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Promised Versus Actual College Experience: The Role of Social Media in Pre and Post-enrollment Experiences

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Promised Versus Actual College Experience:

The Role of Social Media in Pre and Post-enrollment Experiences

by

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PROMISED VERSUS ACTUAL COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PRE AND POST-ENROLLMENT EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

Scholarly research has identified a disparity between the public, print-only messages a college disseminates about itself and what current students claim their experience at a particular institution to be. The present study examined if this disparity or disconnect still exists. Students' self-reported college experience using a survey design was measured in order to discover if current students' exposure to recruitment-driven social media websites and subsequent social media tools altered students' self-reported experience and ultimately created this disparity between "promised" versus "actual" experience. The key findings included that exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites does not influence students' self-report of experience or satisfaction. However, there were significant differences in levels of satisfaction between freshmen versus non-freshmen in specific experience-related areas.

Keywords: college student experience, college student satisfaction, higher education marketing and enrollment, student testimonial blogs, social media

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Promised Versus Actual College Experience:

The Role of Social Media in Pre and Post-enrollment Experiences

There is one primary goal of advertising: persuading the audience. Just as a retail provider will use advertising techniques to entice consumers to patronize their business, colleges and universities employ similar techniques. In the competitive race to increase and maintain student enrollment, colleges and universities, particularly in the private sector, strive to accurately and attractively reflect the values, experiences, and mission of the university community in its public messages.

Over the last decade, enrollment rates have increased despite the declining economy, particularly among private universities (Stern, 2011); however, there is a high rate of dropout or transfer to a new institution among second and even third-year students attending four-year universities (Wiese, 1994). Although there has been some movement to enact programs designed to keep students enrolled after the completion of their first year, universities remain focused on recruiting and enrolling new students (Wiese, 1994). Higher education enrollment management scholars have indicated that contributors to this drop-out and transfer problem include the steadily increasing tuition rate (Wiese, 1994), higher income taxes on university age students and their families (Fossen, 2011), universities accepting and enrolling higher numbers of students than are permitted in their budgets (Associated Press, 2002), and an overall mismatch between students expected experience versus their actual experience (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

Interestingly, two studies that were conducted over a decade apart from each other have identified that there is disparity between the public messages a college disseminates about itself and what students come to accept and believe as true about the college once enrolled (Appleton-

Knapp & Krentler 2006; Wiese, 1994). For example, students may be led to believe that sporting events are well attended on campus; however, upon arrival and after attending a few games they realize that regular attendance is sparse. According to another related study, this "gap," which can be initially defined for the purposes of this study as disparity between conveyed information about experience and actual experience, was one of several variables contributing to a student dropping out or transferring to a different institution (Woosley, 2012). In addition, although previous research has observed that this gap in students' experiences and what experiences are promised by colleges exists, previous scholarly research has only examined the "promised experience" in print messages disseminated on paper by the college or about the college itself (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler 2006; Wiese, 1994). This promised experience is contained in the information that the colleges communicate to the public, including advertisements aimed at potential students that describe what students should expect to encounter inside and outside the classroom.

Previous research that identified the existence of this gap in expectation versus actual experience is now almost a decade old; therefore, the present study seeks to retest the phenomenon with particular focus on public messages conveyed in an online, social media-based forum. According to Greenwood (2012), 92% of colleges of 100 sampled employ more than one form of social media website in conjunction with their official website. Greenwood's study found that in recent years, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are currently used more widely by colleges and universities nationwide (2012). Student testimonial blogs are pieces of student-composed writing that are uploaded to college websites or a social media blog site. They are still

one of the more popular social media tools used by colleges despite a lack of research regarding their effectiveness (Greenwood, 2012).

As mentioned previously, there is little evidence to support the relative effectiveness of student testimonial blogs and social media tools as a whole in fulfilling their primary purpose: leading prospective students to enroll at a particular college (Greenwood, 2012; Johnston, 2010). In addition, recent research has discovered that typically, students do not credit social media sites as a primary influencer in their final decision of what college or university to enroll in (Johnston, 2010). Therefore, in addition to updating and retesting the research of Wiese (1994) and Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) who identified that on a frequent basis, students claim varying levels of dissatisfaction in their student experience, the study described here investigated the potential influence social media sites and student testimonial admissions blogs may have on what current students claim their experience to be.

The present study is actually a two-tiered study design that first analyzes the overall connection between a college's advertisement messages aimed at pre-enrolled students, like student testimonial admissions blogs or posts on social media sites, and the potential for a disconnect or cognitive gap in the promised college experience and the self-reported experience current students claim to have. The second tier of the study specifically examines potential differences in this cognitive gap or disconnect among different age groups of students, specifically comparing first-time freshmen to the rest of the college student population.

Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent does prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven information on college social media sites contribute to what current college students report their college experience has been?

RQ2: To what extent does prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven information on college social media sites contribute to students' college enrollment decision?

RQ3: What is the relationship between students' year in college and what current college students report their college experience has been?

Rationale

While the aim of advertisements is to be persuasive as well as accurate and honest in the claims made, since the field's inception and even today, consumers arguably avoid confusing or misleading messages. At times there is a disconnect between a product or experience promised in an advertisement and what is actually delivered by the entity providing the product or experience. As a social rationale for the proposed research experiment, the results of the study will potentially be able to comment on such a relationship in higher education. Specifically, the proposed research experiment is designed to discover whether exposure to an online advertisement form, such as a promotional blog or a post on a social media website, creates the expectation of an experience that is not met. For the benefit of society, the results of the current research study will inform judgments on whether individuals should air on the side of caution when interacting with the highly personal form of promotionally crafted self-disclosure (i.e., promotional blogs) or posts on a social media site in addition to realizing that such blogs and posts may affect an individual's expectation of a product or experience.

In addition to the social rationale for the proposed research, there is also a scholarly rationale. Specifically, this study focused on the area of student dissatisfaction, which is frequently paralleled by researchers to consumer dissatisfaction (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). Discovering a potential cause of consumer dissatisfaction, particularly in current college students, was the overarching scholarly rationale for this work. Specifically, the proposed study sought to discover whether levels of student dissatisfaction were influenced by a "gap" in students' expectations of the college experience and what experience they actually had as affected by exposure to promotional blogs and/or social media posts. Wiese (1994) and Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) previously identified this "gap" in students' expectations and their actual experience as prevalent; however, neither study cites blogs or social media sites as one factor in creating this "gap." The proposed research experiment, therefore, sought to build on the discoveries of the scholars mentioned as well as other scholars discussed in the review of literature while also formulating new discoveries about the existence of this gap and its potential influence on students.

Literature Review

Advertisements and Consumer Behavior

Advertisements date back to 1500 B.C.E. as carvings of stone placed on the walls of marketplaces. In the most basic sense, little has changed concerning their purpose. As mentioned in the introduction, the primary purpose of an advertisement is to serve as a persuasive device. According to Tellis (2004), "Advertising is persuasive and has the ability to tap in to peoples' motivations by giving something to think about. It invades their conscious and subconscious

thoughts which may change, reinforce, or modify their thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and

decisions" (p. 3).

