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**THESIS**

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FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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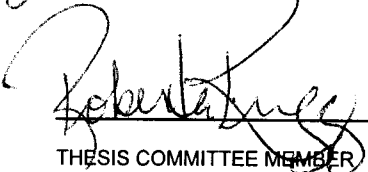
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**A Study of Student Leaders' Facebook Use**

**Valerie Penn**

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## ABSTRACT

Facebook and other social media have changed the way that our society communicates. As student affairs professionals, it is important to understand how this shift in communication affects our students and their development. This study aimed to learn more about how student leaders use Facebook, how they perceive Facebook, and how their leadership position has impacted their use and perception. The researcher used an electronic questionnaire, a Facebook tracking log, and a personal interview to examine the Facebook use and perceptions of eight participants. These participants represented the following groups: Greek leadership councils, orientation leaders, resident assistants, and student government. Results showed that participants used Facebook as a tool to enhance their leadership position. The eight participants' interviews showed that their leadership positions did affect their use and perception of Facebook. Each group tended to use Facebook differently to fit their specific needs.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother. Since I was a small child, I can always remember my mom telling me that I had the world by the tail and could do anything I put my mind to. She was right. She has read countless papers, wiped away many tears, and kicked me into gear more times that I can count. It has been her constant encouragement that has created in me a spirit of passion and determination, a spirit that will continue to grow stronger.

Though my mom has faced her own challenges in life, she has always come out on top. She embodies class, integrity, and dignity. People often tell me that I look just like my mother. I hope that they think I act like her too because that would be true success.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a master's thesis is a challenging but accomplishable task. However, it just seems frightening in the beginning. With the constant support and encouragement of a few key people, I have been able to create a product of which I am extremely proud.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Dianne Timm. I want to thank her for reading and editing my thesis more times than she or I would like to know. Throughout the writing and research processes, Dr. Timm was patient with me and helped guide me to a successful completion. Not only did Dr. Timm chair my thesis committee, she served as a counselor and mentor for me over the past year. This institution and program are lucky to have such a strong woman that is committed to the advancement of the profession and the success of each individual student. I would not be where I am academically, professionally, or personally without Dr. Timm.

I would also like to thank the rest of my committee: Dr. Jenny Sipes, Rachel Fisher, and Bobbi Kingery. My thesis committee was an amazing group of inspirational women. Both my proposal and defense left me in awe of the talent and passion possessed by these women. I am thankful for the time and energy that they put into me over the past year and into countless other students both past and future.

Finally, I would like to thank a man that has always made me feel right at home, Mr. Lou Hencken. He has been a constant source of encouragement and empowerment. His chocolate bunny metaphor made me hungry every time, but it also served as an inspiration to me and my peers. Mr. Hencken cares about this institution and its students, and it is evident every day. I could not imagine my time here without Lou.



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## CHAPTER I

### **Introduction**

The current college population is part of the Net Generation (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). With the most ethnically and racially diverse population to date (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007), the Net Generation is changing the makeup of higher education. Having grown up in a world of constant forward technological movement, this generation communicates and responds to their environment differently than previous generations. The Pew Research Center (2010) characterized this generation as confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat, and open to change.

Howe and Strauss (2000) recognized the following core characteristics for the Net Generation: special, sheltered, confident, conventional, team-oriented, achieving, and pressured. With the parents of the Net Generation being heavily involved in their children's lives, this generation has been encouraged to follow rules and expects to be punished if they break those rules (Howe & Strauss). Their values align closely with those of their parents and others in positions of authority. This generation prefers to comply with social norms and rules. The Internet, cell phones, academic group work, team sports, and other structured group activities have contributed to this generation's team-orientation. Grades and SAT scores are at an all-time high while students carefully prepare for their futures. The Net Generation is pressured to live up to their high expectations.

Communication between people dates back to the beginning of the human population. Social media has been present, but for the Net Generation and other present generations in today's society, social media and communication have a revolutionized definition (Brazelton, Magolda, & Renn, 2012). The Net Generation has grown up in a digital age with constant technological advances that have changed the way this generation interacts with the world (Levin

& Dean, 2012). In a 2009 study of undergraduate students, one student commented after being asked how he adapted to the major technological advancements of his lifetime, "It's only technology if it happened after you were born," (Levin & Dean, p. 20). Think about asking members of the Baby Boomer generation how they adapted to the radio or automobile. They did not adapt; those technological advances were simply a part of life and the way it was, and that is how members of the Net Generation view items such as cell phones, the Internet, and more recently, social media (Levin & Dean).

The Internet, and more specifically Facebook and other social media sites, have transformed the way the people, college students in particular, communicate (Levin & Dean, 2012; Kruger, 2013). Facebook separates itself from other sites claiming that it is specifically designed for people to communicate with one another, get information, and share information (Locke, 2007). Technology such as Facebook "is merely a tool for concepts that have been around for decades-communication and connections" (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013, p. 27). Andrews (2011) reported that 96% of college students have a Facebook account. Other reports claim that 80% to 90% of students have a Facebook account (Facebook; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2011). With this many college students using Facebook as a tool for communication, this online world is an atmosphere in which new social norms are being created. The challenge for student affairs professionals is to understand Facebook, how students use it, and how to teach social media responsibility.

Students within the Net Generation have grown up in a very connected world (Levin & Dean, 2012). Student leaders are highly engaged and are socially connected at high levels. At some point in their development, certain students become leaders among their peers (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Facebook plays a large role in social

connectedness for these student leaders of the Net Generation (Nahorniak, 2012). These students are at the forefront of Facebook use and social connection.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine and further understand how college student leaders use Facebook and how leadership positions impact student's use and perception of Facebook. The findings from this research provide relevant and informative data as well as helpful instruction to student affairs practitioners as they are interacting with students of the Net Generation. It is also the hope that this research will increase practitioners' awareness of students' Facebook use in an effort to better guide them toward responsible use. This research seeks to highlight students' Facebook use so practitioners will be able to understand how Facebook ties into student development and the roles these professionals play in the development of the students.

### **Research Questions**

This proposed study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do student leaders use Facebook?
2. In what way do Facebook habits change after gaining a leadership position?
3. What caused these changes in how student leaders use Facebook?

### **Significance of Study**

Heiberger and Harper (2008) urged college administrators: "Learn to use the variety of electronic media available in positive ways; to stay connected to college social networks, promote relevant events, and help students feel safe and at home on campus" (p. 19).

Technology and more specifically, Facebook and other social media sites, have created a gap between the Net Generation and their predecessors. As student affairs professionals, it is

important to understand how these technologies impact students and how Facebook interaction ties into the development of our student leaders in terms of responsibility and perception. One study stated, “Psychological development during the transition from childhood to adulthood happens within the context of an expanding network of social relations” (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012, p. 369). Therefore it is important to understand how Facebook and other social media have made that expansion more easily attainable.

Social media has changed the way that students experience college, providing unedited access to a “vastly expanded world of social contacts, activities, interactive communication, and self-expression” (Dalton & Crosby, 2013, p. 2). As the former gatekeepers of this experience, it is important that student affairs practitioners understand how this ties into the lives of students and what that means for the roles of practitioners. Through social media such as Facebook, students are often exposed to the institution and campus culture before even coming to campus. It means that institutions must carefully monitor how their institution is portrayed via social media. It is also a challenge for student affairs professionals to listen to their students on social media and adjust to address their needs. Since student leaders are often the face of the university in person, it makes sense that we understand how they portray the institution online.

### **Limitations of Study**

As the researcher and a member of the Net Generation, how I viewed participants and related research was from a perspective different from those of the millennial and even baby boomer generations. This qualitative study that used personal interviews to collect data posing possible limitations due to researcher bias and variability. However, examining how that bias and variability plays into the research allowed me to better understand it and use it to my advantage (Maxwell, 1998).

## **Definitions**

**Net Generation.** The Net Generation includes students that entered institutions of higher education after 2000. This generation is highly characterized by its use of technology (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). There is a slight gap in years between Generation X and the millennials based on various sources. That variation in information is not a limitation to this study as it will focus primarily on the millennial generation.

**Generation X.** Consisting of approximately 51 million people, this generation includes people born between 1965 and 1976 (Scheef & Thielfold, 2008). These people are typically comfortable using technology.

**Baby Boomers.** This generation includes approximately 71 million people born in the U.S. between 1946 and 1964 (Scheef & Thielfold, 2008).

