reputation (Aristotle & Freese, 1967). An authority, expert, and professional who cites their credentials gives validity to their argument through *ethos* (St. Louis Community, n.d.). Adegoju (2008) argued that *ethos* relies on a testament to a person's character. The standing of the communicator in the community elevates the message, which lends added appeal. Examples of *ethos* in marketing include citing a doctor's support for a product, an influencers endorsement on social media, a celebrity mentioning branded merchandise, or a professor contributing a blogpost for a sponsored webpage.

Logos. *Logos* is to "reason logically" (Aristotle, 2001, p. 1330). True and honest appraisals—probable and real—set *logos* apart from the other forms of persuasive rhetoric (Aristotle & Freese, 1967). *Logos* is based on an argument, sometimes using historical references or quoting factual data to reinforce the author's claim, which leads the listener to conclude meaning from the statement (Adegoju, 2008). Du Plessis (2013) analyzed the 2011 Rugby World Cup Twitter account, and found that appeals to *logos* were frequently deployed, in the form of hyperlinks that directed users to external sites that supported the Tweets' claims. The author says, "Twitter, as a social media platform, provides the ideal means of giving examples to substantiate reasoning. It does so in the form of links on which followers can click for more information" (p. 12). A *logos* appeal in a collegiate setting may include faculty posting on social media about their journey from student to research assistant to instructor with hyperlinks to articles about in-

the-field experience opening doors to their success. A student may conclude from the data presented in these types of statements that time spent at ETSU obtaining a degree may help with career placement upon graduation.

Pathos. *Pathos* is to "understand the emotions—that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way which they are excited" (Aristotle, 2001, p. 1330). With *pathos* the communicator seeks ways to evoke a response from the receiver through affective or emotive means (St. Louis Community, n.d.). Communication and media that elicit emotional responses, then, are appeals to *pathos*. The listener, according to Adegoju (2008), adapts the meaning of the spoken or written word to their emotional state. Common responses among populations include crying at commercials, laughing at a college's branded mascot, or becoming angry in response to political commercials. These appeals are purposefully crafted to cater to viewers' emotional status.

Kairos. Not only are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* useful in rhetorical analysis, but so, too, is *kairos*. Sutton (2001) explained that the definition of *kairos* has a lengthy and debatable history. Consequently, Sutton (2001) argued that *kairos* is based on a right time to present an argument and the decisiveness in which to share the message. Miles and Nilsson (2018) emphasized a marketing sense that considers urgency, awareness, and flexible decision-making. They claimed that as communication rapidly evolves and reaction times for marketers shorten, *kairos* is often the rhetorical tool used to communicate with efficiency. Brinks (2019) argued that *kairos* is effective when used in tandem with *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Social media with its ability to reach large stakeholder audiences is an ideal media for marketers who need to react swiftly and decisively.

Answering Research Question #3

QS19 and QF14 were specifically drafted considering The Strength of Weak Ties Theory. QS19 and QF14 ask:

QS19: Do you expect your relationship with your professors will help in securing a job postgraduation?

QF14: Have you assisted a student with a job opportunity?

However, each survey response had the potential to yield important insight into tie strength and the effects it has on marketing appeals. Determinations from the respondent's answers could align with or add to conversations about the theory's central argument and how it pertains to student and faculty relationships. To review, Strength of Weak Ties Theory, as established by Granovetter (1973), posits that connected individuals are more likely to receive novel information if their connection is weak and bound by loose affiliation. Examples of these types of relationships include coworkers, acquaintances, new classmates, and distant relatives. These individuals are connected, but not tightly bound. The intent of data collected from QS19 and QF14 was to add insight into tie strength among faculty-student relationships and the likelihood of career advancement as well as answer RQ3, how do Clemmer stakeholders leverage the insights of Strength of Weak Ties Theory in reformulating the College's marketing strategy?

Chapter 4. Findings and Analysis

The data presented in chapter 4 offers an impression on stakeholder media interest during the fall of 2021. The first section addresses demographics followed by an analysis of quantitative survey questions aimed at understanding student social media adoption, website interest, faculty/student engagement, and areas of media use. The analysis of those survey results answers RQ1. The second section reflects on ways to leverage the rhetorical triangle and *kairos* to better inform marketing, and functions to address RQ2. By establishing student perceptions of Clemmer marketing tactics, and analyzed how faculty think about College marketing strategy, a foundation is laid for the following chapter, in which Strength of Weak Ties Theory was applied to address RQ3.

Respondent Demographics

In the fall of 2021, 1838 actively enrolled students were recruited to take part in the survey. Of these students, 194 agreed to participate in the quantitative study. The number of nonrespondents was 1,644 for students and 275 for faculty/staff. This measurement is more than 30%. Schutt (2015) asserted that a 30% or higher nonresponse rate is unfavorable therefore the research findings should not be applied to the entire population.

In Figure 1, participants' class-level was distributed thus: 18.82% were freshman, 8.6% were sophomore, 13.44% were junior, 15.59% were senior, 23.66% were master's students, and 16.67% were doctoral students, 2.69% answered other, and .54% preferred not to answer.

Students overwhelmingly identified as being enrolled in both East Tennessee State University and Clemmer College with 84% answering that they were a student of both. The remaining 16% were evenly distributed with 6% of students identifying as enrolled in Clemmer

College and 7% listing their enrollment as ETSU. Unsure and other rounded out the results with 3%.

Figure 1

Survey Question Student 1 and Question Student 2
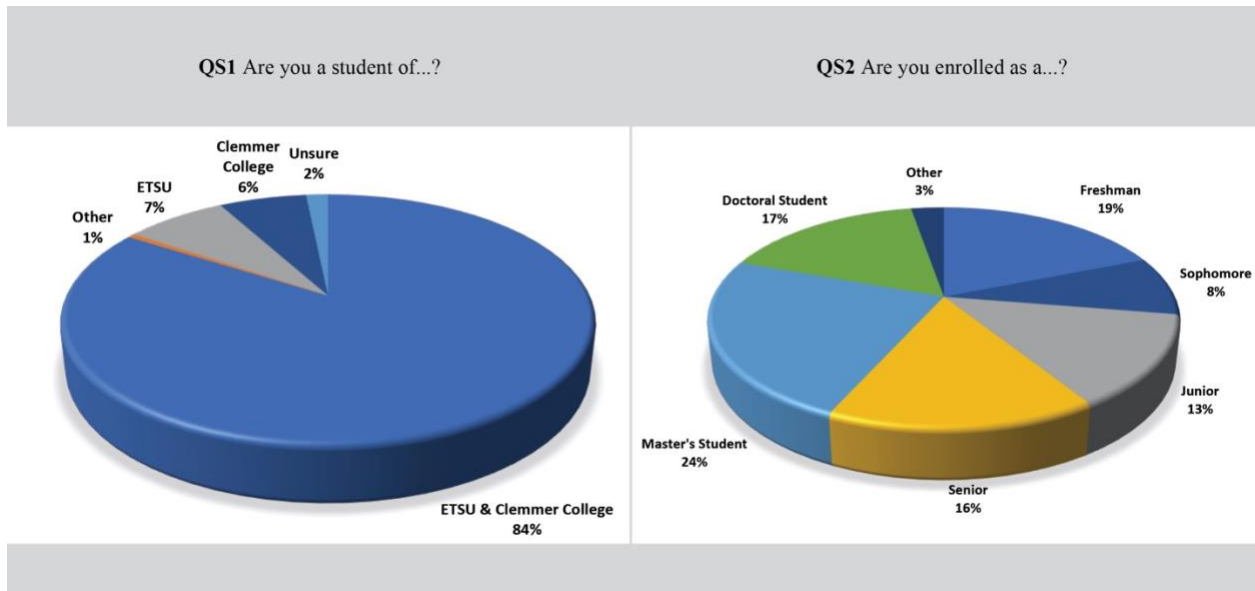
Figure 2 illustrates that their areas of study were 16.94% Counseling and Human Services (CHS), 13.11% Curriculum & Instruction (CUAI), 16.94% Early Childhood Education (ECED), 9.84% Educational Foundations & Special Education (EFSE), 13.66% Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis (ELPA), 18.58% Sport, Exercise, Recreation & Kinesiology (SERK), 8.2% other, and 2.73% were unsure.

The students surveyed varied in age: 59.89% were 18-24, 16.48% were 25-34, 10.99% were 35-44, 11.54% were 45+ and 1.10% preferred not to answer.

A determination was made that the gender of the respondents was not necessary and therefore was not included in the list of survey questions.