In studying consumer behavior, therefore, advertisements do not simply communicate

information; they seek to influence behavior. It is without question, therefore, that a marketing

manager's goal is to have a consumer complete a purchase of a product or service. As such,

advertising is one method for fulfilling this goal. Tellis (2004) argues that consumer motivations

may be altered after coming in contact with an advertisement that *may result*, but does not

guarantee, a purchase completion.

As advertising's persuasive power is complex, it is highly important for this study that

advertisements' direct influence on perception of a product or service as well as potentially

altering consumers' personal goals and motivations prior to encountering advertisements are

examined in the literature review. According to Iacobucci (2012), there is a more intricate

relationship between traditional advertisements and consumers than Tellis described.

Interestingly, what Iacobucci explains is that the manner in which consumers' behavior is

potentially influenced is determined by the type of motivation the consumer has for interacting

with a particular advertisement. For example, a consumer who is considering purchasing a new

vehicle may visit websites to gain further information about their vehicle of choice that will

assist in their decision to complete a purchase. Additionally, if an advertisement is designed to

persuade viewers to purchase the exact vehicle that appeared on television, Iacobucci argues that

the consumer's thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and decisions regarding that vehicle could be

positively affected because the consumer is already motivated to purchase said vehicle (2012).

Their perception of that product, therefore, is altered in the sense that if the product is portrayed

in a positive light, most likely the consumer will also perceive the product to possess any number

of positive characteristics such as reliability or aesthetics. Conversely, if a second consumer

encountered the same advertisement but was not currently involved in purchasing a vehicle, it is

unlikely that the consumer's behavior will be influenced in the same manner, and their

perception may not change at all because they are not interested in the product or its

advertisement (Iacobucci, 2012).

　　　　Additional scholarly research has concluded that a similar relationship exists regarding

Internet advertising. As the current study examined advertisements on university websites,

namely student testimonial admissions blogs and the exposure to social media sites, it is

necessary to discuss the relationship further. While for the most part, consumers have no control

over what advertising messages they encounter via traditional media such as television, the

Internet allows for almost total consumer control of what messages they encounter. Owing to this

control scholars have determined that when consumers use the Internet by clicking on and

looking at advertisements, they are motivated either extrinsically or intrinsically (Yang, 2004).

Extrinsically motivated users are goal-oriented and have a specific outcome in mind, such as

completing a purchase or obtaining more information, when reading or interacting with online

advertising. Intrinsically motivated consumers, however, use the Internet for enjoyment and

entertainment alone. Yang discovered that generally, consumers with extrinsic motivation are

more positively affected by online advertisements than intrinsically motivated consumers (2004).

In addition, it was found that the effects of online advertisements are even greater in an

extrinsically motivated consumer when they concern high-involvement products (Yang, 2004). A

high-involvement product from a consumer perspective is a product that usually requires

significant capital investment, such as a vehicle or a house, and most typically means that the

consumer will engage in high levels of research prior to, during, and after the purchase of the

product (Iacobucci, 2012). Based on this definition, consumers of high-involvement purchases

are extrinsically motivated and are therefore more likely to be positively influenced by

persuasive advertisements. The following section will continue with a more detailed explanation

of how consumers' behavior and potentially their perception of a product or service are altered as

a result of persuasive influence. The bigger picture of course is to explain the fundamental logic

behind how prospective students who come in contact with social media sites, their respective

posts, and student testimonial admissions blogs are influenced.

Uses and Gratifications and Consumer Behavior/Perceptions

The previous section determined that both the content of an advertisement and a

consumer's motivation(s) can directly influence the consumer's behavior. Once again, consumer

behavior can generally be broken down to thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and decisions regarding a

product (Tellis, 2004). These consumer motivations, particularly regarding consumer

consumption of the Internet and online advertisements, have been linked to uses and

gratifications theory. The theory constructed by Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitch (1973), states that

individuals maintain an active role in personal media consumption and interpretation as a means

of meeting their needs and desires. In other words, individuals seek out and use specific media as

a means to feel gratified or satisfied with using the media itself, or individuals use or interact

within a particular media device such as a computer, smart phone, or radio due to a specific

outcome of using that medium that they wish to obtain (Katz et. al., 1973). As it has been

identified that consumers making high-involvement purchasing decisions typically engage in

researching the product which includes interaction on the Internet and with Internet

advertisements, it can be argued that this interaction is explained by the uses and gratifications

theory. Consumers of high-involvement purchases engage in this interaction with Internet media

as a means of meeting their particular needs.

It has been discovered that the longer consumers spend in both "human-message

interaction" and "human-human interaction" on a website, the more the consumer will have a

positive attitude about a brand and purchase intention (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). This "positive

attitude" can also be defined as a positive perception about the product or service based on the

message from either form of interaction. The "human-message interaction" can be defined as a

consumer encountering a one-way message delivered to them by an organization, entity, or

individual such as a blog or online video, whereas the "human-human interaction" is descriptive

of social media-type interactions in which the consumer is engaged with a human representative

of the brand or firm (Ko et.al., 2005). Ultimately, this idea of "positive perception" can be

directly linked with message believability (Iacobucci, 2012) in the sense that if consumers hold

an increasingly positive perception of a product or service after one or many interactions with the

same or similar message, they will be more likely to believe whatever the message is telling

them. The more willing exposure to a particular message, therefore, ultimately influences one's

perception of that message.

While the discussion of late has touched on general consumerism, the focus of the current

study is on a particular segment of consumers: college students. One study (Judson, Aurand,

Gorchels, & Gordon, 2008) made the important connection between colleges and universities

functioning in many respects like a typical business, and accordingly they employ marketing

strategies, such as online advertising on websites which include their own and general advertisements, to persuade potential students to enroll. Because of this, nearly all students who are currently enrolled in any given college or university were exposed in some way to material that promoted the college, including advertisements such as student testimonial blogs or something similar (Wiese, 1994). Numerous scholars have additionally noted that while student college choice is not a tangible product, the process by which they come to the decision to enroll is of high-involvement and the college "purchase decision" itself is therefore a high-involvement purchase similar to purchasing a home or a vehicle (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Judson et. al., 2008). Furthermore, Judson and associates noted that because the current culture in the United States highly reveres those who attend college, many students who engage in the college search and who come in contact with promotional materials, such as online advertisements and student testimonial blogs, are extrinsically motivated or goal-oriented to obtain more information. Therefore, the positive impact of advertising on extrinsically motivated consumers of high-involvement products applies to students involved in searching for their college of choice and ultimately completing a purchase (i.e., enrolling in their college of choice). This study, therefore, sought to determine whether the positively altered perception and behavior of students who are exposed to online advertisements, such as student blogs, influence what they claim their actual college experience has been.

The Content of the "Promised Experience"

Before discussing this differential "gap" in student expectations it is necessary to discuss the specifics of how, more broadly, a university crafts this "promised experience." Moogan (2010) examined a university's marketing strategy as positively or negatively affecting a

student's institutional fit and identified "key marketing themes" which can be used to describe

what comprises the mentioned previously "promised experience." Institutional fit can be defined

as a student's high level of satisfaction and will be further explained in the section following this.

