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The Influence of Institutional Social Media and College Students' Choice

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Abstract

Social media has become a way of personal communication as well as a way for brands and businesses to connect with consumers. In the past twenty years, the expansion of technology into everyday life has impacted the way we interact and communication. There is a lack of information surrounding how social media is influencing prospective students' college choice. There are studies focused on student college choice, and studies focused on how social media impacts consumers, but there is limited research focused on bridging the two concepts. This quantitative study utilized a causal-comparative survey to explore the influence of institutional social media on prospective student college choice on admission to a rural, mid-sized university in the Midwest. The research showed that prospective students were influenced by social media when compared to other college choice factors, and that social media did influence Black student enrollment to the university.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my support system, for without them I don't know if I could have completed it. Thank you for the constant support and belief in me to go back and pursue my degree midst the COVID-19 pandemic. You supported me when I did not believe in myself, and I am truly grateful to all of you. Specifically, my mom, dad, sister, and Matt – I would not be here without your support.

To Gabby and Robyn, thank you for being there for me through all the ups and downs over the past two years. I am so proud of us, and will cherish our time spent together at EIU, and I know we are all going to do great things in our futures. Thank you for accepting me as I am and believing in me.

To Matt – all the time spent apart is over now. I am grateful you chose me to be your partner in this life, and I can't wait for our next adventure.

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Chapter I

Introduction

It is projected that by 2022 roughly half the world's population, or 3.29 billion people, will be social media users (Appel et al, 2020). In the United States, social media usage has grown in all age groups from 2015 to 2019, with the highest percentage of social media users being ages 18-29. In 2019, 90% of American 18–29-year-olds used at least one social media platform (Pew Research Center, 2019). Those in the 18–29-year-old age range are considered Millennials and Generation Z (Brannan, 2019). These generations grew up with modern computers, wireless internet, and other forms of digital technology and in 2019, 96% of them in the United States owned a smartphone (O'Dea, 2019). Generation Z is the traditional college aged student, with the oldest in this demographic graduating college in 2019, and with the youngest in this generation being 11 years old (Brannan, 2019). The options for continuing education are overwhelming, with 4,298 degree granting post-secondary universities in the United States in the 2017-2018 school year (Moody, 2019). To recruit these prospective students, universities can reach them through a strategic marketing plan that incorporates social media into recruitment practices, which will help them stand out among competitors. With 90% of traditional college age students using at least one major social media platform, and 96% of them owning a smartphone, social media marketing is crucial to engaging and recruiting prospective students (Green, 2015).

In addition to the prevalence of social media usage among traditional college aged students, social media is also influencing their decision-making process. In a report by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 215 students

ranked a list of various factors influencing their college decision (Clinedinst, 2019). The data was gathered through NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey and Admission Trends Survey. On a scale of *no importance (1)* to *considerable importance (4)*, social media was ranked of considerable importance as a recruitment strategy to 47% of participants. This is valuable information for institutions to take into consideration when creating social media content to recruit prospective students. The 2017 Social Admissions Report found that 63% of students use social media to research a college they are interested in and 60% have followed or liked a college they are considering (Turner, 2017).

Social media is an effective tool that prospective students are using to receive information on colleges they are interested in attending. Student affairs professionals should be aware of social media marketing practices to reach their targeted audiences. University admissions teams should survey prospective students regularly so that they know if their social media efforts are effective. Universities need to invest in personnel that is appropriately equipped to have successful social media accounts that will help carry them into the 21st century (Peruta & Helm, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this casual-comparative and correlational quantitative study is to investigate prospective students use of social media, and if institutional social media influences their enrollment to the university. This study examined what social media platforms prospective students use and if certain demographics use social media differently. This study was conducted at a rural, mid-sized, public 4-year institution in summer 2021. Understanding how prospective students use social media will help

universities assess their current strategies of social media marketing, and if that strategy aligns with prospective student social media habits.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research question: Is there a relationship between prospective student's social media engagement with institutional social media and enrollment at the institution? Three additional questions will also guide the study:

1. Is there a relationship between prospective students' enrollment decision and the influence of institutional social media?
2. Is there a relationship between time spent on social media and their decision to enroll at the university?
3. Is there a relationship between a prospective students' race/ethnicity and the influence of social media on enrollment decision?
4. Is there a relationship between a prospective students' gender and the influence of social media on enrollment decision?
5. What social media platforms do prospective students use during their college search?

Hypotheses

The following will be the researcher's hypothesis of the proposed research questions:

H_{a1}: The researcher hypothesized that the institutions Instagram account will be the most influential social media platform that prospective students are using to make their college choice.

H₀1: There is no relationship between social media platforms and the decision of prospective students' college choice

H_a2: Students who use social media at a higher rate, will be more influenced by social media in their decision to enroll.

H₀2: There is no relationship between students who use social media at a higher rate and the influence of social media in their decision to enroll.

H_a3: The researcher hypothesized that prospective students of color will use Twitter at a higher rate, and Instagram use will be similar across students.

H₀3: There is no relationship between the influence of social media on the decision of enrollment and race.

H_a4: The researcher hypothesized that women are more likely to be influenced by social media when making their enrollment decision.

H₀4: There is no relationship between the influence of social media on the decision of enrollment and gender.

H_a5: The researcher hypothesized that students are using Facebook at a higher rate than any other social media platform to find out about prospective colleges.

H₀5: There is no relationship between students using social media and their enrollment decision.

Significance of the Study

It is common for institutions to have social media accounts as a means of connecting with prospective students, current students, alumni, and the community they are in (Zachos et al, 2018). Universities use social media to share information while also and creating and maintaining relationships with their stakeholders. The current prospective college student is a part of Generation Z (Brannan, 2019). In 2019, 90% of U.S adults ages 18-29 used at least one social media platform (Pew Research Center, 2019). In addition to a large percentage of traditional college age students using social media, research also suggests that social media is an influential factor in a prospective student's college search (Turner, 2017).

The 2017 Social Admissions Report found that 63% of students use social media to research a college they are interested in and 60% have followed or liked a college they are considering. The breakdown by social media platform is 67% of these students used Instagram, 63% used Facebook, and 42% used Snapchat (Turner, 2017). For universities to effectively recruit students, they must understand where those students are spending their time on social media, as well as what interactions and information they are seeking from different platforms. While there is data provided about social media platform usage, and if students are using social media to research prospective colleges, the impact of prospective students selecting an institution they engage with on social media remains unknown.

Limitations of the Study

Social media is constantly evolving. The success of a platform is uncertain based on regulations, user interaction, updates and more. Data shows people are also spending more time on YouTube, with 81% of adults in the U.S reporting they use the platform (Pew Research Center, 2021). In addition to new platforms coming into the market, existing social media platforms are continuously adding new features to appease consumer needs. Since social media is a consumer driven platform that must constantly adapt, it makes social media platforms unpredictable. This is a limitation since the literature and best practices will become outdated in a few years following research.

The research questions for this study were incorporated into a university wide survey that was distributed through electronic survey that was sent via email to participants. A limitation with all survey instruments that was anticipated is the chance of participants either accidentally or purposefully submitting data twice or inaccurately representing themselves. Also, participants might not answer all questions to the best of their ability. Other challenges with survey creation resulted in questions not using the appropriate language that was originally planned for data analysis.

The population used for this study consisted only of one university's first year undergraduate student population which may limit applicability to other institutions. Based on trends from past first year's demographic profiles, this will be roughly 1,000 total first year students.

Definitions of Terms

Cost per thousand impression (CPM). The cost that measures how many advertising dollars must be spent to reach 1,000 people. (Anderson, 2018).

Departmental social media. Social media that is operated and/or funded by a specific department at a university, intended to represent a specific department.

Engage. When a social media user likes, comments, follows, direct messages, or reposts from an organization's page.

Feed. The page a user can scroll to see content from users they follow.

Institutional social media. Social media that is operated and/or funded by a university which intends to represent that university as a whole.

Organic social media content. “Any social media activity without a paid promotion. It uses free social media tools to build and engage with an online following.” (Tran, 2020).

Social media. “Web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated (e.g., personal photos, videos, writing) or existing (e.g., news, radio, television) content in digital environments through multiway communication.” (Davis et al, 2015, para. 3).

Social media influencer. An influencer is a content creator with a social media following. Social media influencers develop a following by sharing quality content that inspires, entertains, informs, and connects them with their followers. (MediaKix, 2020).

Targeted advertisements. Targeted advertising is a form of online advertising that focuses on the specific traits, interests, and preferences of a consumer. Advertisers discover this information by tracking your activity on the Internet. (GCFglobal, 2020).

Summary

Social media is a constantly evolving and growing part of society and has been a part of the social fabric of Generation Z their entire life (Kasasa, 2021). With this generation already enrolled and entering universities across the United States, higher education has the unique opportunity to reach their prospective students through social media. Nearly all higher education institutions have a social media account on a major platform to do just that. However, there is much more research that needs to be done on institutional social media effectiveness at influencing prospective student's college choice.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This chapter is a review of the literature that focuses on the history, demographics, business uses of social media, as well as how the decision-making process is influenced by it. Institutional social media success and usage among former, current, and prospective students has been primarily researched through quantitative analysis. This research helps to understand the effectiveness of institutional social media among its stakeholders. The demographics of national social media users, as well as institutional social media use and the decision-making process of prospective students will be reviewed in this section.

