CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

SOCIAL MEDIA AND COLLEGE CHOICE

A Dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education in

Educational Leadership

By

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Dedication

To my Father in Heaven
Acknowledgements

First, I thank my God for giving me the revelation and inspiration to balance faith with intellect to produce a work that might be helpful to others. I thank my wife, Angel, for standing by me, encouraging me and never allowing me to give up on this journey. I thank my son for enduring the pressures of expectation from those who believe he should walk my path as he is in the midst of discovering his own. I thank my daughter for sharing my time and attention with this process as she navigated the dynamics of her high school career and adolescent life. I thank my family, friends and colleagues for their continuous support and encouragement. Specifically, I am thankful to Dr. Mary Ann Cummins-Prager who served as my mentor through this process and an incredible source of support in my life. I am also thankful to Dr. William Watkins who has been a model of exemplary leadership and source of inspiration over the years. I am grateful for Dr. Dimpal Jain for taking the time to give me direction, encouragement and a sounding board during times of confusion. Further, I am grateful for the support of Dr. Nathan Durdella who provided guidance to me throughout this process and through the navigation of my career. I am thankful for Audrey Silvestre and Cynthia Cifuentes who provided excellent support as research assistants on this project. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Dr. Yi (Tom) Cai for giving me the inspiration and insight to pursue a topic that would contribute to the world outside of the field of education. I am truly grateful for Dr. Miguel Ceja for his time, support, compassion and insight into the world of College Choice. Finally, words cannot adequately express my gratitude for Dr. Richard Moore for being a great chair, a great coach, a great mentor and a wonderful colleague.
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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL MEDIA AND COLLEGE CHOICE

by

Evans Dwayne Cantrell

Doctor of Education Degree

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

As popularity in social media and technology increases so has the role of technology in the college admission process. There is a clear link between the technologies that are most used by admission offices and the technologies used by prospective college students, however what is not clear is why these are the most prevalent technologies (Lindbeck and Fodrey 2009). In-depth review of the literature also revealed that little systematic and rigorous research has been published regarding the use of technology in admissions or its impact on admission professionals and applicants (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). Further, though admission departments all over the country are actively engaged with the use of technology including social media, few have confidence they are fully benefiting from its use (Lindbeck & Fodrey 2009).

Using Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model as the theoretical framework, the aim of this mixed methods study was to conduct an empirical analysis to ascertain how students used social media through each stage of the process. I conducted an analysis of first-time freshmen at a large comprehensive university as they reflected back on their college choice processes. I gathered survey data and conducted statistical analysis to determine statistically significant correlations between various student
characteristics and their use of social media throughout the five stages of the college choice process. To explain findings from survey data, I conducted focus groups hear students' voices pertaining to why they used social media through each phase of the college choice process.
CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Introduction

The college selection process is a daunting experience for high school students. While navigating through adolescence, many students find themselves in a position of having to make a significant life decision with potential lasting implications. As teenagers, students will need to consider the various aspects of life after high school. These considerations include, but are not limited to, whether or not to leave home, in what region of the country they will live, the type and size of college they will attend, the career they will select, the major that will best lead them to their desired career, and, importantly, the amount of money this journey will cost them and their families. In the midst of all of these considerations, ultimately prospective college students will decide to engage in the college application process.

One of the changes in the college admissions process over the past years is the number of students who are applying to college and the means by which they apply. For example, according to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011), three quarters of the colleges and universities in the United States experienced an increase in the number of college applications received from high school seniors in 2010. One of the reasons noted was an increase of the number of high school graduates; however there was a significant increase in the number of applications submitted by each student. This same study indicated that 77% of high school seniors applied to three or more colleges in the fall of 2010 which is the highest number in 20 years (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011). This phenomenon was attributed to the increasing proportion of college applications submitted online noting that
in 2010, 98% of colleges and universities had online applications available for students (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011).

Before high school students reach the application process, they engage in the college search process (Chapman, 1981) where they actively research information to determine which school they will pursue admission. This process has also changed over the years. More than any other generation, this generation of high school students demonstrates a constant need to be connected to online social networks and have access to digital information (Lindbeck, & Fodrey, 2010). In fact, more than 80% of high school students indicated that they were open to engaging with college admissions representatives through chat rooms and 57% of teens used the internet to research information about colleges (Gastwirth, 2007). Because of this, chief college admissions representatives continue to pursue new strategies to attract applicants and increase enrollments through the use of technology and social media (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007).

Social media is an online communications platform which allows users to establish social networks through peer-to-peer communications and connections (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Social media has become an integral aspect of daily personal life and business practices of millions of people resulting in new, unconventional social and consumer behavior (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Organizations overall are changing their marketing strategies to meet the changing phenomenon of social networking especially given the age and technological sophistication of their audience, thus placing colleges and universities in position to strategically market on social network platforms (Noel-Levitz, 2009). In a study of 802 teens in America, 94% of teen social media users
say they have a Facebook profile, and 81% say that Facebook is the profile they use most often (Pew Research Center, 2013). A 2009 survey conducted by The Center for Community College Student Engagement found that 95% of traditional age students used social media, like Facebook or Twitter, several times a day for many reasons (Glassford, 2010). Data indicates that 89% of teens who post photos online say that people comment or respond to their photos, 72% of teens who post videos online report that people comment on their video content and 76% of teens who use social networks report commenting on blog posts written by others, which demonstrates that the social network experience is as much about sharing information as it is about teens engaging with one another about the information that is shared (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2009). For colleges, one of the benefits of using social media in marketing to prospective students is the unique opportunities to present accurate observations of campus life and the sharing of messages about real experiences to balance the unfiltered information that students share with one another (Glassford, 2010).

**Problem Statement**

In the area of technology and college admissions, there is continued evidence that colleges and universities are eager to embrace new communication tools to recruit and research prospective students (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). A recent survey of 1,000 college-bound seniors shows that prospective students not only value quality content, they are willing to read a great deal of the most valuable content on college web sites (Noel-Levitz, 2009). In addition, the majority of students said that if a college’s web site content did not meet their expectations, they would be disappointed or even consider
dropping that college from their search (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Though social media in
college marketing, recruitment and admissions is on the rise, youth are still more
receptive to e-mail marketing than marketing through social networking (Noel-Levitz,
2009).

There is a clear link between the technologies that are most used by admission
offices and the technologies used by prospective college students, however what is not
clear is why these are the most prevalent technologies (Lindbeck and Fodrey 2009). In-
depth review of the literature also revealed that little systematic and rigorous research has
been published regarding the use of technology in admissions or its impact on admission
professionals and applicants (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). Further, though
admission departments all over the country are actively engaged with the use of
technology including social media, few have confidence they are fully benefiting from its
use (Lindbeck & Fodrey 2009). For example, though prospective college students
indicate a high preference for completing applications and communicating with college
students and faculty online, there is still a significant preference to receive acceptance
letters and financial aid awards by paper mail (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Most importantly, in
the area of social media the challenge for colleges and universities is that simply because
prospective students are using technology and social media as an outlet, college invasion
into their space may not always be welcome, and certain approaches may not be the most
effective for reaching students (Lindbeck, & Fodrey, 2010). Therefore, based on the
literature a study that examines prospective college students’ perspectives and practices
of social media in the college choice process would significantly contribute to the body of
research available to colleges and universities.
**Purpose and Significance**

In the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the use of social media in college admissions targeted toward perspective students (Cappex.com, 2010). The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine college freshmen as they reflect back on their use of social media throughout the college choice process. Using Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model as the theoretical framework, the aim of this study was to conduct an empirical analysis to ascertain how students used social media through each stage of the process. Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model consists of Pre-Search Behavior; Search behavior; Application Decision; Choice Decision; and, Matriculation Decision. This framework guided this study to ascertain how students use social media throughout these stages.