Figure 2

Survey Question Student 3 and Question Student 4
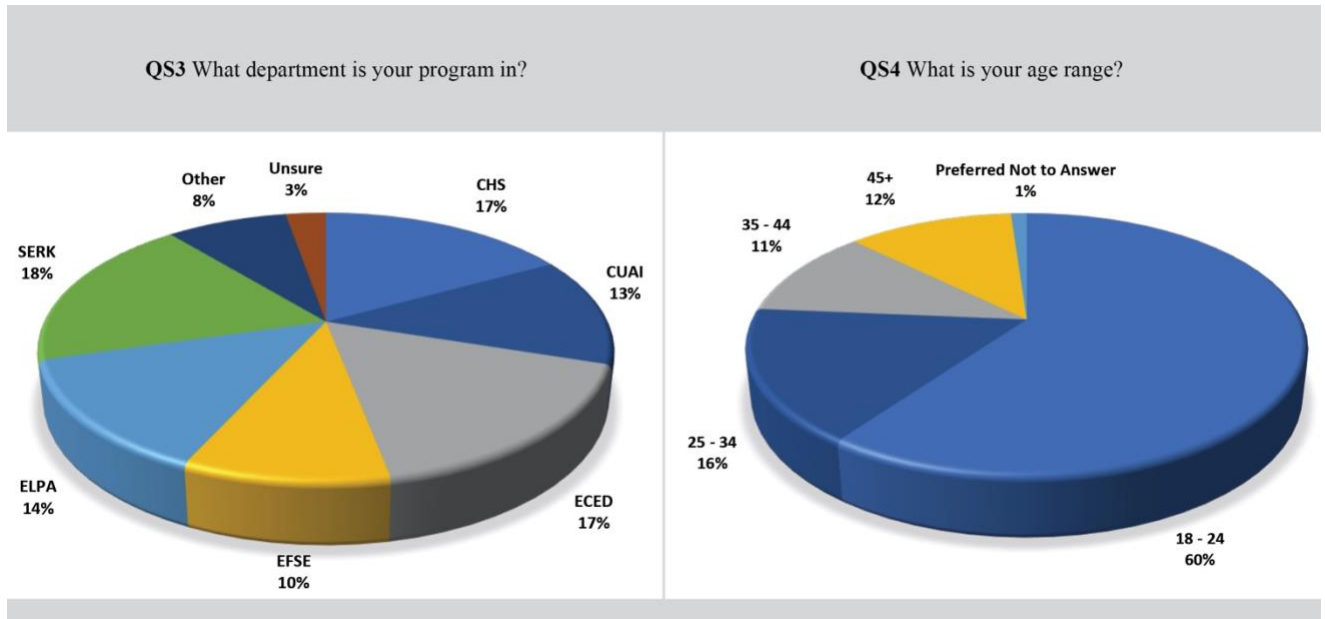
Finding and Analysis of Quantitative Survey Questions

QS5 and QS6 ask students how they first heard about ETSU and whether a parent attended/attends the University. Responses to QS6 were evenly spread out across the different prompts. In Figure 3, "Parents" ranked highest with 19%, followed by "friends" at 15%, and "relatives" at 13%. Results for QS5 reveal that 35% of students have/had a parent who enrolled at ETSU with 64% saying that a parent never attended the University.

Figure 3

Survey Question Student 5 and Question Student 6

QS5 Did/does a parent attend ETSU?

Would Prefer Not to Answer 1%
Yes 35%
No 64%

QS6 How did you first hear about ETSU?

Other 15%
Social Media 5%
Church Member 1%
Parent 19%
High School Teacher 7%
Advert. 8%
ETSU Website 6%
Friend 15%
Relative 13%
High School Counselor 11%
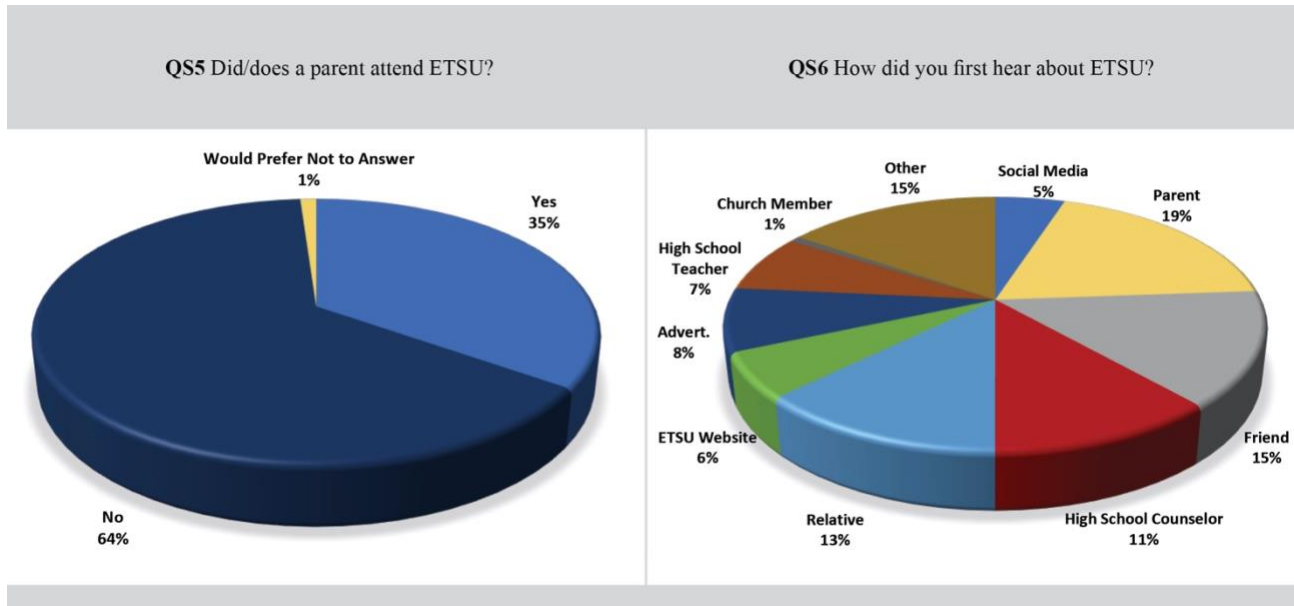
To better understand the strength of the connection and the effects of advertising, the results for QS6 indicated in Figure 4 were separated and categorized as paid/earned/shared/owned media, weak ties, strong ties, and other. Media categorized as paid, earned, shared, and owned would suggest a student heard about ETSU and Clemmer through advertising efforts.

Strong ties outweighed the other categories with 47% of the response falling within this category. Weak ties and paid/earned/shared/owned media both reflect 19% respectively with other accounting for the remaining 15%. The results of this analysis are represented in the figures below.

Figure 4

Survey Question Student 6

QS6 How did you first hear about ETSU?
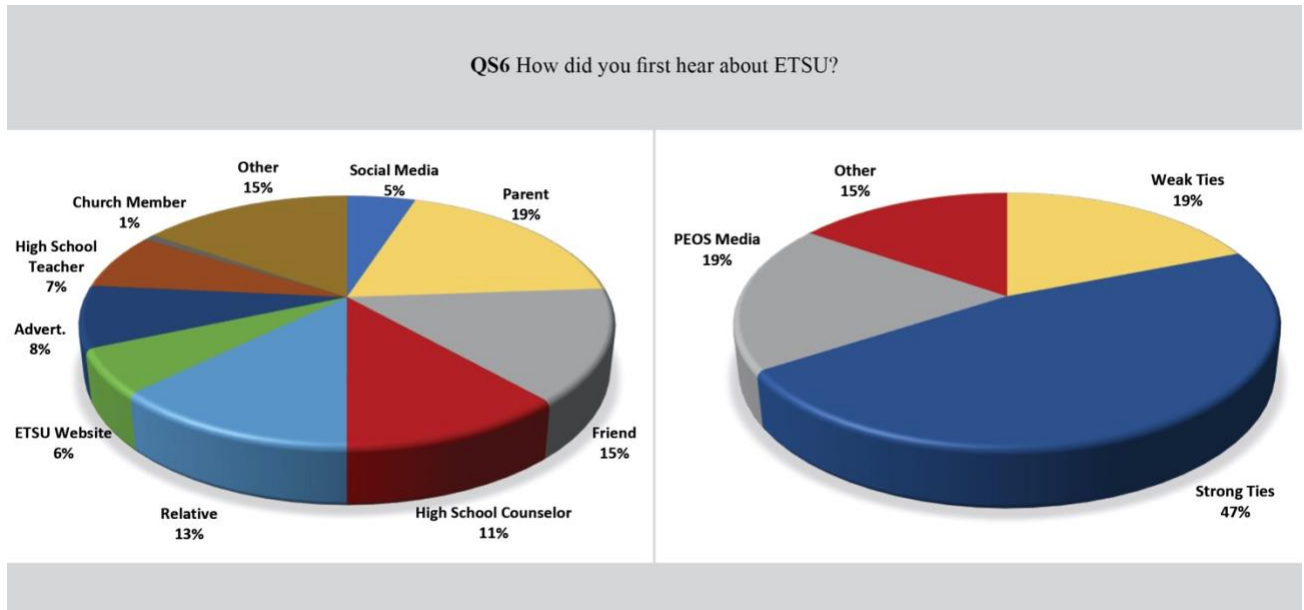
QS7 asked respondents to describe a place, ETSU, rather than people. The results in word choice represented in Figure 5 include "home," "community," "bucs," and "education" ranking among the top common replies. Of the responses sentimental in tone "fun," "pride," "beautiful," and "welcoming" ranked highly. There were other responses that had practical attributes such as "affordable," "opportunity," "expensive," and "degree." Figure 5 details the words most often used to describe the University. There was a total word count of 442. Any responses that had 3 reoccurrences or less were excluded from the list.

