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Creating University and Community Connections Via Social Media: Cedar Valley Focus

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CREATING UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA:
CEDAR VALLEY FOCUS

A Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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Introduction

The upcoming generations of graduating college students are those that grew up on technology, witnessed the launch of Facebook, and posted the first YouTube videos. These young adults are engaged in social media each and every day, but when it comes to removing themselves from their on-line social networks and becoming involved in their local community or even on-campus, they tend to be rather apathetic. As these students become local leaders and community members, their involvement will be critical to community growth, development, and enrichment. It is best that students cultivate the mentality and skills needed to fulfill their civic responsibilities before they shed their cap and gown and enter the “real world.” With growing attention towards marketing through social media outlets, there is reason to believe that these tools could help move students from their virtual communities into their physical communities. Thus, the following hypothesis was tested.

Hypothesis: Social media can be used to market community related organizations, activities, and events in order to increase involvement and build connections with a university community.

In order to test this hypothesis and arrive at a devised plan or program for the best exploitation of social media networks by community related organizations, the following research questions were addressed.

Research Question I: How is social media defined and how has the trend been utilized by marketers?

With the aim of determining how social media can be used to increase college student involvement in the community, it is important to first have a clear definition of social media and identify which online networks and applications qualify as social media. Analyzing how social media is already being used by marketers to promote their products and services is helpful in discovering ways to reach similar marketing results for community organizations.

Research Question II: What is the interest and level of involvement at the college level, specifically within the local community?

Knowing if college students are currently involved both on- and/or off-campus and if they have any desire to increase their community engagement is essential when testing the hypothesis. If college students have little interest in being involved outside of collegiate activities, then there is no need for community organizations to tap into the college community and connect with university students via social media. This question applies to college towns across the United States, but specifically looks at the University of Northern Iowa, which is located in Cedar Falls, Iowa and is a part of the greater Cedar Valley community.

Research Question III: How are college students currently utilizing social media?

Understanding how college students use social media gives insight into which social media tools are the best communication venues to pursue and provide the most successful strategies for doing so. Depending on the demographics and psychographics of the target

audience, varying social media networks may be preferred for certain messages, information, or communication purposes. This question also addresses how University of Northern Iowa students engage in social media and if they utilize social networks to become involved on-campus and in the Cedar Valley community.

Research Question IV: How are community related organizations currently using social media and how great of a response do they get through their efforts?

Knowing how community organizations are applying social media within their marketing plans and strategy, what particular networks are being used, which segments are targeted, and the overall result of social media marketing is valuable in evaluating if social media can be used within the community organization sector to increase college student involvement. This question evaluates the impact of social media marketing by Cedar Valley related organizations on University of Northern Iowa students.

In answering these questions, the hypothesis was proven to be true. A primary research study supported by various other studies, journals, and academic papers indicates that college students have a high use of social media, particularly Facebook, and also a high level of liking involvement within the community. However, their low levels of actual participation present an opportunity to encourage students to be involved, educate them on the benefits of community engagement, and promote community organizations, events, and activities through social media. The following research also identified specific strategies and tactics for building connections between college students and the community via social media.

Review of Literature

Social Media

Social media generation and consumption is not only forecasted to grow in the upcoming years, but it is predicted to “be like air” to a society unable to function normally without it (Li, 2008; Adamic, Davis, Nack, Shamma, & Seligmann, 2008). In essence, the popularity of social media continues to skyrocket, and its uses become more innovative and sophisticated with each passing day. This tool has advanced beyond simply being a means of communication, transforming into an instrument for marketing and networking, embedded with information for discussion and analysis.

Definitions of social media vary between experts and studies. One definition explains social media networking sites as online services with three main components: ability for users to create and share a profile, means to develop a list of contacts whom users are connected with, and capability of users to navigate through their own lists of contacts as well as other’s (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). For the purpose of this research, social media networks are defined to be online communities in which users can communicate and share ideas, information, and documents back-and-forth.

The previous description encompasses a wide variety of online networking tools such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter. While these forms of social media have many similarities, they are also all very different. In fact, each site comes complete with its own jargon. Online acquaintances might be called “friends,” “followers,” or “connections,” depending on which media tool is being used. Nevertheless, no matter what contacts are called, the truth is that these virtual friends may be the most important relationship marketers should be focusing on in the Twenty-First Century.

A majority of marketers are realizing the importance of jumping on the bandwagon of this most recent phenomenon in the business world with 88% of them using social media to market their business (Stelzner, 2009). For example, “When queried on the importance of social media, 26% of respondents in 2007 felt that social media is ‘very important’ to their business and marketing strategy. That figure rose to 44% in approximately one year” (Barnes & Mattson, 2008, p.2). This rapid increase in social media use and its prominence in the marketing world is a strong indication of the successful advertising and promotion that can be achieved through social media.

While the use of social media as a marketing tool continues to grow every day, the daily usage of both novel and savvy users increases as well. Sixty-four percent of marketers are tweeting, Facebook messaging, browsing through YouTube videos, or engaging in other similar activities for five hours each week, and 39% of marketers are closer to ten hours or more per week (Stelzner, 2009). Marketers are not simply logging on to Facebook or Twitter for a quick checkup with their online communities, but they are setting aside five, ten, or even more hours per week to engage with their friends and followers. In order to be successful at social media marketing and spread a message quicker and stronger than the competition, marketers need to invest considerable time into their social network communities. In fact, social media has altogether moved away from a tool marketers explored on their lunch break to a full-time position within firms.

College Students’ Use of Social Media

It is not surprising that the amount of internet usage by college students continues to rise year after year, and with that growth, social media usage has increased as well (Budden,

Anthony, Budden, & Jones, 2007). Social media has become an essential part of students' lives and "digital natives (students who have grown up with the new technologies)...are increasingly relying on the online social networks as a primary means of communication, interaction, and engagement" (Olson & Martin III, 2010, p.1).

College students are not solely using social media tools for entertainment purposes but are participating in them in order to meet their social needs and "strengthen social contacts, community engagement, and attachment by connecting the whole community through networks" (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Eighty-nine percent of students claimed they used social media to socialize, and 79% did so for entertainment reasons. Additionally, 26% of students utilized social media as an educational tool, and 16% used it for professional reasons (Bart, 2009). These data indicate that college students are more likely to turn to social media when they are seeking companionship or simply looking for an activity to occupy their time. Engagement is relatively casual and spontaneous rather than more formal and planned as it is when using social media for educational or professional purposes.