Thus, through this study, I conducted an analysis of first-time freshmen at a large comprehensive university. I gathered survey data and conduct statistical analysis to determine statistically significant correlations between various student characteristics and their use of social media throughout the five stages of the college choice process. To explain findings from survey data, I conducted focus groups hear students’ voices pertaining to why they used social media through each phase of the college choice process. As a professional in the field of university marketing and recruitment my reason for this study was to perform an empirical analysis that would shed light on student behavior in the area of social media. As a researcher, my goal for this study was to better inform the social media marketing and recruitment efforts of colleges and universities nationwide.
Research Questions

The following questions were the focus of this study:

1. At what stage of the college choice process did prospective college students use social media?
2. Which social media platforms did prospective college students use in their college choice process?
3. What are prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process?
4. How do prospective college students perceive colleges that advertise in social media realms?
5. How do prospective college students prefer to receive communications from four-year colleges?
6. How do different subgroups of prospective college students use social media differently throughout each stage of the college choice process?

Conceptual Framework

Many research methodologies and conceptual frameworks have been utilized to cast light on factors and processes by which students make decisions about whether or not to attend college, to which colleges they will apply and which college they will choose to attend (Jordan & Plank, 2001). Newell and Simon’s research on human problem solving identified one decision-making model, referred to as the Information Processing Model, which provides a means for understanding the decision-making process which students employ for making college choices (Govan, Patrick & Yen,
The information-processing model posits that students act as information-processing agents that need to employ decision-making strategies with limited information and processing capacities (Govan, Patrick & Yen, 2006). In providing information to students, this model helps determine what information to provide, how much to provide and how to provide it so that students can process the information provided (Govan, Patrick & Yen, 2006).

However, from the institution's perspective as a recruiter of students, the components, stages, or steps in the process through which students select a college have been variously described (Litten, 1982). These stages and steps have been captured in various models developed by researchers in the area of college choice. An example of the models identified includes econometric models, consumer models, sociological models and models that use a combination thereof (Stage, & Hossler, 1989). In short, econometric models measure the benefits of attending college versus not attending, consumer models measure decisions based on costs of attendance and the risks associated with those costs, and sociological models measure decision-making based on the attainment of status associated with college attendance (Stage, & Hossler, 1989).

One of the first models established (Chapman 1981) which serves as a foundation for college models, suggests that student college choice is influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences which include three categories: (1) the influence of significant persons; (2) the fixed characteristics of the institution; and (3) the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective student (Chapman, 1981). In this model, significant persons consist of parents, counselors, peers and others. The fixed characteristics of the institution are location, cost, requirements
and other elements that are relative constants. The institutions efforts to communicate with students involve systematic marketing strategies to attract students to the university. A strategic approach to the application of marketing principles can attract students to a campus who might otherwise not be interested (Chapman, 1981). College choice involves student characteristics and outside influences that are composed of significant persons, college characteristics and institutional efforts to communicate with prospective students which results in students applying for admission at multiple colleges (Chapman 1981).

Years later, Hossler & Gallagher’s college choice theory was established and became one of the most widely cited models of college choice phases (Cabrera, A & La Nasa, 2000; Shaw et. al., 2009). This model posits three distinct phases through which students navigate in the college choice process: the predisposition phase, the search phase and the choice phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Predisposition is the phase where students develop their aspirations to pursue higher education; the search phase involves various activities conducted by students to gather information about colleges, and the choice phase is where students select and enroll in the college of their choice (Jordan & Plank, 2001). The literature suggests that this process begins as early as the seventh grade and ends when the high school graduate enrolls at college or university (Cabrera, A & La Nasa, 2000).

Another model, incidentally established by another researcher by the name of Chapman (1986) expands the three stage model into five stages consisting of Pre-Search Behavior; Search behavior; Application Decision; Choice Decision; and, Matriculation Decision. Pre-search is the phase where students recognize the need and possibility of higher education, the search phase consists of active information-seeking by the student,
application is the act on behalf of the student of selecting the colleges to which to apply, the choice phase is the consideration of colleges to which the student has been admitted, and the Matriculation Decision phase is where the student actually enrolls in the selected institution (Chapman, 1986).

Chapman’s five stage model seemed to align closest to the current studies conducted to provide data and strategies for college admissions professionals (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011; Noel-Levitz, 2009; Noel-Levitz, 2010; Noel-Levitz, 2012). The five stages provided the depth for analysis relevant for colleges and universities. Therefore, Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model served as the theoretical framework for this study to ascertain how students used social media through each stage of the process. This study examined how, and if, students used social media from the Pre-Search stage, through the Matriculation Decision stage.

From this study, the Social Media Intensity Index was created to measure social media use. My index suggests an emerging theory that revealed three subscales that can be used as a framework by future researchers. This index and its subscales can be adjusted and used across disciplines.

**Overview of Methodology**

As the purpose of this triangulated mixed methods study was to examine the use of social media throughout Chapman’s (1986) five stages of the four-year college search process, I sought to learn how first-time college freshmen at a large public comprehensive university used social media throughout their college choice process. For this type of study, a spectrum of students should be heard; from students who used little
or no social media at all, to students who frequently use social media. Therefore, all first-time freshmen on campus in fall 2013 were the focus of this study. In recent years, the first-time freshman enrollment has exceeded 4,000 students which provided an ample number of participants for quantitative study through the administration of surveys which will be offered to the entire first-time freshman population. From this large number of students, focus groups were selected to compliment the quantitative data with qualitative data.

The first step in the process was to contact upper-level administrators at the institution to inform them of my intent to engage in research. This assisted in maintaining positive relationships with colleagues in the profession. Because of my professional relationship with staff and students at the institution, I had access and permission to invite students to participate in this study. Second, I conducted an initial pilot focus group with a convenience sample of first time freshman in the effort of testing the research questions and gauging whether or not questions needed to be revised. Third, I completed the Institutional Review Board processes to gain permission to conduct surveys and focus groups. Next, I contacted the university department responsible for conducting annual surveys of first time freshmen to collaborate with the development, promotion and dissemination of the survey. Using email and student web portal, I invited every first time freshman student on campus to participate in this study. My goal was to achieve optimal results that were valid, reliable, sensitive, unbiased and complete by producing a survey consisting of questions that measured the behaviors that I wanted them to measure, resulting in data that represented accurate values for these measures (Collins, 2003). For example, I ensured that my survey questions were connected to the research
questions identified for this study. The survey consisted of 130 questions related to college choice, college marketing and social media. The questions were designed using a Likert scale which is a basic 5-7 point bipolar scale in which a respondent ranks rates their opinion in a range of most to least, agree to disagree or like to dislike (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Questions were also written to gather background information on the participants. These questions gathered data including, but not limited to, age, gender, region, major and parents’ education. These questions allowed for the assessment of variables in the analysis of the data.

Next, I contacted faculty of first-time-freshman classes on campus to invite students to participate in focus groups. For the focus groups, I sought the permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pinnacle University to conduct research on the campus. Once approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board for to conduct research for this study I contacted senior administration in Academic Affairs to assist me in the identification of faculty of freshman courses who might be willing to identify student participants. As access to the students was granted by the professors, I made arrangements with the professors to meet with their classes to introduce the study and distribute invitations to participate. When potential participants responded to invitations, they were properly screened to determine that they meet the requirements to participate in this study based on the purpose and research questions. For this study, students were required to be first time college freshman, 18 years of age and attend the Pinnacle University.