**Social Networking Sites.** Dictionary.com (2013, retrieved from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social+network>) defined social network as “a network of friends, colleagues, and other personal contacts.” For the purpose of this research, Social Networking Sites will refer primarily to Facebook and Twitter with Facebook being the principal focus of the research. These sites allow users to expand their social network via online interaction.

**Facebook.** Facebook is a social networking site whose self-proclaimed mission is to “make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.facebook.com/facebook>). Originally designed for college students, the site is now available to anyone over the age of 13. The site is designed so that each user has a personal profile. Users can also join user created groups.

**Summary**

The Net Generation is more connected via technology than previous generations. Because this affects the way that this generation interacts with the world, it is important for student affairs practitioners to understand Facebook and how students use Facebook to enhance their daily lives. Through examining related literature and research and personal interviews with current student leaders, the study sought to further understand how student leaders of the Net Generation use Facebook, if their use changes after gaining a leadership position, and what influences these potential changes.



## CHAPTER II

### **Review of Literature**

Chapter two reviews literature related to Facebook and student leadership positions of undergraduate college students as well as theory that relates to social development and leadership. Facebook is a tool that has revolutionized communication and therefore affects students in a way that must be explored to understand how that plays into their development and their relationships with others. The generational gap is also interesting in terms of social media and technology. Finally, this section will review what it means to be a student leader and what that process looks like.

#### **Facebook**

Facebook was created in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg as a social network site completely committed to the networking of college students (Facebook, 2012). As of 2011, there were more than 800 million members of the online networking community according to the official Facebook statistics page with more than half of those members logging onto the site daily. According to Facebook, an estimated 85% of college students use its social networking site. Other research reports Facebook as the most popular social networking site with 90-94% of students having an account and 97% of that group logging in on a daily basis (Junco, 2011; Kruger, 2013). It was also reported that students check Facebook a mean of 5.75 times a day and spend about 100 minutes on Facebook daily (Junco).

The first step in using Facebook is to create a user profile. Through this profile, information is provided via text and through a profile and cover photo. Information pertaining to romantic relationships, hometown, religious and political beliefs, and a variety of other topics of interest can be made available to the public or just to Facebook friends. This user profile

provides an opportunity for users to create the identity they want to convey to their friends (Birnbaum, 2013). Research suggests that students believe their Facebook profile is an honest representation of who they are (Lampe et al., 2006). Through Facebook, users can become friends with other Facebook users and then have access to any information posted and made public by the other user. A study in 2011 estimated that most users have an average of 300 friends with some users' friend count reaching into the thousands (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2011). Users can also join groups and like fan pages that connect them with other users with similar interests. In a study by Thompson and Loughheed (2012), researchers concluded that Facebook was "a significant element of the undergraduate social culture," (p. 95) reporting that over 80% of their study's participants ( $N=268$ ), log onto Facebook daily. With a new venue for culture and communication comes new and varying rules and expectations of socially acceptable behavior and responsibility. Users have to consider how their content will be interpreted with the possibility of receiving delayed feedback or potentially none at all (Birnbaum). Students have to consider what impression they want to make on those around them using both their physical and digital environments.

In their 2013-14 Almanac, The Chronicle of Higher Education published a variety of statistics surrounding social media and technology. The following paragraph highlights some of the information pertinent to this study. The Higher Education Research Institute conducted a study in 2012 of nearly 200,000 college students from 283 institutions. 51% of respondents claimed they spend between one and five hours per week utilizing social media with 21% claimed between six and 20 weekly hours, and 4.4% claimed an average weekly use of over 20 hours. When asking first year students to report their reasons for using Facebook, the 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement reported that students selected the following items:

connect to friends not at the college, connect to family, connect to friends at the college, meet new people at college, and learn about campus activities. In a fall 2012 survey of over 540 institutions, 94% reported having a campus or institutional presence on Facebook with 85% having a presence on Twitter, and 83% having a presence on YouTube .

Although there has been debate over whether Facebook helps or hinders the intimacy obtained through face-to-face interaction (Kujath, 2011; Twenge, 2013), research supports the conclusion that Facebook, as well as other social networking sites, helps strengthen existing relationships as people use Facebook primarily for that reason in addition to the formation of new relationships (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). In one study, results showed higher perceptions of social support in relation to Facebook (Ellison et al., 2007). Facebook supports the maintenance of existing social relationships as well as the opportunity to develop new connections (Ellison et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that faculty and staff use Facebook and Twitter to better connect with students (Dalton & Crosby, 2013; Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). What this connection looks like differs, however, based on the personal preference of that faculty or staff member.

Researchers have used Astin's Construct of Engagement to analyze student use of Facebook (Mastrodicasa & Matellus, 2013; Junco, 2011). Astin's theory consisted of five tenants:

- 1) Engagement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy; 2) engagement occurs along a continuum (some students are more engaged than others and individual students are engaged in different activities at differing levels); 3) engagement has both quantitative and qualitative features; 4) the amount of student learning and development associated with an education program is directly related to the equality and quantity of student engagement in that program; and 5) the effectiveness of any

educational practice is directly related to the ability of that practice to increase student engagement (as cited in Junco, 2011, p. 163).

Junco's results pointed to both positive and negative relations between Facebook and "engagement, study habits, and on-campus involvement" (as cited in Mastrodicasa & Matellus, 2013, p. 26). Other studies lead to a positive relation between Facebook and engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2011).

Along with all the positive things Facebook does for students, it also creates a new arena for bullying and harassment (Kruger, 2013; Mastrodicasa & Matellus, 2013). Cyber bullying allows the individual to hide behind their internet persona. This has caused college administrators to address this issue and apply appropriate student codes for this behavior. Internet addiction is also a concern for campus educators (Kruger). One study by the Chicago Booth School of Business reported that Facebook and Twitter were "more addictive than alcohol and cigarettes" (Kruger, pp. 32-33). It is also important that students understand the implications of their postings. There are numerous stories in which students have lost scholarships and people have lost jobs based on Facebook or Twitter postings (Rozny, 2011; Smith & Kanalley, 2010).

A recent study conducted, over the period of eight months, examined how undergraduates living in a residence hall used Facebook in hopes of further understanding the "impression management mechanisms" these students use to develop their Facebook profiles and intended impressions as well as how they respond to the content provided by others (Birnbaum, 2013, p. 156). The study found six different fronts that were perceivably intentionally portrayed: "the partier, the socialite, the risk-taker, the comic, the institutional citizen, and the eccentric" (Birnbaum, p.160). All of these fronts were based on the information put forth by the user and

were evaluated by other students, therefore enforcing the idea that perceptions of others are often created based on the choices they make in terms of what they post online.

A 2012 report from the National Task Force on Civil Learning and Democratic Engagement called for “higher education leaders to address the perceived gap between what our nation needs and the qualities of recent college graduates” (as cited in Kruger, 2013, p. 34). Facebook provides the opportunity for community building and the development of communication skills (Kruger). It also provides access to diverse populations providing intercultural interaction and civil learning. Facebook empowers students and other users providing a cyber-stage for civil discourse.

### **Generational Use**

“Contemporary collegians can’t survive without social media. Faculty and student affairs educators struggle to understand it” (Brazelton, Magolda, & Renn, 2012, p. 1). The Net Generation has grown up with a culture accustomed to technology (Smith & Caruso, 2010; Twenge, 2013). They were the first group to popularize social networking; they “built a culture around mobile phones” even before those phones were smart phones, and many began using the World Wide Web before middle school (Smith & Caruso, p. 5). These individuals are accustomed to free personal email and often have accounts on “YouTube, iTunes, Facebook, and countless other popular websites where they access and store gigabytes of data” (Smith & Caruso, p. 7). Technology has become very personalized. Users can choose personal applications, data, and content that can be obtained regardless of time and place. A digital identity consists of of image the individual portrays through social media interaction. The USB drive is quickly becoming a thing of the past with websites like Dropbox and Google Drive.

For members of the Net Generation, it is a normal expectancy for someone to have some type of digital identity on Facebook or some other social networking site (Dalton & Crosby, 2013). A 2012 study provided the following statistics for technology use of students: “86% of students own laptops, 62% own smartphones, 33% own desktop computers, and 15% own a tablet” (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). A study by Educause reported that from 2006 to 2010, a constant 98% of respondents owned a computer (Smith & Caruso, 2010). Numbers like this further illustrate the constant connection to social media available via these devices. Many Net Generation students feel that they need technology to succeed. In a 2013 study of over 110,000 students conducted by the Educause Center for Analysis and Research, 73% of respondents reported that they felt owning a laptop was extremely important to their academic success (as cited in *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 2013-14).