History of Social Media

The concept of social media began with the invention of the internet in 1969 (History.com, 2010) and gained popularity during the Cold War in the 1960s. The internet was initially used as a way for scientists to communicate. During the 1980s and 1990s, the accessibility of computers increased both in the workplace and in private life (Shah, 2016). The first social media platform was the Bulletin Board System (BBS) in 1990. These early networking systems allowed users to create profiles and invite friends to the platform using a specific code. Since 1990, social media platforms have come and gone, and few have risen to the top with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat as major competitors in the social media market today. These four social media platforms collectively host billions of users each month (Pew Research Center, 2021). Each platform has unique features that are constantly evolving to please their consumer base (Shah, 2016).

Not only were social media platforms designed to connect users in a digital space, they also have found ways to generate revenue through advertisements which businesses use to promote their product or service. Businesses pay the social media platform to create advertisements that are shared among their desired demographics. On Facebook this is known as Facebook Ads. On Twitter it is called Promoted Tweets; and finally, they are known as Instagram Ads and Snap Chat Ads on each respective platform. These ad revenue strategies began between 2007 and 2014 and have been a successful tool for the social media platforms with 41.86 billion dollars in ad revenue among Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat in 2019 (O’Dea, 2019).

Facebook

What started off as an experiment by a Harvard student has grown into what is currently the world’s largest social media platform (History.com, 2019). In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg started Facebook to connect exclusively with other Harvard students. Seeing its success at Harvard, Facebook expanded to include the Ivy League school system, just a year after it had started. When Zuckerberg had an investor approach him to grow Facebook worldwide, he dropped out of Harvard to build the brand into what it is today. While Facebook has faced setbacks and controversy over the years, it has had great success and has climbed to over 2 billion users by 2019. Facebook has grown into a popular site for not only users but for businesses as well (Mohsin, 2020b). By May 2020 Facebook had more than 80 million small businesses using its platform as well as \$17.44 billion dollars in revenue from Facebook Ads. Research shows that 78% of users discover a product or service through Facebook and spend almost one hour a day on the platform (Mohsin, 2020b). With more consumers turning to social media to find products and

services, businesses can take advantage of Facebook Ads to reach their desired consumer. Since its creation in 2004, Facebook features for users and businesses has evolved. In the beginning of Facebook, users liked, disliked, and commented on friends' posts (Awan, 2021). Now, Facebook features for users include taking a break, reactions, and Messenger. Facebook also has its own sub-platform for selling and purchasing items through Facebook Marketplace. The evolution of features is a reminder that the social media platforms are constantly reimaged to please its users (Helmond, et al., 2019).

Instagram

Instagram was created in 2010 and is designed to share photos as well as follow, like, comment and react to photos of the people you follow (Blystone, 2020). Combining the terms instant and telegram, Instagram quickly became popular with 25,000 downloads on the day the app was launched. Currently, Instagram has 1.074 billion active users worldwide with 71 percent of these users being under the age of 35 (Mohsin, 2021d). Since its creation in 2010, features have been added to the platform, including messages, being able to add multiple photos to one post, Instagram Stories and most recently, Reels. Instagram also generates revenue through Instagram Ads. This business tool enables companies and creators to have advertisements targeted to a demographic they want to reach. Current research shows that Instagram influences 80% of users in their decision to buy a product or service (Mohsin, 2021d). Utilizing Instagram Ads can be beneficial for a business to reach their desired consumer. Instagram users also report using the platform for 53 minutes a day, which makes Instagram a popular social and business tool that can influence consumers' decisions and purchasing habits.

Twitter

Twitter was created in 2006 and has developed immensely since its conception (MacArthur, 2020). Initially, Twitter was designed to be a short message service (SMS)-style platform where individuals could follow friends and share status updates of 140 characters, which was later upgraded to allow up to 280 characters in 2017. Twitter gained popularity at the South by Southwest conference in March 2007 when more than 60,000 tweets were sent during the event (Britannica, 2020). Currently, Twitter has 192 million daily active users, with 63 percent of users being ages 35-65 (Lin, 2021). Twitter has evolved since its creation and is now popular for sharing and following breaking news, celebrities, sports, and other pop culture events.

Twitter also generates revenue through ads, which Twitter calls Promoted Tweets (Twitter, 2021). Businesses can use Promoted Tweets to appear on a user's timeline if the user fits within their desired demographic. Twitter has also become a popular site for users to make comments on different businesses or brand accounts. For example, if a consumer had a wonderful experience flying on American Airlines, they can tweet about it to let them know about the experience. This type of interaction can be favorable for brands, since 77 percent of Twitter users have a better impression of a brand when they reply to an individual's Tweet (Lin, 2021).

Institutions use Twitter as a recruitment tool for prospective students (Kimmons et al., 2017). In a sample of schools from all 50 U.S states, it was found that colleges are using social media to both recruit and research prospective students. Research found that 71% of the institutions sampled said they believed Twitter was an effective tool in

recruiting prospective students, while 13% reported actively researching prospective students via social media as part of their admissions process.

Snapchat

Snapchat was originally called “Picaboo” and was created in 2010. The platform has been growing ever since its conception with 229 million daily users worldwide in 2019 (O’Connell, 2020). Snapchat is unique in that it allows users to share pictures that disappear in 1 to 10 seconds. Snapchat is popular among teens and young adults with 53% of all 15–25-year-olds in the United States using the platform (Mohsin, 2020a). Since Snapchat’s creation, comedy and honesty were the basis of the platform. On one of the very first blog posts by the company, the founder, Evan Spiegel said, “We’re building a photo app that doesn’t conform to unrealistic notions of beauty or perfection but rather creates a space to be funny, honest or whatever else you might feel like at the moment you take and share a Snap” (O’Connell, 2020, Making the Case section, para. 4). A current feature of the platform is Discover (Snapchat, 2021). This portion of the app allows viewers to see various pop culture and news outlets. The platform has evolved since its creation with the introduction of stories, chat, geofilters and Snapcash. Like its competitors, Snapchat generates revenue through Snapchat Ads. Businesses use these ads to reach their desired consumer. Snapchat Ads are successful with 4 in 10 Snapchat users saying they have discovered a brand or service through Snapchat (Mohsin, 2020a).

Snapchat is an effective business tool that can be used in higher education to recruit prospective students (College Marketing Group, 2020). A popular strategy among universities that use social media is shining a spotlight on student life. A current student

will “takeover” the Snapchat account for the day and share what a day in their life is like as a college student. This type of virtual tour can serve as an in-person alternative or encourage a prospective student to come to campus for a visit.

TikTok

TikTok is a short-form, video-sharing app that allows users to create and share videos on any topic (Geyser, 2021). TikTok features a wide variety of sounds and audio clips, and special effects and features. In 2018 it became the most-downloaded photo and video app available globally. TikTok has used celebrities and accounts with high followings to promote the app (Travis, 2020). Many brands are flocking to TikTok to get users to generate brand-related content. In June 2020 TikTok launched TikTok for Business as a way for brands to run their own ads within the app.

Higher education marketing teams have been strategic in their use of TikTok (Schwartz, 2021). Colleges can run the risk of trying too hard on the app to be appealing to students and prospective students. A university can carve space on the platform to build on their brand identity by focusing on content that performs well on TikTok. Institutions like Syracuse University produce student run videos that showcase their day to day lives as students at the school. This type of content helps people watching understand the day in the life of a student, and this has been especially helpful throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Using students to drive the content of the app, as well as watching and listening to the trends of TikTok, can be useful to be successful and reach prospective students.

YouTube

The popular video sharing website YouTube was formed in 2005 and rose to success quickly (Leskin, 2020) and in 2006 the platform was bought by Google for \$1.65 billion. Since its inception YouTube has been a major player in the promotion of products and ideas including the first iPhone in 2007 and the “It Gets Better” campaign supporting LGBTQ youth in 2010. YouTube makes money by using advertising which rolled out in 2007. It hasn’t always been an easy road to success for YouTube, and in 2017 it made the first of two major algorithm changes by putting stricter policies on ads and revamping the requirements of eligibility for money-generating channels. YouTube also faced backlash over its harassment policy after they were found in violation of children’s privacy laws by collecting the data of children under the age of 13 without parents’ consent. Since its beginnings, YouTube has been a pioneer for digital content.

In addition to having more than 2 billion monthly users, YouTube also is the second-most popular search engine in the world (HigherEducationMarketing.com, 2018). Higher education can take advantage of various strategies to engage consumers through video content using the YouTube platform. Examples of content that universities can take advantage of including guided campus tours, testimonials, program highlights, Q&A sessions, and live video events like athletics or theatre. These videos can be shared across other social media platforms and can increase visibility of the university and ultimately prospective students.

While universities can make their own captivating YouTube content, they may not have to look far for YouTube influencers on their own campus. At Princeton University, student Nicolas Chae is a YouTube influencer who creates videos about their life (Nguyen, 2019). They are a part of a niche community where students upload videos

documenting their college experience and these videos are seen as an authentic look into student life and campus culture which can help prospective students visualize themselves on a specific campus. Taking advantage of this unique strategy is a great opportunity for colleges to work with their students to highlight and promote their campus.

Demographics of Use of Social Media

The users of social media come from different races, genders, education levels and age groups. The social media experience is personalized, meaning no two people use social media the same way. This section will discuss the demographics of social media users across Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, and Twitter. In 2019, U.S adults said they used social media at 72%, compared to 2005 when only five percent of the U.S adult population saying they used social media (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Race and Social Media

Over the past decade, the overall use of social media among Latinx, Black and White users have increased (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). In 2015 the racial demographics of social media users were Black users at 56%, Latinx and White users at 65%, respectively. Compared to 2019, the racial demographics of social media users were Black users at 69%, Latinx users at 70% and White users at 73%. There are also preferences for the type of platforms used, Latinx users of social media are more likely to use Instagram (51%) compared to White users (31%) and Black users (40%). Black and Latinx users of social media are also more likely to use Snapchat at 28% and 29% than White users at only 22%. The study did not include Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander demographics (Pew Research Center, 2019).