Similar to the growth of social media usage among marketers, college student usage of social media has also increased in the past few years. In 2006, 33% of college students engaged in social media, and just two years later in 2008, that percentage rose to 59% with only a mere 11% admitting to never using social media (College Students' Social Networking, 2009). These statistics are consistent with data from the Pew Research Center, which claims that two-thirds of Americans age 18-29 engage in social media (Gotta, 2008). The number of users is not the only aspect of social media that is growing. Approximately 43% of social media users have increased their usage of social media over the years while 33% have remained the same, and 18% decreased their level of usage (Bart, 2009).

These statistics are extremely useful to companies or organizations wishing to reach the college population. It is not common to come across an easily accessible venue in which such a large proportion of college students come together. Not only are college students centered in one spot, but social media also allows them to be reachable at the touch of a mouse, easily segmented by demographics and psychographics, and contacted on a regular basis for a cost that is next to nothing. Any marketer within a company or organization can easily see that social media is an opportunity worth exploring if they seek to pursue college students as their target market.

Various demographics, such as age and gender, impact social media usage and need to be taken into consideration when choosing how to best reach out via social media. The highest users of social networking sites among college students are those ages 18 and 19. Of these students, 57.5% use social media platforms for six hours or more each week whereas only 38% of students ages 20-24 engage in this level of social networking interaction (College Students' Social Networking, 2009).

The difference in usage between ages may be attributed to the fact that 18-19 year old students are just beginning their college experience and most likely have more time to spend online because their studies and other responsibilities are not as time intensive. Also, younger college students may be engaging in social media to a greater extent in order to remain in contact with friends they recently parted from. As students progress through college, their time becomes filled with jobs and internships, demanding classes, and extracurricular activities, and they have less time to devote to social media. Nevertheless, this is still good news for marketers since they are able to reach students early on in their college years while they are the heaviest social media users.

In regards to gender, the amount of time spent connecting through specific social media sites varies. Females use Facebook only slightly more often than males, but males are much more avid users of YouTube with a 28 male to 6 female ratio (Budden et al., 2007). If an organization is looking to use social media to attract college students of both genders, Facebook is the best tool. Facebook can also be used to connect directly with the female college student segment, but the message needs to be crafted in a way to solely target the female Facebook users. Males can be reached via Facebook, but YouTube may be the better alternative since its users are overwhelmingly male.

The suggestion of using Facebook to reach certain college student segments is supported by the fact that Facebook is by far the most popular social media tool among college students with 96% of college students using it on a daily basis. YouTube comes in second with 84% of students viewing videos every day (Bart, 2009). On average, 2.5 hours per week are reserved for Facebook and 2.25 hours are spent on YouTube (College Students' Social Networking, 2009). Twitter, MySpace, and LinkedIn are less popular, with 14%, 12%, and 10% of college students engaging in these sites, respectively (Bart, 2009).

With Facebook being the most prevalent social media platform among college students, it is necessary to explore this communication and networking venue further. In fact, Facebook is the "coolest" social network according to college students and it "overtook Google as the number one most popular website among both genders of college students" (Analytics, 2009, p.1). Facebook boasted having 67 million active users in 2008, and over half of these members logged in daily, staying on the site for approximately 20 minutes (Park et al., 2009).

When looking at college students specifically, studies across the United States, and in particular the Midwest, agree that more than 90% of college students use Facebook (Pempek,

Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009, p.227). Their typical usage is slightly higher than the overall average, with weekend usage approaching almost 30 minutes a day (Pempek et al., 2009).

College students tend to engage in Facebook in the evening and late at night. Between the hours of 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m., 92.39% of students claimed to log on to Facebook, and 80.43% did so between 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (Pempek et al., 2009). These stats are significant considering Facebook makes it feasible to reach almost the entire college population each and every day, and knowing to target communication between the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. increases the tool's effectiveness and probability of successful interaction.

Facebook has continued to grow with its user base, allowing participants to engage in multiple applications under one social network. Thus, users are engaging in Facebook for a variety of reasons and to fulfill a range of purposes. When considering the Group feature of Facebook, research has shown that it meets the needs of socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information (Park et al., 2009). This feature is an additional application that brings together members with similar interests, activities, or beliefs. Members of Facebook Groups are "interested in meeting and talking with others as well as getting peer support and a sense of community" (Park et al., 2009, p.731).

Even though many Facebook users create and/or join Groups, few members are actively engaged in socialization via this feature (Pempek et al., 2009). Nevertheless, those who are highly involved in their Facebook Groups utilize them "to learn about on- and off-campus events and details regarding specific products and services" (Park et al., 2009, p.731). These users participate in civic activities promoted through Groups and do so to a greater extent if they have a high life satisfaction and social trust (Park et al., 2009). Facebook Groups are an effective, efficient means of weeding out students who do not seek involvement while connecting

specifically with students of specific interests who are looking to take action within their respective interest area.

While socializing is an important element of Facebook and Facebook Groups are beneficial to reaching certain segments, a majority of user time is spent simply “reading and/or viewing information without directly interacting in any way” (Pempek et al., 2009, p.235). Marketers may view this as a problem with social media communication, but the truth is that even if students are not responding to the marketing message online, awareness of the event, activity, and organization is increasing. Students may notice that a few of their friends are attending an event promoted through the Facebook Event feature or read about an activity through posts between friends. Even if social media does not incite direct action online, students may still be more likely to get involved on-campus or in their community because they became aware of an event through Facebook.

Similar to social media in general, Facebook usage and drive to action within the physical community varies between age and classification in college. When considering classification, underclassman are more likely to become involved in the community because of Facebook compared to upperclassmen due to being less stressed and having more free time (Park et al., 2009). On the other hand, when it comes to civic awareness and being involved in local community politics, juniors are the most likely to be engaged (Alkandari & Alshallal, 2008). These findings present additional elements to be considered when marketing to college students through Facebook. If general community activities are being promoted, it is best to target freshman and sophomore students, but if the events relate to civic awareness, then juniors should be the chosen segment.

College Students' Level of Involvement

While college students may express concern for community service, involvement, and culture, they often fail to put their interest into action through involvement in community activities and programs or volunteer work. One study hypothesizes that this is due to students' low awareness of the importance of community engagement or simply that students do not find this type of involvement appealing (Alkandari & Alshallal, 2008). College students need to be informed that "participation in volunteer activities helps [them] develop leadership skills, become more aware of multiple cultures, community issues, and personal and social values, such as knowing and accepting people of different cultures, working with collaboration, and a warning of national and community issues" (Alkandari & Alshallal, 2008, p.574).