The gap between generational uses of social media is becoming smaller (Smith & Caruso, 2010). In 2007, there was almost an 80 percent difference in the percentage of students age eighteen to twenty-hour and students age fifty and older. In 2010, however, that number decreased to about 35 percent.

### **Student Leaders**

A 2005 study by Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen concluded that student leaders attain that leadership status at different points in their lives. The timing is based on developmental influences including “adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning” (p. 596) as well as five other stages of development: developing self, group influences, changing view of self with others, broadening view of leadership, and leadership identity.

Adult influences typically recognize the leadership potential within an individual first (Komives et al., 2005). These adults could be parents, group leaders, teachers, etc. and are viewed as role models, mentors, and eventually a possible friend. Peers, particularly older peers, influence interest and involvement in leadership positions. These peers offer confirmation and support as students become interested in leadership status and provide further meaning as the individual develops as a leader. Meaningful involvement creates the foundation for student leadership as it exposes students to diverse individuals, encourages further understanding of themselves and their values and interests, and develops skill sets (Komives et al.). Student leaders typically experience some type of training, retreat, or class to help prepare them for their specific position. These tie into the reflective learning. It is in these environments that students are challenged to reflect on their own thoughts, uncovering “their passions, integrity, and commitment to continual self-assessment and learning” (Komives et al., p. 598).

During students’ time at the institution, they experience psychological development. Chickering’s (1969) Theory of Identity Development includes seven vectors of development: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. The development of a college student is influenced by student leadership positions they seek out whether anticipated or not. Student leadership positions are an opportunity for students to further explore their identity, purpose, and integrity from a new perspective (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). Student leaders have more responsibility than the average student. In these leadership roles, they are often expected to work in groups and form mature personal relationships (Komives et al., 2005). They also get the chance to develop a

leadership style and an identity different from the identity they held previous to gaining a leadership position.

A 2009 study by Posner examined the changes in a group of students' leadership behavior from their freshman to senior year based on their involvement in a leadership development program and compared that group with a control group of students who did not participate in the leadership development program. The study examined the following behaviors: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. The study found that students involved in the leadership development program significantly increased their leadership behaviors as they progressed from year to year in comparison with the control group not enrolled in the program. The participants were also more likely to engage in leadership opportunities than the control group.

In terms of their use of social media, as students in leadership positions experience a new sense of responsibility and purpose, this translates to the way they conduct themselves in their physical and potentially in their digital environment. They are also more likely to engage in behaviors such as "modeling the way" (Posner, 2009, p. 554). When intentionally developed by advisors, peers, or other individuals, students' growth and development increases in comparison to students who may not be involved in leadership positions (Posner).

For student leaders in the Net Generation, social media is an important tool (Nahorniak, 2012). It can be used to advertise events, provide group conversation and online training, and serve as a source for feedback. Facebook and other social networking sites can also be used to lead conversations about current issues and campus engagement. Through this ownership of the online presence of a particular student leader's organization or campus as a whole, they have the opportunity to learn about online professionalism which will likely translate into their personal



lives and future employment opportunities. Facebook is part of an individual's personal and professional brand and can become important when that student leader begins looking for a professional position as many employers check Facebook and web presence before making a hiring decision.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the literature reviewed provides an overview of Facebook, the generational use of Facebook with emphasis on the Net Generation, and student leadership development. Research shows that the current college population, one that is largely made up of the Millennial or Net Generation, uses technology in different ways than previous generations due to the creation of social media such as Facebook. This communication change also affects the development of our students and particularly student leaders. As student affairs professionals, it is important to understand this part of students' lives. The information provided in this chapter guided the researcher in the completion of this study in terms of better understanding the current student body and their views and perceptions of Facebook as well as their developmental level as a student leader.

## CHAPTER III

### **Methodology**

#### **Design of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain understanding of how student leaders used and perceived Facebook before and after gaining leadership positions. Qualitative research relies on the philosophy that “the realities of the research setting and the people in it are mysterious and interpretive” (Holliday, 2007, p. 6) and has “an interest in meanings, perspectives and understandings” (Woods, 2006, para. 4). Through the use of a personal interview in the study, the researcher can ask follow-up questions to gain more specific information pertaining to the use of a change in attitude toward Facebook. Using a quantitative study limits the information attained by that study whereas qualitative studies leave a more open channel for exploration (Holliday). Qualitative research is also much more individualized in that the results will not necessarily be the same every time due to the variability in participants, researchers, location, and other variables within the research.

Advisors of targeted groups were contacted via email by the researcher (Appendix A). After advisors provided the researcher with potential participants, the researcher contacted four to five members of each group via email (Appendix B) and provided a link to a questionnaire (Appendix C) about their use of Facebook. If the participants noted that they were willing to participate in further research concerning their Facebook use, the researcher then contacted them via email. Within this email, the researcher asked the participant to track their Facebook use for one week prior to a face-to-face personal interview with the researcher. This variety of inquiry increased the strength and validity of the results of this study (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2002; Woods, 2006). Through the use of three different measures, the researcher was able to gain

insight into college students' use of Facebook how this may have changed with the attainment of a leadership position on campus.

The questionnaire prompted the participants to begin thinking about their Facebook use in general and allowed the researcher to gain some initial insight as to who the student is, what position they hold, and the way they use Facebook prior to the interview. Data, particularly demographic data, helped the researcher begin to understand the impact of the students' leadership position related to students' use of this social media. The questionnaire, followed by the use of the week-long Facebook tracking log and personal interview, helped the researcher get a more well-rounded understanding of the students and their use of Facebook.

The Facebook tracking log allowed the researcher and participant to view self-reported usage of Facebook including time and activity during each session over the course of one week. This was important as it prompted the participants to begin thinking about their Facebook use prior to the interview. The information provided in the Facebook tracking log was intended to help the researcher gain a better understanding of the participant's use of Facebook and provided an opportunity for further exploration of motives for engaging in certain ways online. However, it appeared that many of the participants were not committed to filling out the log for the entire week. Even by admission, many of the students only logged what they thought was significant rather than logging every time they viewed their Facebook.

The face-to-face interaction was vital because it allowed the researcher to observe the participant's non-verbal communication (Woods, 2006). This kind of information gathering is useful because it helped establish rapport with the participant, allowing for a more open line of communication and therefore providing more detailed and honest responses. It allowed for further exploration of responses, allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of that

participant's experiences. It was during this interview that the researcher explored the participants' perceptions of Facebook and their online activity. A researcher cannot observe thoughts, behaviors, or beliefs, but through an interview, a researcher can gain an understanding of another person's perspective (Patton, 2002). The purpose of the interview portion of this study was to gather information about how participants used Facebook before and after becoming a student leader through a guided conversation.

### **Participants**

The researcher contacted advisors or supervisors of the following groups: Resident Assistants (RAs), the Student Government executive board, the PanHellenic Council (PHC) and Interfraternity Council (IFC) executive boards, and orientation leaders. This study focused on students in their first year of the leadership positions within these targeted groups. The researcher asked advisors or supervisors for a list of at least five individuals in their first year of leadership within the specific organization. Some advisors or supervisors sent the entire roster of first year leaders. The researcher then emailed individuals requesting their voluntary participation in this study. The researcher sent out three emails to each identified potential participant. If there was no response, another member of that group received an email. This continued until two participants from each group agreed to complete the entire research process which included the online survey, Facebook Tracking Log, and the final face-to-face interview which led to a total of eight participants. The interviews lasted between five and ten minutes.

The specified groups are representative of student leaders on this particular campus. These specific groups have been chosen because they cover diverse areas of significance within campus life at the institution: student life, residence life, Greek life, and new student programs. These students are typically visible leaders among the student body. Many students that hold

one of these roles often hold multiple other leadership positions as well. Within the participant group, all eight participants held multiple previous leadership positions.

Participants included four males and four females. Seven of the eight participants identified as white/Caucasian with the eighth participant identifying as Latino/Hispanic. All of the participants were in at least their second year of higher education with one participant being in their fifth year. Four of the participants had declared education majors with three of those being specifically in special education.