Figure 5

Survey Question Student 7

QS7 - Word Count (442)					
Student's View of ETSU					
home (21)	5%	small (7)	2%	helpful (4)	1%
community (17)	4%	beautiful (6)	1%	money (4)	1%
fun (16)	4%	college (6)	1%	supportive (4)	1%
bucs (12)	3%	family (6)	1%	university (4)	1%
education (11)	2%	inclusive (5)	1%		
school (10)	2%	opportunity (5)	1%		
johnson_city (8)	2%	welcoming (5)	1%		
pride (8)	2%	degree (4)	1%		
tennessee (8)	2%	diverse (4)	1%		
affordable (7)	2%	expensive (4)	1%		
mountains (7)	2%	friends (4)	1%		

Figure 6 illustrates results from QS8 and QF9. QS8 asked students to reply with three words that they associate with ETSU professors. Similarly, QF9 posed the question to faculty and staff: what are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Clemmer College students? Common to both surveys, responses with a higher percentage of reoccurrence included "helpful" and "caring." Other positive words related to support, engagement, knowledge, and advocacy rounded out the top responses (see figure 6).

Respondents were asked to separate their word choice with a comma so that there was no interpreter confusion. However, in some instances issues surfaced. For example, QS7 asked respondents: when you think of ETSU, what are the first three words that come to mind? In a few cases students responded with a multiple word entry. "Johnson City" is one such example. In this instance, an underscore was placed between Johnson and City so that the entry was

considered one word. This aided the frequency counter software as the excel list was processed for word reoccurrence.

Figure 6

Survey Question Student 8 and Question Faculty 9

| QS8 - Word Count (422) | | QF9 - Word Count (62) | | QF9 and QS8 - Word Count (484) | |
Student's View of Faculty		Faculty's View of Students		Cumulative	
helpful (28)	7%	caring (4)	6%	helpful (32)	6%
caring (20)	5%	helpful (3)	5%	caring (24)	4%
kind (19)	5%	white (3)	5%	kind (20)	3%
understanding (15)	4%	bright (2)	3%	understanding (15)	3%
smart (13)	3%	engaging (2)	3%	smart (13)	2%
knowledgeable (11)	3%	hard-working (2)	3%	knowledgeable (11)	2%
nice (11)	3%	optimistic (2)	3%	nice (11)	2%
teacher (11)	3%	resilient (2)	3%	teacher (11)	2%
supportive (9)	2%	advocates (1)	2%	supportive (10)	2%
friendly (8)	2%	athletes (1)	2%		
educated (7)	2%				
passionate (7)	2%				

University websites and individual college webpages are important for student learning outcomes and information dissemination. Ford (2011) asserted that prospective high school students use websites to learn about an institution prior to their decision to attend. Moreover, Ford stated that websites act as an "informational and transactional tool" (p. 26) for currently enrolled students. QS9 and QF12 are designed to gauge the effectiveness of this tool with current Clemmer student and faculty/staff populations. QF12 asks, what are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Clemmer College's website? Similarly, QS9 asks students, what are the first three words you think when you hear ETSU's website?

Survey results suggest that the phrasing of the student question may have had an unintended effect. By asking about ETSU's website rather than Clemmer College's website

students may have misinterpreted the question. Students use the website for more than

information search. Goldlink is a subsection of the ETSU website that allows students the

opportunity to access class registration, check account balances, and keep track of graduation

status. In Figure 7, word frequency for QS9 indicate that "easy," "informative," "helpful,"

"goldlink," and "confusing" ranked highly among students. With 15 mentions, "goldlink"

suggests that students answered the question based on the website's effectiveness in achieving

their learning outcomes rather than as a place to receive information on University offerings. In

contrast, faculty and staff frequent word choice appeared to rank the website based on usability

unrelated to Goldlink. Figure 7 provides a list of the most frequent words associated with student

and faculty/staff website experience.

Of the top cumulative words often mentioned in survey response "easy," "informative,"

"confusing," "helpful," and "goldlink" ranked highly.

Figure 7

Survey Question Student 9 and Question Faculty 12

QS9 - Word Count (415)		QF12 - Word Count (73)		QS9 and QF12 - Word Count (488)	
Student's View of Website		Faculty's View of Website		Cumulative	
easy (28)	6%	confusing (3)	4%	easy (30)	6%
informative (17)	4%	inconsistent (3)	4%	informative (19)	4%
helpful (16)	4%	unwieldy (2)	3%	confusing (17)	3%
goldlink (15)	3%	informative (2)	3%	helpful (16)	3%
confusing (14)	3%	navigate (2)	3%	goldlink (15)	3%
d2l (11)	2%	disjointed (2)	3%	d2l (11)	2%
blue (11)	2%	dated (2)	3%	blue (11)	2%
organized (11)	2%	static (2)	3%	organized (11)	2%
useful (9)	2%	easy (2)		useful (9)	2%
difficult (8)	2%			difficult (9)	2%
information (7)	2%				
gold (7)	2%				

Response to QS10 reveals that most of the news and information students receive comes from Clemmer's college-wide email newsletter. The majority response (37%) visualized in Figure 8 indicate that this form of communication is widely known within the College. "Social media" and "professor engagement" are even at 18%, with "classmates" earning 13% and "website" receiving 12% of the audience response, respectively. Most respondents indicate in QS11 that "important dates and deadlines" outweigh other forms of Clemmer communication, receiving 29% of the total response. "Scholarships and grant opportunities" closely follow with 25%. "News and upcoming courses" registered 19% of the overall response. Both "student profiles" and "faculty profiles" fell below 10% as well as "information on research projects."

Figure 8

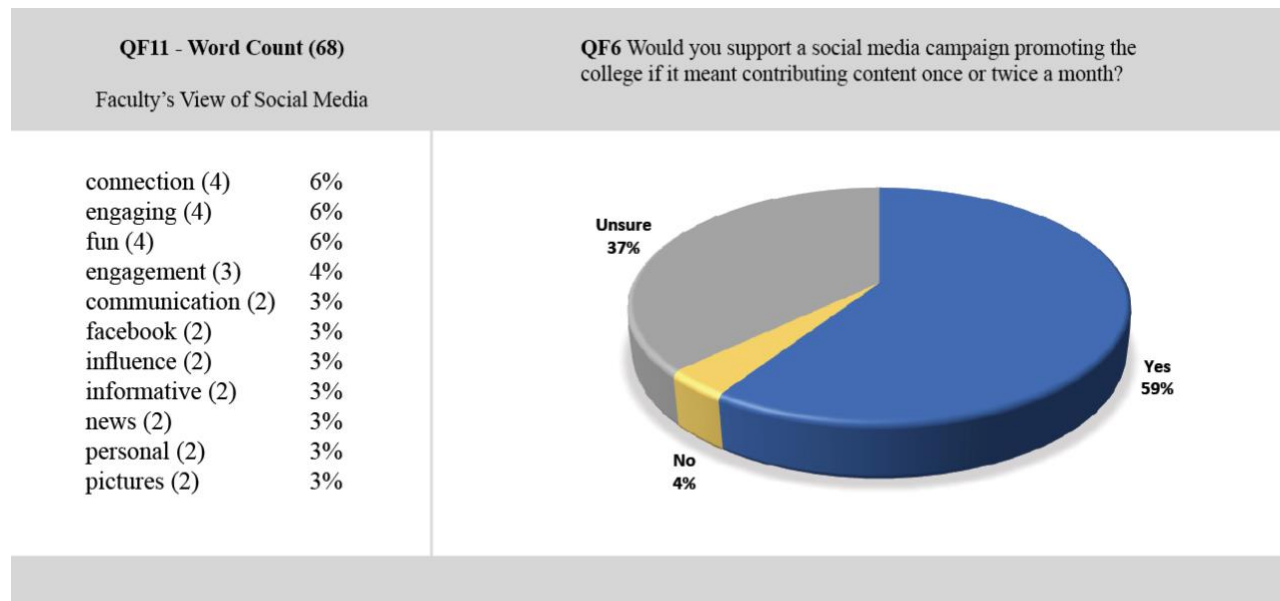*Survey Question Student 10 and Question Student 11*
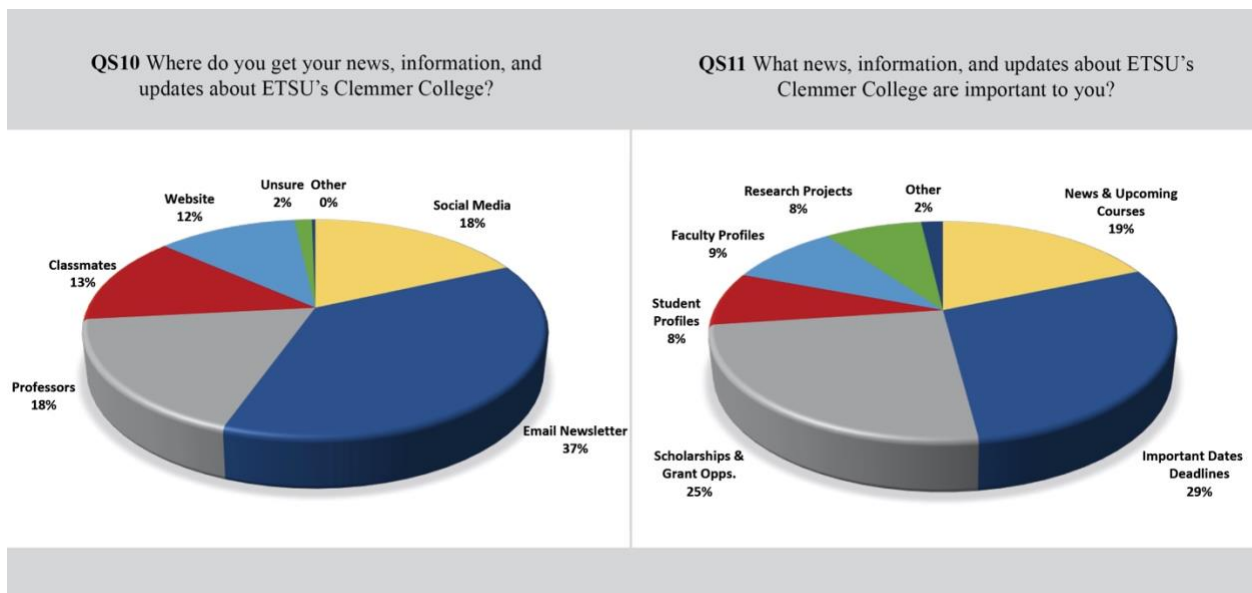
Faculty/Staff response to QF11 indicates that information gathering, and dissemination ranks highly for social media use. Furthermore, social media is viewed as a place to engage and