Finally, I created the first Social Media Intensity Index which suggested an emerging theory on social media and college choice. This was revealed through the three
dimensions of the Social Media Intensity Index that I created to assist with the measurement of social media use. In establishing this pilot instrument to measure social media use, I consulted with senior administration and marketing professionals at Pinnacle University to determine what aspects of students’ social media use were important for the university. Their desired measurements aligned with select survey questions that were included in this study.

Ethical issues related to this study include the protection of participant identity and avoidance of interviewing students to whom I may have connection. I took careful measures to protect the identity of the participants by using pseudonyms to reference the research site and generalities to refer to any data. Further, having colleagues in administrative positions, I refrained from inviting students to participate who might feel that my connection to their superiors (ie. supervisors in their workplace, professors, etc.) might have jeopardized their anonymity.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

According to Bryant (2004), delimitations are factors that the researcher uses to constrain the boundaries and narrow the scope of the study. The results may not be applied for all persons, places or at all times. The delimitations of the study are as follows:

- This study was conducted at one public university in California. Though the research site is a large diverse setting, attitudes and behaviors may not be reflective of all students nationwide.
• Social media is a rapidly evolving entity. New channels will be developed and preferences of channels used by students will change. As the types of social media preferred by prospective students changes, the results of how new forms of social media may change.

• Due to the time constraints of this study it is not possible to study the frequency of use of every channel of social media by prospective college students. Therefore, only the top three most frequently used channels were selected for this study. How students prefer and use other forms of social media throughout the stages of the college choice process is not included in this study.

• The theoretical framework selected for this study was Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model. Though this model is the most closely aligned with current admissions and technology studies, there are other models that have fewer stages, and others that expand college choice into more stages. Studies on those additional stages may provide different data.

Limitations are what are inherent in qualitative and quantitative methodologies that will limit the study (Bryant, 2004). The limitations of the study are as follows:

• Because this was a retrospective study as first-time college freshmen reflected back on their college choice process, some of their recollections may be inaccurate, information may be exaggerated, or details may have been forgotten over the years.

• There is a possibility that language barriers or misunderstanding of terminology used in the survey could yield inaccurate data.
Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I presented the recent phenomenon of the use of social media in our society especially by college, universities and prospective college students and the challenge of learning how prospective college students are using media throughout the college choice process. This chapter contained the problem, purpose of study, and research questions and concluded with the conceptual framework and methodological approach along with the delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapter II is a review of the relevant literature related to technology in admissions, social media and college choice. In this chapter, social media is defined along with the selected channels of social media for this study. This chapter concludes with the description of the theoretical framework selected to guide the research. Chapter III contains a detailed description of the methodology selected for this study. The chapter will first describe the research tradition selected, the proposed research setting and context, the research sample and data sources and the process for data analysis. Chapter IV consists of the results and findings of this study. This chapter contains tables and figures displaying the data collected, relevant responses from focus groups and descriptions of analysis of the data. Chapter V consists of discussion and conclusions. This chapter contains a summary of the purpose, research questions, methodology, summary of findings, possible application of findings and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In recent years there have been significant changes in the preferred methods students use to search for information. One profound change is accessing information through the Internet. However both the nature of digital material and the strategies students use to navigate the material are ever-evolving (Rich, 2008). Recognizing that this generation is far more technologically savvy than any previous generation, understanding how to distribute information through digital channels is important (Lindbeck & Fodrey, 2010). In fact, this generation of students is so technologically astute that one university used the term ‘Google generation’ to identify individuals born after 1993 who have no recollection of life without the Internet (Rich, 2008). This generation, also known as the millennial generation, has acquired advanced information navigation skills in technological realms which raises challenges for universities to maintain innovation in the distribution of information through digital media. One challenge in particular is for colleges and universities to maintain awareness of the online channels that students choose in searching for information in general (Rich, 2008).

Today, technology has emerged and is an integral aspect throughout students’ transition from secondary to postsecondary education, particularly as students engage in information exchange with colleges pertaining to the admissions process (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). In fact, according to the findings from recent survey data, 88% of prospective college students stated that they would be disappointed or possibly eliminate a school from consideration if the web site at that school did not meet their expectations (Lindbeck & Fodrey 2009).
This chapter includes literature regarding the technology and college admissions, historical and current information on social media and insights into the concept of college choice. After engaging the literature, I explain the theoretical framework selected for this study and the rationale for its selection.

**Technology in College Admissions**

Research shows that technology is fundamentally changing the landscape of college admissions, from the modes of communication between colleges and students and families to processes for enrollment management and strategic planning (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). According to Noel-Levitz (2009), communicating with prospective students has changed significantly in the past ten years as campus marketing has adapted first to the use of the internet and e-mail and now to the use of newer social media formats like social networking.

For example, Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, (2011) report that in 2010 colleges and universities indicated that 40% of all inquiries from prospective students were received by email or internet (see figure 2.1).
As it pertains to the college application process there has been a noted increase in the number of college applications submitted per student since the introduction of the internet-based application used by most college admission offices (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). One concept of allowing students to apply to multiple colleges using one form is The Common Application which was established in 1976 (Ehrenberg & Liu, 2009). The Common Application is a non-profit membership organization that allows students to complete one application for admission and submit it to any of the member colleges and universities nationwide (Ehrenberg & Liu, 2009). This application process has evolved from a paper application, to a floppy disk to an online application for students (Ehrenberg & Liu, 2009). In 2005, The University of California and The California State University required all students to submit online applications for admission to their combined 23 campuses being the first and largest university systems to
do so (Maitre, 2003). In 2010, approximately 9 out of every 10 students submitted an online application to a four-year college (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2010).

Beyond the application process, colleges and universities have now evolved to providing most of their communications online through web portals. For example, San Jose State University, like many others, conducts their student business through what is known as the My SJSU portal (SJSU, 2013). Through this system, students can view general campus updates, register for classes, pay fees, order and purchase textbooks and even pay for student identifications. However, information on this system also includes the ability for students to view their admissions decisions as soon as they are available (SJSU, 2013). However, though prospective college students indicate a high preference for completing applications and communicating with college students and faculty online, there is still a significant preference to receive acceptance letters and financial aid awards by paper mail (Noel-Levitz, 2009).

**Social Media**

As social media is a relatively new entity, this subsection contains the description of social media, the demographic of users, the leading social media channels and the ways in which colleges and universities use social media to engage with prospective students. Social media is an online communications platform which allows users to establish social networks through peer-to-peer communications and connections (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Social media has become an integral aspect of daily personal life and business practices of millions of people resulting in new, unconventional social and consumer behavior (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Social networking has taken the
internet by storm with a rapid rise in popularity and activity in a very short period of time. According to research by The Nielson Company, social networking has surpassed email in popularity as two-thirds of Internet users worldwide use social networks (Noel-Levitz, 2009). According to the Pew Institute, people ages 18-25 are more likely to engage in multiple realms of social media as demonstrated by an 83% participation rate among this demographic (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

One of the original popular social networks was Friendster which was the first site to move from web log publishing to casual communicating and socializing (Magid & Collier, 2006). Shortly thereafter, MySpace was established to combine web log activity with member-to-member contact allowing users to share online content and media with one another (Magid & Collier, 2006). This was followed by Facebook which is a social networking site that was originally oriented towards college students, and now stands atop the list of social media sites (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007).