Following the introduction of each participant, Table 3.1 provides information for easy reference.

***Participant #1.*** Participant #1 is a Caucasian male in his fourth year at the institution majoring in sports management with a business minor. He has previously held executive positions within his fraternity. He currently serves as the president of the Interfraternity Council, a non-paid position to which he was elected by a body of his peers.

***Participant #2.*** Participant #2 is a Latino/Hispanic male in his second year at the institution majoring in special education. He has previously served on the homecoming committee, the union and health service advisory board for student government, a member of the Student Standard Board, and a representative for his residence hall in the Residence Hall Association. He is currently a resident advisor, a paid position for which he was selected through an interview process.

***Participant #3.*** Participant #3 is a Caucasian female in her third year at the institution majoring in math education with a Spanish minor. She has previously served as the cheerleading captain and Mortar Board secretary. Participant #3 currently serves the student government as

the Vice President for Academic Affairs, a paid position for which she was elected by a body of her peers.

**Participant #4.** Participant #4 is a Caucasian male in his fifth year at the institution majoring in finance and accounting. He has previously served as the president of his business fraternity, president of College Republicans, State Chairman of the College Republican Federation, and Campaign Manager for a state representative candidate. Participant #4 currently serves as the Speaker of the Student Senate, a paid position for which he was elected by a body of his peers.

**Participant #5.** Participant #5 is a Caucasian female in her third year at the institution majoring in psychology with a sociology minor. She has previously served as co-captain for dance team and has held various positions within the orientation leader team. Participant #5 is currently serving in the upper levels of the orientation leader team, a paid position for which she was selected through an interview process.

**Participant #6.** Participant #6 is a Caucasian male in his third year at the institution majoring in elementary education. He has previously served as community service chairman, risk management officer, and philanthropy chairman through his fraternity. Participant #6 currently serves as an orientation leader, a paid position for which he was selected through an interview process.

**Participant #7.** Participant #7 is a Caucasian female in her third year at the institution majoring in special education. She has previously served as Parliamentarian for her sorority. Participant #7 currently serves as the Vice President of Membership Development within PanHellenic Council, a non-paid position to which she was elected by a body of her peers.

**Participant #8.** Participant #8 is a Caucasian female in her second year at the institution majoring in special education and elementary education. She has previously served as a representative for her residence hall in the Residence Hall Association and as a floor representative in her residence hall council. Participant #8 currently serves as a resident advisor, a paid position for which she was selected through an interview process.

Table 3.1

*Participant Data*

Participant number	Grade created Facebook Account	Current year at institution	Resident Assistant	New Student Programs	Interfraternity Council, PanHellenic Council	Student Government	Number of previous leadership positions
1	8 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>			x		2
2	9 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	x				4
3	9 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>		x			2
4	10 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>				x	5
5	8 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>				x	3
6	8 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>		x			3
7	8 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>			x		1
8	10 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	x				2

**Research Site**

This study looked at undergraduate students holding leadership positions at a public Midwestern university with an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students. Interviews were conducted in a meeting room in a residence hall. The room was private and often used by various student groups or individuals; therefore the participants were not subjected to negative

perceptions based on their entrance to and use of the room. The glass door was covered, and blinds were closed to increase confidentiality.

### **Instrument**

Students first provided information via an electronic questionnaire (Appendix C) emailed by the researcher. This short questionnaire asked basic demographic questions as well as questions pertaining to their Facebook use. Along with this questionnaire, willing participants received a Facebook tracking log (Appendix E) that allowed participants to record their Facebook use in terms of time spent and activity for one week. After that one week period of recordkeeping, participants met with the researcher for a personal interview. This interview followed a specific protocol (Appendix G) to gather data that helped further understand the potential answers to the research questions.

### **Data Collection**

Initial data was collected via electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent as a link in an email (Appendix B) to specific individuals recommended by their advisor or supervisor. A consent form (Appendix C) was attached to this document and students who clicked “agree” provided their consent to participate. The questionnaire was designed to collect demographic data including classification and other leadership positions. Other questions were designed to understand the amount of time each participant spends using Facebook, how that time is used, and how that activity has changed since gaining a leadership position. Participants were asked to complete a Facebook Tracking Log (Appendix E) for seven days prior to the interview. The purpose of the log was to prompt the participants to become aware of their Facebook use and to record their usage for further analysis with the questionnaire and the



interview. When students came in for the interview with the researcher they were asked complete the consent form (Appendix F), clearly stating their level of involvement in this study.

Participants were assigned numbers at the beginning of the study and asked to use those numbers when turning in the questionnaire and Facebook tracking log. The interviews were also labeled by the same number system. The correlation between names and numbers was kept on a Microsoft Word document on a password-protected drive belonging to the researcher. Any correspondence between participants and researcher via email was kept in a specific folder in a password protected email account. Participant numbers were adjusted from their original number to numbers one through eight.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher fully transcribed and coded all personal interviews. As a fellow member of the target group, net generation student leaders, the researcher viewed and interpreted the material through a specific coding filter. A coding filter is the perspective from which a researcher views material (Saldana, 2013). Therefore, interviews were reviewed and coded separately by the researcher's thesis chair and another researcher. The researcher used the coded transcriptions to find linked responses and themes to assist in the analysis and comprehension of the data as it related to the identified purpose and research questions for this study. The researcher used a spreadsheet to reorganize information based on research question and theme. Each research question was placed on a sheet by itself. In the first column of the sheet were the participant numbers. In the first row were the identified themes. The researcher inserted quotes from the transcriptions into the appropriate locations based on participant and theme. Through this reorganization of information, the researcher was able to identify subthemes.

After completing this part of the analysis, the researcher compared the results of the questionnaire and the coded face-to-face interview to further understand the student leader and their use of Facebook.

Throughout the research process, it became apparent that participants were not accurately recording their Facebook usage. The researcher observed this through comparing the log with their personal Facebook page and finding discrepancies and through participants willingly disclosing that they had done their best but did not fully complete the log. The log was helpful in that it prompted participants to begin thinking about their Facebook use prior to the interview, but was not useful as a data set.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study examined student leaders at a mid-sized public institution in the Midwestern United States using a questionnaire, Facebook tracking log, and face-to-face interview with the goal of better understanding how student leaders use and perceive Facebook.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

This chapter is a presentation of information gained from eight student leaders about their Facebook use as it correlated to their leadership position. This was accomplished through obtaining the following from each of the eight participants: online questionnaire, Facebook tracking log, face-to-face interview. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do student leaders use Facebook?
2. In what way do Facebook habits change after gaining a leadership position?
3. What caused these changes in how student leaders use Facebook?

In an effort to respect confidentiality, participants were identified by numbers one through eight. Through transcription, coding, and analysis of data, themes and subthemes were detected in the responses in the interview. Themes were also identified by responses in the questionnaire. This chapter will provide an overview of those themes and subthemes in an effort to answer the research questions.

#### **Student Leader's Use of Facebook**

All of the participants reported creating their account between eighth grade and their sophomore year in high school. Reasons for creating their accounts ranged from following the crowd or being encouraged by an older sibling to communication through the use of shared statuses and pictures. For example, Participant # 2 stated, "I came from a really small town...I got on Facebook so I could connect with everyone." Similarly, Participant # 4 commented, "I created the account because Facebook was the up and coming thing...I used it to keep in contact with friends." Participant # 1 said he used Facebook for "newsfeed checking," and "looking at

photos.” Participant #3 reported using Facebook to “share photos” before gaining leadership positions.

All of the participants reported owning a mobile phone with access to the internet, and seven of the participants reported using that device to access Facebook more than once per day. Participant #3, a member of student government, commented, “I only look for specific notifications that get sent to my phone.” Seven of the participants reported owning a laptop computer with four of those participants using their laptop to access Facebook more than once per day. Three of the participants reported owning an iPad or tablet device, but none reported using their tablet to check Facebook more than every couple of days.

Participants discussed using Facebook for a variety of reasons in relation to their leadership position. Group communication, publicity, information, and accountability emerged as themes throughout the interviews.