connect with other platforms users. Facebook was specifically mentioned in the results,

outranking any other social media application.

In Figure 9, respondents answering QF6 were asked about their support for social media

content creation if their involvement was sought. A majority, 59%, answered that they would

support efforts to create social media content if their contributions were sought. Only 4% clearly

expressed disinterest with the remaining 37% unsure about their involvement.

Figure 9

Survey Question Faculty 11 and Question Faculty 6

QF11 - Word Count (68)		QF6 Would you support a social media campaign promoting the college if it meant contributing content once or twice a month?
Faculty's View of Social Media		

connection (4)	6%	
engaging (4)	6%	
fun (4)	6%	
engagement (3)	4%	
communication (2)	3%	
facebook (2)	3%	
influence (2)	3%	
informative (2)	3%	
news (2)	3%	
personal (2)	3%	
pictures (2)	3%	

Unsure 37%

Yes 59%

No 4%

QS13 offered a series of interesting findings which are illustrated in Figure 10. While

Facebook, 24%, and Instagram, 36%, received the most responses to student engagement with

Clemmer College through social media, 5% of students responded that they had interacted with

the College through TikTok, Snap Chat, and LinkedIn. At the time of this study, the College did

not have a social media account or presence with TikTok, Snap Chat, or LinkedIn. Additionally,

22% of student response indicated that they are not engaged with the College through social media.

What makes the response from QS13 even more compelling is survey response to QS14. Respondents overwhelmingly affirmed that the Clemmer College needs to have an active presence on social media. Results are 70% agree or strongly agree with 24% remaining neutral and 3% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing.

Figure 10

*Survey Question Student 13 and Question Student 14*
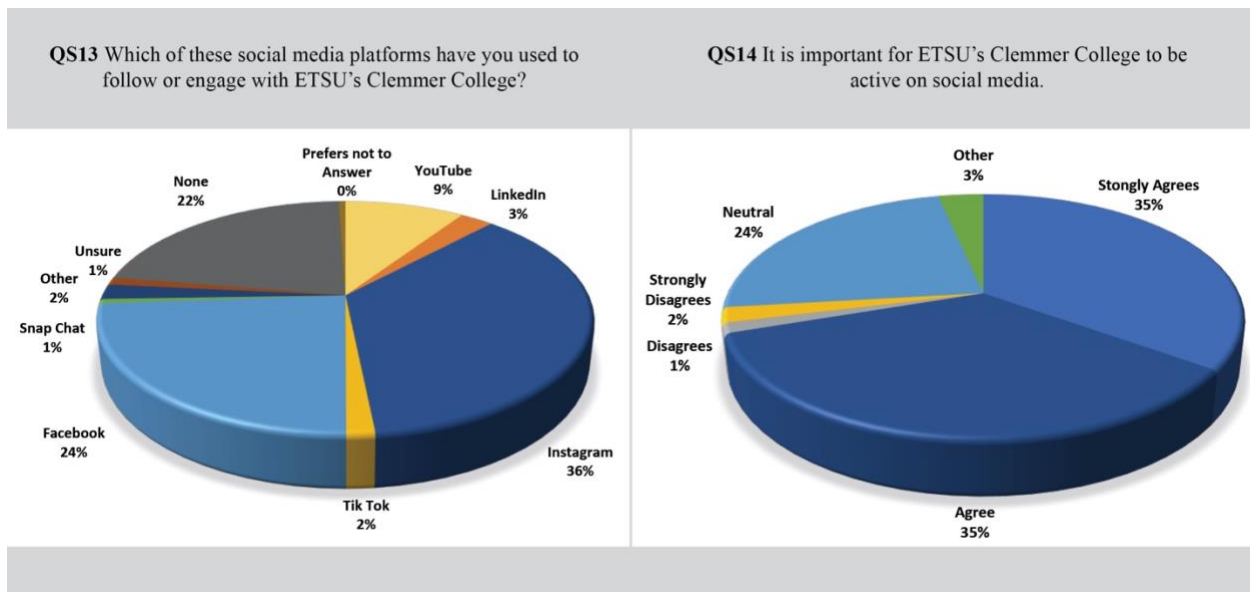
In QS15, Students expressed interest in sharing posts on behalf of Clemmer College with 56% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 16% had an unfavorable opinion with the remaining 28% neutral, unsure, or preferring not to answer.

Figure 11 shows that faculty/staff answered QF4 evenly split on the posts they would be willing to share with student populations. "Job opportunities," "Clemmer news," "research," "professional opportunities," and "encouraging statements" all ranked highly.

Figure 11

Survey Question Student 15 and Question Faculty 4
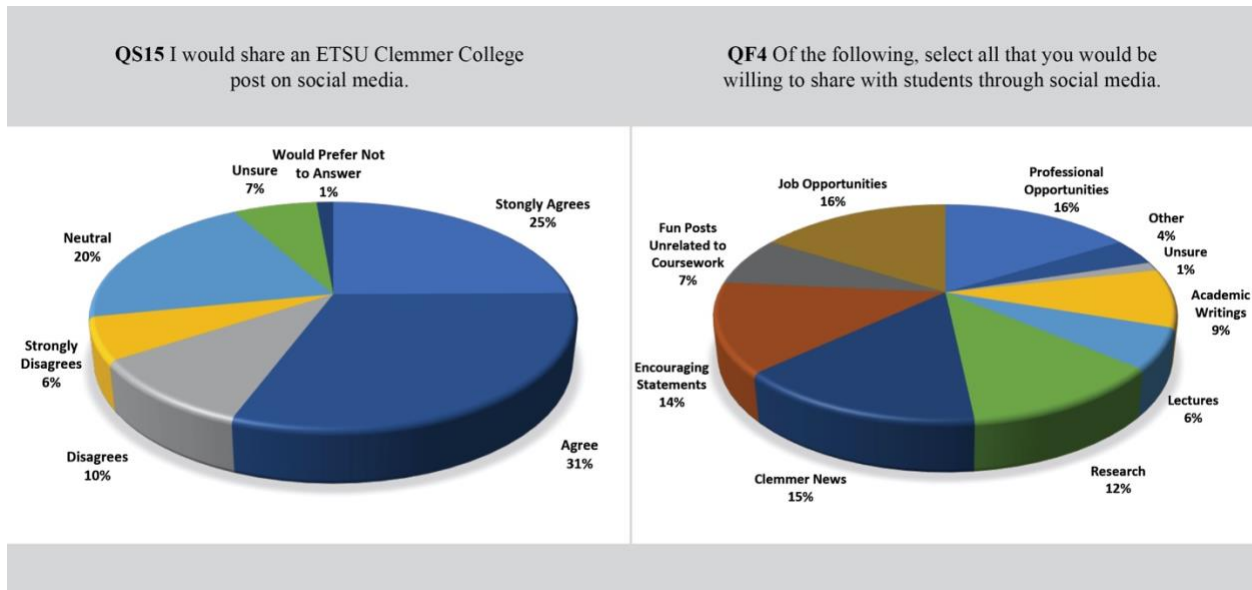
QS18 and QF3 address formality and student/faculty engagement. Students were asked whether professors should maintain a "formal" or "informal" tone on social media. Correspondingly, QF3 poses a question to faculty and staff about formality when engaging with students. In both cases, "informal" was selected less often. Students responded with 30% "formal," 16% "informal," and 37% "both." Faculty/staff responded with 22% "formal," 11% "informal," and 45% "both." The remaining percentage points were divided among "unsure," "neither," and "would prefer not to answer." Figure 12 provides an illustration of these results.