The key academic marketing themes, which are ultimately the categories of the content of the

promised experience, include teaching quality, course content, perceived reputation of the

university, research quality, and faculty reputation (Moogan, 2010). Outside of academic

matters, key themes include but were not limited to university facilities, cost of living, and

student life. While these themes are typically standard content in university advertisements,

simply stating these dry facts will not gain a potential student's attention and ultimately influence

enrollment. Omitting certain facts, however, has not been cited as negatively or positively

affecting an enrollment decision (Moogan, 2010). It is important to note that just as Judson and

associates (2008) identified students as consumers of a university's marketing strategies,

Moogan (2010) equates a student enrolling in a particular university to a consumer completing a

purchase.

The motivations of a university's marketing strategies are therefore the same as most

other firms: to persuade their target consumer group to complete a purchase using advertisements

as a tool. Therefore, as Tucciarone (2008) explains, "students will not respond to an advertising

message unless the message has the ability to gain their attention. This is accomplished by

demonstrating that the product or service resonates with students' needs and wants," (2008, p.

78). It is arguable, therefore, that in order for an advertisement to be persuasive to a consumer,

the needs and desires of the consumer must be met by the way the brand or product is positioned.

A well-crafted advertisement, therefore, can cause the consumer to believe that a product or

service is not simply something they want but something that is a necessity (Iacobucci, 2012).

The expectation of that product or service, therefore, is that once purchased, it will completely

satisfy the consumers' need or desires depending on what was promised. This expectation in

consumers can be equated to the expectations of college students as explained in the next section.

Student Expectations of Experience and the Self-reported Experience

Studies indicate that many students in the post-purchase phase of college (i.e., after the

completion of their first year) are frequently dissatisfied with the experience (Appleton-Knapp &

Krentler, 2006). As such, scholarly survey-based research has concluded that a "gap" exists

between student expectations and their later self-reported evaluations of the university (Comm &

Mathaisel, 2002). The current study examines the following: the potential connection between

the expectation created in consumers (students) as a result of a persuasively crafted

advertisement message like a student blog, the single or frequent exposure to that message as

positively influencing student's positive perception of the university, and the consumer purchase

principle of an advertisement causing an expectation of needs and desires to be met. This study

also explores whether this "gap" is at all influenced by the content of the "promised experience"

as communicated by student testimonial blogs and in posts on other social media sites.

Ultimately, when this "gap", occurs, high levels of student dissatisfaction also ensue (Appleton-

Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

Interestingly, a link has been drawn between this "gap" and student satisfaction based on

the expectancy/disconfirmation model which relates to the attitudes, thoughts, and feelings of a

consumer based on pre-experience expectations versus post-purchase experience (Appleton-

Knapp & Krentler, 2006). This consumer marketing model (the expectancy/disconfirmation

model) insists that dissatisfaction (negative disconfirmation) will occur in consumers (students)

if the performance, experience, product, or service does not meet their expectations (Oliver,

1980). Conversely, if the expectations of the consumer are met or exceeded, the consumer will

experience satisfaction in the form of zero disconfirmation or positive disconfirmation

respectively (Oliver, 1980).

Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) confirmed that if a course at a business college of a

small, private, Northern university does not meet the pre-determined expectations students have

of the course, dissatisfaction will occur. Their research confirms the existence and recent

prevalence of the expectancy/disconfirmation model. The implications for the research at hand

are that in addition to identifying specifically what marketing themes are used in the

advertisements on a particular university's website, students must also be asked to identify what

experience they were promised and whether their current experience satisfies what was

promised.

Most recently, many higher education scholars have focused on social media like student

testimonial admissions blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and others, and the role that they play in

conveying that promised experience. More specifically, research has determined what types of

social media are the most influential to a high school student's college enrollment decision

(Greenwood, 2012). In addition, more recent studies have determined where social media as a

whole ranks in comparison with other tools used as a means of persuasion (Johnston, 2010;

Parrot & Tipton, 2012).

Social Media and the Expectation of Experience

Interestingly, despite the growing prevalence of social media tools and usage for college recruitment (Greenwood, 2012), two very recent studies reveal that social media tools like a Facebook page or blog rank at the bottom or near the bottom on the list of factors that students claim contributed to their decision of where to enroll (Johnston, 2010; Parrot & Tipton, 2012). What is equally as interesting is that while social media's influence ranked near the bottom on students' lists, social media tools were ranked of higher importance and more towards the top on the lists of current college employees, including admissions officials (Johnston, 2010). This of course indicates that college employees potentially place far more reliance on social media tools while perhaps overlooking students' number one influencer: their parents. Johnston's study indicated that the mother, the father, and then an informal interaction with a college faculty or staff member (i.e., a coach) were the most important influencers of where to enroll (2010). What is also interesting about this finding is that messages conveyed by the college, particularly in less formal settings like social media, may not be the only conduit of student experience that ultimately leads to the dissatisfaction of current students. It suggests that it is likely a combination of factors, such as the information influential parents convey to their children, which may also be a cause of the phenomenon studied in this research.

What is important to remember is that both of these studies are limited in the sense that they relied solely on students' self-reported data. The drawback to this is that often times self-reporting is not a true reflection of the phenomenon. Greenwood's study claims that despite students' reports that social media rank low on their list of what influenced their enrollment decisions, social media are some of the primary recruitment tools that admission teams employ.

The goal of this research study, therefore, is to determine whether a social media tool does have any influence on a student's self-reported experience and ultimately if social media tools are conveying information that alters a student's expectation of experience causing levels of dissatisfaction.

Dissatisfaction ultimately leads to student attrition (Willcoxson & Joy, 2011). Although attrition rates will not be discussed in the results of the present study, a survey instrument widely used to assess attrition and gauge students' experiences on a college campus was adapted for the questionnaire.

Student Satisfaction and Attrition/Retention

It is plausible that as scholars have connected low levels of student satisfaction with the university and high rates of attrition, a link may also be drawn between this "gap" in student expectations as a possible additional or related cause of attrition. This study will not investigate this phenomenon, but will adapt a scale designed to determine causes of attrition to measure student experience. According to Tinto, student attrition can be defined as "the rate at which students terminate college without completing a degree" (2012, p. 128). Interestingly, a study conducted by Willcoxson and Joy (2011) measuring students' self-reported rationale for attrition at the first, second, and third-year level found, for example, that the highest cause of attrition in first-year students was the student's misunderstandings of professor expectations and a lack of academic confidence. More importantly, in second and third-year students, their study concluded that attrition can be attributed to lacking a clear rationale for attending the university linked in part to a growing misunderstanding of how their overall college experience will benefit them in the future. While attrition is not the equivalent of simple dissatisfaction, reducing levels of

dissatisfaction may be a motivation for universities to maintain enrollment. Based on Willcoxson

and Joy's study, it would appear that the primary predictor for students leaving a university,

however, is the level of dissatisfaction with their experience.