**Group Communication.** When asked why they created their Facebook account, all of the participants answered that they used it to communicate. They used it to talk with friends, to put up pictures for others to see, and to look at other users’ status updates. These are all forms of communication. Participating in a Facebook group allows users to stay in touch and communicate with members of the group on a regular basis. Participant #1 commented, “I think Facebook is the easiest way to get messages around.” Each participant discussed using Facebook as a means of staying in touch with groups or organizations they are involved in at the institution. This included using Facebook for mass communication allowing them to send a message out to an entire friend or follower list. Facebook has created formats that make it easy to communicate to a larger group. Participants reported using Facebook’s Group application to communicate with specific groups of Facebook friends. When asked how she uses Facebook now, Participant

#5, a member of the orientation staff answered, “usually checking groups that I’m in for different jobs or positions.”

**Mass Communication.** In reference to using Facebook to connect with large audiences, Participant #1 commented, “[My fraternity] joined the freshman page and posted a picture of [the fraternity] wall.” Facebook offers participants access to a much larger audience than most other channels of communication. Participants reported using their personal Facebook page and associated connections with friends or followers to help broadcast messages. For example, Participant #2, a Resident Assistant, mentioned using his residence hall’s Facebook page to send out a “Happy Labor Day” to all of the page’s followers. Participant #8, also a Resident Assistant, discussed that although she is not friends with her current residents, she is friends with other people at the institution and often uses Facebook to communicate messages with those people. All of the participants discussed using their personal Facebook page to communicate to their specific group about things related to their leadership position.

**Communication within Facebook Group.** With Facebook making it easier to communicate with a group at one time, several of the participants identified it as a way to share information with all members at one time. Five of the eight participants discussed using Facebook groups as a main form of communication with their groups. In this study, these groups included fraternity and sorority executive boards, Greek leadership councils, and orientation groups. Participant #1, President of the Interfraternity Council, made the following comment concerning using Facebook as a main form of communication, “...that’s the only way I’ll get in touch with them since no one really checks email anymore.” Also commenting on her communication with fellow Greek leaders, Participant #7, Parliamentarian for the PanHellenic

Council, said, “It’s the groups. I’m parliamentarian for [my sorority] so I oversee all of our cabinet positions, so they use messaging to get ahold of me because I can get it on my phone.”

It was worth noting that the two Resident Assistants, Participants #2 and #8, did not discuss using groups to communicate with those on their floor. These participants did not say anything about utilizing their personal Facebook account to communicate with members of the community on their floor or in their building.

**Publicity.** The students interviewed for this study are all involved in groups that plan events and seek to get information about their groups’ activities out to more people. When asked if they use their Facebook account for publicity related to their leadership position(s), seven of the eight participants reported yes. Participants reported using their Facebook account for publicizing events, promoting student engagement or organizational involvement, seeking applicants for open positions, sharing political information and opinions, and promoting activism. In discussing his frequent use of Facebook for publicity, Participant #4, the Senate Speaker for student government stated,

I use it to advertise for this student leadership position, the student leadership position in my fraternity, the student leadership position in college republicans, literally every group. It’s by far the best tool, because people always see it. You can get it out to them, it’s more appealing to them, and there is a higher likelihood of the message getting through as opposed to a flyer. So I definitely use it as a tool.

As a leader within New Student Programs, Participant #5 mentioned using Facebook to reach out and publicize events during the beginning of the fall semester: “When I was doing the events for the first week of school, I would post, ‘Here is this event at this time. Come out.’” Participant #1

also said his fraternity tried to reach the incoming students at the beginning of the semester: “We joined the freshman page and posted a picture of the [fraternity].”

**Information.** Just as participants reported using Facebook to send out information, participants stated that they use Facebook to obtain information as well. Participants reported using Facebook to get information about politics, sports, general news items, student organizations, campus events, and information about the local community. Participants #1, #6, and #7, all members of fraternities and sororities, talked about obtaining information about their organizations through Facebook. For example, Participant #6 who is involved in several organizations, stated, “I’ll just go through all my groups and make sure I’ve read through everything and not missed anything.”

Participants discussed a number of Facebook pages associated with the institution, academic programs, and registered student organizations that provide information to members. Participant #8, a Resident Assistant, commented, “I like EIU’s page, RHA, NRHH...” The Resident Hall Association (RHA) and National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH) are both organizations associated with housing and residence life. Participant #8 was a leader within residence life prior to gaining her position as an RA and utilized these pages to stay in the loop with the organizations for which she served. Participants also mentioned a variety of pages that are not officially related to the institution but were created for students. These pages offer topics such as confessions, secret admirer, and some parody.

**Accountability.** Because of the access to others’ information provided through Facebook, users have access to a large amount of information pertaining to individuals. This seemed to be especially true within the fraternity and sorority system as Participants #6 and #7 reported using Facebook to hold fellow members of their groups accountable. Participant #7

discussed her sorority's alternate Facebook account: "We have a fake Facebook so that we can go in and X pictures that are inappropriate and represent our sorority in the wrong way."

Participant #6 commented in reference to his fraternity brothers, "If I see something posted that shouldn't be said or seen online, then yeah, I keep people accountable." Only participants that were part of Greek organizations specifically discussed holding their fellow members accountable because their actions could be a reflection of the sorority or fraternity as a whole.

**Relationships.** Facebook was created with the intention of helping college students connect with one another. As Facebook has evolved to meet the needs of a much larger population rather than just college students, it has become a tool used by many to maintain and create relationships. The college student leaders in this study reported using Facebook to maintain relationships with friends and family and to make and develop new connections.

**Relationship maintenance.** College students maintain relationships with a variety of people including family, friends, and members of groups to which they belong. Participant #1, a member of the Interfraternity Council, and the Resident Assistants, Participants #2 and #8 shared that they use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family. Participant #1 talked about how Facebook allows him to keep in touch with friends both near and far, "...that's kind of the only way people communicate nowadays."

**New relationships.** Not only do students use Facebook to stay connected to people, they also use it to get to know people and develop relationships. Participant #4, a member of student government, and Participant #6, an orientation leader, reported that they use Facebook to build relationships. Participant #4 reported having over 1,000 Facebook friends. When asked if he knew all of those individuals or if he accepted all Facebook friend requests, Participant #4 commented that he would accept certain individuals he did not already know personally if the



individual was associated with the institution or if there was a potential for a beneficial relationship:

It really depends because if they're at school, then yeah, I would definitely want to know them. Otherwise, we would have to share something professionally in common. I've added some people that I have not met but that I eventually do meet. That's not uncommon. I probably have a few, maybe 50, friends that I've eventually met over the course of things...

Participant #6 who works with orientation said in reference to communicating with incoming students,

I've definitely used [Facebook] to get ahold of people...somebody I've met through New Student Programs. If I didn't get any of their contact information, it's easy to just search and message them because you don't have to be their friend to message them.

### **Changes in Facebook Habits after Gaining Leadership Positions**

Seven of the participants claimed that they did believe their Facebook use changed after gaining a leadership position in the original questionnaire. The personal interviews further proved the change in online usage. Through the interview participants were able to provide more specific information about when that change happened. All eight participants held leadership positions before the position for which they were chosen as a participant. Therefore, their Facebook use began changing before they obtained their current leadership position. Some of the changes that emerged as themes were that student leaders spent less time on Facebook after obtaining a leadership position, became more aware of what was appropriate and inappropriate, and became more aware of how their Facebook use affects how others perceive them.

**Less time spent on Facebook.** As active campus leaders the students' time is spent balancing many different responsibilities that may take them away from leisure activities such as perusing Facebook for fun. Five of the eight participants reported they believed they spend less time on Facebook now than before they gained a leadership position based on the surveys they completed prior to the interview. In the personal interviews, all eight participants reported spending less time on Facebook. Participant #5, a leader with orientation, shared that as she has become busier, her use of Facebook has changed, "...before I had leadership positions, I would get on Facebook as a social thing, but now that I have my leadership positions, I don't really have the time for those reasons, so it's usually just a few minutes to check things." Fellow orientation leader, Participant #6, also commented on how his use of Facebook shifted with increased involvement in his fraternity and orientation, "I basically just use it for groups now. But like, whenever I first started, it was to interact with people..." Participants #2 and #3 made similar statements claiming they spend less time on Facebook now compared to before they began their role as a student leader based due to time restrictions and busier schedules. Participant #8, an RA, commented concerning her Facebook use, "I'm not on it as much as I used to be. I have better ways to spend my time now."