In 2007, the social networking site MySpace ranked sixth in the United States in overall web traffic with over 47 million unique visitors each month (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007). MySpace is a more general interest social networking site, with a focus on music and popular culture (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007). MySpace has since lost its popularity and is no longer ranked among the top 10 social media sites. However, according to Experian Marketing Services (2013) Facebook has become, by far, the leading social media channel in the United States with over two billion visits to their site, followed by You Tube and Twitter (see Figure 2.2).
Because these are the three most popular social media channels in the United States, for insight into the nuances of social media I will share details of each. As for teens, in 2007 93% of youth ages 12-17 were internet users who created webpages, uploaded photos and videos, shared personal information, maintained blogs and journals and engaged with other teens on a daily basis (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2009). This technological experience that provides collaboration and user-generated content is well-received by the Millennial generation as evidenced by a 2009 survey which indicated that 50% of respondents reported that they belonged to Facebook and 52% reported that they belonged to MySpace (Lindbeck & Fodrey, 2010). As displayed
in figure 2.3, although Facebook has the highest teen users among all the social media channels at 94%, Twitter actually has the second highest users among teens at 26%, followed by Instagram which had a teen user rate of 11% as reported by Pew Research Institute (Fox, 2013). According to the Pew Research Center (2013) the average teen Facebook user has 300 friends versus the typical teen Twitter user who has 79 followers, thus though teens have waning enthusiasm for Facebook, in part due to the increasing number of adult users and over-saturation of users overall, they continue to use it because it is an important part of overall teenage socializing.

(Fox, 2013)
Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site that was originally oriented towards college students, however eventually Facebook announced it will no longer restrict membership to individuals affiliated with institutions of higher education (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007). In 2010, Facebook users represented 22% of all global internet users, spent over 500 billion minutes engaging in this medium, and shared approximately 70 pieces of content per month (Lilley, Grodzinsky & Gumbus, 2012). A 2009 survey conducted by The Center for Community College Student Engagement found that 95% of traditional age students used social media, like Facebook or Twitter, several times a day for many reasons (Glassford, 2010).

According to co-founder, CEO and President Mark Zukerberg, Facebook exists to provide a communal service by helping you connect and share with the people in your life (Lilley, Grodzinsky & Gumbus, 2012). This is exemplified in the means by which Facebook is utilized. When registering for Facebook, potential members are encouraged to use their real identities and present an accurate description of themselves (Lilley, Grodzinsky & Gumbus, 2012). Once they become members, they invite family, peers, classmates, co-workers, and others to be Facebook friends which builds their friend lists and discloses their social ties and social networks on the site (Lilley, Grodzinsky & Gumbus, 2012). Facebook among teens has gained great popularity. In a study of 802 teens in America, 94% of teen social media users say they have a Facebook profile, and 81% say that Facebook is the profile they use most often (Pew Research Center, 2013).
**You Tube**

Two co-workers attended a dinner party, captured recordings of the dinner party on video and attempted to upload the video content to the internet but found themselves frustrated by the duration of time and the difficulty of the posting process (Wasserman, 2006). It was from this frustration that You Tube was born. Founded in 2005, You Tube is a video sharing site which allows users to upload television and movie clips, music videos and user-generated amateur video content to a common site where it is viewed publicly (Reyes, 2007). The popularity of You Tube arose quickly and gained the attention of media elite due to the large number of teens who were utilizing the site as a video player for their My Space pages (Wasserman, 2006). One year after its inception, You Tube was named Time magazine’s inventions of the year and was shortly thereafter sold to Google for $1.65 billion (Reyes, 2007). Today, You Tube is linked to the Google search engine and remains popular with teens as it allows them record video with their cell phones and quickly upload the content (Wasserman, 2006).

**Twitter**

Launched on July 13, 2006, Twitter 2 is an extremely popular online microblogging service with several millions of users (Asur, & Huberman, 2010). In less than three years of its inception, Twitter commanded more than 41 million users as of July 2009 and continues on a rapid incline (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). Twitter allows users to post messages, referred to as tweet, about any topic within a 140-character limit and/or follow the tweets of others (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). According to Asur, & Huberman, (2010), Twitter can be considered a directed social network, as each
user has a group of subscribers known as followers and submits status updates that consist of personal information, news or links to images, video and articles.

However, unlike most online social networking sites, such as Facebook or MySpace, Twitter users have the option to follow others or be followed by others requiring no reciprocation (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). Because of its one-sided nature of relationship, one study identifies Twitter as more of an information network than a social media site as top users are mostly celebrities and mass media and most of them do not follow their followers back (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). In fact, unlike other social networking services, Twitter shows a low level of communication reciprocity in that 77.9% of users are connected one-way, and only 22.1% have reciprocal relationships (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). Due to its vast reach, a number of corporations, businesses and organizations are using Twitter as a viral marketing mechanism for product advertisement and information dissemination (Asur, & Huberman, 2010).

When thinking about Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, what is important to note about teens’ engagement is that the term social network is the operative term as teens utilize these sites to engage with friends (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2009). In fact, even as information, video and photographic content is posted, the purpose is to share it with their community in a social context. Data indicates that 89% of teens who post photos online say that people comment or respond to their photos, 72% of teens who post videos online report that people comment on their video content and 76% of teens who use social networks report commenting on blog posts written by others, which demonstrates that the social network experience is as much about sharing information as
it is about teens engaging with one another about the information that is shared (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2009). This is a significant point of note for colleges and universities who are attempting to reach teens through these channels. Again, the above mentioned networks were described for informational purposes and context. Other social medial channels used by prospective students may be revealed through the surveys and focus groups that I will be conducting for this study.

**College Social Media Marketing**

The Center for Marketing Research at The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth conducted one of the first longitudinal studies and one of the most comprehensive studies on the use of social media in college admissions (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). This study consisted of a nationwide telephone survey of 478 Admissions Directors, Deans and Admissions Officers from accredited colleges and universities in all 50 states. One of the results of this survey indicated that 91% of colleges and universities feel that social media is either “very important” or “somewhat important” to their future strategy which was far greater than the perceptions of Fortune 500 businesses (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). In response to this phenomenon, college admissions offices have adapted their communication efforts by increasing their usage of social as evidenced by 85% of the respondents reporting that they utilized at least one form of social media (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). With more and more schools moving into multiple channels of social media, and with colleges learning to use social media more effectively, research suggests that schools that don’t allow for conversation will be quickly passed by (Barnes & Mattson, 2008).
Organizations overall are changing their marketing strategies to meet the changing phenomenon of social networking especially given the age and technological sophistication of their audience, thus placing colleges and universities in position to strategically market on social network platforms (Noel-Levitiz, 2009). In fact, The University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research found that usage of social media by college admissions offices increased from 61% in 2007 to 95% in 2009 (Glassford, 2010). Colleges have come to the understanding that through social media prospective students are able to learn more about the college while also connecting with current students in a genuine and personal way from other students not just the talking heads from admissions offices (Cappex.com, 2010).

A national poll was conducted by Noel-Levitiz (2010) involving 1,000 high school students who were prospective college students pertaining to their behaviors and expectations of colleges and universities. Of the participants, 51% were females, 52% identified as White, over 90% had B grade average or higher, over 70% reported that at least one parent attended college, and almost 90% stated that they desired to attend a state college or university. The results of this study indicated that 76% of students stated that they are Facebook users while 33% stated that they are My Space users. Further, while You Tube is the second most popular social media site in the U.S., 52% of the students surveyed stated that they have viewed college and university videos online, however only 10% reported viewing them on You Tube (Noel-Levitiz, 2010).

Another point of note from this survey was that 74% of current, college-bound high school seniors said they think colleges should have a presence on social media sites, and 81% of these students acknowledged that they look for both official and unofficial
content about colleges when they go online (Noel-Levitz, 2010). On the contrary, in a parallel survey of more than 1,000 colleges and universities in the U.S. conducted by Noel-Levitz (2010) less than 40% of the colleges and universities offered direct links to social media resources like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn from their websites even though students expect colleges to have a greater social media presence.