The representation of race in social media varies among platforms. In recent years the phenomenon of “Black Twitter” has been studied (Freelon et al., 2018). Black Twitter is described as:

A space in which black people discuss issues of concern to themselves and their communities—issues they say either are not covered by mainstream media or are not covered with the appropriate cultural context. For these users, Black Twitter allows everyday black people to serve as gatekeepers for the news and information needs of a plurality of black American experiences—with coverage, perspective and consideration not found elsewhere (Freelon et al., 2018, p.40).

Black Twitter brings attention to social issues and cites discrepancies in major media’s misrepresentation or underrepresentation of black individuals.

Gender and Social Media

Social media usage has grown significantly for women but not for men since 2015. In 2015, 62% of males were social media users and 68% of females were social media users. (Pew Research Center, 2019). By 2019, those numbers had increased with 65% of men and 78% of women using social media (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Female users grew by 10% whereas male users only grew by three percent over all platforms. The study only included male and female participants, not other genders.

Social media has the influence to reinforce gender stereotypes. A recent study about two Instagram pages that glamorized the partying aspect of college, was found to have reoccurring themes of objectification of female college students, submissiveness of female college students, and an emphasis on a young white collegiate experience (Davis, 2018). These images of women perpetuate the harmful message of male dominance and

masculinity. The study also found that the Instagram pages frequently mocked older women on the page to glamorize only young attractive women. The study also found that masculinity and male bonding are celebrated and encouraged, especially at the expense of women. These types of gendered social media pages are harmful to women who think that this behavior is what they should aspire to, and harmful to men because it reinforces toxic masculinity and dominance (Davis, 2018). If an individual in high school sees these pages and thinks that this is how college will be, they may also be influenced to act a certain way based on the content they are seeing on the pages.

In addition to social media reinforcing gender stereotypes, the business aspect of the intersection of gender and social media has come under fire in recent years. As businesses and advertisers turn to social media to engage new customers, they typically target advertisements based on the user's gender (Bivens & Hamison, 2016). When a user signs up for a social media platform, they are often asked what their gender is. Facebook introduced a variety of gender options besides female and male for the first time in 2014. This was a monumental first step in accurate representation for individuals who are not men or women. This paved a way for other companies to follow suit. Companies ask for an individual's gender for advertising purposes.

When advertisers use a social media platform, an advertisement will be targeted to them based on the demographics the advertiser is wanting to reach. The advertisers pay the company to use the data to target potential customers. The power of capturing personal data does not come without concerns. Individuals from marginalized groups could be subjected to surveillance solely based on the demographics they are required to share at sign up (Hamidi et al., 2018). If a platform does not have a specific category for

gender that is required to fill out, the platform will infer a gender based on the algorithm that is generated by the user's actions and will include them in their advertising targeting (Bivens & Hamison, 2016). This is called automatic gender recognition.

Education Level and Social Media

In addition to race and gender, the education levels of users and their social media usage can vary. In the past, social media was not easily accessible to someone with a high school diploma (Le, 2019). The education levels of users that were included in the Pew Research Center (Perrin & Anderson, 2019) study are those that received a college diploma, those that went to college but did not graduate, and those that graduated high school and did not pursue higher education. From 2015 to 2019, each education level use of social media has risen, with the usage of those that received a college diploma and those that went to college but did not graduate growing at the same rate (Pew Research Center, 2019).

In 2015, 76% of U.S adults who used social media had a college diploma which grew to 79% in 2019. In 2015, 70% of U.S adults who used social media went to college but did not graduate which grew to 74% in 2019. In 2015, 54% of U.S adults who used social media graduated high school which grew to 64% in 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2019). The most significant increase has been among those that graduated high school and did not pursue higher education at a 10% increase, but they still are less likely to use social media than their more educated peers.

Education level representation in social media usage matters. The attainment of a college degree has inspired software that takes an applicant's social media usage into consideration (McCabe, 2017). College graduates who are looking for a career

change, or are re-entering the work force, may find it difficult to cope with the changes of the hiring processes brought on by social media. A popular professional networking site is LinkedIn. Created in 2011, LinkedIn connects professionals from all over the world (Koch et al, 2018). While LinkedIn has posting for jobs of all skill levels, it is a platform for college graduates to utilize to connect with people and groups in the fields or companies they are wanting to start a career in. LinkedIn also allows users to search for those that may have attended the same institution. Social media can be a major resource for college graduates to network and receive a job. However, it can also hinder them if they are not careful. Recruiters can search for candidates on other social media accounts to see their personal information and what they are posting about. If the candidate is posting pictures of them partying excessively or using profanity in numerous posts, the recruiter may be inclined to stop the process with that candidate or rescind an offer (McCabe, 2017).

Age and Social Media

The age demographics for social media are predictable considering that most people under the age of 25 grew up with technology and social media. In 2015, 90% of social media users were ages 18-29-which remained unchanged in 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2019). The largest increase in percentage of users was in the 50-64 age group. In 2015 51% of adults in the US aged 50-64 used social media and by 2019 that number had grown to 69%. Individuals in the 18–29-year-old age range are considered young millennials and Generation Z. Those in the 30–49-year-old age range are considered Old Millennials and Generation X, while those aged 50-64 are considered Generation X

and Baby Boomers. Each generation has a different experience with social media which has affected how they have adapted to trends over the years.

In a study that looked at behaviors among different generations, it was discovered that Generation Y, those born between 1981-1996 and also called Millennials, are the most influenced by social media (Berezan et al., 2018). The study looked at Generation Y, X, and the Baby Boomers and how psychological needs play a role in many factors of social media. Generation Y is inclined to connect with users using different technical features of social media like commenting, friending, tagging and liking others' content. This age group meets social satisfaction and develops a sense of self through interacting on social media. A characteristic of this age group is wanting to connect with others and having a group-oriented mindset (Berezan et al., 2018). This generation is more likely to post content that reflects the life that they want to portray to others, instead of the life that they are living. For example, if a college student is in a fraternity and thinks that it will "boost" their social status, they may post about the fraternity on all their social media accounts, even if they are getting hazed and not enjoying being a member of a fraternity.

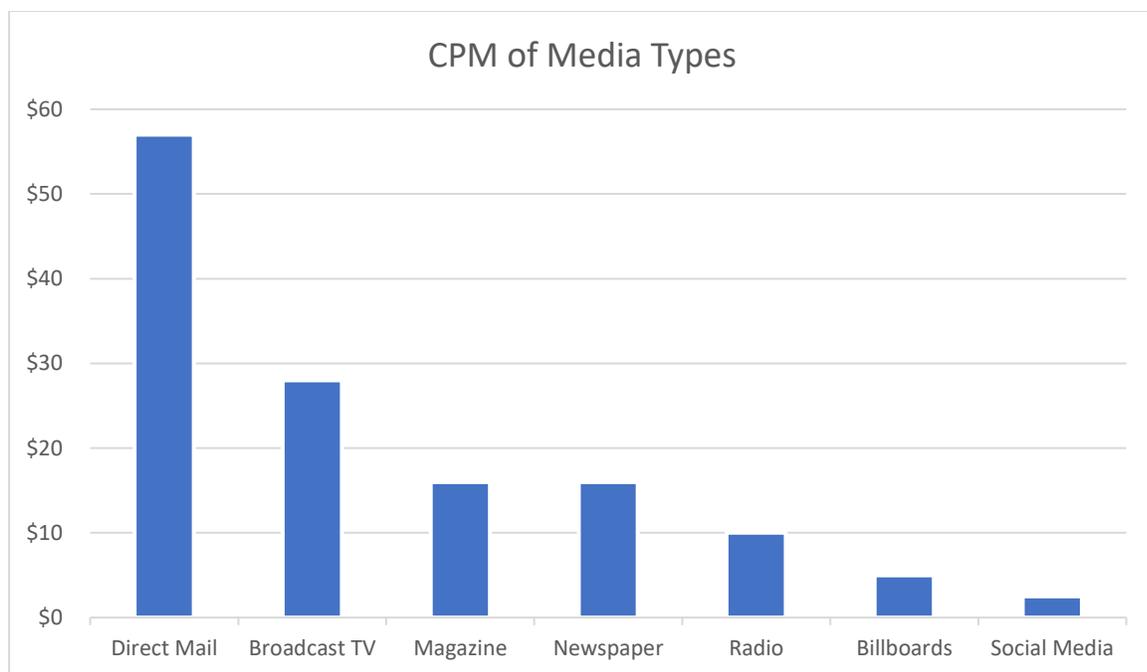
Generation X, those born between 1965 and 1980, presents themselves differently than Generation Y (Berezan et al., 2018). The content a Generation X user may post will be more consistent with their real life. They are also more selective with who and what they interact with on their social media accounts. Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, that use social media have a completely different view of social media than Generation X or Y. Baby Boomers may struggle with the technical features of social media and therefore not spend a lot of time using it. There is no pressure for the Baby

Boomer generation to present themselves in a certain way because they have less value in their online presence than their real-life presence (Berezan et al., 2018).