**Awareness of good versus bad.** Participants were aware of what content was inappropriate for a student leader. Participants #1, Interfraternity Council President, #2, an RA, and #7, Parliamentarian for PanHellenic Council, specifically discussed their intentional effort to keep inappropriate comments, photos, and other comments away from their Facebook pages. Participant #7 stated,

"I'm underage, so if there is anything alcohol-related in a picture, I won't put it up.

Maybe like before my leadership position, that's not something I would have thought

about. Not even just alcohol related but if something is inappropriate even in the background wherever I was, I would post it anyways, but now I don't. I make sure pictures are appropriate before I post them.”

Participant #2 talked about how he wants to portray whom he is through Facebook, “I'm doing stuff that's positive. I'm not like, 'Oh, party, party...I'm using it for a positive message.”

**Awareness of perceptions.** Several of the participants expressed their awareness of how they are perceived via Facebook and that they are supposed to be role models and represent the institution positively and responsibly. Participant #2, an RA, commented, “You're in a fishbowl.” This awareness of how they are perceived online seemed to increase through their involvement in leadership positions. Participant #4, Senate Speaker for student government, talked about a growing awareness that information may be shared, “I've got to be very considerate of the audience...once it's out there, it's out there.” Participant #4 is a representative of the student body and of the institution and has over 1,000 friends. He is aware that a large number of people for which he is supposed to be a role model will see anything he posts on Facebook. Being concerned about how he may be perceived, Participant #6, an orientation leader, stated, “I have it set to where, just in case someone posts something inappropriate on my page, I have to approve it before it goes public.” Participant #6 discussed in his interview the importance of being a good role model for potential and incoming students and is aware of how his Facebook presence could impact this perception.

### **Causes of Changes in Facebook Habits after Gaining Leadership Positions**

After gaining a student leadership position, students are faced with a greater responsibility for themselves, their organizations, and their institution. This change in position and in responsibility can lead to a change in other parts of their lives as well. Participants in this

study cited a variety of reasons for changing their Facebook use after gaining a leadership position including concern about their future, awareness of perceptions based on Facebook use, the fear of getting in trouble, and expectations put forth by a supervisor or advisor.

**Future focus.** Half of participants claimed that their future and specifically, their future employment was a major cause for the change in their Facebook use. None of the participants are in their first year of higher education. The college culture and their peers caused participants to think more about how they are perceived online. Participant #4 said, “Professors in the School of Business say, ‘Well you better make sure you know what you’re doing. If your profile is public you want to make sure your projecting the right image.’” Participant #1, IFC President, made the following statement when asked why he is more aware of the things he posts on Facebook: “A lot of the guys that I’ve talked to that are older than me said they blocked their Facebook when they started job searching because...they didn’t want to get caught with anything they did in college.” Participants #3 and #6 both talked about their futures as teachers and difficulty of finding employment if their Facebook portrayed a negative image. Participant #2 said in reference to future employers: “If they saw anything that was completely inappropriate, it could jeopardize future jobs.” It was apparent in all eight interviews that the participants were aware that their online presence could affect their future careers.

**Training/guidance related to position.** Some student leaders are in positions through which they receive training. That training can sometimes include formal or informal information about social media. One of the participants, Participant #5, an orientation leader, claimed that appropriate social media usage was written into her work contract. Other student leaders in positions where they are not receiving pay may simply receive information to influence their online usage. Several of the participants claimed they received guidance or advice about what is

appropriate. Participant #2 shared that in his resident assistant training, “They said in training, ‘You’re in a fishbowl.’” As a member of the orientation staff, Participant #5 stated,

My bosses in New Student Programs, I have two major bosses, and I know that they’re on Facebook. Our contract kind of laid out our rules. It was said, “If we find out or if someone shows us something on a social network, it’s going to come back.” It was not really a training, more of a warning.

**Awareness of perceptions.** Awareness of perceptions was stated above as a change in the Facebook use of student leaders, but it was also claimed as a reason for change by some participants. Participants are aware that they represent the institution, their groups, and serve as role models for those around them. This responsibility leads them to want to portray a positive image of themselves. In working with orientation, Participant #6 said, “All the freshman see you; all incoming students see you. You don’t need them to see something that’s inappropriate.” Participant #7, Parliamentarian for PHC, in realizing that people can find her online because of her position stated, “I’m a role model. I know people look up to me. I’m getting to that position where people know me, and I don’t know them. I think twice about that.” Participant #8, an RA, made a similar statement in reference to when she became more aware of what she posted on Facebook and how that impacted her use: “When I got involved in RHA...They don’t know me. I don’t want them to get a perception from Facebook.”

**Fear of getting in trouble.** As students are taking leadership positions, they are learning to take on personal and institutional responsibility. Participants understood that inappropriate Facebook use could cost them their positions. The fear of getting in trouble was a reason that a few participants stated as a major reason for changing their Facebook use. Participant #2, an RA, commented, “If they saw something that was completely inappropriate...that can jeopardize

my job.” Participant #5, an orientation leader, stated, “I feel like I got the position for a reason, and I don’t want to lose it over social networks.” Not only can individuals get in trouble, but a single user’s post can affect entire groups of people. Participant #7, Parliamentarian for PHC, claimed, “If something isn’t appropriate, I could personally get in trouble for that or get my sorority in trouble...I wouldn’t want to lose out on a great opportunity for something as silly as posting something on Facebook.”

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the information learned in efforts to better understand how student leaders use Facebook and if their leadership position affected their use. Through a questionnaire, Facebook Tracking Log, and personal interview, the researcher was able to gain insight into how these eight participants use Facebook, if that use has changed since obtaining a leadership position, and the causes of that change.

## CHAPTER V

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to examine how student leaders use Facebook, how their Facebook use has changed, and what impacted change in use. This chapter will review the findings of this study, identify conclusions, and provide suggestions for future research. This chapter will also provide recommendations for university administration, student advisors and supervisors, and student leaders.

#### **Significance of Findings**

Facebook was created for college students to communicate with their peers (Facebook, 2012). This study provided further evidence that college students are using Facebook to communicate in a variety of ways such as posting statuses, sharing photos, joining groups, and publicizing information as identified in previous studies (Thompson & Lougheed 2012; Nahorniak, 2012).

This study showed that Facebook is utilized by student leaders to maintain existing relationships and for the formation and development of new relationships (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Participants reported using Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family and to form new relationships. Not only do users communicate with individuals, Facebook allows for mass communication as well, which 90% of the net generation claim to use (Junco, 2011; Kruger 2013). Based on their responses, these participants take advantage of using a free channel of communication provided through Facebook. Participants reported using Facebook to communicate with groups such as groups for fraternities or sororities, groups for executive boards, and even groups of friends. Participants also use Facebook to communicate with their entire friend list. Facebook allows users to create a thread of information about a certain topic

using posts and comments (Facebook, 2012) making group communication easier and more accessible than email or text messaging. Participants in this study use Facebook as a tool for group communication.

**Differences among participant groups' Facebook use.** Facebook's original purpose was to be a communication tool for college students (Facebook, 2012). All of the participants discussed using Facebook for communication in a variety of ways with their peers on and off campus. They reported using Facebook to connect with members, hold others accountable, and publicize information or events. Participants included representatives from student government, New Student Programs, Interfraternity Council, PanHellenic Council, and Resident Assistants. The two representatives from each of the four groups viewed Facebook similarly. This led the researcher to conclude that each group used Facebook slightly differently based on their specific positions and responsibilities.

**Resident Assistants.** Participants #2 and #8 were Resident Assistants. Participant #2 commented that he was friends with his residents while Participant #8 stated that she was not friends with residents. Although they made different choices, the Resident Assistants have to consider proximity to their residents. They live with the students with which they work and form relationships. Being friends with their residents could create a responsibility for the RA to act on any violations posted on Facebook. The Resident Assistants were the only participants that did not discuss using Facebook to communicate with others in their group, in this case students living on their floor. They reported using Facebook more personally rather than to benefit their position.

**InterFraternity Council and PanHellenic Council.** Participants #1 and #7 were representatives from Greek leadership organizations with Participant #1 serving an executive



board role within the Interfraternity Council and Participant #7 serving an executive board role within the PanHellenic Council. Although Participant #6 was selected based on his role as a leader within New Student Programs, he also identified as a member of a Greek organization for which he has served a variety of leadership roles. All three of these individuals discussed using Facebook to connect with their fraternity and sorority organization members. Participant #6 and #7 both claimed that they use Facebook to hold fellow members accountable as they see the actions of individuals as a reflection on the organization as a whole. Although other members identified strongly with their groups, the participants that identified as Greek seemed to have a stronger tie to their specific organization through Facebook. They expressed concern about the perceptions of their organization. This is interesting because they are the only group of participants that have to rely on themselves for the recruitment of future members and future success for their organizations. The other groups are led by staff members through selection or election processes.