Personal Assessment for the College Experience

The study described here used a survey questionnaire as the primary method for

operationalizing the variables found in the research questions. As a large focus of the study was

in determining the existence of a cognitive "gap" in students' self-reported experience in relation

to their exposure to a form of social media, such as a student testimonial or promotional blog or

Facebook, a section of the survey instrument included the factor-analyzed and scientifically

validated portion of the Personal Assessment of the College Experience Survey (PACE). The

PACE survey instrument has been widely used by over 250 colleges as a means for identifying

areas of the student experience at an institution, namely colleges and universities, in need of

attention and improvement since 1991 (Tiu, 2001). The original PACE survey model consisted

of 57 survey items, excluding demographic-related questions (Tiu, 2001). After extensive factor

analysis, Tiu (2001) re-organized survey questions and reduced the question base to 46 survey

items. The rationale for Tiu's study was that while 250 colleges and universities had been

administering the survey for over a decade, not a single study had ever been conducted to

measure the validity and reliability of the instrument in what it claimed to measure (2001). As

mentioned, Tiu's work did support the validity and reliability of the factor-analyzed version and

as such, that is what was used in this study. A specific explanation of the structure of the factor-

analyzed survey employed in the present study will be described in the methods section.

It is important to note that factor analysis can be defined as "a statistical procedure that identifies the factor structure and interrelationships among variables" (Tiu, 2001 p. 12). Ultimately, Tiu's purpose in conducting the analysis was to maximize the effectiveness, reliability, and validity of the PACE survey instrument as a tool for identifying "the organizational conditions that are responsible for the perception of campus climate," (2001, p. i). Interestingly, after documenting that the factor-analyzed version of the survey does in fact measure an individual's perception of six (now five) climate factors in an institution, the new PACE survey is more commonly used to measure climate perception in large organizations and businesses, not in colleges and universities (Tiu, 2001). That being said, the methods section will therefore explain why minor wording changes to Tiu's final version of the instrument had to be altered to fit the purposes of the present study.

In employing the new PACE survey as well as additional multiple choice questions designed to gauge students' exposure to college social media sites and specific tools such as promotional blogs, the present study proposes that there is a statistically significant relationship between the two dependent variables of the research questions and the independent variables. The dependent variables are what current college students say their experience has been and what influenced the current student's enrollment decision. The two independent variables are what current college students report recruitment-driven information on college social media sites promises, and the current and previous level of exposure to recruitment-driven information on social media sites including promotional student testimonial blogs.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from full-time students, both undergraduate and graduate, at the Rochester Institute of Technology. During the 2013-2014 Academic year, RIT has 16,950 total students; 2,583 of those students are first-time freshmen. As this is a two-tiered study, it is important to share information about first-time freshmen specifically and about the entire RIT student population. A group of 1,200 students of the total 16,950 undergraduate and graduate students at RIT was contacted to participate in this study. Given the method by which the sample was reached, the sampling technique was actually a convenient sample. The sample was collected in a specific order of steps.

First, the primary researcher directly contacted the Director of RIT's Academic Support Center, who is in charge of the "Year One" class. "Year One" is a required, introduction to college life class that all members of the population must take in the fall semester. Note that age, gender, and other demographic information were not used as criteria for selecting individuals for the sample. The only demographic information collected was gender, age, and whether they were first-time freshmen. In total, 700 of the 1,200 students contacted to participate in this study were contacted through the help of Academic Support. All 700 of these potential participants were first-time freshmen.

The method by which the remaining 500 students were contacted was by e-mailing the survey information to all students within RIT's College of Liberal Arts. Students who attend RIT's College of Liberal Arts include first-time freshmen all the way through graduate level students. These two groups combined are intended to represent the total population of

undergraduate and graduate students at RIT. Because of the sample's limitation, the results of the study, therefore, only have the ability to report on trends in the population described: full-time, fully matriculated, first-time freshmen students and/or all other students at levels in school beyond their first year. The rationale and research questions of the present study lead to the potential of sampling of populations outside of RIT; however, the sampling procedure in the present study is convenient in that it draws only on those individuals with whom the researcher had the most direct access to.

Sampling Procedure

As mentioned, 700 of the 2,583 total first-time freshmen were contacted through the help of RIT's Director of Academic Support. To ensure that 700 respondents were identified for participation, the Director of Academic Support assisted the researcher in determining specific Year One faculty members with multiple sections of the class. Those faculty members were contacted and asked to have their students participate in an online survey hosted on the RIT Clipboard website. It was through the Director of Academic support, the individual who oversees the entire Year One program, that the faculty members teaching the course were contacted and made aware of the survey. Ultimately, only those first year students whose Year One faculty instructors allowed their classes to participate were a part of the sample.

For those students contacted within RIT's College of Liberal Arts, every student within that college was contacted using an e-mail server that sent an invitation to participate to each of those students. The students who chose to participate simply had to follow the link to RIT's Clipboard survey site, the survey-hosting site used for the present study. There were a total of 80 valid respondents to the survey once it was administered.

Survey Procedure

Each survey participant received access to an online Clipboard survey titled "College Student Experience Survey" (see Appendix B). There were 10 multiple choice questions about past interactions with social media sites sponsored by colleges including opinions of the effectiveness of certain sites. This section also attempted to measure the frequency and exposure to college promotional social media, specifically to student testimonial admissions blogs and other sites. As mentioned previously, the factor-analyzed version of the PACE survey comprised the second section of the "College Student Experience Survey" employed in the present study. The questions asked students to respond to statements made about their university ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree; it was designed to measure students' self-reports of their experiences. The survey directions indicated that students must answer the questions based entirely on their personal experiences and opinions. Brief demographic information was also measured to better describe the sample. The conclusion of the survey featured a thank you as well as access to the researcher's contact information.

Instrumentation

There were two-tiers to the present study. As such, there were dependent and independent variables within each tier. As mentioned previously, there were two dependent variables in the first tier: (a) what current college students say their college experience has been, and (b) influences on the student's college enrollment decision, and two independent variables: (a) information conveyed on recruitment-driven social media sites, and (b) prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites. The second tier of the present study examined all of these variables, but specifically the role that one dependent variable, *students' year in*

college, played on the survey results. To operationalize each variable, a detailed survey was

designed. The first, tier-one, dependent variable was operationalized by the factor-analyzed

version of the Personal Assessment of the College Experience (PACE) survey. According to Tiu

(2001), "assessment of organizational climate can be a powerful indicator of organizational

effectiveness," (p. 2). PACE is a survey designed to measure the perception of organizational

climate by asking a series of questions that ultimately fall into five climate categories.

Organizational climate is defined as, "College administrators, faculty, staff, and students (i.e.,

internal customers) perception that their needs and expectations related to work and education

are met or exceeded by the institution" (Tiu, 2001 p. 3). The organizational climate is effectively

measured by including questions designed to elicit responses in five (previously six) climate

categories. The factor-analysis procedure eliminated one climate category (Tiu, 2001). These

categories include managerial behavior, institutional structure, students' needs and development,

teamwork, and meaningful work and task control. It is important to point out that the version of

the PACE survey published by Tiu (2001) was designed and worded to specifically measure

employees' satisfaction and experience in working at a particular higher education institution.

The survey was not redesigned with a student sample population in mind. Because of this, there

were a number of questions that were not actually relevant to the present study as they were

geared towards employees. Those irrelevant questions were removed from the survey

questionnaire used in the present study for that reason. In total, 16 questions were eliminated due

to the general nature of the question. The total number of questions comprising the PACE section

of the "College Student Experience Survey" administered in the present study was 30 questions.