As of 2015, Generation Z was entering into universities across the United States. Generation Z was born between 1997 and 2015 and is the first generation to have internet access readily available and they are comfortable using technology (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). They are avid social media users and consider interacting on social media a part of their social identity. Generation Z grew up in a post 9/11 world with economic hardships. Despite these challenges, Generation Z is determined to change the world. They are more accepting of others from diverse backgrounds and want to use their social media platforms for positive change.

Social Media as a Marketing Tool

The concept of social media as a marketing tool is a newer concept that has expanded immensely over the past decade. Traditional forms of marketing include billboards, signs, direct mail, radio, flyers and brochures, cold calling, and event marketing (Anderson, 2018). These techniques are still used in marketing but are expensive to maintain in comparison with social media marketing. Knowing how numerous demographics interact with social media is important for businesses to reach their desired customer (Hootsuite, 2021). Cost per thousand impression (CPM) is the cost that measures how many advertising dollars must be spent to reach 1,000 people. See the chart below for a breakdown of CPM for traditional and social media marketing.



It is important for marketers to know where the demographic they are trying to reach are getting their information from to ensure their advertising dollars are being well-spent. When using social media marketing, it is important to keep in mind where prospective students are spending their time as the age group of prospective students are using Snapchat and Instagram more so than Facebook (Shields & Peruta, 2019). As stated previously, 90% of individuals aged 18-29 use social media (Pew Research Center, 2019). The potential for institution marketing teams to reach this demographic through social media marketing is high. In addition to traditional college age students, research shows that their parents are also spending time on social media, with 82% of U.S adults aged 30-49 using at least one social media platform, and 69% of U.S adults aged 50-64 using at least one social media platform (Pew Research Center, 2019). Understanding where certain demographics are spending their time on social media can help universities reach certain messaging to intended audiences (Shields & Peruta, 2019).

Social media marketing advantages are its low cost and high visibility, but it does not come without disadvantages. A disadvantage of social media marketing is the negative feedback that can spread quickly (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). For example, if a university has an issue where a Greek chapter is accused of hazing, it can create a damaging reputation even before there has been an investigation. This happens because users can interact with each other through essentially an instantaneous electronic word-of-mouth. The age of social media adds a heightened sense of ethical awareness for brands to follow (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). If a customer has a negative interaction with a brand, that customer can leave a review or comment about the brand on their social media which can influence other customers buying decision.

To combat negative feedback or interactions from customers, businesses may turn to social media influencers to promote their brand or product. In the past 10 years the term “Instafamous” is used to represent those that are regular people, but who attain a large following on Instagram (Jin et al., 2019). This person may become ‘Instafamous’ from partnering with certain niche brands to promote to their followers. An important part of being Instafamous is building a platform and persona that makes the individual seem trustworthy to their followers. Brands may choose to find Instafamous individuals to promote their products to their audience. Popular niches on Instagram are beauty, fitness, and fashion. Instafamous individuals can be a powerful social media marketing tool for businesses and products to take advantage of to reach their target audience and ultimately make sales (Jin et al., 2019).

Paid Social Media Marketing

Paid social media marketing refers to when a brand or organization pays a social media platform to place their content on the user's newsfeed or timelines (Shields & Peruta, 2019). As previously mentioned, every major social media platform allows for paid social media marketing. Instagram Ads, Facebook Ads, Promoted Tweets and Snap Chat Ads are all forms of paid social media. The advantage of using paid social media marketing, is that a user does not have to like your profile to see the content. The platform allows the organization or brand to select criteria for who they want to reach. Based on criteria selected will determine if a user sees an advertisement (Bock et al., 2014). For example, if a small university on the east coast wanted to attract more students from the west coast, they would run a paid social media campaign that sent advertisements to users who fit their demographic profile. Another example is if a university wants to run a fundraising campaign among alumni. The university does not want current students to see the campaign because they are not a part of the target audience. They may select geographical regions based on where current alumni are living.

Institutional Social Media Use

In the business of higher education, standing out among competitors is key to attaining new students and retaining current students (Shields & Peruta, 2019). As of the 2017-2018 school year, there were 4,298 degree granting post-secondary universities in the United States (Moody, 2019). The possibilities for prospective students are endless, which is why it is important for universities to have a strong marketing plan to convert prospective students to enrolled students (Shields & Peruta, 2019). Universities at their core are businesses that need to bring in revenue to operate. Higher education needs to

maintain a high perception of brand loyalty, which relies on its alumni, current students, and prospective students (McAlexander et al., 2006). A study conducted by Clark, Fine and Scheuer (2016) showed that, on average, a student who follows a university social media account has a higher perceived relationship quality with their university. Perceived relationship quality is defined as the overall evaluation of the strength of a given relationship. For universities, this means forming and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders. Social media has the power to make or break a brand, including a university image. Student loyalty increases when students feel that their university communicates well with them and meets their needs. There is research that supports various types of social media platforms that include university sponsored accounts as well as organization and department specific platforms (Shields & Peruta, 2019). The findings from this research show that encouraging prospective students to seek out platforms of organizations they are interested in joining, the major they are thinking about, and the university created social media platforms will help a student get a well-rounded view of campus life (Shields & Peruta, 2019).

Social media also plays a positive role in transfer student success. In a 2014 study by Nehls and Smith (2014), Facebook groups were created for incoming transfer students. This space was utilized for incoming transfer students to post in a community that was supportive and inclusive before they ever stepped on campus. The students could post about themselves, questions about campus, or anything they were interested about. Typically, these pages are facilitated by student affairs professionals or some sort of campus life office at the university. The staff members can answer questions students may have or post about events happening at the university. This trend has expanded to

Instagram where pages are made specifically for new students at a university. This is another way for students to connect, ask questions, and even find roommates (Nehls & Smith, 2014).

Advantages of Institutional Social Media

As previously discussed, there are numerous advantages for organizations to use social media as a part of their marketing strategy. First, compared to traditional forms of marketing, social media has a low cost (Anderson, 2018). There are no fees associated with creating an account, unlike the printing and mailing of various brochures and print materials. The creation of a social media account typically includes analytics and tracking tools that can determine what types of posts an audience enjoys (Shields & Peruta, 2019). A Facebook business profile includes Facebook Insights which illustrate how many people the post reached, how much interaction the post received, where those individuals were located and other analytic tools. Additionally, universities can take advantage of “trending” social media posts, or types of posts that are currently popular. This type of organic content is popular among users and is typically low cost. Another advantage of institutional social media is that social media is easily accessible to those in the university demographic. Previous research on social media content types in higher education marketing shows that followers of universities on social media are receptive to content that covers topics of athletics, general university news, school spirit and admissions (Shields & Peruta, 2019).

Challenges of Institutional Social Media

While social media is typically low cost, it still costs the institution money in the form of employing staff to focus on social media strategy. Social media is a constantly

evolving platform, and if not managed correctly can be costly to the university image and perception. An aspect of social media that can be challenging is when there is negative feedback from the audience. If there is an issue at the institution, negative press can instantly be shared. Actively managing the social media accounts is an important part of social media marketing. Another challenge to social media marketing is the algorithm of each platform (Bernazzani, 2018). This is completely out of the institutions control and is created by the social media platform. The algorithm of a social media platform determines what content is shown on a user's newsfeed. In 2018, Facebook changed their Newsfeed to feature primarily content from a user's friends and family over content from brands and companies. The organic reach for brand content was around 1% which means Facebook content will typically only be seen if a brand pays Facebook to promote their content. This can cause universities to spend more money than previously spent on Facebook to reach their audience.

College Choice and-the Decision-Making Process

Making the choice of if and where to go to college is one of the biggest decisions a person may make during their life. Coming to a decision may take months or years of preparation and determination, and may be influenced by numerous factors such as cost of attendance, geographic location, parental influences, etc. (Skinner, 2019)- The basic steps of the decision-making process are problem recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives (Le et al., 2019). Higher education may be viewed as a service, but it is a service that an individual cannot try out before purchasing. Like other services, consumers rely on word-of-mouth, the influence of stakeholders, and other marketing tactics that highlight transparency and have a

personalized approach (Skinner, 2019). Throughout the decision-making process there are numerous risks that an individual must take into consideration before reaching a final decision. These risks include financial, performance/functional, physical, psychological, social, and time/convenience. To mitigate these risks, the consumer begins the information search to begin making a decision.

During the problem recognition stage, prospective students are figuring out the best path for them (Galotti & Mark, 1994). For some students this does not include college right away or college at all. Depending on what career path they desire, vocational or technical school might be the next best option. For others, money might be of concern and so a community college is the next choice. Once prospective students recognize the problem, they move to the information search process. How much does college cost? Am I eligible for a scholarship? Do they have my major? Will my credits transfer easily? These are all questions to consider and find information on before choosing a college.

After the problem recognition stage, an individual will enter the information search stage. Previous research has stated that the higher the involvement with the purchase, the higher the perceived risk (Simões & Soares, 2010). Individuals may check out various websites to compare services, visit the facility or talk to people who are familiar with what the individual wants to decide about. An individual will employ these strategies in the information stage to reduce uncertainty. The information search stage can include internal and external searches. Internal search is based on retrieving existing information in memory or knowledge from previous related experiences. External search is information search beyond one's memory and refers to collecting new information

from several personal and non-personal sources. Typically, an external search happens when an internal search is not enough to decide (Simões & Soares, 2010)

During the evaluation of alternatives stage, the student will have found information that pertains to them and weighs the pros and cons of each choice (Galotti & Mark, 1994). During this stage outside influences may affect the decision-making process such as input from reliable sources like as parents or friends. It is important to remember that this process is not linear, and a prospective student may switch between the stages many times before concluding. The importance of each stage can also change as the student gets closer to a deadline of applying or committing to a university. A student may be in an evaluation of alternatives for quite a while before reaching a decision (Shields & Peruta, 2019). During the evaluation of alternative stage, numerous choice factors will emerge. Choice factors are basic determinants for the final decision. A student choice in choosing an institution could include cost, proximity to home, academic standings, facilities, influence of others and potential for employment after graduation.