In yet another survey of 1,000 college-bound seniors focusing on their practices and expectations, 41% stated that they found colleges online by conducting searches through Google or other search engines, however, only 3% stated that they found colleges online by conducting research through MySpace or Facebook (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Even with the rise of social media, 87% of respondents surveyed said they would be willing to give colleges their e-mail addresses, 67% said they would provide their personal e-mail address that they check most often and 23% said they would use an e-mail address dedicated to their college searches thus indicating that 18-24 year olds are still more receptive to e-mail marketing than marketing through social networking (Noel-Levitz, 2009).

Despite the collaborative and trendy technology preferences of Millennials, many colleges and universities continue to use one way (i.e. school Web sites) and more traditionally established technologies (i.e., email) in their recruitment strategies (Lindbeck and Fodrey 2010). Ironically, based on the data this might not be a bad idea. It would behoove college and university marketing managers to understand that for prospective college students, a social media channel like Facebook is used for visiting fan pages to get an unfiltered view of a particular college through the perceptions of other prospective students and currently enrolled students by reading their comments related to
the dynamics of their experiences (Cappex.com, 2010). Students and parents actually preferred to communicate with college representatives through E-mail, live chat or instant messaging considerably more than other forms of electronic communication due to the to the real-time response and more private forum that is not found in social media (Noel-Levitz, 2012).

**College Choices**

In this section I will share general information about the study of college choice. I will then present theories that are relevant to college choice that have permeated the literature over the past several years. Finally, I will share examples of leading college choice models including the model selected as the theoretical framework for this study.

Prior to the 1950s, fewer than two of every 10 high school graduates went on to college, however due to the Civil Rights Act and the Higher Education Act, by the end of the 1960’s more than half of all high school graduates were accepted into college (Kinzie, et. al., 2004). Since 1970, successful collegiate marketing activities, coupled with the introduction of college rating systems like U.S. News & World Report, public awareness of the diverse options facing high school students has impacted the college choice process (Niu & Tienda, 2008). With higher education participation rates increasing and a greater number of students attending colleges and universities, an increasingly competitive environment has emerged (Kinzie, et. al., 2004).

Within the myriad of college choice studies, some focus on the aspect of research pertaining to how prospective college students develop a college choice set when considering the colleges to which they will apply, whereas others focus on the influence
of institutional characteristics such as academic programs, size, cost and location, on student decision-making (Chapman, 1986; Niu & Tienda, 2008). Because of the number of factors involved in the college choice process for students, the complexity of college choice must be recognized by researchers when deciding upon which aspect of college choice they will consider in their research and which they will ignore (Chapman 1981).

The decision making process for students who wish to continue their education beyond high school consists of numerous factors including academic capacity, parental educational achievement, community expectations, encouragement from teachers and counselors, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Ceja, 2006; Chapman 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1994). The college-choice process is not only complex but affects many high school students and family members as well as colleges and universities (Ceja, 2006; Kinzie, et. al., 2004; Pérez, & McDonough, 2008). However, traditional college choice literature asserts that students make rational decisions based on available information when choosing a college (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Part of the decision-making process for this generation of students involves peer-to-peer engagement, information sharing and feedback far more than any other generation making the connection between college choice and social media. (Lindbeck & Fodrey, 2010).

**College Choice Theories**

Throughout the years, numerous theories were developed to address prospective college student decision-making which is now commonly known as college choice. One theory, known as the Random Utility framework, was first illustrated by Manski and
Wise to understand college preferences stating that students will enroll in the college that yields the highest utility (Niu & Tienda, 2008). Though this framework is utilized by many researchers, some believe that there are various approaches considered. For example, some believe that students consider every college option while others believe that students search for utility among the colleges at which they believe they will be offered admission (Niu & Tienda, 2008). In evaluation of the Random Utility framework, it is noted that there is usefulness in understanding the basic elements of a complex decision-making process, however due to the magnitude of the numerous variables involved in the college choice process caution must be used when attempting to infer precise predictions about this process (Niu & Tienda, 2008).

This theory is comparable to Multi-Attribute Utility Theory which posits that decision-makers act to maximize the utility, or value, of various attributes related to a decision especially in the case of uncertainty where people will tend to maximize the expected value of utility function (Wallenius, et. al., 2008). The methods of this theory are intended to help decision-makers understand that each problem is a part of the decision-making process as a whole (Wallenius, et. al., 2008).

Finally, Consumer Socialization Theory posits that consumer communication affects their cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes by developing learned consumption-related skills, knowledge and attitudes in the marketplace (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). This theory delineates consumer learning processes, how people function as consumers in society, and how environmental sources and peers impact attitudes, motivations and behaviors. These theories lend to a progressive outlook from general decision-making to specific college choice theories.
College Choice Models

Many research methodologies and conceptual frameworks have been utilized to cast light on factors and processes by which students make decisions about whether or not to attend college, to which colleges they will apply and which college they will choose to attend (Jordan & Plank, 2001). Newell and Simon’s research on human problem solving identified one decision-making model, referred to as the Information Processing Model, which provides a means for understanding the decision-making process which students employ for making college choices (Govan, Patrick & Yen, 2006). The information-processing model posits that students act as information-processing agents that need to employ decision-making strategies with limited information and processing capacities (Govan, Patrick & Yen, 2006). In providing information to students, this model helps determine what information to provide, how much to provide and how to provide it so that students can process the information provided (Govan, Patrick & Yen, 2006).

However, from the institution's perspective as a recruiter of students, the components, stages, or steps in the process through which students select a college have been variously described (Litten, 1982). These stages and steps have been captured in various models developed by researchers in the area of college choice. An example of the models identified includes econometric models, consumer models, sociological models and models that use a combination thereof (Stage, & Hossler, 1989). In short, econometric models measure the benefits of attending college versus not attending, consumer models measure decisions based on costs of attendance and the risks associated with those costs, and sociological models measure decision-making based on the
attainment of status associated with college attendance (Stage, & Hossler, 1989). For this study, I will focus on a combination model which uses an aspect of each to arrive at stages of college choice.

One of the first models established (Chapman 1981) which serves as a foundation for college choice models, suggests that student college choice is influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences which include three categories: (1) the influence of significant persons; (2) the fixed characteristics of the institution; and (3) the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective student (Chapman, 1981). In this model, significant persons consist of parents, counselors, peers and others. The fixed characteristics of the institution are location, cost, requirements and other elements that are relative constants. The institutions efforts to communicate with students involve systematic marketing strategies to attract students to the university. A strategic approach to the application of marketing principles can attract students to a campus who might otherwise not be interested (Chapman, 1981). College choice involves student characteristics and outside influences that are composed of significant persons, college characteristics and institutional efforts to communicate with prospective students which results in students applying for admission at multiple colleges (Chapman 1981).

Years later, Hossler & Gallagher’s college choice theory was established and became one of the most widely cited models of college choice phases (Cabrera, A & La Nasa, 2000; Shaw et. al., 2009). This model posits three distinct phases through which students navigate in the college choice process: the predisposition phase, the search phase and the choice phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Predisposition is the phase where
students develop their aspirations to pursue higher education; the search phase involves various activities conducted by students to gather information about colleges, and the choice phase is where students select and enroll in the college of their choice (Jordan & Plank, 2001). The literature suggests that this process begins as early as the seventh grade and ends when the high school graduate enrolls at college or university (Cabrera, A & La Nasa, 2000).

Another model, incidentally established by another researcher by the name of Chapman (1986) expands the three stage model into five stages consisting of Pre-Search Behavior; Search behavior; Application Decision; Choice Decision; and, Matriculation Decision. Pre-search is the phase where students recognize the need and possibility of higher education, the search phase consists of active information-seeking by the student, application is the act on behalf of the student of selecting the colleges to which to apply, the choice phase is the consideration of colleges to which the student has been admitted, and the Matriculation Decision phase is where the student actually enrolls in the selected institution (Chapman, 1986).