***Student Government.*** Student government representatives, Participants #3 and #4, both reported having large numbers of friends. Participant #4 specifically reported having over 1,000 Facebook friends. This makes sense seeing that these are elected positions and are representative of the entire student population. Participants #3 and #4 utilized their Facebook to network and to communicate with the body of students they represent.

***Orientation.*** The representatives that served as leaders within orientation and New Student Programs discussed their awareness of how they are perceived based on their online presence. This was the only group that was provided with specific expectations concerning their online use. There is an institutional expectation that these individuals represent the institution responsibly. These participants expressed an understanding that they served as role models for

the institution and should present themselves both in person and online accordingly. Although these participants did not discuss using Facebook to communicate with their orientation group specifically, they did discuss using groups to communicate with members of the other groups with which they are involved.

**Change in student leaders' Facebook use.** College students experience development as they work their way through college (Chickering, 1969). Student leaders experience development as they take on responsibility. Each student that becomes a leader and then develops based on that status does so at different points in his or her life (Komives, 2005). In this study, many of the participants had been involved since their first or second year at the institution. Regardless of when they attained their leadership role(s), all of the participants claimed that their Facebook use had changed since becoming a student leader. All of the participants in this study were aware of the many consequences that could occur if they chose to post inappropriate content on their Facebook pages.

Participants in this study reported using Facebook as a social tool and a way to communicate with friends prior to becoming a student leader. Although many of the participants maintained this kind of Facebook use, they all reported that their use changed once they were in a leadership position. These student leaders began using it with more purpose as a way to communicate with their group in addition to maintaining communication with their friends and family. Facebook went from just a fun activity to a tool for their leadership platforms.

**Training, guidance, and privacy concerning Facebook use.** As a social media that emerged during the time these participants were in middle school or early high school (Facebook, 2012), these students have grown up using technology and social media but have had

to figure things out for themselves as the technology continued to progress (Levin & Dean, 2012). Participant #4, Senate Speaker for student government, made the following comment:

...coming up in the internet age, it was pretty much the Wild West. In the 1990s, I learned how to use the internet when I was seven or eight years old, 1997/1998. There was no such thing [as guidance or rules concerning internet usage] because they [parent, teacher, or mentor] didn't even know what it was. They learned as I learned, and as things came along, around junior high, teachers would start trying to stress that [responsible internet usage] a little bit. Then professors in the school of business would say, "You better make sure you know what you're doing." If your profile is public, you need to make sure you're projecting the right image, and if it's not, you definitely want to keep things on lockdown...

Facebook has become a highly used method of communication and image projection.

The issue of what content is private and what content can be monitored ethically has become an issue that supervisors and advisors must face (Timm & Duven, 2008). Individuals have the right to publish their personal information on Facebook and are protected under the First Amendment as long as that free speech is of a "peaceable" manner (U.S. Const. Amend I, retrieved from [http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first\\_amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment)). However, if a student chose to post threatening or violent information on Facebook, a public forum, that information is then available for use in disciplinary action by the institution or the government. Similarly, if students post photos of themselves breaking laws or policies within a residence hall, the information is then legally available as evidence in judicial hearings (Timm & Duven). Many of the participants reported receiving verbal warnings or guidance about how to properly utilize Facebook while only one reported having received specific expectations in a work agreement.

## Recommendations

**Institution/Administration.** As leaders in higher education, university administration often sets the tone and holds the key to the social media gate for the institution. Based on research and the results of this study, students are using Facebook as are many institutions. It is in the best interest of university administrators to maintain a personal and institutional presence on Facebook. First, it is important to maintain a personal presence in efforts to set an example for appropriate Facebook use for faculty, staff, and students. It is also important to stay in tune with the online culture of the institution, not to mention its students. Having a personal Facebook account will also help administration understand how students communicate and interact via social media. The institution should also have a strong presence on Facebook. Potential students can gain a glimpse into the campus culture through Facebook pages of students. The institution cannot control how the institution is portrayed through individual's pages (Timm & Duven, 2008). However, if the institution chooses to put forth an official Facebook page, it can control the information released and help control the online perceptions of the institution. Once an institution chooses to have officially affiliated Facebook pages, other issues can emerge. Does each department get a Facebook page of their own? Who manages and/or approves the information conveyed through these pages? Will employees be given expectations? All of these questions must be considered before jumping into the world of social media. However, failure to jump in could leave an institution in the dust since the majority of institutions already have a Facebook page at the very least with many also having a Twitter and YouTube account (Educause, 2013, as cited in The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2013-14).

It would also be very beneficial to students to receive information about responsible online usage and how their online presence could affect their current and future positions. Career services, residence life, and student life are all potential sources for this information.

### **University Security/Police Departments**

University security and police departments have an opportunity to connect with students via Facebook. Interactions with police officers are often negative because the student is getting in some kind of trouble (Closson, 2013). University security and police departments are in place to protect students and provide a safe environment for learning. To create more positive relationships with students, many officers walk around campus and engage with students, but this can often be difficult because students are busy or do not really want to talk with officers. Based on this study and a variety of others, students are using Facebook (Thompson & Loughheed 2012; Nahorniak, 2012). This presents the opportunity to communicate and interact with students at their convenience and allows for positive interactions.

**Student Advisors/Supervisors** Student leaders most often are under the guidance of an advisor or supervisor. These individuals could be faculty, staff, graduate students, or even administration. It is important that these advisors and supervisors are educated about social media and the privacy and ethical issues surrounding it. It is also important that supervisors and advisors have discussions with their students about Facebook and how their online presence affects their position as a role model for the institution but also how that presence can affect students' futures. Expectations for use should be in place and in writing. Although there is little that the institution can restrict based on the First Amendment (Timm & Duven, 2008), supervisors and advisors can put forth expectations that students abide by local law and institutional policy. It would be harder to act upon any violation that is less clear based on state

law and university policy, expectations should also be put forth concerning students' general behavior and presentation of themselves as a role model and positive representation of the institution.

**Student Leaders.** As mentioned in the results section, participants are aware of their role model status on campus. While it seemed these specific participants used Facebook appropriately and to their advantage, that may not always be the case. Student leaders and students in general should be very careful of how they choose to use their Facebook and other social media accounts. The way students present themselves online is often a first impression for people that may not know them personally. Their online presence could also alter an otherwise good impression if posts are inappropriate or negative in nature. Student leaders should also serve as examples and educators for their peers. They should set an example of responsible Facebook use and work to educate those around them about the importance of doing the same. These student leaders can also help create a respectful atmosphere in the Facebook community, a place where many users feel and behave more boldly because of the anonymous nature of social media.

**Students.** Employers often look at social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, just to name a few of the most popular social media. College students are going to have these accounts, it is their responsibility to make sure what they present is appropriate if peers, faculty, staff, and even potential future employers were to look at their page, that people would be impressed rather than disappointed by the content. Facebook presents an opportunity for networking and effective impression management if used responsibly.

## **Future Research**

This study focused on student leaders. However, there are endless opportunities for future research. One could examine the Facebook use of undergraduate students that have chosen not to take part in leadership roles. It would also be interesting to look at how athletes use Facebook and if that impacts their popularity among the student body. Comparing the Facebook use of freshman and senior students could also provide some interesting data about the development of their Facebook use as they experienced development in other areas. It might be of interest to examine the correlation between Facebook use and student standards issues. A final suggestion for future research is to look at how young professionals use Facebook and if their Facebook or other social media use played any role in attaining their first professional position.

## **Summary**

The participants in this study had a firm grasp on their goals and aspirations. This translated into responsible Facebook use. However, not all students have the mindset or influences as these participants. As a fellow member of the Net Generation and an avid Facebook user, this study caused me to become more aware of my own Facebook use. I found myself carefully considering each post before I clicked "Post." This study also helped me further understand the need for education and guidance concerning internet usage and more specifically Facebook usage. Because we grew up and developed in tandem with the internet and social media, the Net Generation learned along with their parents, teachers, and other mentors. Within higher education, it is our responsibility as practitioners to not only articulate but also model responsible use for those around us and for the many Facebook users to come. We can educate

these students, help them to avoid social media issues, and leave a positive footprint on their future.