Conversely, things may be beginning to change, at least in the case of college students' level of volunteering. According to the study *College Students Helping America* conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Services (2006), from 2002 to 2005, the number of college students who engaged in volunteer work increased 20% with a rate that exceeded volunteering among the entire adult population. Almost half of college students volunteer 12 or more weeks a year with a certain organization while approximately one-fourth are more sporadic and volunteer less than two weeks per year with their organization. Females tend to volunteer more frequently than males and are more oriented towards hospital or health care work while the male population engages in sports-related philanthropy. Overall, volunteering with an education program, youth service group, or religious organization was the most popular among college students. It was also interesting to note that individuals who worked more hours and were enrolled in an institution of higher education as a full-time student were more likely to volunteer (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006).

Community Organizations' Use of Social Media

It is obvious that college students make social media a part of their daily lives and “in order for savvy marketers to successfully reach this potential market, they must learn how to reach ‘Generation @’ through social networks” (Budden et al., 2007, p. 10). Thus, if community organizations wish to attract college students to their events and activities, they ought to tap into social media networks. Even an article published in 1999 (years before the launch of major social marketing tools) identified the importance of online social networks in building and improving community connections.

Using social networks is an inexpensive way for community organizations to strengthen social ties and increase the ease of resource sharing between parties. By encouraging information distribution and discussion, more people feel knowledgeable about recent events and activities and are more likely to get involved (Kavanaugh, 1999, p.16). This increased sense of belonging is a positive indicator of the impact social media can have on the relationship between college students and community organizations. It is projected that “community outreach projects will...continue to evolve on a trial-and-error basis as organizations learn to interact with external audiences in nontraditional ways” such as via social media (Gotta, 2008, p. 28).

The most forward-thinking communities and non-profit organizations have already begun to use social media in their marketing and have been rather successful. One example of this is the Soles4Souls shoe charity. Soles4Souls is prominent on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and “in the past year, the charity’s growth can be tied to an intentional approach to seek out the so-called ‘Millennial Donors’ (those aged 16-29) where they exist – which has lead the charity to [these] social media applications” (Soles4Souls Catching Fire, 2009, p.1). Another organization, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Scottsdale, plans to “leverage their social media knowledge to

extend their marketing communications to popular social networking platforms, driving increased response rates, volunteer participation and donations in a cost-effective manner” (Allviant Launches Social Media, 2009, p.1).

Community organizations are quickly realizing the benefits that social media has for businesses and are beginning to utilize these networks in order to boost participation and awareness. However, while there are masses of blogs, opinions, and even facts as to how and why social media marketing works for corporate businesses, there is still little information as to how these tools can establish connections between a university and its local community.

Methodology

Instrumentation

The hypothesis and research questions were tested using primary research paired with an analysis and integration of the literature reviewed. The literature review was used to guide my primary studies and to compliment the data that I discovered. Primary research was completed by conducting a survey with students attending college within a university-centered town.

The survey was designed to discover the ways in which University of Northern Iowa (UNI) students utilize social media, the level of UNI student involvement both at UNI and within the Cedar Valley community, and the factors that influence social media use and level of involvement in a community. The survey contained five sections: social media, involvement and community, use of technology, future orientation, and demographics (Appendix). The majority of the questions were closed-ended, requiring a yes/no response or asking for a rating on a Likert scale. Before distributing the survey to students, the study was approved by the Institutional

Review Board in order to ensure that it met the requirements for protection of human research participants.

For my sampling frame, I set out to find University of Northern Iowa undergraduate students between the ages of 18 to 26. Respondents were recruited by administering the survey to various UNI classes with the choice to participate or refrain from completing the survey, effectively narrowing the respondent group to UNI undergraduate students. Classes were chosen at random and comprised of many College of Business Administration courses due to ease and convenience of distribution, but also included classes from other colleges such as the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. My sample resulted in 132 useable surveys. The data from these surveys were entered into a database, checked for errors, and analyzed using statistical software to arrive at of the forthcoming results and conclusions.

Demographics and Psychographics

Due to the fact that many of the surveys were distributed to upper-level College of Business Administration classes, the demographic data reflect this population. Almost half of respondents (47.66%) were College of Business Administration majors, 14.06% were College of Humanities and Fine Arts majors, 12.50% were College of Natural Sciences majors, 12.50% were College of Social and Behavioral Science majors, and the remaining 13.28% were College of Education majors, General Studies majors, deciding, and/or double majors. Reaching many junior and senior students through upper-level courses was beneficial to my research since these students have had the longest opportunity to experience the University of Northern Iowa and

Cedar Valley¹ communities. Of the respondents, 6.25% were freshmen, 12.50% were sophomore, 21.88% were juniors, and 59.38% were seniors.

In regards to gender, there were slightly more female participants with 53.91% of respondents being female and 46.09% being male. Additionally, the desired age of survey participants was 18-26, and all surveys from participants not meeting these criteria were discarded. Age of respondents had a normal distribution with the majority of students (55.47%) being 21 or 22 years of age.

The years that respondents resided in the Cedar Valley ranged from zero years to twenty-five years with a mean of 5.30 years. Over half (52.4%) of the students surveyed lived in the Cedar Valley between three to four years, 23% for one or two years, and 8.8% for 20 to 22 years or almost their entire life. Throughout their years in the Cedar Valley, most students lived on-campus less than two years (65%) with a mean of 1.13 years. The mean of students living off-campus was slightly higher at 1.64 years. Of the students who choose to live off-campus, 44.6% did so less than two years and 55.4% lived off-campus for more than two years.

Since social media is a fairly new topic and it heavily relates to technological advancements, it was important to gather data on how familiar respondents were with new technology and the Internet. All students surveyed were comfortable with using current technologies; 89.8% owned a laptop, and 96.9% had easy access to the Internet. Also, 44.1% of students had the Internet on their cell phones, allowing social media networks to always be at their fingertips.