Chapman’s five stage model seems to align closest to the current studies conducted to provide data and strategies for college admissions professionals (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011; Noel-Levitz, 2009; Noel-Levitz, 2010; Noel-Levitz, 2012). The five stages allow depth for analysis that will provide relevance for colleges and universities. Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study combines Multi-Attribute Utility Theory with the Chapman’s five-stage college choice model to ascertain how students used social media through each stage of the process. This study examined how, and if, students used social media from the Pre-Search stage, through the
Matriculation Decision stage. Further, by hearing students’ perspectives on how and when they used social media throughout their search and decision process, this study sheds light on the utility of various channels of social media for the students who utilized them. Another aim of this study was to contribute to this recent technological phenomenon by proposing a new college choice model which will be referred to as the Social Media Intensity Index whereby researchers could measure social media use for their strategic planning purposes.

Conclusions

First, in the area of college choice and decision-making, The Information Processing Model suggests that the reason that students use less complex decision-making processes is not because they yield better results, but because they are simpler and more comfortable (Govan, et. al., 2006). For example, according to Chapman (1981) students are most likely to apply to colleges in which they are interested and to which they are likely to be admitted. It was further noted that it is presumed that only colleges viewed as being at least minimally acceptable on all major dimensions are included in the students’ application set (Chapman, 1981). Thus, students’ college search efforts entail determining which attributes, costs and benefits possessed by various colleges align with the desired interests of the students (Chapman, 1986).

Second, in the area of social media, there is continued evidence that colleges and universities are eager to embrace new communication tools such as social media to recruit and research prospective students (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). However, a recent survey of 1,000 college-bound seniors shows that prospective students not only value
quality content, they are willing to read a great deal of the most valuable content on college Web sites (Noel-Levitz, 2009). In addition, the majority of students said that if a college’s Web site content did not meet their expectations, they would be disappointed or even consider dropping that college from their search (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Therefore, although social media in college marketing, recruitment and admissions is on the rise, as previously indicated 18-34 year olds are still more receptive to e-mail marketing than marketing through social networking (Noel-Levitz, 2009).

There is a clear link between the technologies admission offices and prospective students are using most, however what is not clear is why these are the most prevalent technologies (Lindbeck and Fodrey 2009). It was also noted that after in-depth review of the literature, it is clear that little systematic and rigorous research has been published regarding the use of technology in admissions or its impact on admission professionals and applicants (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). Further, though admission departments all over the country are actively engaged with the use of technology, few have confidence they are fully benefiting from its presence (Lindbeck & Fodrey 2009). Therefore, based on the literature, an empirical study to learn how students use social media in the college choice process offers contribution to this discussion. Chapman (1986) suggests that it would be difficult to achieve reliable data with a one-shot retrospective study conducted at or near the end of the search process due to students’ lapses in memory regarding their past experiences, perceptual distortions and halo effect or self-rationalization justifying their final decisions.

However, the focus of this study is not the search process per se, but the use of social media throughout the process. Thus, the emphasis of this study was more on how
students used social media and which forms were more desirable to them. The aim was to seek the perspectives of students of their use of social media and their expectations of colleges and universities as it pertained to their use of social media. As illustrated in the literature, there are multiple phases in the college choice process. Using Multi-Attribute Utility Theory and Chapman’s five-stage college choice model, this study focused on how students used social media through each phase of the search process. Studying this aspect of college choice diminished the impact of the halo effect on the data. The halo effect occurs when people are faced with important decisions, are uncertain about the choices, and change their thinking to rationalize their decision in the effort of achieving favorable outcomes (O’Neal, 2005). Therefore, with this study, as college freshman reflected back on how they used social media through the five stages of the college search process, they did not need to defend their final choice. Instead, they were empowered to share their views on the process itself from a critical standpoint.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine college freshmen as they reflect back on their use of social media throughout college choice process. Using Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model as the theoretical framework, the aim of this study was to conduct an empirical analysis to ascertain how students used social media through each stage of the process. In that past few years, there has been a significant increase in the use of social media in college admissions targeted toward perspective students (Cappex.com, 2010).

Thus, through this study, I conducted an analysis of first-time freshmen at a large comprehensive university. I gathered survey data and conducted descriptive statistics and t tests to determine statistically significant correlations between various student characteristics and their use of social media throughout the five stages of the college choice process. I also conducted focus groups hear students’ voices pertaining to how they used social media through each phase of the college choice process. As a professional in the field of university marketing and recruitment my reason for this study was to perform an empirical analysis that will shed light on student behavior in the area of social media. As a researcher, my goal for this study was to better inform the social media marketing and recruitment efforts of colleges and universities nationwide.

Research Questions

The following questions were the focus of this study:
1. At what stage of the college choice process did prospective college students use social media?

2. Which social media platforms did prospective college students use in their college choice process?

3. What are prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process?

4. How do prospective college students perceive colleges that advertise in social media realms?

5. How do prospective college students prefer to receive communications from four-year colleges?

6. How do different subgroups of prospective college students use social media differently throughout each stage of the college choice process?

**Chapter Organization**

This chapter first describes the research tradition selected for this particular study. As a study using mixed methods, details of why this approach is appropriate is explained. Next, the research setting and context is discussed. The research sample and data sources consisting of focus group interviews and a survey of first time freshman is detailed. The chapter concludes with a process for data analysis and summary including my role as a researcher.
Research Tradition

This study is a mixed methods design combining cross-sectional survey design with focus group interviews (Creswell, 2008) to explain the role of social media and its influence in the four-year college choice process for high school students. A mixed methods research design involves collecting, analyzing and combining both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study (Creswell, 2008). A mixed method design is one that includes at least one quantitative method acquiring numerical data, and one qualitative method acquiring commentary data (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). The assumption with this particular process is that the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions than either method individually (Creswell, 2008). The goal of mixed methods research is to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative analyses (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Mixed methods also encompass triangulation which refers to the intentional use of multiple methods to investigate the same phenomenon in order to strengthen the validity of the achieved results (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). It is a process for cross validation of the results of two or more distinct methods as congruent and comparable data are obtained (Jick, 1979). In a mixed methods study quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, given equal priority, and compared to determine similar or dissimilar results (Creswell, 2008). Thus, the design selected for this study involved the use of mixed methods consisting of focus groups and a larger survey to examine how high school students used social media throughout the five stages of the college choice process (Chapman, 1986). I developed and administered a
questionnaire for all first-time freshmen that required them to reflect back on the various stages of their college choice process in order to gather information on how they used social media through each stage. I also conducted focus groups to ascertain student perceptions of how they used social media through each of the five college choice stages, and how they perceived colleges and universities that use various social media channels.

**Connection to Purpose and Questions**

This mixed methods study focused on first time college freshmen as they reflected back on their college choice process and the causal relationship between their use of social media and their college selection. To learn how students engage in social media and the preferences of which media they choose to engage can be gathered quantitatively. However, the rationale of why students engage in these mediums in their college selection processes and what their perceptions are about universities’ presence in these realms are important and must be gathered qualitatively. However, because this is a new phenomenon, there are few studies of social media in college decision making. Therefore, I explored these behaviors quantitatively through survey to accurately measure these behaviors, and qualitatively through focus groups to explore behaviors.

With this approach, the quantitative methodology was complimented by exploring more deeply the students’ perceptions and perspectives through their voices to determine this relationship. Therefore, a mixed methods approach seemed to have been the best match for this type of study. Further, a triangulated mixed methods design created a balanced dialogue different audiences who may be persuaded by either method or a combination thereof (Creswell, 2008).
Role of the Researcher

According to Peshkin (1988) researchers should actively seek out their subjectivity so that they can be aware of the impact of their subjectivity on the outcomes of their research. Upon reflection of my own subjectivity to my research topic, my role as a researcher was not to silence or attempt to rid myself of subjectivity, but to embrace it and manage it in a way that I was personally engaged in the research without tainting its outcomes (Peshkin, 1988).