Social Media and the Decision-Making Process

Understanding the decision-making process is important for marketers to do their job effectively. Social media can influence decision-making process in a positive or negative way. In a survey administered by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, students reported on the influences that effected their college decision (Clinedinst, 2019). Social media was ranked as considerable importance as a recruitment strategy, with 47% of the 215 participants. In addition, the 2017 Social Admissions Report found that 63% of students use social media to research a college they are interested in and 60% have followed or liked a college they are

considering. The breakdown by social media platform channel is 67% Instagram, 63% Facebook, and 42% Snapchat. Being able to extend a university's brand through social media is important for a student who visits campus (Turner, 2017). When prospective students visit campus, the university admissions team can encourage them to follow the university on the social media account they prefer. Once the student leaves campus, social media can then become an influencing factor in whether that student feels aligned with the culture of the university.

In addition to the institution influencing prospective students, it is important to keep the current student body satisfied. When the student population is satisfied, they will be the best spokesperson for the university to prospective students. This effect has the possibility of transferring to social media. If students who are satisfied with their college experience use social media to post about how much they love campus, their major, and other opportunities provided by campus, someone in their newsfeed may see it and start thinking about their own future. In a study of 1,783 people, 88% of the respondents say they consult online ratings and reviews if they are purchasing a new item (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2017). Knowing these statistics is helpful for institutional marketing and admission teams. Using social media strategies like having current students take over institutional social media accounts for a "day in the life of a college student" or spotlight different types of students on campus can influence a prospective student's decision to find more information or connect with that student.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Social media is a popular tool that is used as a way for others to connect on a personal level and as an effective business tool that influences consumers. It is crucial for

higher education to create effective social media content as a part of their marketing strategy. When social media is executed effectively, it will engage current, former, and prospective students. Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat and Twitter are popular social media platforms where universities should be engaging with their audience. According to Pew Research Center (2019), the users of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat make up 60% of daily users across all platforms for the age group of 18-29. This data illustrates that prospective students are in the age range that spend a vast amount of time on social media. The theories that will guide this research are Perna's conceptual college choice model, and the social media engagement theory.

Perna's Conceptual College Choice Model

The conceptual college choice model created by Perna (2006) combined the assumptions from the economical and sociological college choice models because of the belief students' college choice decisions were influenced by their system of values and beliefs, which created student's perceptions. This model focuses on the differences of student's individual choices and determined the access and type of information students had as they were making their choices by exploring four layers. The layers included habitus (perception) factors; school and community context factors; higher education context; and social, economic and policy context (Perna, 2006).

The first layer, or center of the model was habitus factors. These factors include demographic factors such as gender and race; cultural capital factors; social capital factors such as access to information about higher education and assistance with higher education. The second level, school, and community context determined the availability of resources; the types of resources available, and the structural supports and barriers

students face. The third level of the model is the higher education context. It includes the marketing and recruitment of a university or college, its location, and the institutional characteristics students deemed important when making their college decision.

The last level of the model is social, economic, and policy context. This level includes demographic characteristics such as social forces, economic characteristics such as unemployment rates, and public policy issues such as the new federal or state educational aid (Perna, 2006). This college choice model is comprehensive and explores the reason why students choose a college when the cost and benefits were equal as well as determining students' levels of access to information sources. While college choice models are extremely useful in predicting student college choice process, they cannot fully explain students' decisions when making their final college choice. Nonetheless, college choice models are strong indicators of students' college decision-making processes. This model was used in this study to help create the survey questions that encompassed the factors of gender and race, use of social media to find information on colleges, the types of factors that influenced their choice to attend the university, and the influence those factors had on their enrollment to the university.

Social Media Engagement Theory

Social media engagement theory (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016) is based on Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) model of co-creation. This model defines co-creation as being "about joint creation of value by the company and the customer" (Prahalad et al., 2004, pg. 8), and is based on consumers interacting with businesses, products, and services in such a way that the consumer has influence on the business' choices. Social media engagement theory expands on the model of co-creation as it describes a system where

users engage with other users who also use the platform, or the technical features of the platform (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016).

Users fulfill personal needs by being involved on the social media platform. The social aspect of engaging with other users offers a personalized experience. A user has the choice to be as involved or uninvolved on the platform as they chose. If a user is highly engaged on a social media platform, the more important the personalized experience becomes. When organizations provide spaces for the creation of experiences, higher user engagement occurs. The most prominent tenant of social media engagement theory is that the increase of user engagement will lead to an increase in usage of the social media platform (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). Usage is how often a user is spending time on the social media platform either exploring, retrieving, or interacting with content. The more engagement, the more valuable the co-creation of value higher user engagement leads to greater usage of the social media platform. This theory was used to create survey questions that gathered information on the personal use of social media. The researcher asked participants to indicate how much time they spent on social media, and did that time spent have an influence on their enrollment to the university.

Summary

Social media has become a part of the fabric of our everyday lives. It is a means for people to use as a personal resource to connect, as well as a way for businesses to connect with consumers. The rise of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter and TikTok have transformed the way the world communicates with each other. With over half the world using at least one social media platform, the utilization of social media in higher education is a tool that should not be overlooked. This study utilized

Perna's Conceptual College Choice Model along with the Social Media Engagement Theory to understand the influence of social media on prospective students college choice.

Chapter III

Methods

Quantitative casual-comparative and correlational designs were used in this study to answer the research questions. A causal-comparative research design works to identify the source of the result between two or more variables (Apuke, 2017). This chapter describes quantitative techniques that were used in this study to collect data on the impact of institutional social media among prospective students' college choice. It provides information about the instruments that were used, participants involved, and the treatment of data collected.

Design of Study

To measure the social media influence on prospective student's college choice, this quantitative study focuses on the social media use of first-year students, how different populations of prospective students use social media, and the impact of institutional social media on their college decision to attend a midsized Midwestern four-year university. Causal-comparative and correlational studies are appropriate. These research methods draw on previous quantitative research that has been conducted on the impacts of social media use on decision-making as well as how college students perceive institutional social media.

The institution at which the research was conducted sent a survey to all admitted first year students, whether attending the research site or not, during summer 2021, approximately 8,000 individuals. Participants were asked demographic questions as well as survey questions coordinated by the office of enrollment management to measure student interest and impact of institutional recruiting efforts to students who applied to

the institution. Five additional questions, inspired by Constantinides and Stagno (2011), were added to the existing survey to analyze participant use of social media and the impact social media had on their college decision. Results were collected through an online survey and analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Participants

The participants in this study were 415 first year undergraduate students who were admitted to a midsized, public, Midwestern four-year state university for the fall 2021 semester. Of these 302 (72.8%) were females, and 113 (27.2%) were males. Most participants came from White (56.1%), Black or African American (22.7%), and Hispanic (13.5%) ethnicities. Of the participants, 291 (69.1%) were enrolled to the institution while 124 (29.9%) did not enroll to the institution.

Research Site

The institution that was studied is a public, mid-sized, Midwestern, 4-year university located in a rural setting. As of fall 2020, the university has just over 6,000 students, with around 4,600 undergraduate students. Women made up 59% of the degree-seeking undergraduate class while men made up the remaining 41%. Much of the degree seeking undergraduate body were non-Hispanic White 60%, followed by Black 13%, Hispanic 13%, and approximately 10% all other categories. The institution operates social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Venmo, Flickr, and TikTok.

Instruments

A quantitative online survey, designed by the enrollment management office, was used to collect data for this research using Qualtrics. The additional survey questions

added for this study are inspired by Constantinides and Stagno's (2011) study which looked at the potential of social media as instruments of higher education marketing. The survey consisted of demographic and Likert-scale questions to determine individual use of social media, as well as how students rank factors pertaining to their college choice. The survey questions were structured into three groups corresponding to the following three main areas.

Demographic Questionnaire

The survey collected demographic information including sex, age, race, academic year, student status, enrollment status, and academic major. The demographic questions are to assist in grouping factors that are relevant to identify trends and patterns of social media use among first-year students.

Influencing Factors Used for the Selection of Higher Education

This section of the survey asked questions using a five-point Likert scale to rate the importance of the following college choice factors: campus visits, cost of attendance, geographic location, personal relationships, and social media platforms (See Appendix A and B for survey questions). The points of the scale will be from (1) *not important at all* to (5) *very important*.

Social Media Use

Finally, the survey included a five-point Likert scale to quantify the participants' use of various social media platforms in their personal lives. The points of the scale were from (1) *not at all* to (5) *less than once a week*. There were also multiple-choice questions used to identify what social media platforms the student used to learn more about their prospective institution. These questions are meant to identify the participants'

use of various social media platforms, and frequency of activities performed using social media. These questions asked if a respondent used social media to search information about colleges, was the information found on social media helpful, and how much time the respondents were using social media platforms in their personal lives.