Figure 12

Survey Question Student 18 and Question Faculty 3
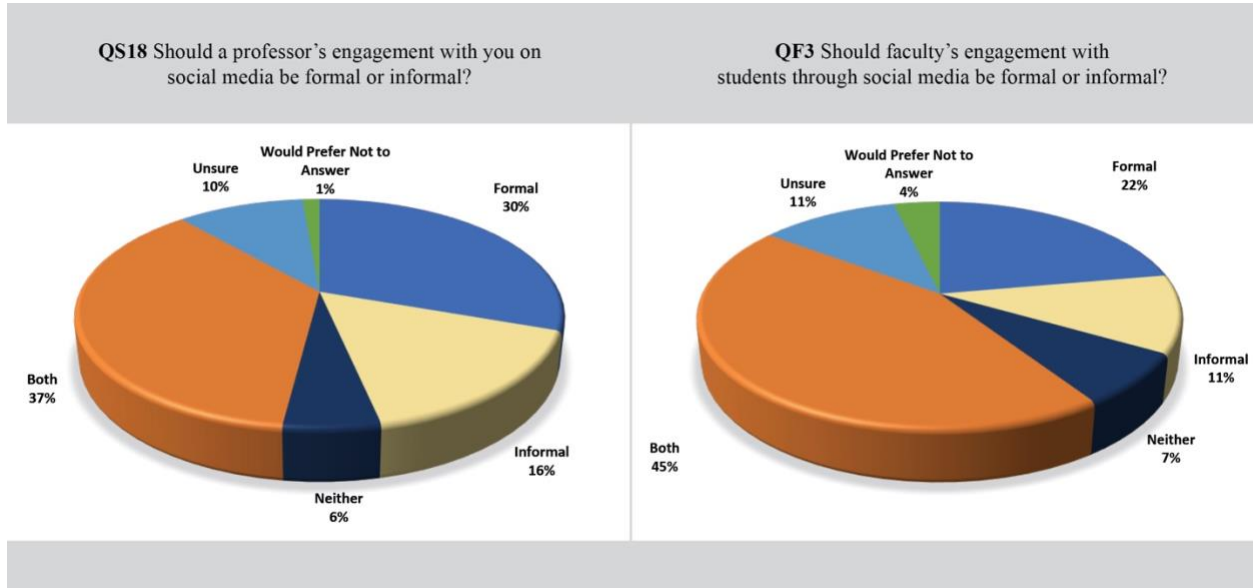
QS19 and QF14 were questions designed to ask about job assistance and opportunity for students. Students were less likely to expect professor support in employment opportunities over their faculty/staff counterparts; however, they strongly, 68%, believe that a professor will help them secure a position upon graduation. QF14 asks, have you (faculty/staff) assisted a student with a job opportunity? Results from this question, shown in Figure 13, point to a clear willingness to assist students entering a professional setting post-graduation with 81% answering "yes" and 11% saying "no" they have not assisted a student.

Figure 13

Survey Question Student 19 and Question Faculty 14

QS19 Do you expect your relationship with your professors will help in securing a job post-graduation?

Prefers not to answer 1%
Unsure 21%
No 12%
Yes 66%

QF14 Have you assisted a student with a job opportunity?

Unsure 8%
No 11%
Yes 81%
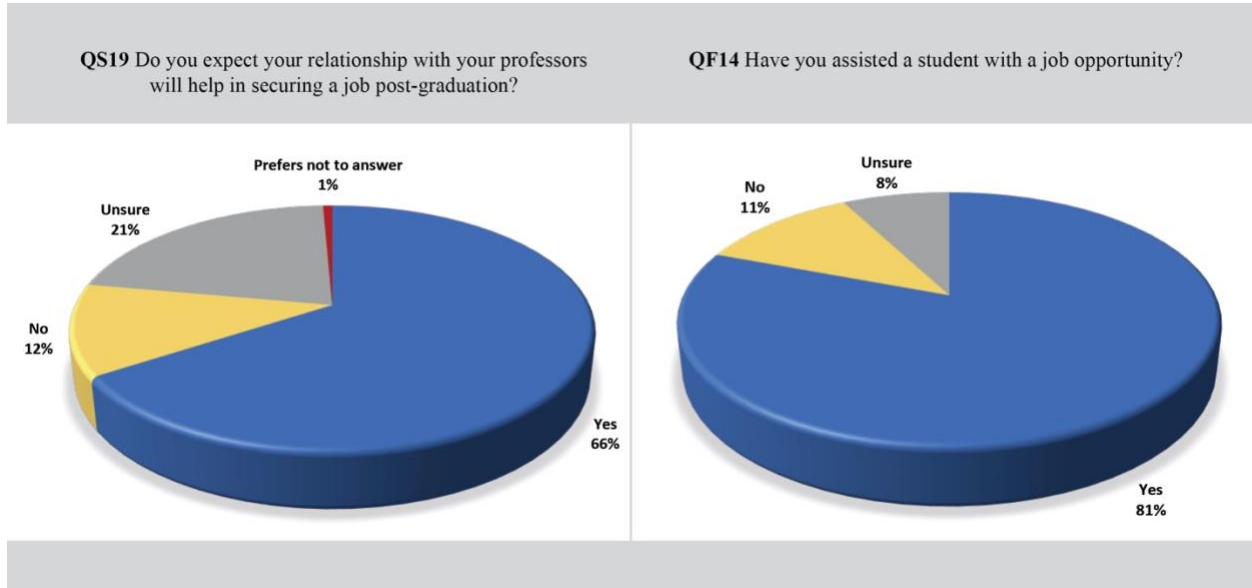
QS20 and QF15 present a similar question to both student and faculty/staff populations. QS20 is flawed in that it assumes the student has pride in the institution. This was remarked upon by a student in the "other" section where they were given the opportunity to address the issue. Future studies should consider rephrasing this question.

Even though there was a conflict of word choice, both surveys yielded comparable results. Overwhelmingly students, 29%, and faculty/staff, 25%, wear ETSU gear. Students are more likely to share proud stories with family and friends by a 24% to 18% margin. Posts to social media was well received by both groups with 18% agreeing to share stories. The use of branded tumblers and mugs was more popular with faculty/staff by a margin of 22% to 13% for students. The full survey results can be found below in Figure 14.

Figure 14

Survey Question Student 20 and Question Student 15
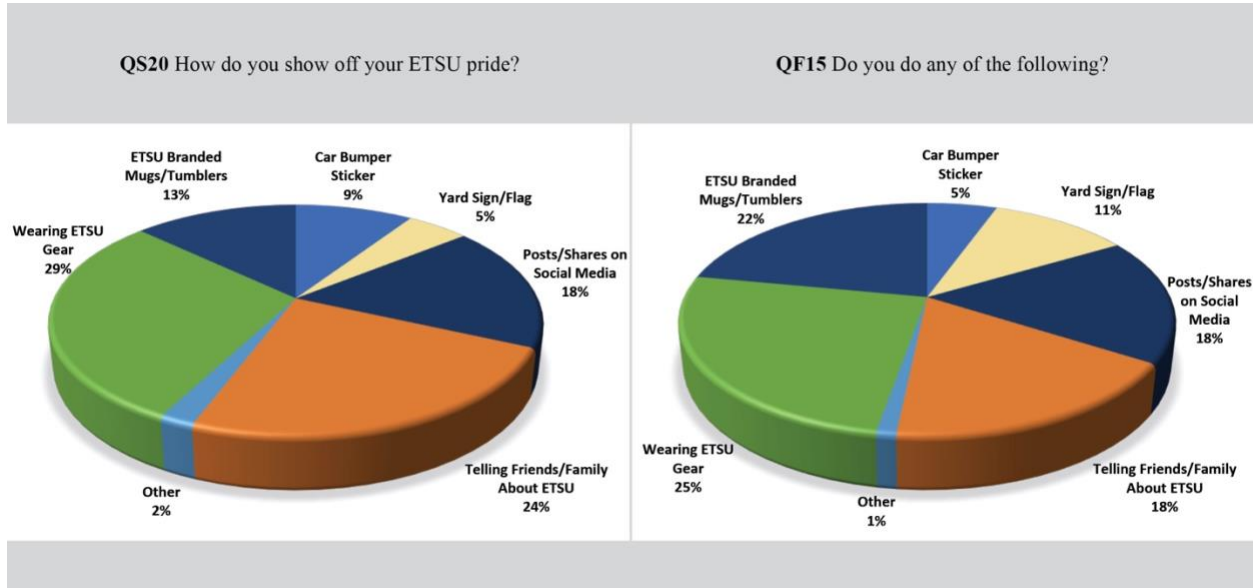
The quantitative survey results provide a snapshot into the media Clemmer College students use; however, this picture is incomplete. To develop a robust view of Clemmer College marketing a qualitative survey of faculty and staff was coupled with the student survey results. Below, rhetorical solutions to concerns voiced in open-ended responses from the faculty/staff survey are presented. This qualitative data helps to illuminate ways in which Clemmer can shape the marketing strategy moving forward.