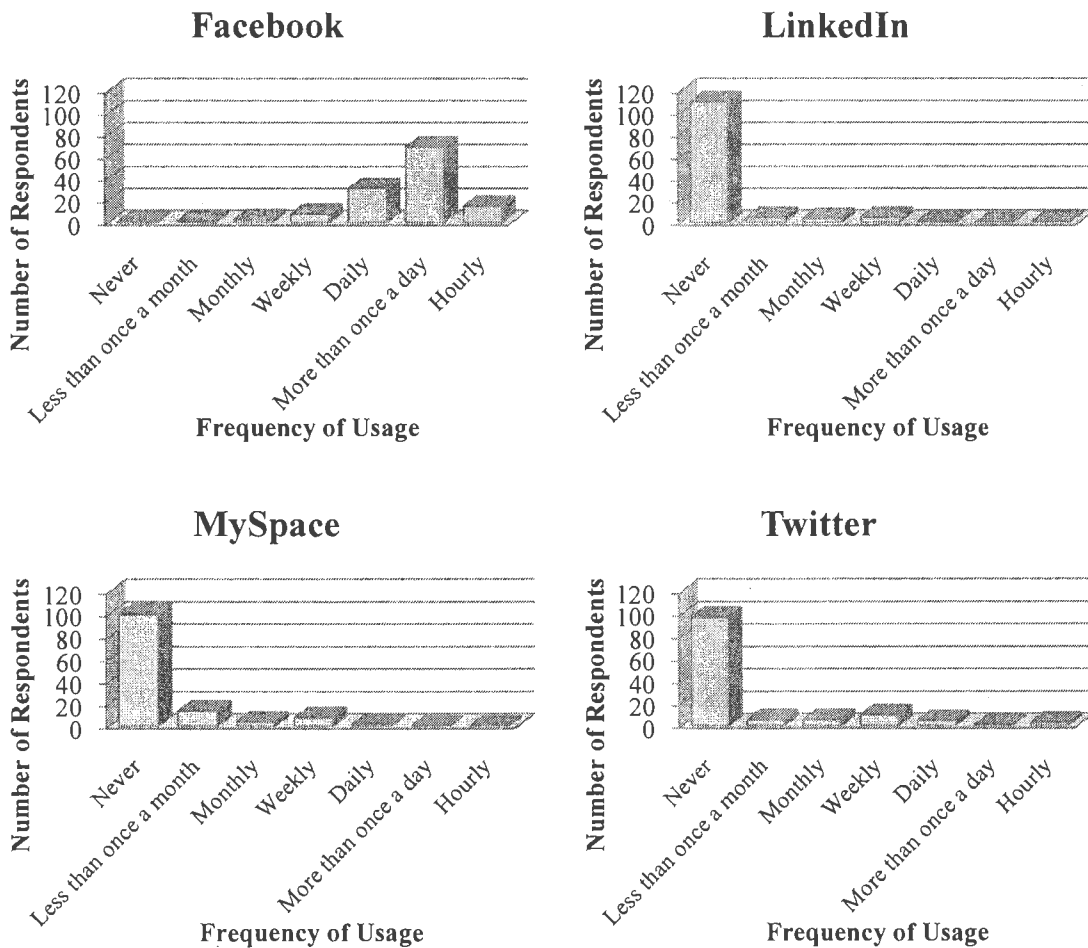
¹ The Cedar Valley comprises the cities of Cedar Falls, IA (population 36,940) and Waterloo, IA (population 65,998) along with surrounding small towns and communities (Cedar Falls (city), Iowa, 2010) (Waterloo (city), Iowa, 2010).

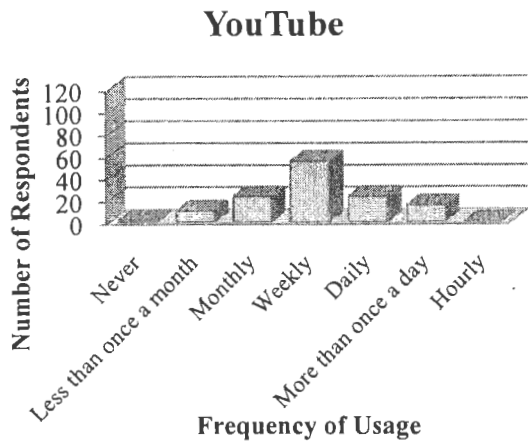
Results

College Students' Use of Social Media

By performing a one-sample T-test on college students' usage of the five major social media tools, I discovered that Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and MySpace are all statistically significant at $\alpha=.05$ confidence. This indicates that college students' level of usage does not fall around what would be thought to be average usage i.e. weekly. However, YouTube was not significant, meaning the distribution of the data matched very closely to the normal bell curve distribution. These frequencies of social media usage by University of Northern Iowa college students are exhibited in Figure 1.

Figure 1:





Not surprisingly, Facebook had the highest usage among college students. The majority of students engaged in Facebook more than once a day and the average usage fell between daily to more than once a day (mean=5.61) with only .8% percent of respondents never using Facebook. Highly consistent with past research findings showing that 90% of college students engage in Facebook on a daily basis, 89.8% of UNI students claimed to use Facebook at least daily. These data support the statement that Facebook is the most popular social media tool and the best online network to reach college students.

LinkedIn was least popular among college students with 86.6% never using it. Those that used LinkedIn did not do so on a frequent or consistent basis, signifying that it is not the most appropriate means of reaching college students. MySpace and Twitter also had low usage rates. However, of the 24.4% of students who used Twitter, their frequency of use had a normal distribution. Most Tweeters engaged in Twitter on a weekly basis and a few even used it on more of a weekly or hourly basis. This indicates that while many students do not utilize Twitter, those that do are fairly avid users and could be informed of community events via tweets. MySpace users were not as dedicated to this form of social media and kept their usage to a daily

basis at the most with the majority of users using it less than once a month. Similar to LinkedIn, MySpace would not be a very beneficial channel of communication with college students.

As mentioned, YouTube's frequency of use had a normal distribution and a mode of weekly usage with 43% of respondents. Consistent with the distribution and mode, the mean of YouTube's frequency of usage was also weekly (mean=4.03). However, the usage is much lower compared to other studies with only 29.7% of students using it at least daily. In promoting events and activities only a few days in advance, YouTube would not be sufficient to get the message out to a large number of students. On the other hand, this social network could be highly beneficial in promoting larger events weeks or even months in advance.

Most demographic and psychographic variables did not have an effect on UNI students' level of engagement in social media. According to the results of an independent sample T-test, males and females utilize social media to the same extent. However, a cross tabulation shows that females do use LinkedIn slightly more than males while males visit YouTube more often than females. There were no significant differences due to marital status, growing up in a rural or urban area, or financially contributing to college education. Relating to classification, freshman and sophomores had a slightly higher use of social media but not to the extent that it was significant. One factor that did increase involvement in social media was having Internet access of the respondent's cell phone. An independent sample T-test showed that students with Internet on their phones engaged in social media at higher levels than those without it.

College Students' Level of Involvement

When students were asked about their interest in being involved on- and off-campus, the results showed that a large percentage of students liked collegiate and community engagement.

In fact, UNI students enjoy being involved in the community slightly more than on-campus. The results of a frequency test show that 80.32% of students like to be involved in the community compared to 75.59% who enjoy being involved on-campus. This high level of interest in being involved at the college level both on-campus and in the community helps answer research question two and signifies that students care about their university and community and enjoy getting involved in these two areas.

Running a cross tabulation test helped determine if students like to be involved only in the community or on-campus or both. Results of this test are shown in Table 1 below and indicate that the majority of students like being involved in both. However, there are a handful of students who prefer to be involved either in the community or on-campus but not both or do not enjoy involvement at all.