Data Collection

This study used data collected in the summer of 2021 and maintained by the office coordinating enrollment management at the research site which will retain ownership of the full survey results. The responses to the questions used in this study were pulled out for statistical analysis by the researcher once the office completed data collection. The researcher for this study was not involved in the collection of data from participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey was imported into SPSS which was used to run statistical analysis on the research questions. Non-completed surveys were removed and not used in the analysis. All personally identifiable information of the participants was separated from the survey results and removed and was not used in data analysis. A series of tests were run on the survey data to examine if a relationship exists between the use of social media and reasons for enrollment to the university.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to display the demographics of the participants in percentage form. Frequencies of answers chosen for each survey question were also reported.

Chi Square Test of Independence

A chi square test of independence was conducted between social media usage of participants and their ranking of factors that influenced enrollment to the institution. A chi-square test of independence checks whether two variables are likely to be related or not.

The Chi-Square test of independence is used for testing hypotheses when variables are nominal. The Chi-Square test of Independence is statistically significant when $p < .05$. Cramer's V test also was used to measure the effect size for the chi-square test of independence. It measures how strongly two categorical fields are associated. It is interpreted as a measure of the strength of an association between two variables. The coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with closer to 1 being a stronger association.

Research Question 1

In research question 1, the researcher combined variables before analysis. The variables that were combined were *slightly important, important, moderately important, and greatly important* to create the dichotomous variable of important. A chi-square test of independence was conducted on the dichotomous variable of important and not important.

Research Question 2

The researcher combined variables to create a dichotomous variable before conducting a chi-square test of independence. The variables that were combined were *not at all, less than once a week, once a week and less than an hour a day*. A chi-square test of independence was conducted on the dichotomous variable of less than an hour a day and more than an hour a day.

Research Question 3

The researcher combined variables of I am unsure of whether it did or not and I used it but it didn't really sway my decision either way, to create the dichotomous variable of no influence and the variables of somewhat influence and greatly influence to create the variable of influenced. A chi-square test of independence was conducted on the dichotomous variable of no influence and influence.

Research Question 4

The researcher combined variables of I am unsure of whether it did or not and I used it but it didn't really sway my decision either way, to create the dichotomous variable of no influence and the variables of somewhat influence and greatly influence to create the variable of influenced. A chi-square test of independence was conducted on the dichotomous variable of no influence and influence.

Treatment of Data

Data was collected online through Qualtrics and imported into SPSS for statistical analysis. All exported files were stored on a password protected flash drive. Following Institutional Review Board policy, all data used by the researcher on the flash drive will be kept for three years and then destroyed. A copy of the analysis of the data produced by this study was provided to the enrollment management office for their retention and use.

Summary

This study is a quantitative causal-comparative study utilizing correlational design. Through this methodology, this study aims to examine the relationship between first-year student's social media engagement with institutional social media and enrollment to the institution. Additionally, this study examines the ways in which first-

year students use social media. The participants were non-probability convenience based and had to opt-in to take the survey.

The survey was distributed to the students consisted of a demographic questionnaire and a questionnaire inspired by the Constantinides and Stagno (2011) study asking specific segmented questions about social media use and informational sources used in their college decision-making process. A descriptive analysis, chi-square test of independence was conducted on the completed results of the surveys.

Chapter IV

Results

In this chapter, data collected from the institution's college choice survey will be provided. This annual study collects data from all admitted first year students about a variety of topics including the factors that the student used in making their enrollment decision. Additional questions to answer this study's research questions were included in this year's annual enrollment management survey and the results of the survey were analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. This study focused on the influence of institutional social media on prospective student college choice. The survey was sent to 8,235 of first year and transfer students admitted to the institution. After one week of data collection, 1,036 responses were collected and reviewed for a response rate of 12.6%. Of the total results, there were 250 participants who did not complete the additional questions added to the survey. In addition to participants who did not fill out the additional questions, there were 353 participants who indicated that they did not use social media, and 18 participants whose responses could not be used in analysis. In this study there are 415 participants used for statistical analysis.

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between a prospective student's enrollment decision and the influence of institutional social media?

Participants were asked to rank the college choice factors that had an impact on their enrollment decision. The researcher looked at the influence of those who enrolled against those who did not enroll at the institution and who indicated that they used social media to research colleges. Among participants who used social media, social media was

important in their enrollment decision for both those who enrolled at the institution with 63.6% indicating that it was slightly important, important, moderately important, and very important, while 61.3% of participants who did not enroll indicated it was slightly important, important, moderately important and very important. See Table 4.1 for full results.

Table 4.1

Participants' Ranking of College Choice Factors (N = 415)

College Choice Factor	Not Important		Slightly Important		Important		Moderately Important		Very Important	
	n (%)		n (%)		n (%)		n (%)		n (%)	
	NEn	En	NEn	En	NEn	En	NEn	En	NEn	En
Social media*	19 (15.3)	20 (6.9)	29 (23.4)	29 (23.2)	33 (26.6)	83 (28.5)	28 (22.6)	52 (17.9)	15 (12.1)	50 (17.2)
Cost of Attendance	1 (0.81)	3 (1.0)	3 (2.4)	1 (.3)	22 (17.7)	54 (18.6)	5 (4.0)	12 (4.1)	92 (74.2)	219 (75.3)
Academic	1 (.8)	1 (.3)	2 (1.6)	2 (.7)	24 (19.4)	70 (24.1)	7 (5.6)	6 (2.1)	90 (72.6)	210 (72.2)
Location	7 (5.6)	4 (1.4)	6 (4.8)	16 (5.5)	42 (33.6)	103 (35.4)	19 (15.2)	58 (19.9)	49 (40)	107 (36.8)
Campus Visit	7 (5.7)	6 (2.1)	5 (4.1)	12 (4.1)	38 (30.9)	91 (31.3)	20 (16.3)	39 (13.4)	52 (42.3)	141 (48.5)
Family*	14 (11.5)	16 (5.5)	16 (13.1)	25 (8.6)	43 (35.2)	86 (29.6)	32 (26.2)	60 (20.6)	17 (13.9)	102 (35.1)

Note: NEn denotes frequencies for students who did not enroll; En denotes enrolled. * denote significant associations at $p=.05$

Facebook	40 (32.3)	83 (28.5)	9 (7.3)	29 (10)	17 (13.7)	34 (11.7)	35 (28.2)	70 (24.1)	23 (18.5)	75 (25.8)
Twitter	67 (54)	159 (54.6)	11 (8.9)	27 (9.3)	8 (6.5)	35 (12)	25 (20.2)	46 (15.8)	13 (10.5)	24 (8.2)
Instagram	11 (8.9)	20 (6.9)	3 (2.4)	15 (5.2)	17 (13.7)	21 (7.2)	34 (27.4)	84 (28.9)	59 (47.6)	151 (51.9)
Snapchat	20 (16.1)	37 (12.7)	4 (3.2)	8 (2.7)	11 (8.9)	6 (2.1)	19 (15.3)	50 (17.2)	70 (56.5)	190 (65.3)
TikTok	43 (34.7)	68 (23.4)	6 (4.8)	6 (2.1)	5 (4.0)	12 (4.1)	12 (9.7)	37 (12.7)	58 (46.8)	168 (57.7)
Other	84 (67.7)	196 (67.4)	7 (5.6)	18 (6.2)	7 (5.6)	15 (5.2)	15 (12.1)	27 (9.3)	11 (8.9)	35 (12)

Note: NEn denotes frequencies for students who did not enroll; En denotes enrolled.

The null hypothesis was there is no relationship between a prospective student's enrollment decision and time spent on social media. A chi-square test of independence analysis was conducted to evaluate whether those that used social media for more than an hour a day had an influence on enrollment. The variables of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, other) and the usage of those platforms were included in this analysis. A dichotomous variable was created to include responses of not at all to less than an hour a day, and that variable was used for analysis with the more than an hour a day variable. See table 4.3 to see the full result of the chi-square independence test.

Table 4.3

Results for a Chi-Square Analysis: Time Spent on Social Media and Enrollment

Social Media Platform	χ^2	p	Cramer's V
Facebook	2.16	.138	.073
Twitter	.6	.439	.038

Instagram	.011	.915	.005
Snapchat	.09	.753	.015
TikTok	2.51	.113	.078
Other	.879	.348	.046

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between a student’s gender, the influence of institutional social media and enrollment decision?

Participants were asked to indicate how social media content influenced them in their college choice. The researcher looked at participants who did enroll to the institution and did not. Female participants who enrolled to the institution indicated that it somewhat influenced their decision at the highest rate, with greatly influenced my decision as the second most selected option. Among females who did not enroll, greatly influenced my decision was the most reported, with somewhat influenced my decision in second place. Male participants indicated that social media somewhat and greatly influenced their college choice at the highest rates with somewhat influenced my decision as the top choice among male participants.

The null hypothesis was there is no relationship between a student’s gender and the influence of institutional social media on enrollment decision. Based on the results, male participants who enrolled were influenced at a higher rate that female students who enrolled. Among participants that did not enroll, social media had a stronger influence among female participants.

Table 4.4

Participant’s Gender and Influence of Social Media on Enrollment

Content Influence of Social Media	Enrolled		Did not enroll	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
I am unsure whether it did or not	4 (4.9)	24 (11.5)	2 (6.3)	6 (6.5)
I used it, but the content didn't really sway my decision either way	13 (15.9)	35 (16.7)	10 (31.3)	16 (17.2)
It somewhat influenced my decision	36 (43.9)	84 (40.2)	10 (31.3)	33 (35.5)
It greatly influenced my decision	29 (35.4)	66 (31.6)	9 (28.1)	38 (40.8)

A chi-square test of independence test was performed to assess the relationship between gender and social media influence on college choice. Two dichotomous variables were created, the first one combined the variables of I am unsure whether it did or not to create the variable of no influence, and the second one combined the variables of somewhat influenced my decision and it greatly influenced my decision to create the variable of influence. The variables of influence and no influence were used for the chi-square test of independence. For male participants there was no statistical significance on their college choice, $\chi^2(1, N=113) = 3.81$, $p=.051$, Cramer's $V=.184$. For female participants there was no statistical significance on their college choice, $\chi^2(1, N=302) = 2.02$, $p=.16$, Cramer's $V=.082$. Therefore, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis, there is no relationship between a student's gender and the influence of social media on their enrollment decision.