Findings and Analysis of Qualitative Survey Questions

Selzer (2004) described rhetoric as "the ways people manipulate language and other symbols for persuasive purposes" (p. 281). Selzer's analysis of rhetorical text provides a researcher with a way to "understand better how particular rhetorical episodes are persuasive" (p. 281). Bryant (1953) argued that rhetoric was not an actual science designed to derive meaning

from language but to form educated opinions and theories from the rhetor's use of words. Bryant (1953) illustrated the point with the following:

> Rhetoric, therefore, is the method, the strategy, the organon of the principles for deciding best the undecidable questions, for arriving at solutions of the unsolvable problems, for instituting method in those vital phases of human activity where no method is inherent in the total subject-matter of decision. (p. 407)

Miles and Nilsson (2018) argued that by implementing rhetoric into a campaign a marketer can inform an audience through persuasive means using *ethos*, *logos*, or *pathos*. They stated, "It can provide us a way of looking at the communicative relationship between brands and stakeholders that is highly nuanced and fundamentally strategic" (para. 20). In Oeppen Hill's (2020) study she acknowledged a history of viewing rhetoric in negative terms, "persuasion and manipulative" (p. 90) and argued against this misunderstanding. She defined rhetoric as communication, and through rhetoric, Oeppen Hill asserted an interpretation of language can be useful. Drawing on rhetorical theory, suggestions for ways in which Clemmer College stakeholders can leverage rhetorical appeals to improve marketing strategy are pursued. Several faculty responses to the open-ended survey are cited, and suggestions for how, moving froward, the College can deploy *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and/or *kairos* to engage target audiences.

QF5 asked, what is missing from Clemmer College marketing and social media? One respondent said, "Many students with diverse backgrounds have commented that they do not feel welcome and supported in their life away from campus." Creating change through marketing for these students seeking equity has its challenges, according to Kipnis et al. (2021). The author

suggested that the lack of communication or silos within institutions creates a loss of common knowledge that would help advance Diversity-and-Inclusion-Engaged Marketing (DIEM). Kipnis et al. (2021) argued that there are several factors discouraging implementation of inclusionary appeals. A few barriers they identified include 1) building campaigns based on university standards forgoing the needs within individual colleges, 2) organizations attempting to address certain elements of inclusion and diversity often omitting some aspects of equity, and 3) a general lack of empathy for populations seeking inclusion. Ways to address several of these issues include brand ambassadors with reputational currency (*ethos*) speaking in terms of compassion, emotion, and understanding using appeals consistent with *pathos*. Recently, the College promoted Jessie Wang to Assistant Dean of Equity, Inclusion, and Student Success. In doing so, the Clemmer College has given a voice to groups of interested stakeholders who traditionally are excluded from the conversation due to their minority status. Wang's *ethos* was promoted in an eblast to the College's faculty, staff, and student body. As a person with a minority identity Wang can speak to groups with an authority that minority students will relate to, giving her message trusted appeal.

In response to QF5, a respondent addressed connectedness by writing, "I am not sure that a student from rural Appalachia would connect with these social media platforms or marketing efforts. Since we are a regional University, it seems like this might be an area where increased focus could be placed." Dr. Brian Noland, President of East Tennessee State University, mentioned storytelling in a 2018 convocation address. He stated, "I encourage each of you to help me tell our collective story whenever or wherever the opportunity arises" (Noland, 2018, p. 6). In fact, Noland's entire address to faculty and staff was built on the importance of stakeholder storytelling and the perceived reputation it can construct within communities. Connecting current

student populations with moving and emotive (*pathos*) storytelling can provide Clemmer College with lasting brand recall (Varadarajan & Malone, 2018) and the story told should come from stakeholders within higher education who have intimate knowledge of the organizations challenges and successes (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). These stakeholders, like Dr. Noland, are authorities with weighty *ethos* giving their appeal added importance. While I agree with Maringe and Gibbs (2009) assertion that stakeholders with insight into the organization are best to tell the story of a brand, this suggestion may also be counterproductive. If the issue is a trusted source of information, Dr. Noland and other important stakeholders within the organization may not have the influence to recruit a student from rural Appalachia. Referenced throughout the survey responses was the fact that many students are first generation. Leaning into peer storytelling with appeals to *pathos* may have more impact.

Another response to QF5, emphasized affiliation when the respondent said, "It has to be a bridge that builds a relationship with the students." The bridge must connect a student to something or someone. Alumni, faculty, administrators, and individuals within a professional setting can act as trusted agents of integrity. To revisit Freese, integrity is central to *ethos* (Aristotle & Freese, 1967). Anctil (2008) asserted that featuring faculty with notable accomplishments can positively impact the message and establish trust with university stakeholder populations. Faculty and staff were asked if they would be willing to share content for social media posts. There was a willingness with 59% saying yes, they would, and 4% saying, no they would not. The rest were unsure. With more than half of the faculty and staff willing to lend their time to assist with content creation, some of these stakeholders can add their *ethos* to drive home the message.

QF2 asks survey participants what they think is the purpose of the College's social media. One respondent said, "I would hope it would bring to students' attention information that can aid their progress through their programs. Info about Clemmer events, advising, etc. are helpful. Job fair info, tips on gaining employment, guides to study groups, and other opportunities (internships, etc.) can be very helpful." This survey response focused on information with time constraints. According to Miles and Nilsson (2018) *kairos* "is a situational concept, in other words, that orientates rhetoric around the opportune moment and encourages an improvisatory approach" (para. 21). The authors asserted that a clever marketer will find moments and strategy in communication by capitalizing on timing. They emphasized that marketers should not be beholden to preplanned strategies; rather, they should incorporate and expect a sudden shift in appeals.

Another respondent answered QF2 by saying, "The purpose of Clemmer College (and the different department's) social media is to keep alumni, faculty and staff informed of what is occurring within the College (departments), to recruit potential students, and to connect with local school systems/agencies for mutual benefit such as volunteering, job opportunities, etc." Again, *kairos* has the potential to build brand marketing appeals considering this survey response. *Kairos* is an awareness of the right time to communicate appeals but also knowledge about the audience receiving the communication (Brinks, 2019). An example of a missed *kairos* appeal is promoting alumni affairs to current students. Sending an e-blast advertising alumni activities to students who have yet to graduate would be inappropriate and uninteresting to current students. Using social media with consideration for the audience and timing is key to effectively using persuasion through *kairos*. Oeppen Hill (2020) warned that student populations

are more diverse, making it difficult to identify populations to target marketing appeals. This can complicate the execution of *kairos* as the means of communication.

When appeals to *kairos* are ineffective because time is not a factor, *ethos* may aid in a more targeted marketing approach. In response to QF2, a respondent said," To tell our story; to recruit/interest people in us; to share information." *Ethos* here could promote educational opportunities sought at Clemmer College through social media posts. Promoting messages to interested stakeholders with a link to verifiable data will add gravity to the appeal and give the message more meaning.

While targeted responses are important in reaching specific audiences, sometimes a broader approach is needed. In response to QF2, a respondent addressed several purposes for the College's social media. They said it is "To share how we are actively engaged around campus and in the community. To help build a sense of community and generate positive impressions. To make us more accessible to a variety of people." In this respondent's observation they express a need to communicate with large segments of the audience. To address this a marketer can use the triad—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*—with *kairos*. This umbrella strategy can appeal to people who respond to emotional, logical, and/or character solicitations. If these are not enough to reinforce the appeal the addition of *kairos* can aid through timebound messaging. The use of several rhetorical types is supported by Brinks (2018), who asserted that deploying multiple Aristotelian attributes is often an effective means of persuasion. While using multiple forms of persuasion may prove useful, it is important to maintain a balance between the appeals. Overusing any or all may prove counterproductive and turn off populations the marketing is designed to reach.

Persuasive messages are crafted with the expectation that a person will benefit from the product being offered (Bolatito, 2012). Benefits for student populations not only include an educational experience; entertainment and excitement are also an expected part of their journey. *Kairos* can aid a marketer in promoting upcoming events and opportunities to the target audience, while *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* support additional messaging. Arunrangsiwed and Pairoa (2016) maintained that brand mascots have both *pathos* (emotional appeal) and *ethos* (trust appeal). Moreover, Dwivedi et al. (2020) asserted that influencers and prominent individuals can perform any number of roles within the college community including faculty, administrators, and mascots. Clemmer College marketers can then conclude that Bucky, ETSU's school mascot and semi-celebrity, can be useful through *ethos* and *pathos*. Furthermore, linking posts produced on behalf of the mascot to events held a year prior creates a promise (*logos*) in the student's mind that the future event will produce similar entertainment (Du Plessis, 2013).

In response to QF2, another respondent said, "I feel it is to keep the students informed and involved. I wish it was used more often for involvement. It should include all: students, faculty, staff, and administration. It should be fun, fresh, and excitement driven." A similar refrain is expressed by another respondent: "To keep students and the community informed of what's going on and what we're excelling at." Fun, fresh, excitement, and excelling have the appearance of an emotional (*pathos*) appeal. Marketing to students through *pathos* in tandem with *kairos* will drive home the messaging.