Table 1:

| | | Like to be Involved in Community | | Total |
|-------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| Like to be Involved On-Campus | Yes | 86 students 67.72% | 10 students 7.87% | 75.59% |
| | No | 16 students 12.60% | 15 students 11.81% | 24.41% |
| Total | | 80.32% | 19.68% | |

Results of the cross tabulation suggest that activities and events incorporating both on-campus and/or university elements and aspects of community involvement will be the best

received by college students. This could include activities such as a food drive on campus, university organizations planning a highway clean up event, or community organizations leading a seminar within a university building. The cross tabulation also reveals an opportunity for community organizations to reach out to those students who like involvement in the community but do not favor on-campus involvement. Students such as these are most likely the best participants within the community since their time is not consumed by university organizations and clubs and they have a passion for community involvement.

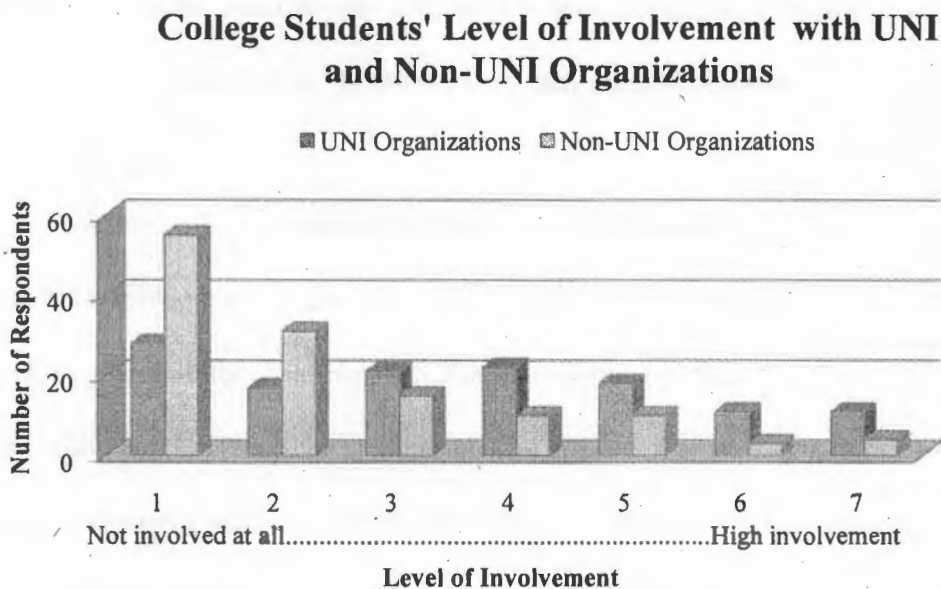
Nevertheless, liking involvement on-campus and/or in the community does not necessarily translate into being active within either of those two arenas. With such a high percentage of students claiming to enjoy being involved, it was surprising to discover that actual levels of involvement were considerably low, especially in the case of involvement with non-UNI-related organizations.

By performing a one-sample T-test on students' involvement with UNI-affiliated organizations and activities such as Northern Iowa Student Government, UNI athletics, Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center, clubs relating to majors/minor, campus ministries, and the like, I found the level of involvement to be slightly less than average with a mean of 3.48 on a seven point scale. The distribution of data was spread out somewhat evenly among the levels of involvement. However, the mode rating for level of involvement was a rating of 1 (i.e. not involved at all) with 21.9% of students in this category. Nevertheless, there were still 31.3% of students who fell above the average level of involvement with a rating of 5, 6, or 7.

The same test was performed on student involvement with non-UNI-affiliated organizations and activities such as Cedar Falls Junior Chamber, Big Brothers Big Sisters, YMCA, Waterloo athletics, and local parishes. These data were highly skewed towards not

being involved at all with only a small amount having high involvement. In fact, 43% of students were not involved at all and 78.9% of students had a less than average level of involvement with non-UNI related organizations. The results of these tests are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2:



University of Northern Iowa students' dispersed range of involvement with UNI-affiliated organizations and activities and relatively low level of involvement with non-UNI-affiliated organizations and activities show that there is room for improvement in these areas. It is discouraging that the actual levels of involvement are so low when the interest exhibited by students was so promising. In fact, the results of these tests compared with students' interest in involvement seem to entirely contradict each other.

While a greater percentage of students like involvement in the community, the actual levels of involvement with non-UNI-affiliated organizations was much lower than involvement

with UNI-affiliated organizations. The UNI involvement data are less surprising since a larger percent of students are highly involved, yet there is still a great failure of student involvement on-campus. These results could be caused by a variety of factors. Students who like involvement in the community may be engaging in community service activities and local events through the UNI organizations they participate in. Other students may like to be involved in both UNI and community events, but only have enough time to dedicate to those activities that are most convenient and relevant to their education, most likely on-campus UNI events, organizations, and activities. Some students may simply be unaware of the opportunities beyond the University campus.

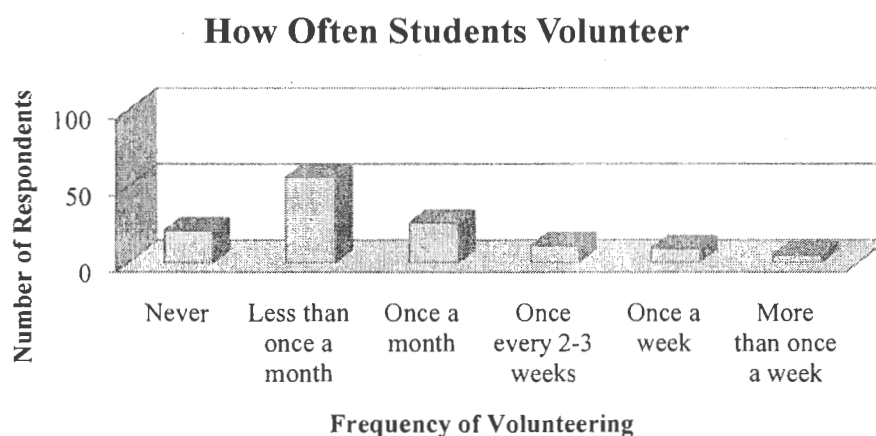
A few factors were identified that increase UNI students' involvement. Students who like to be involved in the community have a greater involvement in UNI-affiliated activities and events compared to those who do not like involvement in the community. When community organizations try to attract those students who like involvement in the community, they need to be aware that many of these students are already involved with UNI activities. Their best strategy may be to reach these students through the UNI-related organizations that they are already a part of.