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APPENDIX A

Email to Advisors of Target Groups

(Advisor),

My name is Valerie Penn. I am working on my thesis as part of an assignment for the course CSD 5950, Thesis and Research, as a requirement for the Master's of Science program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.

I need some assistance from you. My thesis is about how students perceive their Facebook use. I will ask students to do a survey and a one week Facebook log before the interview, and the interview will last approximately 15 minutes.

I need to interview two to three people from (group). Could you provide me with a list of five people that would be helpful in my thesis research? I would contact them via email to ask for their participation.

Their decision to participate is completely voluntary. They have the right to terminate their participation at any time without penalty.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with their participation in this study.

Information from this research project will be shared with student affairs practitioners on EIU's campus as well as other student affairs practitioners based on further presentation and publication of this study.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact the course instructor, Dr. Dianne Timm at (217) 581-5327 or at [dtimm@eiu.edu](mailto:dtimm@eiu.edu).

Thank you,

Valerie Penn

**APPENDIX B**

**Initial Email to Potential Participants**



Dear *(student name)*,

You have been recommended by *(supervisor/advisor name)* to participate in a study about student leaders and Facebook.

This survey is being conducted as part of an assignment for the course CSD 5950, Thesis and Research, as a requirement for the Master's of Science program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.

Dr. Dianne Timm serves as the course instructor with myself, Valerie Penn, as the Principle Investigator on the project.

This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Should you designate your willingness to continue participation in this study past the initial survey, you will be contacted by the Principle Investigator to complete a one week Facebook tracking log followed by a face-to-face interview.

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. You have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

Your participation in this research will be kept confidential. All documents will be identified through a participant number. Your participant number is: \_\_\_\_\_.

Information from this research project will be shared with student affairs practitioners on EIU's campus as well as other student affairs practioners based on further presentation and publication of this study.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact the course instructor, Dr. Dianne Timm at (217) 581-5327 or at dtimm@eiu.edu.

Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relations with Eastern Illinois University.

Here is the link to the survey:  
*(link)*

Thank you in advance,  
Valerie Penn

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent for Questionnaire

This survey is being conducted as part of an assignment for the course CSD 5950, Thesis and Research, as a requirement for the Master's of Science program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.

Course Instructor: Dr. Dianne Timm  
Principle Investigator: Valerie Penn

This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Should you designate your willingness to continue participation in this study past the initial survey, you will be contacted by the Principle Investigator to complete a one week Facebook tracking log followed by a face-to-face interview.

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. You have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this survey.

Information from this research project will be shared with student affairs practitioners on EIU's campus as well as other student affairs practitioners based on further presentation and publication of this study.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact the course instructor, Dr. Dianne Timm at (217) 581-5327 or at [dtimm@eiu.edu](mailto:dtimm@eiu.edu).

Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relations with Eastern Illinois University.

APPENDIX D

Facebook Questionnaire

## FACEBOOK QUESTIONNAIRE

**Please enter your participant number.**

It was listed in the email you received from the researcher.

**Please Identify Your Gender**

- Male
- Female
- I'd prefer not to provide this information

**Please select the race with which you most identify.**

- White/Caucasion
- Black/African American
- Latino/Hispanic
- Asian American
- Native American
- Other

**What is your student classification?**

Please include any years at community college or other institutions of higher education.

- 1st Year
- 2nd Year
- 3rd Year
- 4th Year
- 5th Year
- 6th Year

**What is your major?**

**If you have a minor, please list it here.**

└

**What other leadership positions have you held during your college career?**

└

**The following questions are directly in reference to the leadership position that was specifically discussed in the email you received from the researcher.**

How was your current leadership position obtained?

- Elected by a body of peers
- Appointed by faculty/staff
- Hired through interview process

**The following question is directly in reference to the leadership position that was specifically discussed in the email you received from the researcher.**

Is this a paid position?

- Yes
- No

**Which of the following do you own personally?**

- Mobile phone
- Mobile phone with access to internet
- iPad or other tablet device
- Laptop computer
- Desktop computer

**Do you have a Facebook Account?**

- Yes

No \*If "No," this is the end of the survey, and your participation in this study ends here. Thank you for your participation in this study.

**On average, how many times have you done the following?**

	More than once per day	Once per day	Every couple of days	Once per week	Less than once per week
Accessed your Facebook account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used your mobile phone to access your Facebook account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used your tablet to access your Facebook account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used your laptop computer to access your Facebook account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used your desktop computer to access your Facebook account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used a public computer (library, classroom, etc.) to access your Facebook account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**The following question is directly in reference to the leadership position that was specifically discussed in the email you received from the researcher.**

Do you spend more or less time on Facebook since you've attained your leadership position?

- More
- Less

**The following question is directly in reference to the leadership position that was specifically discussed in the email you received from the researcher.**

Do you feel that your Facebook usage has changed since gaining your leadership position?

- Yes
- No

**Would you be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview related to this questionnaire?**

If so, please respond include your name and email address below. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will require some personal tracking of Facebook use over a seven day period prior to the interview.

---



APPENDIX E

Facebook Tracking Log



APPENDIX F

Informed Consent for Personal Interview

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### *Student Leaders and Facebook*

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Valerie Penn, a master's student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. Valerie Penn is working under the supervision of Dr. Dianne Timm, a professor in the Counseling and Student Development Department at EIU. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you before deciding whether or not to participate. You will be one of eight to ten participants in the study.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine and further understand how college student leaders use Facebook and how leadership positions change students' use and perception of Facebook. With the findings from this research, I hope to provide relevant and informative data as well as helpful instruction to student affairs practitioners as they are interacting with students of the Net Generation. I hope to increase practitioners' awareness of students' Facebook use in hopes that we can better guide them toward responsible use. I also hope that through a better understanding of students' Facebook use, practitioners will be able to better understand how this ties into their development as students and as leaders.

#### **Procedures**

If you choose to continue volunteering in this study, the final method of research is a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher, Valerie Penn. In the interview, you will be asked about your Facebook habits, perceptions, and training. You will also be asked to log into your personal Facebook account to support your answers. The researcher will not ask for or record any of your log in information and will not view your Facebook page without your permission.

#### **Potential Risks**

The risks associated with this study are no greater than those associated with daily life.

#### **Confidentiality**

The questionnaire, Facebook log, and face-to-face interview are all linked to you through your participant number. The records that connect this number to your personal identity will be kept in a Microsoft Word document in a password protected drive. Any information obtained associated with this study that identifies you as a participant will remain confidential while being disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The Principal Investigator and Dr. Timm will have access to information that could be used to identify you.

#### **Participation and Withdrawal**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to provide any information that you do not wish to provide.

**Identification of Investigators**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact any of the following individuals:

Valerie Penn  
 (601) 917-5533 (Phone)  
 Vpenn@eiu.edu (Email)

Dr. Dianne Timm  
 217-581-5327 (Phone)  
 dtimm@eiu.edu (Email)

**Rights of Research Subjects**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
 Eastern Illinois University  
 600 Lincoln Ave.  
 Charleston, IL. 61920  
 Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
 E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

---

*I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 E-Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

APPENDIX G  
Interview Protocol

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did you create your Facebook account?
2. Why did you decide to create an account?
3. Before gaining your leadership position, how did you spend your time on Facebook?

*At this point, the interviewer will ask the participant to pull up their Facebook account. The interviewer will ask the participant about recent posts.*

4. How do you spend your time on Facebook since gaining your leadership position?
  - a. Do you use your Facebook account to advertise?
  - b. Do you use your Facebook account to check on members?
  - c. Do you use your Facebook account to stay in the loop with the campus community (Chuckvegas, EIU Confessions, etc.)?
5. How has your Facebook use changed?
  - a. Do you think more about items you post before posting them?
  - b. Do you consider who might see your posts and what that might mean for your position?
  - c. Do you use it to enhance your leadership (posting announcements, making connections, etc.)?
6. Did you receive any training or guidance about your online presence from your advisor or supervisor in your leadership position?
7. In what ways has your thinking changed about what you choose to post?
  - a. What is influencing this?
  - b. Are there specific individuals who influence what you have on Facebook?