RQ 4: Is there a relationship between a student's race, the influence of institutional social media and their enrollment decision?

Participants were asked to indicate their race, enrollment decision and the influence of institutional social media on their enrollment decision. The researcher analyzed participants who enrolled and who did not enroll by their ethnicity.

Table 4.5

Participants Ethnicity and Influence of Social Media on Enrollment

Ethnicity	I am unsure whether it did or not	I used it, but the content didn't really sway my decision either way	It somewhat influenced my decision	It greatly influenced my decision
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Black or African American				
Enrolled	4 (6.3)	4 (6.3)	20 (31.7)	35 (55.6)
Not Enrolled	3 (9.7)	10 (32.3)	7 (22.6)	11 (35.5)
Hispanic				
Enrolled	2 (6.1)	7 (21.2)	9 (27.3)	15 (45.5)
Not Enrolled	3 (13)	2 (8.7)	12 (52.2)	6 (26.1)
White				
Enrolled	12 (7.0)	36 (20.9)	75 (43.6)	49 (28.5)
Not Enrolled	9 (14.8)	11 (18.0)	27 (44.3)	14 (22.9)

The participants in this study ranged from various ethnicities, but certain groups were not represented in the data to determine if their ethnicity had an impact in social media influence on their college choice. The participant ethnicities with the highest rate were White, Black or African American and Hispanic. The ethnicities of American Indian/Alaskan Islander, Asian, Multiple, Unknown/Not reported did not have enough participants to include in the analysis.

The null hypothesis was there is no relationship between a student's race, the influence of institutional social media and their enrollment decision. A chi-square test of independence was

performed on African American, Hispanic, and white participants to assess the relationship between ethnicity on social media influence and college choice. Two dichotomous variables were created, the first one combined the variables of I am unsure whether it did or not to create the variable of no influence, and the second one combined the variables of somewhat influenced my decision and it greatly influenced my decision to create the variable of influence. The variables of influence and no influence were used for the chi-square test of independence. There was statistical significance between African American ethnicity and social media influence on college choice with $\chi^2(1, N= 94) = 10.24, p=.001$, Cramer's $V=.330$. There was no statistical significance between social media influence and white or Hispanic participants. Therefore, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis.

RQ 5: What is the utilization of social media among admitted students to learn more about college?

When asked about what social media platforms were used to learn more about the colleges participants were considering, Instagram was the most popular followed by Facebook. See table 4.6 for a complete breakdown of social media popularity.

Based on the current literature, the researcher hypothesized that Facebook would be used the most to learn about the colleges that prospective students considered. This study found that while Facebook was still in the top three, Instagram was the most popular with the participants by over 20% with YouTube coming in third in popularity. Table 4.2 provides a detailed list of the social media platforms used by the participants to learn more about the colleges they were considering. Participants were allowed to select more than one response for the social media platform that they used to learn about the colleges they were considering.

Table 4.6*Social Media Platforms Used to Learn More About the Colleges Considered*

Social Media Platform	<i>n (%)</i>
Instagram	287 (68.4)
Facebook	180 (43.4)
YouTube	131 (31.6)
Twitter	55 (13.3)
Niche	52 (12.5)
Snapchat	50 (12)
LinkedIn	11 (2.7)
Cappex	10 (2.4)
Pinterest	6 (1.4)
ZeeMe	3 (0.7)
Tik Tok	3 (0.7)

Note: Participants could select multiple social media platforms

Participants were also asked to identify the social media platform that was the most helpful for making their college choice. The results were divided into participants' selection based on their enrollment to the university. The most helpful platform identified by participants that enrolled at the institution was Instagram with 43% of those participants finding it the most helpful, followed by Facebook at 26.5% and YouTube at 13.7%. For students that did not enroll to the university, Instagram was also selected as the most helpful with non-enrolled participants at 30.6%, followed by YouTube at 25.8% and Facebook at 14.5%. Based on these findings, Instagram is the social media platform that is not only the most used to learn about colleges, it also viewed as being the most helpful.

Among the top three platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram) all of the platforms had statistical significance on their influence on enrollment decision for the participants that selected that platform as helpful. Table 4.3 provides a breakdown of each two-way contingency analysis for the social media platform selected and the participant enrollment decision.

Table 4.7

Results of Chi Square: Helpful Social Media Platform vs. Enrollment

Comparison	X ²	p	Cramer's V
Instagram vs. enrollment	156.37	<.001	.98
Facebook vs. enrollment	95	<.001	1
YouTube vs. enrollment	72	<.001	1

*p <.05.

Table 4.8

Social Media Participants Found the Most Helpful for College Choice

Social Media Platform	Enrolled n (%)	n (%) Not Enrolled
Instagram	125 (43)	38 (30.6)
Facebook	77 (26.5)	18 (14.5)
YouTube	40 (13.7)	32 (25.8)
Niche	17 (5.8)	19 (15.3)
Twitter	13 (4.5)	10 (8.1)
Other	5 (1.7)	1 (.8)
Snapchat	8 (2.7)	2 (1.6)
Cappex	2 (.7)	3 (2.4)

Linkedin	3 (1)	0 (0)
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Summary

The goal of this research was to explore prospective students' college choice and the influence of institutional social media, as well as the personal use of the respondents. The impact of race and gender was also explored in the analysis of these results. Results were collected through Qualtrics and analyzed in SPSS. Chapter IV discusses the findings of this survey.

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to discover if social media use has an influence on the enrollment decisions of prospective students. In addition, the researcher wanted to see if there was a significant difference among prospective students in the way they used social media in their personal lives and how they used social media to find information about institutions that they were applying to for college. Differences in gender and race were also evaluated to compare the influence of social media on their enrollment decision. This chapter will discuss the findings of this study, its relevance to previous literature, limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research.

Social Media Use and Student Enrollment

A 2017 Social Admissions Report (Turner, 2017) found that 60% of students have followed or liked a college they are considering attending. Of those students, they followed different social media platforms for the schools they were interested in with 67% using Instagram, 63% using Facebook, and 42% using Snapchat. The participants in this study similarly reported using social media platforms to learn about the colleges they were considering. Snapchat accounted for 12% of the participants who said they used it to learn more about the colleges that they considered, compared to 68% of participants using Instagram and 43% on Facebook. While previous research has addressed the prominence of Facebook as a social media platform (Mohsin, 2020b), in this study, Instagram was the most influential for prospective students to research colleges they were interested in attending.

Participants in this study also found that students were using YouTube as well as other platforms to learn more about the colleges they were considering, a finding new to the existing

literature. With YouTube's continued growth in popularity among platforms in recent years, universities have the unique opportunity to create engaging and informational videos for prospective students. Universities also can take advantage of the students on their campus who make YouTube videos and have a large following to highlight the benefits and positive aspects of their campus.

While research is limited on prospective students' use of YouTube to inform college choice, there is research that has found that high school students are using YouTube specifically for educational purposes and to find research on new topics (Bardakci, 2019). A quick YouTube search of an institution can let professionals know if prospective students are seeing university created content or content from current students. Universities can collaborate with current students to help create content that is informative for prospective students to use and highlights the strengths of the institution. Current students are one of the best sources for incoming students to receive information about the institution, especially on the factors that they find important (Bardakci, 2019) so those institutions need to tap into those sources in their own marketing and outreach.

Participants in this study were asked to identify what platforms they considered to be the most helpful for making their college choice. Prospective student use of social media does appear to have some impact on students' decision to enroll at an institution with all participants in this study ranking Instagram as the most influential social media platform. Similar differences were found with those that used Instagram and Facebook when enrolled participants were compared to non-enrolled. YouTube was the only platform that was ranked higher by non-enrolled students than among enrolled participants suggesting that the institution's identity as presented on YouTube was a potentially negative influence on their decision. Instagram and

Facebook are two platforms that participants used at the highest rate that were the most helpful on college choice. Universities should be using these platforms daily to post various types of content. Posting multiple times a day, using features like polls, stories, links, etc. are all ways to engage the audience on these platforms. Not posting consistently, or not using all the features of the social media platforms could reflect negatively on the image of the university or lead to disengagement with the institution's social media.

The study also found that the most popular platforms used to learn about the colleges by the participants, whether or not they were helpful, were again Instagram followed by Facebook and YouTube. While other platforms were identified and used by some students, these three consistently were the not only the most popular but were also viewed by the participants as the most useful. These top three platforms were all found to be statistically significant on participants enrolling to the university. When creating social media strategies, universities need to pay special attention to these platforms to have a cohesive strategy for getting good information to prospective students.

There are numerous factors that influence a prospective students' college choice. Previous research suggests that factors like cost of attendance, geographic location and parental influences are all major influences in a prospective student's college choice (Skinner, 2019). In this study, participants were asked to rank the different factors impacting their college choice (social media, cost of attendance, availability of academic programs, location, their campus visit, family) on a scale of not important to very important. While social media was not ranked the highest of factors or as very important to prospective students, it did rank as important for 63.6% of participants. It was also found to be statistically significant positive factor for participants who decided to enroll to the institution. While social media was not the most important college choice

factor for prospective college students, it was still a source for important information for prospective students and made an impact on their overall enrollment decision.