The table in Section 1 in Appendix A illustrates the number of questions in the PACE section of the survey administered in this study that fall into each category. A detailed explanation of each category is also discussed below. It is through the results of the PACE survey, demonstrated to measure organizational climate, that the first dependent variable, what current college students say their experience has been, will be measured.

The following is a brief definition of the parameters of each climate category measured in the PACE survey. Within each major category there are also a handful of sub-categories represented in individual questions asked. These sub-categories included in each climate category can be found in the table in Section 2 of Appendix A.

Managerial behavior: Affects employees' and/or students' satisfaction, performance, and perception of work environment (Tiu, 2001 p. 70).

Institutional structure: Focuses on areas of empowerment, commitment, cooperation, motivation, communication, support, and diversity within an organization like a college, university, or company (Tiu, 2001p. 74).

Student needs and development: This should be the *driving force for what and how educational institutions conduct their business*. It is essentially the institution's effectiveness in fulfilling the needs of students (Tiu, 2001, p. 77).

Teamwork: This is directly linked with employee and student satisfaction. Individuals must feel they are able to participate in decision-making and contribute to group projects to feel satisfied. There is also a need for individuals to believe that a spirit of cooperation is institution-wide (Tiu, 2001, p. 79).

Meaningful work and task control: Satisfaction is also linked to individuals' need to

perceive value in the tasks they complete and feel that they have moderate control over

what tasks they work on (Tiu, 2001, p. 81).

To determine a student's level of belief or agreement with a particular statement made in

the PACE survey, the answer portion following the statement is a traditional Likert scale model

of five numeric responses. The number one, for example, represented if students "strongly

disagree" with a statement made, whereas the number five represented that students "strongly

agree" with a statement made. In the directions, students were told that if they selected number 2,

for example, it meant that they still disagreed but not strongly. In other words, word meanings

were assigned for particular answers but in reading and determining results, numeric assignments

were made for coding purposes. Furthermore, this scale was ultimately designed by the

researcher to be able to see the breadth of discrimination between subjects who ultimately claim

to have had exposure to social media and social media tools like promotional blogs.

Although the measurement of the dependent variable is determined by having students

complete the questionnaire measuring their beliefs about their experience in these categories, the

results of the survey as a whole, including the PACE section and the multiple choice section was

designed to measure the independent variable from tier-one:

(1) Prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven information on college social

media sites

The first independent variable from tier-one was determined by comparing the results from two

different respondent groups to the PACE section of the survey. Ultimately, respondents were

categorized into two over-arching groups based on their responses to the 10 multiple-choice

questions found at the beginning of the survey. These included respondents who reported to have

had some level of exposure to social media tools and websites run directly by a college or

university. These respondents reported having actually used social media and its tools as a part of

their college search. The second group consisted of those respondents who reported never having

used college social media tools as a part of their college search, even if they had awareness of

what the tools were. Ultimately, by comparing the results of the PACE survey section between

those with exposure and who claimed prior use of the tools versus those without exposure who

did not use the tools, the independent variable was measured. The potential variation in answers

between the two groups indicated what information was conveyed to students about potential

experience on recruitment-driven social media sites.

It is important to note that the survey used for the present study was distributed during

one of the last weeks of the fall semester. This time frame was chosen because students most

likely had formulated opinions and beliefs about their college experience thus far. However,

because the survey was administered only in the first semester, freshmen would more likely be

familiar with information conveyed through promotional materials from the college recruitment

process.

The independent variable from tier-one, prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-

driven social media sites and tools, was measured and operationalized by including multiple

choice questions that asked subjects to self-report what social media tools most highly influenced

their college choice. In addition, these questions measured subjects' level of exposure to these

tools. By including these questions, a connection was drawn between students' overall exposure

to social media that promoted a college and their satisfaction with their overall college experience.

The final dependent variable from tier-one, influences on student's enrollment decision, was not measured broadly in the present study. Prior research conducted recently by Johnston (2012) and Greenwood (2012) has already reported a wide range of influences on a student's enrollment decision. However, the present study sought to discover what specific tools have potential influence while also exploring whether subjects believed social media and its tools had any influence at all in their decision. This is measured by the series of 10 multiple-choice questions aimed at measuring exposure, levels of effectiveness of specific sites and tools, and social media as a whole.

Finally, to determine the relationship that the dependent variable from tier-two, students' year in college, had on the other variables from tier-one, the final question of the survey asked whether participants were first-time freshmen. The overall survey results on all levels were compared between those who answered "yes" versus "no." Note that age was also asked in this survey and that was also used to categorize results.

Results

The results of the present study indicate that there is not, overall, a statistically significant relationship between current students' level of exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites prior to attending college and their overall satisfaction with their college experience. However, statistically significant results were found when examining the differences in satisfaction of college experience between freshmen and non-freshmen respondents to the study. To further

explain these findings, the following results section will report the findings as they relate to the

appropriate research questions posed.

RQ1: To what extent does prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven

information on college social media sites contribute to what current college students report their

college experience has been?

A Mann-Whitney test was conducted to measure the relationship between two groups of

respondents: those who had exposure and those who did not have exposure to prospective

college's social media sites prior to attending college. The results of both groups' responses to

the PACE section of the College Student Experience Survey were calculated to determine if

there was a statistically significant difference in the overall satisfaction of experience within each

group (i.e., those with exposure and those without exposure). The results can be found in Table

1.

Table 1

Differences between Exposure and Non-exposure to Social Media on PACE

	n	Mean Rank	*p*
PACE			.663
Exposure	36	40.71	
Non-exposure	42	38.46	

There was not a statistically significant relationship in the responses on the PACE survey

between those with exposure and those without exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites

($p = .663$). Therefore, the present study can determine that within the sample of the population

chosen, there was not a statistically significant relationship between respondents' prior and/or

frequent exposure to recruitment driven-social media sites and their self-report of their college experience.

   RQ2: To what extent does prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven information on college social media sites contribute to students' college enrollment decision?

   To report results for this research question, respondents were asked to select what specific social media sites they found to be the most helpful in deciding where to attend college from a list of eight choices. The options included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Other, None of these, blogs, and Flickr. The top six responses to the corresponding survey question are exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2

Most Helpful Social Media Sites in Deciding Where to Attend College

Social Media Site	*n*	%	Cumulative %
Facebook	27	33.8	34.2
Twitter	1	1.3	35.4
Instagram	1	1.3	36.7
YouTube	2	2.5	39.2
Other	7	8.8	48.1
None of these	41	51.2	100
Total *N*	79	100	

Ultimately, 51% of total respondents indicated "none of these" as the top choice for "most helpful social media site." In addition, 47.7% of respondents indicated that some form of social media site was "most helpful;" 33.8 % of respondents chose Facebook as the "most helpful social media site." What can be reported based on these results is that there is a relationship

between prior, but not necessarily frequent, exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites and

students' college enrollment decision as 47.7% indicated that a social media site (including

"Other") was in fact helpful in determining their enrollment decision. While this is not the

majority, the present study can at minimum comment on the existence of a relationship between

the two variables in *RQ2*. In addition, as a portion of this overall study focused specifically on

the potential influence of student-testimonial admissions blogs, it is important to note that no

respondents chose the option of student-testimonial blogs as the "most helpful," which is why it

is not listed at all in Table 2 above.