The research setting that I chose was a large, public, comprehensive university to which I am closely connected. The topic of study is one with which I am professionally engaged. Further, the demographic of this study was reflected in my household as my wife was in university outreach and recruitment for over 10 years, and both of my children were prospective four-year college students. Thus, I had subjectivity as a university administrator, a professional in the selected field of study and as a parent of prospective university students.

In my role as a researcher who conducted this study on a campus where I am very well connected, I had a certain amount of influence and access to people and data. In this research setting, I had strong ties to senior administrators, faculty and staff who had the authority to provide access to people and information. Though this was a positive aspect of my research, there also existed a level of caution that needed to be exercised as this study was conducted. The fact that I knew people on campus that could provide me data, and I knew students who could assist me with interviews and focus groups posed a potential threat to the purity of the research process with people having such familiarity with me or those to whom I was connected. If proper care was not taken, then
participants could have been generous in providing what I wanted as opposed to providing information organically and truthfully.

Second, having worked in the field of college access (including pre-college programs, college counseling, university outreach and admissions) for 20 years, I certainly had my experiences, views and biases. Whenever I saw news reports that inaccurately portrayed college admissions processes or misrepresented processes and procedures on campus, I became highly irritated. Further, because I experienced a host of patterns over the years that have provided anecdotal information regarding this field, I needed to exercise caution and took on the role as a learner who was prepared to receive information that could have been in conflict with my professional experiences.

Finally, as I was a parent of a high school graduate and a high school senior who were both prospective university students in the college search process, I had an in-home focus group of sorts. Whenever we were discussing recruitment ideas in our office, I took them home to my kids to hear their thoughts and assess what their classmates were saying and doing. For example, many colleges were investing heavily in social network channels to reach students. I attended many conferences nation-wide where there were numerous workshops on how to use social media in the college recruitment process. However, my kids who were avid social media users informed me that high school students did not use this medium to search for college information. According to my kids if prospective college students wanted information about a college, they would either go to the campus website or simply Google it. This was another area where my subjectivity needed to be acknowledged.
To maintain integrity in this study, a mixed methods approach helped to alleviate subjectivity by triangulating qualitative data with quantitative data. Being aware of my presuppositions, I consciously and cautiously allowed the data to speak for itself. Second, it was important for me to proceed with the understanding that the world of social media is ever-changing and to anchor my beliefs in my hypotheses would have been counterproductive. In other words, what I learned through this research will add to the discussion of social media. However the rapidly changing world of technology could consist of more or different forms of digital engagement channels in the future which could change how students and universities approach college decision-making and marketing. Finally, I will depend on my dissertation chair to hold me accountable in maintaining objectivity throughout the research process.

Research Setting and Context

The research setting for this study was Pinnacle University. Pinnacle University is a large, comprehensive university located in California. This university is a member of a university system and with an enrollment of more than 20,000 students is among the larger four-year colleges in the state. The campus population consists of first-time freshmen, continuing freshmen, sophomores, juniors, first-time juniors who are transferring from other colleges, seniors, post-baccalaureate students, graduate master’s students and doctoral students. Pinnacle University is a Hispanic-Serving Institution (H.S.I.) in that the Hispanic student enrollment exceeds 25%. Annually, the university has high African-American student enrollments in comparison to other colleges and universities in the state. In addition, the campus has an international student enrollment
that is among the highest in the nation with an international student population representing approximately 100 countries.

This campus, like other universities around the country, has a marketing department that is responsible for creating and distributing various types of communications to prospective students. Annually, printed materials such as information booklets, brochures and marketing items are designed and disseminated worldwide to inform students and families about the university and attract them to the campus. In the past five years there has been a move to establish a digital identity at the university by having a prominent presence in social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and others. Many resources have been committed in both dollars and personnel to advance the social media presence of the university. Because of this phenomenon, this research setting provided great relevance for this study.

Pinnacle University is also an accessible institution for research. Because of relationships with administrators in this university system, I had access to students, departments, facilities and other resources at the campus. I also had the privilege of being a colleague to many of the gatekeepers on the campus. When I didn’t know them personally, I knew the right people to make the connections appropriate for me to adequately navigate the campus to yield successful results.

Therefore, there were four dynamics that made Pinnacle University an optimal research setting for this study. First, the size of the student population provided a vast pool of students from which data was received. Second, the ethnic makeup of the student body allowed for a diversity of representation in the participants. Third, the campus had a commitment to engage in social media and was represented in multiple social media
channels. Finally, I had access to the campus through relationships with the administration, faculty and staff to engage with student participants.

As a university administrator it was important to use care in providing an open environment for student participants in the attempts to diminish any fear of authority that may have existed. As a colleague to university administrators, I needed to exercise caution in allowing the views and interests of other professionals to influence my research procedures and analysis. Navigating these roles was both rewarding and challenging. Again, these roles afforded me access into places not easily accessed by individuals outside of this community. However, I needed to be careful to adhere to the prescribed standards and procedures in order to preserve the integrity of the study.

**Procedures for Research**

As the purpose of this triangulated mixed methods study was to examine the use of social media throughout Chapman’s (1986) five stages of the four-year college search process, I sought to learn how first-time college freshmen at a large public comprehensive university used social media throughout their college choice process. For this study, a spectrum of students was heard; from students who used little or no social media at all, to students who frequently used social media. Therefore, all first-time freshmen on campus will be the focus of this study. In recent years, the first-time freshman enrollment has exceeded 4,000 students which provided an ample quantitative sample through surveys which were offered to the entire first-time freshman population. From this large number of students, focus groups were selected to compliment the quantitative data with qualitative data.
The first step in the process was to contact upper-level administrators at the institution to inform them of my intent to engage in research. This assisted in maintaining positive relationships with colleagues in the profession. Because of my professional relationship with staff and students at the institution, I have access and permission to invite students to participate in this study. Second, I conducted an initial pilot focus group with a convenience sample of first time freshman in the effort of testing the research questions and gauging whether or not questions need to be revised. Third, I completed the Institutional Review Board processes to gain permission to conduct surveys and focus groups. Next, I contacted the university department responsible for conducting annual surveys of first time freshmen and collaborated with their staff to promote and disseminate of the survey. Finally, using email and student web portal, I invited every first time freshman student on campus to participate in this study.

Ethical issues related to this study included the protection of participant identity and avoidance of interviewing students to whom I may have had a connection. I took careful measures to protect the identity of the participants by using pseudonyms to reference the research site and using generalities to refer to any data. Further, having colleagues in administrative positions, I refrained from inviting students to participate who might have felt that my connection to their superiors (ie. supervisors in their workplace, professors, etc.) might have jeopardized their anonymity. Below are descriptions of the survey and focus groups which served as the two sampling strategies for this study.
Cross-Sectional Survey

According to Creswell (2008) cross-sectional survey and longitudinal survey are the two basic research survey designs. Cross-sectional research survey design measures views, attitudes, or practices at one period in times, versus longitudinal survey design which measures attitudes, practices, needs, trends or changes over time (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, the first method that was used to gather quantitative data for this study was the development and distribution of an online cross-sectional survey that measured the current attitudes of college freshmen as they reflected on how they used social media throughout the college choice process.

Sample. The online quantitative survey was conducted with all fall 2013 first time freshman at Pinnacle University as they were asked to reflect back on their college choice experiences. Because of the diversity of the student body, all first time freshmen were invited to participate in this survey. Thus survey was distributed to all 5,800 first time freshmen via email (sample survey questions can be found in the appendix). This provided substantive data for the analysis of how different demographic groups used social media throughout Chapman’s (1986) five stages of the college choice process. Of those to whom the email was sent, 497 students completed the survey.