Additionally, even though living in the Cedar Valley during the summer does not affect liking to be involved in the community, it does affect actual levels of involvement. Students who have spent summers in the Cedar Valley or lived in the area for a greater numbers of years are more likely to be involved in community activities and participate in the Cedar Valley because of social media. This may be a result of students having more time in the summer to get involved when their UNI activities are put on hold until the fall semester. The data show that if community organizations focus on increasing student involvement during the summer months

when students are more likely to participate, they will be more likely maintain this involvement into the academic year.

Volunteering and community service comprise a large portion of non-UNI-related activities and also need to be considered when evaluating student involvement off-campus. As indicated in Figure 3, 83.6% of students engage in some sort of volunteer work, but the majority of these students only volunteer once a month or less. Once again, this reveals an open opportunity for community organizations to grow college student involvement by devising ways to increase volunteer and service work to a more frequent basis. Programs that are structured to volunteer on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule may attract students devoted to a specific area or interest and increase their frequency of volunteering and involvement.

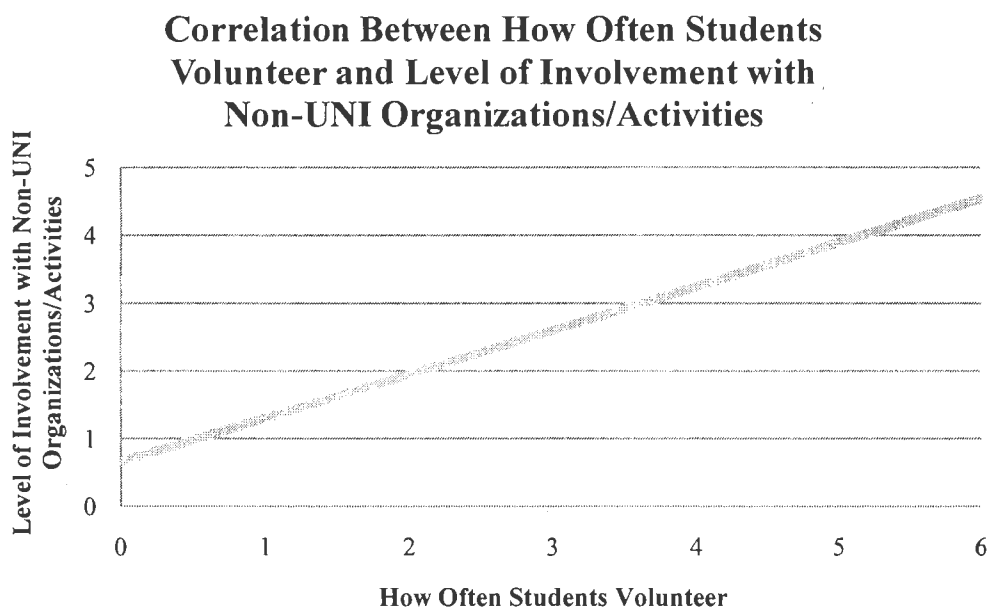
Figure 3:



Since most volunteer work occurs off-campus, it is not surprising that the frequency of volunteering follows a similar pattern as involvement in non-UNI organizations. Using a regression analysis with $\alpha=.05$, I found that there is a correlation between how often students volunteer and how involved they are with non-UNI-affiliated organizations/activities ($R^2=.272$,

$F=47.004, p<.05$). Figure 4 shows that as the frequency of student volunteering increases so does the level of involvement with non-UNI organizations/activities, suggesting that students who volunteer are doing so through non-UNI-affiliated organizations. This is good news for community organizations related to volunteer services because it indicates that students who engage in volunteer work are willing to help outside of the UNI campus.

Figure 4:



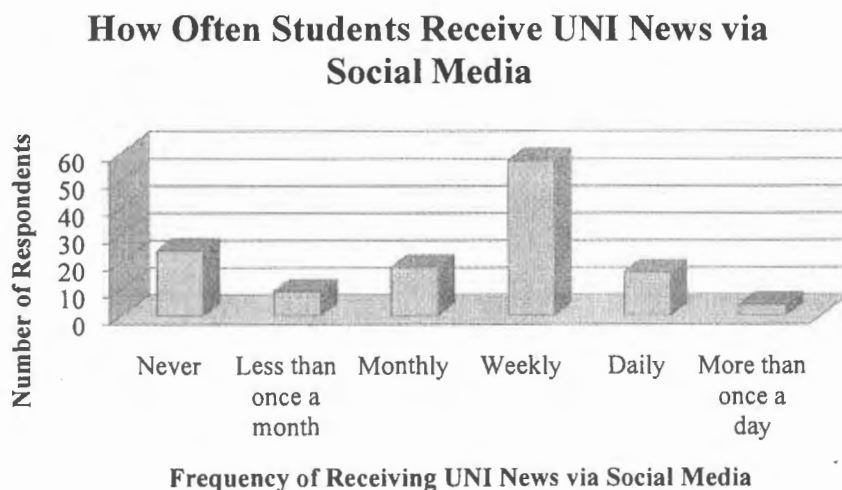
It is also interesting to note that 86.3% of students who like to be involved in the community plan to be involved after graduation, and 94.1% of students who like to be involved in the community plan to volunteer after graduation. This supports the idea that the upcoming generation of graduates will be the next wave to volunteers and participants within the local community. As previously stated, these students need experience and time to hone their skills in order to lead community programs and events to success in the future.

College Students' Level of Involvement with UNI Related Social Media

Many students are engaged in social media related to UNI. Almost half of UNI students, 49.2%, have participated in a UNI-affiliated event because of social media. These events were typically athletic games, Campus Activity Board events, and Northern Iowa Student Government activities but also included many other events including presentations, 5K races, fundraisers, volunteer opportunities, and Homecoming activities. Thus, UNI organizations have been rather successful in creating awareness and initiating action from students via social media. These data are a positive sign that social media marketing can be used by other organizations in order to reach college students as well.

Additionally, 60.1% of students receive UNI news via social media at least weekly with some of these students receiving news more than once a day. A one-sample T-test was ran to show the frequency of students receiving UNI news via social media and the results are shown in Figure 5. With so many students getting news from social media, it is obviously a place to promote events and encourage student involvement, but this advertising needs to be done well in advance in order to capture the large percent of students who seek news only on a weekly basis.

Figure 5:



College Students' Level of Involvement with Cedar Valley Community Organizations

Related Social Media

Results from surveying University of Northern Iowa college students showed that 18% of students are a Facebook friend, group member, or fan of a Cedar Valley community organization on Facebook. This low percentage indicates that Cedar Valley organizations are not currently doing enough to engage with UNI students through Facebook. Also, organizations are failing to drive their small following to their Facebook pages. Only a handful of students consistently visit a community organization's page while 82.6% check it weekly to less than once a month. Considering the high level of student activity on Facebook, there is a great opportunity for organizations to increase their Facebook traffic through messaging, posts, invites, and other similar applications.