  RQ3: What is the relationship between students' year in college and what current college

students report their college experience has been?

  A Mann-Whitney test was conducted to compare overall responses to the PACE section

of the College Student Experience survey between freshmen and non-freshmen respondents. In

addition, this same test was conducted to compare the isolated sections of the PACE survey

questions as separated by climate categories: managerial support, institutional structure, student

needs, teamwork, and task control. The results of these tests are exhibited in Table 3.

Table 3

Differences between Freshmen and Non-freshmen on PACE and Subscales

	n	Mean Rank	*p*
PACE			.127
Freshmen	25	45.20	
Non-freshmen	53	36.81	
Managerial Support			.075
Freshmen	25	47.36	
Non-freshmen	53	37.38	
Institutional Structure			.032
Freshmen	25	47.44	
Non-freshmen	53	35.75	
Student Needs			.132
Freshmen	25	45.12	
Non-freshmen	53	36.85	
Teamwork			.008
Freshmen	25	49.28	
Non-freshmen	53	34.89	
Task Control			.770
Freshmen	25	40.58	
Non-freshmen	53	38.99	

The results indicate that there is not, overall, a statistically significant relationship between the

two variables posed in *RQ3,* year in school and students' self-report of college experience, as the

mean rank of scores for the PACE survey was 45.12 for freshmen and 36.85 for non-freshmen,

yielding a *p*-value of .127. Interestingly, freshmen scored the PACE survey higher than non-

freshmen. This indicates that though there is not a statistically significant relationship in the

differences in results between freshmen versus non-freshmen, freshmen respondents were more

satisfied overall with their college experience compared to non-freshman participants.

Interestingly, within each climate category section on the PACE survey, there were

statistically significant relationships between freshmen versus non-freshmen. The responses

within both the institutional structure climate category and the teamwork climate category

yielded statistically significant differences with a *p*-value of $p = .032$ and $p = .008$ respectively.

This statistical difference within each category points to the fact that freshmen were significantly

more satisfied with their individual experiences in these areas than non-freshmen. It is also

important to note that within the sub-category of managerial support, with a *p*-value of .075 the

difference in responses between freshmen and non-freshmen approached statistical significance.

The remaining two categories, student needs/development and meaningful work/task control

yielded *p*-values of .132 and .770 respectively, indicating that there is not a statistical difference

between the overall satisfaction of freshmen versus non-freshmen in these sub-categories.

Although no statistically significant relationships were found between students with

exposure versus those without exposure to recruitment-driven college social media sites on

responses to the PACE survey, it is important to point out a few final statistics. In revisiting the

results of *RQ1,* it is necessary to break down the differences in responses of freshman versus

non-freshman (see Table 4).

Table 4

Differences between Freshmen and Non-freshmen Exposure to Social Media

	n	%
Exposure		
Freshmen	12	15
Non-freshmen	25	32
Total	36	47
Non-exposure		
Freshmen	13	16
Non-freshmen	29	37
Total	42	53
Total Respondents	78	100

Of the 78 responses to the survey question asking about respondent's prior exposure to social

media sites, 36 respondents indicated that they did have exposure to these sites. According to the

survey results, 12 of those 36 respondents were first-time freshman, and 24 of the respondents

were non-freshmen. It is important to remember that 25 freshmen participated in the present

study. As such, the remaining 13 freshmen reported that they did not have any exposure to social

media sites prior to attending college. The implications of this will be discussed. The rationale

for presenting these statistics is that commentary will be permitted regarding the existence or

non-existence of a relationship between exposure to social media sites and the statistically

significant differences in responses to sub-categories of the PACE survey of freshmen versus

non-freshmen.

Discussion

There are a number of significant findings from the results of the present study that potentially call for a re-examination of colleges' approach to using social media tools as a recruitment method. While the study has concluded that social media do in fact influence students' enrollment decisions, there are implications for future research regarding if social media sites with recruitment-driven purpose cause a cognitive gap in students' expected versus actual experience. In addition, social media sites can also be ruled out as a factor influencing the sinking levels of satisfaction in the areas of managerial support, institutional structure, and teamwork in non-freshmen versus the more-satisfied freshmen respondents at the present time. While the current study cannot comment on the college experience perceived directly by those potential students who visit recruitment-driven social media sites, there is much to say about current students, their overall satisfaction of college experience, those students' exposure to social media tools, and ultimately the existence and non-existence of relationships to all three.

To briefly re-cap, the overall research goal for the present study was to discover if current students' exposure to recruitment-driven social media websites and subsequent social media tools would alter students' self-reported experiences. In addition, it sought to discover any potential influence social media sites had on a student's college enrollment decision. To best address if in fact these over-arching questions were answered, the discussion will address research questions one by one.

RQ1: To what extent does prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven information on college social media sites contribute to what current college students report their college experience has been?

The non-statistically significant relationship between results on the PACE survey of respondents with exposure versus without exposure to social media sites ($p = .663$) as a part of their college search process indicates that exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites does not have a direct relationship or influence on students' self-report of experience (Table 1). As the PACE survey is designed to not only measure answers about experience, but about student satisfaction as well, exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites does not ultimately have an influence or a relationship to students' self-report of overall satisfaction with their college experience within the sample of the population selected for the present study.

To briefly revisit Wiese (1994), and his discovery in the "cognitive gap" between students' expected versus actual experience, the subjects of that study were entirely first-time freshman students who had only been in college for a few weeks (1994); therefore, given that the present study examined responses from students of all years and at a later point in the semester, perhaps the existence of this "cognitive gap" does not currently exist in students in the sample of the population examined here. However, the lack of a statistically significant relationship between students' overall satisfaction with their college experience and their exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites does not entirely rule out that this cognitive gap no longer exists in current college students. As mentioned in the results section, there were statistically significant differences between sub-category responses and satisfaction levels of first-time freshmen and non-freshmen. While the present study may have determined that overall, the "cognitive gap" is not created, influenced, or related to exposure to social media among the members of the sample, it is important to also determine if exposure to social media is potentially related to the statistically significant differences in responses on the PACE survey of

freshmen and non-freshmen. Before addressing that, however, it is important to note that the results of the present study did discover that exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites and information may be related to a student's final enrollment decision. This addresses the second research question posed:

RQ2: To what extent does prior and/or frequent exposure to recruitment-driven information on college social media sites contribute to students' college enrollment decision?

As explained in the results section, Table 2, while just over half (51.2%) of respondents to the College Student Experience survey claimed that none of the social media sites listed on the survey question were "the most helpful," this also means that nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) indicated that a form of social media was in fact helpful. The goal of this question on the survey was to determine which specific sites had the greatest influence on students' enrollment decision and to determine if social media sites in general were reported as helpful and influential in students' final enrollment decisions. Though the greater percentage of respondents to the survey found no social media sites helpful in their enrollment decision, the fact that 47.7% of respondents selected a social media site as "most helpful" indicates that social media do influence enrollment decision. There is no way to comment, however, on if the exposure to social media, and whether or not its information, positively or negatively influences enrollment decision. It is likely that content shared on social media sites run by the Rochester Institute of Technology positively influenced those students who sited social media as "helpful" (because respondents on the present study ultimately chose the Rochester Institute of Technology). Since the present study did not ask specific questions to gather that information, the most that can be said is that there is a relationship.