In response to QF2, a respondent said, "The purpose of our social media presence is recruitment and sustaining relationships with students and alumni." Correspondingly, this response echoed a similar theme: "Recruitment and retention, keeping alumni connected in order to solicit involvement and donations." There are a multitude of reasons a person may stay

engaged with their university and give to the mission, according to Cascione (2003), ranging from religious to social advancement to affinity for time spent at the institution. Through storytelling, the university—acting as a trusted and credible source—can inform communication. This then becomes an appeal to *ethos*. Moreover, some alumni populations carry prestige and reputation that can make their presence instrumental. Cascione (2003) asserted that students are often profoundly impacted by alumni giving. This is an opportunity for colleges to use statistics and data (*logos*) to drive home the impact of annual giving on current student stakeholders. These students will eventually become alumni and given the opportunity they will become strong advocates for the institution and its messaging.

In reference to QF2 a respondent said of incoming populations, "To show what we are doing to attract people who may be interested, to provide information about our programs or events, to provide outreach for projects or research." A real asset to college marketing messages through appeals designed around *logos* is the abundance of data driven research and resources. Enrolled students engaged in publicized projects are useful as a tool to recruit graduate students interested in colleges focused on learning through research. For example, if the college markets research opportunities and uses statistics to emphasis the importance of student engagement in lab settings a potential recruit may infer that their presence on campus will lead to meaningful research. This is central to *logos* appeals.

The rhetorical responses selected for inclusion in this study stood out for the issues they pose, and the potential role marketing has in resolving these conflicts. While some of the issues are institutional and unlikely to change at the College level, some of the survey concerns can be resolved through a more invested marketing approach.

Persuasive language is often associated with communication efforts (Barker, 2018). What a brand stakeholder may fail to recognize is that it is their own language about a brand that informs the messaging appeals that marketing teams employ to define an organization. Bryant (1953) stated, "Ever since men first began to weave the web of words to charm their fellows, they have known that some men can impose their wills on others through language in despite of reason" (p. 416). In this statement Bryant addressed advertising and its rhetorical role in communication. In contrast to Bryant, this study argues that opinions and statements made about a brand are not ill-informed nor without reason, but the result of stakeholder rhetoric, essential in the creation of marketing material that speaks to their interest.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Approximately 14,000 students attend East Tennessee State University (ETSU) annually (Data USA, n.d.). Originally founded as a "normal school" in 1911, the institution's mission was to train teachers who would prove proficient in their profession of instruction (State of Franklin, n.d.). The University continues to provide interested students with degrees specializing in educational foundations. Clemmer College houses these programs under the University's structural makeup. Additionally, the College offers educational degrees with a focus in sport science, leadership, and counseling.

Support for the academic schedule, student affairs, faculty interests, collegiate events, and all other University sponsored affairs is guided by a host of administrative staff. University Marketing and Communications employs marketing specialists and public relations officials overseeing external and internal communication with the stakeholders and interested publics on behalf of ETSU and Clemmer College. Conclusions drawn that answer RQ3 considered these populations.

RQ3 asks, how do Clemmer stakeholders leverage the insights of Strength of Weak Ties Theory in reformulating the College's marketing strategy? Considering the research question, survey QS19 and QF14 asked faculty/staff and students about job prospects and stakeholder relationships. These questions were designed specifically with the Strength of Weak Ties Theory in mind. When reviewing survey responses to all the open-ended questions, a theme appeared. Words often used in survey responses to describe Clemmer College relationships include "connect," "sustain," "bridge," "share," "engaged," and "involved." These words infer that stakeholder association is central to building communication and marketing appeals by engaging a network of bound individuals.

An Overarching Theme: The Strength of Weak Ties Theory

This study is not designed to qualify Granovetter's (1973) theory on tie strength; however, when this theory is applied to the research the expectation is that it can inform future college marketing. To revisit Granovetter's (1973) argument, he asserted that tie strength has a direct effect on career mobility. According to Granovetter, the strength of the tie considers a relationship in terms of time, distance, familiarity, and benefits. His assertion is that a weak tie (distant relative, neighbor, or acquaintance on social media) showed greater ability to share job opportunities with dissimilar groups by bridging diverse communities together.

Faculty and staff address issues of diversity among the University's stakeholders in their survey responses. Data from the research suggest that the school's location and overall demographics contribute to this outcome. Research has shown that a minority stakeholder's presence can have positive impact by performing in a weak tie role (Carolan & Natriello, 2006). This then has the benefit of increasing information proliferation if indeed the Granovetter theory holds true, and populations are willing to receive information more readily from these types of individuals. From this the inference drawn is that Clemmer College should adapt more of these minority populations into the marketing message. These advocates can bridge communities within the College creating a robust marketing and communication plan.

An area for consideration is that—although these minority voices can act as novel resources for information dissemination—their weak tie status may counter any rhetorical benefit their *ethos* potentially provides. If they are an untrusted source, then their persuasion may not prove useful enough in marketing the Clemmer. Carolan and Natriello (2006) reached this conclusion in their research on tie strength and links to trust. They said, "Elaborated codes are complex and universal—more reflection is needed in organizing one's communication when

there is a greater difference between those to whom the speech is addressed" (p. 5). Carolan and Natriello (2006) found that any potential benefit of a weak tie was neutralized by the lack of trust in the information shared. Anctil (2008) found that universities and colleges exist within a "trust economy" (p. 9) by arguing that success for institutions of higher education is reliant on building a reputation that places honesty above all other selling features. Moreover, Timke (2017) maintained that appeals on social media are trusted more often when it comes from family and close friends. This then suggests that the Clemmer would benefit from using strong ties in conjunction with social media to communicate on behalf of the College.

Data presented in this research introduces a complication for the adoption of social media in communicating Clemmer priorities. Research found that most students want the College to have a social media presence and remain actively engaged with them throughout their time at school. This is consistent with earlier studies (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Wertalik, 2017). Students want a relationship with faculty that moves beyond instruction and into a personalized experience (Gablinkse, 2014). However, most Clemmer College students and faculty/staff expect a formal tone when communicating through social media. This could complicate how a marketer approaches a social media conversation with the various stakeholder populations. social media communication often takes an informal tone unless using applications where formality is expected such as LinkedIn. There could be vastly different definitions of formal for students and faculty/staff. Digging deeper into these expectations would help the College and their plan for communicating with various populations. Bridging these groups will happen only when there is a clearly defined expectation from both parties.

As expected and consistent with prior research (Gruzd et al., 2012; Roblyer et al., 2010; Schwartz, 1994), some of the data from the surveys reflects a population of faculty/staff

concerned with engaging students on social media. This is understandable and adopting social media as a means of communicating publicly with students has its challenges. Osterrieder (2013) addresses some concerns among teachers who expressed reluctance that ranges from formality to social media literacy. These concerns are echoed by Clemmer College faculty and staff in their survey responses.

While support for faculty and staff who experience concerns over social media engagement should be addressed, the need for their participation cannot be overlooked. Not only does faculty willingness to create content for social media lift some of the burden from the marketing department as Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) found, but faculty/staff are also stakeholders with intimate knowledge of the college (Mainardes et al., 2010). The data shows that faculty are overwhelmingly willing to support social media initiatives through content contribution. Maringe and Gibbs (2009) found that student and instructor relationships build communication that connects and bridges marketing goals for a sustained communal experience. Timke (2017) agrees that groups of stakeholders can be brought together through social media use. These ties, whether strong or weak, are important for communicating with student populations as they move through their collegiate experience. One of the final and most important acts that colleges can perform for their student populations is connecting them with future job prospects which sets them up for a lifetime of potential success.

Students and faculty/staff within Clemmer College agree that aid with employment prospects is expected. Considering Granovetter's reasoning, supporting a weak tie role for faculty/staff within the College may help students as they enter post-graduation. However, the Strength of Weak Ties Theory is challenged in Burke and Kraut's (2013) research on tie strength

as it relates to Facebook and job prospects. Their findings revealed that weak ties were no greater in securing employment than that of strong ties.

Conflict over strong versus weak ties is reflected in the research. Students who answered the survey were split on how they first heard about ETSU. While strong ties such as parents, friends, and family amassed most of the response, a considerable percentage answered that weak ties contributed to their knowledge of the University. This reinforces the need for college marketers to adopt a well-rounded appeal that communicates to complex stakeholder populations.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Interest in this study stems from my time as a graduate assistant tasked with working on the Clemmer College e-newsletter. I developed an interest in the internal conversation among key stakeholders and how their opinions and views can shape the marketing strategy. This study set out to address three areas of interest: 1) the student perception of Clemmer's current marketing, 2) how rhetoric can assist in college communication, and 3) the influence of Strength of Weak Ties Theory on stakeholder populations. The study successfully discovered useful ways the Clemmer marketing team can implement rhetoric to effect change in internal conversations which will have direct impact on external marketed messages.