Time Spent on Social Media and Student Enrollment

The survey in this research was distributed to participants who were traditionally aged, first-year students who had just completed high school as well as incoming transfer students. The demographics of this population's age ranges from 18 to 20 years old, which is the demographic that uses social media frequently, especially Snapchat. This is in line with the broader population's use of Snapchat, since 53% of all 15- to 25-year olds in the United States use this platform (Mohsin, 2020a).

While participants in this study indicated that the top choices of Social Media platforms for finding information about colleges were Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the personal usage habits around social media among participants tells a different story. Participants indicated they used Snapchat overall the most out of all social media platforms. Using Snapchat as a student-centered platform to do 'day in the life' take overs, highlight events on campus, and encourage students to use campus geofilters, can be ways to engage new students to showcase all the university has to offer.

The top three platforms that participants spent the most time on for their personal use of social media were with Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok. While participants did not indicate that they were using Snapchat and TikTok as informational tools in their college search, they were still spending a substantial amount of time on the platform. Including Snapchat and TikTok in their social media strategy would be beneficial for universities since a large part of their target audience are using these platforms.

TikTok was one of the most used social media platforms among participants and, as a platform, TikTok has taken off in popularity over the past two years, especially among teens and young adults. The growing platform features short videos no longer than three minutes, and offers an array of engaging sounds, filters, and video editing tools (Bas, 2022). As TikTok continues to grow in popularity, universities have the unique opportunity to showcase student life by using students to participate in TikTok trends, create campus centric content, and highlight what it's like to be a student on campus. While universities do not have control over what students put on their personal social media concerning their institution, they do have the ability to mitigate negative press or highlight positive press. For example, at Washington University in St. Louis, a student went viral on TikTok for spending leftover meal points to help the homeless (Baker, 2021) with the student receiving over 6 million views on her video. While the university has a program in place for donating meal points to charities in the St. Louis area, the student was able to highlight how they were helping the community and giving Washington University positive press.

While the time spent on social media of a prospective student may not translate into a measurable influence on a student's enrollment decision for an institution, paying attention to where prospective students are spending their time on social media can be useful to highlight campus life and use targeted advertising to reach those prospective students. It is also critical for higher education administrators to be aware of what the institution's image and presence is on these platforms especially if they are not providing content on them as part of the social media plan for the institution.

Gender and the influence of social media on enrollment decision

Current research has found that women are more likely than men to use social media in general, with 65% of men using social media compared to 78% of women (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). This study's participants aligned with the institution's undergraduate student population (Institution, 2020) though it contained less men than the general population using social media.

Although there was not a statistically significance difference between men and women on their decision of whether to enroll at the institution, there was anecdotal evidence of some differences in attitude and approach between men and women that professionals should be aware of when designing the institution's social media strategy. This study showed that while administrators may not need to focus on creating specific content designed to appeal to the differences between the genders in their efforts, there are enough differences present to be aware of them when designing a comprehensive plan to inform and influence prospective students about the institution.

Race and the influence of social media on enrollment decision

The demographics for this study were mostly comparable to the demographics of the students at the institution at large, though there were more Black participants represented than the campus' population. This study found that Black and Hispanic participants were greatly influenced by social media when making their enrollment decision. Institutions need to pay attention to the social media content that is being posted both on their institutional social media and by students to ensure that it is representative of the minority student experience on the campus.

While there were no statistically significant differences on the influence of social media content among White and Hispanic participants, there was a statistically significant difference

for African American participants. The fact that African American participants were more influenced by social media content on their enrollment decision is important for institutions to consider when designing initiatives for reaching prospective students. At the institution researched, the content that is being created is an influential component to the college choice of prospective students from minority demographics.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Prospective students can research campuses using a variety of social media platforms to inform their decision beyond the official platforms that institutions control. The participants in this study indicated that they did use social media to help inform their college choice, with the most used and most helpful platform being Instagram followed by Facebook and YouTube. Two of these platforms, Instagram, and YouTube, are often not a focus or even part of the institution's official social media efforts or at best, are minimally used. Universities need to recognize this and one way to do this is that they can equip students with tools to create content to be consumed on these platforms to promote the university image. Additional research should be done to include newer platforms like TikTok, and others, as they gain in popularity so that institutions are current with student interest.

Additionally, this research found that Black prospective students were more influenced by what they found through social media in their college selection than other ethnicities. Of the Black participants, 55.6% that enrolled to the institution indicated that social media greatly influenced their decision to enroll. While social media may not influence all ethnicities equally, students from the African American population are using social media to make decisions about their college choice. When communication and social media plans are being made, professionals need to ask themselves if their content is inclusive and provides information that marginalized

communities can identify with. Institutions should recognize that the social media content that is directed to prospective students from different ethnicities, especially students from marginalized groups, can impact the enrollment decisions of prospective students. Administrators should reach out to various minority student organizations and promote their social media, as well as ask to highlight or incorporate the experiences of those students into the institutional social media.

Each social media platform has unique features that make it stand out from other platforms. Posting the same content on each social media platform with the same caption is not engaging or exciting. Taking advantage of Instagram stories, polls, and interactive features can help engage with prospective students. Incorporating numerous features of each social media platform to engage audiences such as geofilters that are unique to a specific geographic location, student spotlight takeovers, and other strategies for highlighting campus life has been proven to be an effective business tool (College Marketing Group, 2020).

Social media is a dynamic, fast changing, and ever evolving source of connection for prospective students. Institutions need to be aware of this and constantly be refining and updating their marketing and outreach efforts. A five- or ten-year plan is useless with this medium. Tik Tok was launched in 2016 and in less than six years is a dominant platform though six years from now it may be obsolete. Institutions must actively monitor, engage, and adapt to changes in the social media consumption habits of their students if their efforts are going to be successful.

Recommendations for Future Research

- This study was conducted at a mid-sized four-year public institution in a rural setting. Replicating it at different types of institutions and in different geographic areas of the country with more diverse participants may yield supporting or different results.

- Since social media has a rapidly evolving nature, constant and regular studies about student social media use, preferences, and impressions are necessary to keep the institution's social media plan viable.
- As a component of a much larger survey, additional studies on student perceptions of an institution's social media 'identity' and the impact it has on prospective students could be conducted as a stand-alone study which may provide more information and focus by participants.
- Future research should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of social media among students who did not enroll to the institution. Future research could include a qualitative study that focuses on students who did not enroll to the university and determine if their perceptions of the university were different than what they saw on social media during their college search process and to the extent that it impacted their decision making.

Conclusion

Prospective students are using social media to research the colleges they are interested in attending, and they do not limit themselves to the official accounts and the platforms that the institution prefers. Higher education must work to embrace social media as an informational tool, a way to connect and engage with prospective students, and to use it as a storytelling platform that helps answer the question of why prospective students should choose the institution. This study found that social media does in fact have an influence on enrollment, and institutions need to have strategies in place to recognize this source of information for students in their efforts to convert prospective students to enrolled students.

In this study, prospective students primarily used Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook to find out information about the institutions they were considering. Prospective students in this

study also spent more than an hour a day on social media platforms including Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok and see these as valuable tools to find the information they value. When creating content for each platform, universities can create platform specific content by taking advantage of their current students, who are already creating content, as well as paying attention to viral social media trends. Prospective African American students in this study indicated that social media did influence their enrollment to the institution more than other ethnic groups. Prospective students from marginalized backgrounds are looking for information on the colleges they are considering on social media and being influenced by the content they find to decide whether or not to enroll at the institution. Content needs to be inclusive and accurately capture the minority student experience for these prospective students.

Social media cannot be an afterthought to professionals in higher education. Commitment to social media will enhance the university image, as well as staying on top of social media trends. Embracing social media and the fast-paced nature of platforms means more prospective students seeing the information necessary to help inform their college choice.

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Appendix A

The following questions were used for analysis that were a part of the college choice survey....

1. Are you planning on attending this institution in the fall?

- Yes
- No

2. Ethnicity

- American Indian/ Alaska Native
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- White
- Multiple
- Unknown/ Not reported

3. Gender

- Male
- Female

Appendix B

The following questions were added to the college choice survey for this study....

1. What social media platforms did you use to learn more about the colleges you were considering

- Snapchat
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- ZeeMe
- Cappex
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Niche
- I didn't use social media to learn about colleges
- If other, please specify

2. What social media platforms did you use the most to find helpful content about the colleges you were considering?

- Snapchat
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube

- ZeeMe
 - Cappex
 - Pinterest
 - LinkedIn
 - Niche
 - I didn't use social media to learn about colleges
 - If other, please specify
3. How much do you use the following social media platforms (not at all, more than an hour a day, less than an hour a day, once a week, less than once a week)
- Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
 - Snapchat
 - TikTok
4. Please rank the impact of the following factors for choosing the college you plan to enroll at (very important, important, moderately important, slightly important, not important)
- Information from social media for your college of choice
 - Cost of attendance/ financial aid for your college of choice
 - Availability of your academic program at your college choice
 - Geographic location of your college of choice
 - Your experience during your campus visit for your college of choice
 - The influence of a friend, family member or high school guidance counselor

5. To what degree did the content available from the schools you consider available influence your college choice decision?

- It greatly influenced my decision
- It somewhat influenced my decision
- I used it, but the content didn't really sway my decision either way
- I am unsure whether it did or not