The most significant discovery from the survey results are the differences in responses to the PACE survey of freshmen and non-freshmen students. These variances in student satisfaction in the specific categories of institutional structure, teamwork, and managerial support have the potential to determine that there is some factor, or multiple factors, which has caused this. The third and final research question to be addressed is:

RQ3: What is the relationship between students' year in college and what current college students report their college experience has been*?*

Although there was not a statistically significant relationship (and ultimately a difference) in responses of freshmen versus non-freshman to the PACE survey as a whole ($p = .127$), the statistically significant differences to the three climate categories mentioned is most intriguing. In re-examining the differences in the climate categories of institutional structure (in which $p = .032$), teamwork (in which $p = .008$), and managerial support (in which $p = .075$), there are a few key elements to these categories that link them together. According to Tiu (2001), teamwork and managerial support questions deal specifically with interactions between students, faculty members, and other students both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, these are two categories of the PACE survey that are directly linked to satisfaction (Tiu, 2001). All three of these categories have nothing to do with student life such as living in the dormitories, campus dining, extra-curricular, or support services such as tutoring or the Registrar's office. Those areas of the college experience are covered mostly in the student needs and development category of questions. No statistically significant difference was found between freshmen versus non-freshmen in the student needs category, which indicates that whatever levels of satisfaction each

group had, it is unlikely that an external factor such as prior exposure to recruitment-driven

social media sites influenced this outcome.

What is also interesting is that the category of institutional structure deals mostly with

respondents' perception of how the institution as a whole affects both their personal performance

as a student and how the institution as a whole ensures the success of all members of the

institution's vast community. Freshmen, according to the survey results, significantly report

satisfaction with the institution's ability to do these things. This means that students who are

non-freshmen clearly do not agree. Implications for future research could certainly be to

determine what specifically is causing this difference. Additionally, to paraphrase Tiu (2001),

teamwork for students means that they were able to participate in making decisions and

contribute to group projects. Consequently, a core value of their institution is a spirit of both

cooperation and teamwork. Thus, the teamwork category is arguably most closely linked with

the institutional structure category as both ask questions related to the theme of unity,

communication, participation, and cooperation. The fact that freshmen versus non-freshmen

responses to PACE yielded a ($p = .008$) difference to the teamwork category, which as

previously explained is also linked to institutional structure, indicates that in some way freshmen

feel that teamwork is valued and that their contributions are in fact valued. While this study

cannot determine the specifics of why non-freshmen, for example, do not claim that teamwork is

valued nor do they feel that their team contributions are as valued, the final piece to the current

research is to discuss whether exposure to social media had anything to do with this discovery. It

is also important to note here that while teamwork, institutional structure, and managerial

support are all connected and all resulted in differing levels of satisfaction among the two

groups, the final climate category, meaningful work/task control held the most evenly scored

levels of satisfaction in the two groups. The *p*-value for this category (*p* = .770) indicates that

across all levels and years of study in the sample used in the present study, all respondents

generally felt value in the work they were doing as well as ownership for the work that they are

assigned in the classroom.

Whether or not the introduction of exposure to recruitment-driven social media sites is a

variable influencing the statistical differences previously discussed, it is safe to say that there is

likely a variable, or multiple variables, that do in fact influence these discrepancies. To conclude

the discussion section, it is necessary to examine the potential role that exposure to social media

could play in the resulting differences of responses of freshmen versus non-freshmen. According

to Table 4, 36 of 78 respondents to the College Student Experience survey claimed that they had

visited recruitment-driven social media sites prior to attending college, a staggeringly low

number considering the amount of time and energy that many colleges and universities spend to

keep their social media sites running. To recap, 25 of the 78 total respondents to the present

study were freshmen. Thus, according to Table 4, 12 freshmen claimed to have had exposure to

social media sites, while 13 claimed no exposure to social media sites. The freshmen respondents

to the present study are split almost evenly between exposure and non-exposure, an indication

that it is likely that exposure to social media is not, in fact a variable that influenced or caused

the statistically significant differences in responses to the PACE survey climate categories,

managerial support, institutional structure, and teamwork. It is also difficult to say if exposure to

social media influenced the responses of the non-freshmen first because there is no specific

breakdown of year available in the demographics to determine, if, for example the majority of

"non-freshmen" were only sophomore students or if they were grad students. More specifics on

the make-up of the "non-freshmen" group may have helped to determine more of a trend and

potential relationship between exposures to social media and the discrepancies in satisfaction in

the two groups.

While exposure to social media may not directly influence the satisfaction levels of

current students both overall and in sub-categories, as mentioned, social media plays a role in the

enrollment decision. Research conducted by other scholars such as Greenwood (2012) and

Johnston (2010) has also concluded that social media plays a role, though minimal, in the

decision. In addition to confirming that social media still influences enrollment decision in some

form, the more significant discovery is that, within the group of respondents surveyed, social

media is not linked to satisfaction of experience. Hence, the cognitive gap identified by both

Wiese (1994) and Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006), is not linked to social media exposure.

This does not mean that the cognitive gap no longer exists in current students; it means that

exposure and interactions with social media do not appear to cause it in the sample of the present

study. Unfortunately, as such a small number of the actual student population participated, 78 of

16,950 total students at RIT, the present study is unable to comment on the population as a

whole, and simply comments on the trends within the sample. With that, it is important to

discuss the limitations and suggestions for future research that could enhance and build upon the

results and analysis presented here.

Limitations and Future Research

The potential results of the present study are beneficial to both the academic community

and the community of higher education enrollment. While prior exposure to recruitment-driven

social media does not appear to relate to students' self-report of experience within the sample,

the significant findings in differences between freshmen versus non-freshmen levels of

satisfaction within the PACE survey do call for additional research. There are a number of

factors that could have influenced this discrepancy. As social media has also been ruled out as a

factor or variable causing this discrepancy between year groups, additional survey research

questioning more specifically students' interactions in the classroom needs to be conducted, as

that appears to be the crux of where the differences are occurring. That suggested study is less of

an enrollment management, and more of an internal, institutional study; however, in the field of

enrollment management, it is also suggested that further research be conducted to discover if the

"cognitive gap" in student expectation versus actual experience still exists and if so, what causes

it. To do this, it would be beneficial to survey a contingent of prospective-only students and

gauge first what their exposure to recruitment materials is, and second, what their expectations of

experience are. The second step to this suggested study would be to re-survey those prospective

students who actually enrolled at a particular university about their current college experiences

and to compare discrepancies between the reported "expected" versus "actual" experiences.

Limitations

Given the results of the present study, it is necessary to discuss the study's limitations.