In regards to Twitter, only 2.3% of students (three respondents) were following a Cedar Valley organization. This is not surprising considering the low levels of Twitter users among UNI students. However, if usage of Twitter would happen to increase, Cedar Valley organizations could aim to increase their presence on Twitter as well.

Furthermore, only 14.2% of students have participated in a Cedar Valley community event or activity because of social media. On a positive note, two-thirds of these participants are a friend of a Cedar Valley organization on Facebook. Thus, it can be inferred that the more interaction between students and Cedar Valley organizations through social media, the higher level of involvement initiated because of social networks. The remaining one-third, which has become involved in the community because of social media but does not directly engage with community organizations through Facebook, must have been informed of the event through other networks or became aware through Facebook indirectly, such as via a friend's post. These data

once again support the theory that any type of presence on social media can spark action outside of the virtual community.

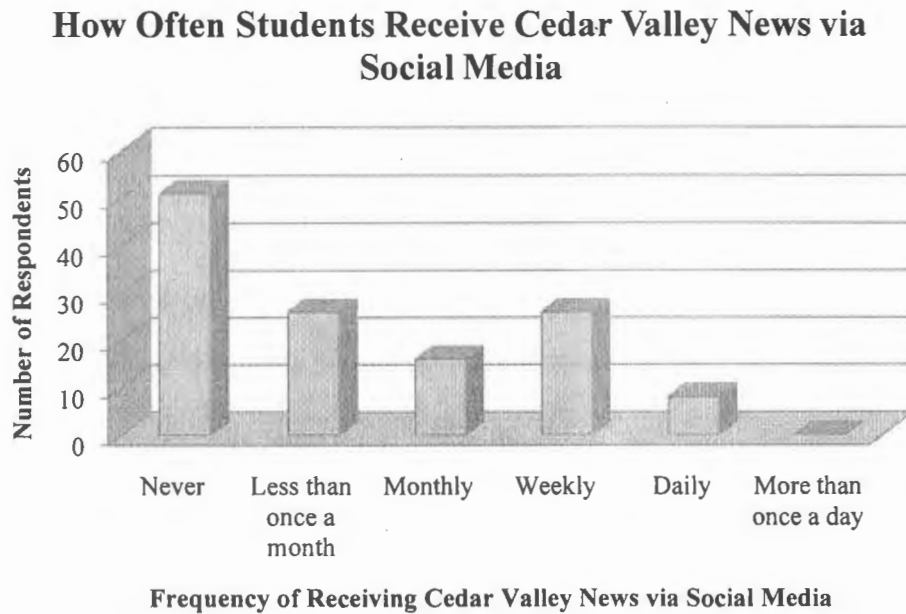
Events that students participated in because of social media tended to be recreational and entertainment related. Most common responses included band concerts, music performances, hockey games, biking events, parties, and bar/restaurant events. Community organizations should continue sharing information about these events and activities through social media, and, in order to promote other events, the organization could focus on the recreational and entertainment aspects to attract more students.

It was interesting to find that if students were involved in social media, their specific level of involvement did not affect their chances at participating in a Cedar Valley event because of social media. This suggests that when it comes to increasing involvement via social networks, it does not matter if a student engages in social media every hour or once a week. Students who are less involved in social media have just as great of chance of participating in community because of social media as those who are very involved. For Cedar Valley organizations, this means that they have the possibility of attracting all levels of users and not solely those who are highly engaged in social media.

Similar to becoming involved in the community because of social networks, the amount of students who get news about the Cedar Valley via social media is much lower than those who receive news pertaining to UNI. In fact, 40.2% of students never receive news about the Cedar Valley community through social media and only 26.8% do so on a weekly basis or more. This lower result may be in correlation with the smaller number of student online followers in general. It may also indicate that students are not as interested in Cedar Valley news or that community organizations are not providing enough news for students to easily access it. Figure 6 shows the

results of a one-sample T-test illustrating the frequency of students receiving Cedar Valley news via social media.

Figure 6:



Limitations

Limitations of my study resulted from failure to investigate certain findings further through another survey or additional methods of primary research. Significant data about using social media to build connections between university students and the local community was discovered through primary research, but the deeper reason to why these were the results was left up to speculation and education analysis derived from the literature reviewed. By conducting a follow-up survey based on the conclusions from this research, valuable insight into college students reasoning for specific social media usage and level of involvement could be found.

Also, the survey did not identify whether or not students became involved in Cedar Valley organizations or volunteer work through their UNI organizations. If students' community involvement stemmed from on-campus involvement, then this may have swayed the results of my research. Students who did not get involved in non-UNI-affiliated organizations yet liked involvement in the community were not inquired about why this was true. It would have been beneficial to know if this lack of involvement was due to being too involved in other activities, limited awareness of community events and programs, or simply not wanting to get involved.

The limited demographic variation of survey respondents restricted the research of identifying correlations between involvement and/or social media use and certain demographic characteristics. With a more diversified sample in terms of major, and classification, more accurate tests could have been run to see if these variables impacted UNI students involvement and use of social media. Also, a larger sample size may have assisted in making these tests feasible.

Respondent bias from students answering questions based on what they expected be the appropriate answer is another limitation to my research. This is most evident in responses to questions relating to likes/dislikes and future behavior while questions that evaluated past or current behavior seemed to be answered with more honesty. The high percentage of students liking involvement in UNI and community activities when compared to actual involvement may have been a result of respondent bias. Also, the claims to be involved in the community and volunteer work were most likely exaggerated as well, considering 52% of students who do not like involvement in the community stated that they would be involved after graduation.

Conclusion

Through my research, it can be concluded that the hypothesis that social media can be used to market community related organizations, activities, and events in order to increase involvement and build connections with a university community is valid. There are stipulations and certain circumstances that affect the strength of this conclusion, but overall, it has been demonstrated that social media is an avenue community organizations should take to market their events, programs, and activities to local college students.

With the high and growing prominence of social media, it is important that organizations differentiate and structure their message in such a way that it does not get lost in the plethora of advertising already embedded in social networks. This means that Cedar Valley organizations, or any community organizations for that matter, cannot simply be content with having a presence on social media networks; they need to make that presence known and stay active in their virtual communities. It is rare that college students seek to interact with community organizations through social media, so it is the organizations' responsibility to reach out and get involved with social media.