Some of the data found areas of conflict such as expectations in tone and the use of social media to communicate Clemmer College affairs. Other areas of discord include tie strength and useful ways to implement it to meet marketing goals. While this was surprising, it was not entirely unexpected. Stakeholders are a complex mix of individuals/organizations—familiar, loosely connected, or strongly bonded. This is what makes the Strength of Weak Ties Theory both useful and conflicting. Students and faculty expect their bonded relationship will help in advancing job opportunities, but the research also shows that students are profoundly impressed upon prior to arriving on campus by close tie relationships. This research would suggest that while knowledge of weak tie relationships is important and can be useful in constructing some marketing messages, a resourceful marketer will consider all types of ties to inform the overall strategy.

Conflict of Interest

At the time of this project, I was a graduate assistant for Dr. Pamela Mims, Assistant Dean of Research and Grants for Clemmer College. Although she and other College faculty/staff

offered support throughout the project, they did not provide help that skewed the results or my analysis. This may or may not be a conflict of interest, but it should be noted.

Limitations

The number of nonrespondents was 1,644 for students and 275 for faculty/staff. This measurement is more than 30%. Schutt (2015) asserted that a 30% or higher nonresponse rate is unfavorable therefore the research findings should not be applied to the entire population. A limitation to this research study was that it had an inadequate sample size and cannot be applied to the general populace.

Another limitation included the survey design. Because of the survey phrasing, student's answers to QS9 had an unintended effect. The question references ETSU's website rather than Clemmer College's website. This then caused the unintended consequence of students responding based on the website's effectiveness in achieving their learning outcomes based on their experience using GoldLink. The desired results were to better understand student's view of Clemmer College's website for marketing.

Finally, research on TikTok and Snapchat in marketing universities is limited. This was not pursued in the literature review.

Future Studies

While Granovetter's (1973) study draws comparison among individuals and their tie strength, added research into organizations such as Clemmer College acting as agents of information dissemination may prove useful. A group of organizations existing independently from one another but bound by the commonality of higher education can act in much the same manner as individuals. For example, in this research, students and faculty/staff showed willingness to wear ETSU gear and purchase ETSU branded merchandise. This act has the

potential to bridge two individuals loosely bound through their institution. Can it then be theorized that a thing rather than person will also act as a weak tie?

Additionally, what this study did not address is the advancement of students throughout their studies and the connectedness they feel to their institution. An area of research that can add to the conversation should consider the tie strength of a freshman versus that of a senior. If a freshman is loosely connected to faculty upon entering school and a senior is more intricately connected upon exiting school does that change their job prospects due to tie strength? As a result of time spent in school, a senior may have formed strong ties with faculty that would not be beneficial post-graduation when they are seeking employment opportunities. Does this then suggest colleges should encourage a more nurturing type of relationship early in a student's journey tapering off to a less familiar relationship as they reach the last step in their collegiate journey—graduation?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Staff and Faculty Survey Questions

Clemmer College Marketing - Staff/Faculty

QF1 What are the primary demographic markers (e.g., behaviors, personality, socioeconomic status, etc.) that comprise Clemmer's student body, and how do you think it might benefit the College (and students) if those markers were more diverse?

QF2 In your opinion, what is the purpose of Clemmer College's social media presence?

QF3 Should faculty's engagement with students through social media be formal or informal? Forma l/ Informal / Both / Neither / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QF4 Of the following, select all that you would be willing to share with students through social media: Professional Opportunities / Lectures / Academic Writing / Research / Clemmer News / Encouraging Statements / Fun Posts Unrelated to Coursework / Job Opportunities / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer / Other

QF5 What is missing from the Clemmer College marketing and social media?

QF6 Would you support a social media campaign promoting the College if it meant contributing content once or twice a month? Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QF7 Do you follow a Clemmer College student on social media? Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QF8 Describe your parameters for following a student. (e.g., they become alumni, they send friend request)

QF9 What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Clemmer College Students? (Separate words with commas)

QF10 What are the strengths and weaknesses of Clemmer College Alumni communication?

QF11 What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of social media? (Separate words with commas)

QF12 What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Clemmer College's website? (Separate words with commas)

QF13 Think of the ideal Clemmer College graduate, finish this sentence. A Clemmer College graduate will fulfill their goal of... (You can pick up to three) being happy / belonging / improving the world / helping others / having a full life / disrupting what is broken / working in a position and with people they love / realizing their vision / lighting up a crowd through laughter / seeking intelligent answers to complex problems / making dreams come true / creating a prosperous community / unsure / would prefer not to answer

QF14 Have you assisted a student with a job opportunity? Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QF15 Do you do any of the following? Select all that apply: Display an ETSU car bumper sticker other than a parking pass / Display an ETSU yard sign or flag / Post and/or share ETSU news on social media / Wear ETSU gear like shirts and hats / Use ETSU branded items like mugs and tumblers / Tell friends and family about ETSU accomplishments / Would prefer not to answer / Other (Specify)

QF16 Thank you for your time, do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or feedback for me about ETSU's Clemmer College promotional and media practices?

Appendix B: Student Survey Questions

Clemmer College Marketing - Students

QS1 Are you a student of: ETSU / Clemmer College / Both ETSU and Clemmer College / Unsure / Would rather not answer / Other (specify)

QS2 Are you enrolled as a: Freshman / Sophomore / Junior / Senior / Master's Student / Doctoral Student / Non-Degree Seeking / Would Prefer not to answer / Other (specify)

QS3 What department is your program in? Counseling and Human Services / Curriculum and Instruction / Early Childhood Education / Educational Foundation and Special Education / Educational Leadership and policy Analysis / Sport, Exercise, Recreation and Kinesiology / Unsure / Undecided / Would Prefer Not to Answer / Other (specify)

QS4 What is your age range? 18-24 / 25-34 / 35-44 / 45+ / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QS5 Did/Does a parent or relative attend ETSU? Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QS6 How did you first hear about ETSU? Social Media / Parent / Friend / High School Counselor / Relative / ETSU Website / Advertisement / High School Teacher / Neighbor / Church Member / Other (Specify)

QS7 When you think of ETSU, what are the first three words that come to mind? (Separate words with commas)

QS8 What are the first three words you think when you hear "ETSU professor"? (Separate words with commas)

QS9 What are the first three words you think when you hear "ETSU website"? (Separate words with commas)

QS10 Where do you get your news, information, and updates about ETSU's Clemmer College? (Select all that apply) Social Media / Email newsletter / professors / Classmates / Website / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer / Other (Specify)

QS11 What news, information, and updates about ETSU's Clemmer College are important to you? (Select all that apply) News and upcoming courses / Important dates and deadlines / Scholarship and grant opportunities / Student profiles and features / Faculty profiles and features / Research projects / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer / Other (specify)

QS12 How often do you use the following social media platforms? YouTube / Instagram / Facebook / LinkedIn / Tik Tok / Pinterest / Snap Chat / Other (Specify social media)

QS13 Which of these social media platforms have you used to follow or engage with ETSU's Clemmer College? (Select all that apply) YouTube / Instagram / Facebook / LinkedIn / Tik Tok / Pinterest / Snap Chat / None / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer / Other

QS14 It is important for ETSU's Clemmer College to be active on social media. Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree / Unsure / Prefer not to Answer

QS15 I would share an ETSU Clemmer College post on social media. Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree / Unsure / Prefer not to Answer

QS16 Do you follow a classmate on social media Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QS17 Do you follow a professor on social media? Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QS18 Should a professor's engagement with you on social media be formal or informal? Formal / Informal / Neither / Both / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QS19 Do you expect your relationship with your professors will help in securing a job postgraduation? Yes / No / Unsure / Would Prefer Not to Answer

QS20 How do you show off your ETSU pride? Select all that apply: Car Bumper Sticker / Yard sign or flag / posts and shares on social media / Wearing ETSU gear like shirts and hats / Use ETSU branded items like mugs and tumblers / Telling friends and family about ETSU / Would Prefer Not to Answer / Other (Specify)

QS21 Thank you for your time, do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or feedback for me about ETSU's Clemmer College promotional and media practices?

Appendix C: Data Collection and Storage

Data Collection and Storage

Informed of the project before the study began, ETSU's IRB granted approval to begin recruitment of survey participants on July 9, 2021. A recruitment email was sent to students and staff/faculty with a link to the Qualtrics administered survey on September 13, 2021, with an end date for survey responses assigned to October 8, 2021. This study was designed to capture a moment in time defining it as cross-sectional forgoing a prolonged research technique attributed to longitudinal studies (Hahn Fox & Jennings, 2014; Schutt, 2015). Cross sectional surveys, as characterized by Schutt (2015), are the accumulation of data at a single point in time and do not require multiple data collection intervals. A longitudinal study is unnecessary in this case because I was not looking into the effects of marketing's evolution on student populations, the results of a cross-sectional survey sufficiently address the RQs by analyzing specific stakeholder response in the fall of 2021.

The surveys were administered anonymously with no respondent attributes assigned to their answers. Several questions supplied basic demographic designation to offer clarity on the respondent's role within Clemmer College. The data was collected and saved in a OneDrive file for examination and deleted at the close of the study. A decision to use rhetorical analysis conducted by the researcher was established early in the project.

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