Despite the promising potential results, there were a certain number of limitations to the study

that may call for a much larger-scale study to be conducted to truly determine if social media

influences experience in any way. One primary limitation is that the survey is entirely a self-

report. While all surveys pose this issue, it is important to mention because the results of the

entire study depend on what specific respondents claim. It does not actually measure their

thoughts. In addition, a second limitation is that despite great efforts to gain participants from a potential pool of 1,200, only 78 individuals participated, which makes commentary for entire populations difficult.

In addition, the introduction and portions of the literature review discuss the potential for the existence of a gap between what is communicated via the social media sites' "promised experience" and students' actual experience as a potential cause of rates of attrition and/or transferring to alternate institutions. It is vital to note the current research is not able to comment on the variables measured and tested as contributing to rates of dropout (attrition) and/or transfer due to what variables are actually operationalized and measured. For example, there are no questions in the survey regarding dropout causes of thoughts of dropout. Should the study have focused more on these issues, commentary on these issues would be possible.

What is most significantly and not directly addressed in the current research study is the actual content of the "promised experience" communicated on social media websites. As mentioned, as with any survey, self-report does not allow the researcher to access respondents' actual thoughts. More important than that, the survey did not ask specifically for respondents to recall specific information they remember being communicated via social media sites about the college experience. Perhaps, if questions attempting to gain this information had been asked, the present study would have been able to comment on differences between what "promises" colleges made and what students actually experience. Despite this fact, the results of the present study do point to the fact that within the sample group, exposure and ultimately any information conveyed on those sites did not influence the report of experience or satisfaction. Therefore, since the satisfaction of the student respondents to the present study was not affected by

exposure to social media, it is arguable to conclude that current students may no longer have a

"cognitive gap" between pre-enrollment expectations and post-enrollment experiences.

Additional research is strongly advised to verify and validate these results.

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Appendix A

Climate Categories and Sub-categories

Section 1: Number of Questions per Climate Categories

Climate Categories	# of Questions
Managerial Behavior	10
Institutional Structure	4
Student Needs/Development	8
Team Work	4
Meaningful Work/ Task Control	4

Tiu, F. S. (2001).

Section 2: Sub-Category Identification
Identification of question sub-categories represented in each climate category section

Managerial Behavior	Managerial Feedback Managerial Support Managerial Acceptance Clear Expectations Communication Creativity
Institutional Structure	Communication Organizational Structure Empowerment Cooperation Team Work Motivation
Student Needs/Development	Student Learning Career Preparation Educational Experience Competencies Student Needs Personal Development
Team Work	Cooperation at team level Communication within teams Problem solving using teams Cooperation at department level Collaboration among teams
Meaningful Work/ Task Control	Meaningful work Relevant work Work control quantity Work control organization Work expectations

Tiu, F. S. (2001).

Appendix B

Survey

Section 1: The College Student Experience Survey

College Student Experience Survey

The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Once you begin, you will not be able to save your results so please allow enough time to complete the survey.

Note that prior to completing this survey, it is requested that you read the informed consent document that was attached to the e-mail message you received. By submitting your responses to the survey below, know that you are agreeing to participate in the study and that you are granting permission to the primary researcher to use your responses for the purposes of her study.

Thank you!

1. When deciding where you would attend college, did you visit prospective colleges' social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc.) and read or view posts shared on the site?

○ Yes

○ No

2. As a high school student looking at potential colleges, how many times each week did you engage with college social media site(s)?

○ 0 times each week

○ 1-5 times each week

○ 6-10 times each week

○ 11 or more times each week

3. Do you believe that college social media sites assisted you in making the final decision of what college to enroll in?

○ Yes

○ No

4. What social media site do you feel was the most helpful for you in making a decision about where to attend college?

○ Facebook

○ Twitter

○ Blogs or blog sites like Tumblr

○ Instagram

○ Flickr

○ YouTube

○ Other

5. What social media site do you feel was the least helpful in making a decision about where to attend college?

○ Facebook

○ Twitter

○ Blogs or blog sites like Tumblr

○ Instagram

○ Flickr

○ YouTube

○ Other

6. In reading or viewing posts on a college's official social media site, I found the posts uploaded by the college itself to be the most helpful.

○ Yes

○ No

7. In reading or viewing posts on a college's official social media site, I found posts uploaded by individual users, not the college itself, to be the most helpful.

○ Yes

○ No

8. Colleges will frequently upload blogs posts on their admission website written by current students. In your college search process, did you ever see one of these blogs?

○ Yes: I read blogs like this as part of my college search

○ Yes: but I never read blogs like this as part of my college search

○ No: but I am familiar with what they are

○ No: I have never heard of this type of blog

If yes to question 8, please answer questions 9, 10, and 11. If no, please skip to question 11.

9. In your college search, how often did you read blogs written by current students that were officially posted by the college?

○ Daily (or more)

○ Weekly

○ Monthly

○ A few times a year

○ Never

10. Social media sites was the #1 influence of where I decided to attend college.

○ Yes

○ Other: [   ]

11. In the section below, please reflect on your experiences during the present semester as a first year college student. Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your college and your experience as a student there.

Instructions: Please answer honestly.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Professors here provide timely feedback for my work	○	○	○	○	○
Professors here express confidence in my work	○	○	○	○	○
My ideas are taken seriously by my professors	○	○	○	○	○
My personal development is important to my professors	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Professors here help me to improve my work	○	○	○	○	○
I always receive appropriate feedback about my coursework	○	○	○	○	○
Course expectations are communicated to me by professors	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty set clear goals for me to achieve in their classes	○	○	○	○	○
I am given the opportunity in class to express my ideas	○	○	○	○	○
I am allowed to be creative in my class work	○	○	○	○	○
I receive adequate information about important activities at this institution	○	○	○	○	○
Open and ethical information is communicated at this institution	○	○	○	○	○
A spirit of cooperation exists at this institution	○	○	○	○	○
Individuals who I've encountered at this institution have motivated my scholastic performance	○	○	○	○	○
This institution prepares students for further learning	○	○	○	○	○
This institution prepares students for a career	○	○	○	○	○
I am satisfied with my educational experience thus far	○	○	○	○	○
My competencies have been enhanced	○	○	○	○	○
Students receive an excellent education at this institution	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty meet the needs of students here	○	○	○	○	○
Students here are assisted with their personal development	○	○	○	○	○
Support services personnel meet the needs of students	○	○	○	○	○
There is a spirit of cooperation among group members assigned for a class	○	○	○	○	○
There is opportunity for all ideas to be exchanged among group members assigned for a class	○	○	○	○	○
Groups assigned in class frequently use problem-	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
solving techniques					
A spirit of cooperation exists in my major department	○	○	○	○	○
I am responsible for meaningful work	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of work I do is appropriate	○	○	○	○	○
I am able to organize my school day	○	○	○	○	○
Accuracy is expected of me in my coursework	○	○	○	○	○

12. What year did you graduate from high school?

○ 2013

○ 2012

○ 2011

○ Prior to 2011

13. Please indicate your gender.

○ Male

○ Female

14. Please indicate your age

Age [   ]

15. Are you currently a first-time freshman? (i.e., is this is your first semester as a full-time college student?)

○ Yes

○ No

This completes the College Student Experience Survey. Thank you for your time!

SUBMIT