While many students are interested in being involved in the community, they need to be prompted into action by others. Students also need to be informed about how community involvement and volunteering can assist in the development of leadership skills and awareness of cultures, community issues, and standards since these abilities will prove to be valuable when students graduate college and become members of their local communities. Community organizations should provide this information and encouragement through social media in conjunction with promoting their events and activities.

The more interaction community organizations can make with college students, the more involved students will be. Organizations can build communication by increasing the amount of community related news they share on social media networks. It is evident that students pay attention to news about the university via social media, and if community organizations send news directly to students, it does not have to be any different for them. However, while simple news updates may create awareness about community happenings and events, without a direct call to action, students may forego participation. Community organizations needs to very straight-forward with students, provide them with all the details for participating, and possibly even ask for commitment by signing up online or making direct contact with the organization.

Aiming social media promotions at freshmen and sophomore college students is the most efficient, effective, and beneficial use of an organization's time and resources. These students have higher levels of social media use, and studies indicated that younger students are also more likely to become involved in the community because of social media. Additionally, by attracting younger students, community organizations can strive to maintain their involvement throughout their years in college, even as they progressively become busier upperclassmen.

Community organizations should also take a variety of other factors into consideration when building their social media marketing plans. In the past, students became involved in community recreational and entertainment events because of social media. Organizations should continue to highly promote these events and also tie them into other activities in which they are intending to increase involvement. Since many students who like involvement in the community are also involved in collegiate organizations, it may be beneficial for the community to build partnerships with university activities. This would allow students to remain involved with collegiate organizations while also increasing their community participation. However,

community organizations must keep in mind that some of their most dedicated students will come from the segment that does not like participating in collegiate activities. Thus, they will also need to keep promoting events and activities that are not associated with the university. Another successful way to draw students to community activities is to do so during the summer months. Students who reside in the local community through the summer are more likely to get involved since they do not have as many other responsibilities or collegiate events.

The best social media network for spreading information about community organizations and involvement to college students has proven to be Facebook. This communication channel should be used by community organizations when they desire to reach a wide variety of college students. They can also use the Facebook Group feature to attract a specific target market. When sending messages or engaging in communication via Facebook, it is best to do so between the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. when the majority of college students are logged on.

YouTube can also be a beneficial social media network for community organizations. This tool is best used when targeting the male population, but will reach female users as well. Since users do not engage in YouTube as often as Facebook, it is not recommended for quick updates or promoting events with a short notice. Instead, YouTube should be used to advertise larger scale events weeks or even months in advance.

As Twitter continues to grow and if it increases in popularity among college students, it could be used in the future as a promotional tool for community organizations. Students who currently engage in Twitter tend to do so on a fairly frequent basis, and thus, have a higher probability of noticing a community organization's tweets. However, with the current low usage of Twitter by college students, it would not be recommended to invest in this network at this time.

Studies have shown that social media helps community projects evolve while building a greater sense of belonging for college students within the local community. The Corporation for National and Community Service (2006) has praised those dedicated to “building strong community connections in new and creative ways,” such as utilizing social media networks, and “the Corporation [also] believes that colleges and universities and the students that attend them are critical to building a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America” (Dote et al., 2006). It is important that college students take advantage of their local communities by increasing involvement off-campus, and social media provides the perfect channel for community organizations to reach out and connect with college students in a familiar environment they engage in each and every day.

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Appendix

Social Media Survey

Please circle your answers unless otherwise indicated.

--- Section 1: Social Media ---

1. Check how often you use each of the following social media tools.

Facebook

- Hourly
- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

LinkedIn

- Hourly
- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

YouTube

- Hourly
- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

MySpace

- Hourly
- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

Twitter

- Hourly
- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

Other (please specify)___

- Hourly
- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

2. Are you a Facebook friend, group member, or fan of a Cedar Valley community organization on Facebook? Yes No

***If yes, check how often you visit their page.

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

4. Are you following a Cedar Valley community organization on Twitter? Yes No

***If yes, check how often you pay attention to their tweets.

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

5. Have you ever gone to an event or participated in a Cedar Valley community activity as a result of social media advertising? Yes No

***If so, please name event/activity: _____

6. Have you ever gone to an event or participated in a UNI activity as a result of social media advertising? Yes No

***If so, please name event/activity: _____

7. Check how often you get your news about upcoming Cedar Valley community events via social media.

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

8. Check how often you get your news about upcoming UNI events via social media.

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

--- Section 2: Involvement and Community ---

9. Do you like to be involved on campus? Yes No

10. Do you like to be involved in your community? Yes No

11. How involved are you with UNI affiliated organizations/activities such as Northern Iowa Student Government, UNI athletics, Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center, clubs within your major, campus ministries, etc.?

Not involved at all High Involvement
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. How involved are you with non-UNI affiliated organizations/activities such as Cedar Falls Junior Chamber, Big Brothers Big Sisters, YMCA, Waterloo athletics, local parishes, etc.?

Not involved at all High Involvement
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. Check how often you volunteer.

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once every 2-3 weeks
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- Never

14. How strong of connection is there between UNI and the Cedar Valley community?

Not strong at all Extremely strong
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

--- Section 3: Use of Technology ---

15. How comfortable are you with using the most current technologies?

Not comfortable at all Extremely comfortable
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. Do you have internet access from your cell phone? Yes No
 ***If yes, check how often you engage in social media via phone.
 Hour to hour
 More than once a day
 Daily
 Weekly
 Monthly
 Less than once a month
 Never

17. Do you own a laptop? Yes No

18. Do you have easy access to the internet? Yes No

--- Section 4: Future Orientation ---

19. Are you planning to continue your education beyond your Bachelor of Arts degree? Yes No

20. Do you plan to be involved in community organizations after graduation? Yes No

21. Do you plan to volunteer after graduation? Yes No

22. Check how much you expect to make after graduation.

- <\$30,000
- \$30,000-40,000
- \$40,000-50,000
- \$50,000-60,000
- >\$60,000

23. How much do you expect your life to improve over the next 3-5 years?
No improvement at all Extreme improvement

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

--- Section 5: Demographics ---

24. Age: _____

25. Gender: Male Female

26. Marital status: Married Single

27. Major: _____

28. Classification: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

29. Location grew up in: Urban Rural

30. How many years have you resided in the Cedar Valley? _____

31. During your time at UNI, how many years have you spent living on-campus? _____

32. During your time at UNI, how many years have you spent living off-campus? _____

33. Where do you most often spend your summers as a student? Cedar Valley Other (please specify) _____

34. Are you helping to pay for your college education? Yes No

***If yes, please indicate the approximate amount of your student loan debt, if any: _____

35. Do you own a credit card? Yes No

***If yes, please indicate the approximate amount of your total credit card debt, if any: _____