Upon receiving the results, I begin by examining the characteristics of survey respondents. Comparisons of the survey sample to the fall 2013 overall first time freshman population at Pinnacle University can be found in Chapter Four of this study. However, as noted in table 3.1, there were twice as many males as females who participated in this study. Further, as displayed in table 3.2, Chicano/Latino participants
were the largest group, followed by Caucasian participants, Asian participants and African-American participants. Participants who indicated “Other” or “Decline to state” are those who either identified with an ethnicity other than those listed, or who opted not to disclose their ethnic identity. For the purpose of this study, only those who selected an ethnic group were analyzed and compared.

Table 3.1 – Gender of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 – Ethnicity of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decline to state</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicano/Latino</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>94.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrument development.** In survey research the questionnaire is the data collection and the respondents’ answers to the survey questions are the measurements obtained for the study (Collins, 2003). A survey is also instrumental in the triangulation (Creswell, 2008) of the data to insure the integrity and quality of this research. My goal is
to achieve optimal results that are valid, reliable, sensitive, unbiased and complete by producing a survey consisting of questions that measure the behaviors that I want them to measure, resulting in data that represent accurate values for these measures (Collins, 2003). For example, I will ensure that my survey questions are connected to the research questions identified for this study. I also want to ensure that the questions are clearly written to be easily understood by the participant to yield the best results.

The questions for this study were combined with questions constructed by the university for institutional research purposes. Participants answered numerous questions regarding their social media use throughout the college choice process. The survey consisted of 50 questions related to college choice, college marketing and social media. The questions were designed using a Likert scale which is a basic 5-7 point bipolar scale in which a respondent ranks rates their opinion in a range of most to least, agree to disagree or like to dislike (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Questions were also written to gather background information on the participants. These questions gathered data including gender, ethnicity, region high school from which participants graduated, and participants’ parents’ education. These questions allowed for the assessment of variables in the analysis of the data. A printed copy of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

**Operational definitions.** For the purposes of this survey, student characteristics consist of gender, ethnicity, location of high school alma mater and major. For Chapman’s (1986) college choice model, the five-stages consist of Pre-Search Behavior; Search behavior; Application Decision; Choice Decision; and, Matriculation Decision.
Pre-search is the phase where students recognize the need and possibility of higher education, the search phase consists of active information-seeking by the student, application is the act on behalf of the student of selecting the colleges to which to apply, the choice phase is the consideration of colleges to which the student has been admitted, and the Matriculation Decision phase is where the student actually enrolls in the selected institution (Chapman, 1986). Social media is defined as an online communications platform which allows users to establish social networks through peer-to-peer communications and connections (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012).

Survey. When the survey revisions are complete, I will seek the permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pinnacle University to conduct research on the campus. I will then invite the entire first-time freshman community at Pinnacle University to participate in this survey through two processes. First, I will seek permission from the senior administration to send an invitation to participate to all first-time freshmen on the campus. Should permission be granted, I will contact the Office of Institutional Research to provide me with the email addresses of all first-time freshmen to whom I will send an announcement. Second, I will seek permission to place an invitation to participate in this study on the campus-wide student information system known as the web-based portal.

The actual survey will be conducted through an online system by the name of Baseline which is a product of Campus Labs. This system has a support service that will assist me in the development of the questions to ensure that the terminology and scale are appropriate to yield the desired results. Through Baseline, I can post the survey online,
email the survey link to the participants and receive the raw data as well as summative data including various charts.

After the students have been invited to participate in this study, the survey link will be available for two weeks. The reason for the brief window of opportunity for this survey is due to the number of surveys given to students throughout the year. There must be a specific time period identified when the opportunity to complete this survey has concluded, otherwise this survey may not receive adequate participation due to competing studies. My goal is to receive a 50% response rate yielding at least 2,000 responses. Each year, Pinnacle University administers a survey to the entire first-time freshman class at the beginning of the academic year. The response rate of this survey has been greater than 50%. For this study, I will partner with the University to collaborate the development of the annual questionnaire. In doing so, the response rate should align with my goal. If this goal is not achieved in the two-week window, I will extend the deadline to participate and send a reminder email and campus portal alert including the incentives offered to participate. Further, if there is a low response rate, I will contact the instructors of freshmen courses to seek their assistance in promoting the completion of this survey.

**Data Cleaning and Validation.** Data cleaning consists of detecting and removing errors and inconsistencies found in data collection, files and databases so that the quality of the data may be improved (Rahm & Do, 2000). Data cleaning also involves maintaining useful data while eliminating data that is errant or non-useful to the study (Guyon, Matic, & Vapnik, 1996). For this study, once the survey data was collected, I
sorted through the responses to identify any inconsistencies with responses or errors within the electronic reporting system. For example, I checked to see if respondents answered the prompts correctly, and if the questions and responses were in alignment. Because this was a mixed methods study, validation was achieved through triangulation of data (Creswell, 2008). Information from focus groups was compared to information gathered from survey data and presented a multi-faceted view of the research topic. Upon preliminary review, assessment was made to determine if the information gathered in the surveys made sense compared to the information gathered in the focus groups. Further, I determined if all of the combined information from my study made sense compared to information outlined in the review of literature before I conducted in-depth survey analysis.

**Survey analysis.** At the conclusion of the survey period, I gathered the raw data from the survey and conducted a Computer Analysis (Creswell, 2008) using SPSS for the purpose of identifying any statistically significant correlations that would inform this study. In response to research question number one, I ran frequencies and descriptive statistics across each of the five stages of the college search process to determine which social media platforms prospective college students used. To address research question numbers two, three, four and five, I used descriptive data analysis from the questionnaire and exploration through focus groups to ascertain students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process, students’ perceptions of colleges that advertise in social media realms, and students’ preferences for receiving communications from four-year colleges. Finally, to answer research question number six, I used
descriptive statistics to analyze their responses to the questions and displayed the results in a series of tables. Then I conducted cross-tabulations and t-tests on the survey data to learn how different subgroups of prospective college students used social media differently throughout each stage of the college choice process.

I also developed the Social Media Intensity Index (SMII) which was used to assess the intensity of social media use of the participants of the study. The SMII consists of three subscales: Value which measured how much participants valued social media in the college choice process; Volume which measured the amount of social media usage by participants in the college choice process; and Variety which measured number of social media channels used by participants in the college choice process. The details of the SMII are found in the Results section and the appendix.

To ensure that the research sample was representative of the campus community, I compared the demographics of the respondents to the demographics of the Pinnacle University to ensure that the research sample was representative of the campus community at-large. Because the demographics were similar, I did not need to weight the responses.

Focus Groups

For the qualitative aspect of this study, the entire first-time freshman population was far too large to engage in a meaningful, in-depth analysis. Therefore, to supplement the quantitative survey, two focus groups (Creswell, 2008) were held with a total of 21 fall 2013 first time freshmen who reflected back on their high school years to share how they used social media throughout their college choice process. Originally used within
communication studies to explore the effects of films and television programs, focus
groups are a group interview process that uses group interaction as a form of method
(Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups are used to explore the knowledge and experiences of
the participants, and are instrumental in examining what, how, and why people think and
feel the way that they do (Kitzinger, 1995). According to Morgan (1996), focus groups
are a technique which involves group interaction to gather data in a specific area detailed
by a given researcher.

To identify these focus group participants, I used a combination of purposeful
sampling, and convenience sampling (Creswell, 2008). Purposeful sampling is the
selection of specific individuals who can help you to understand a phenomenon as you
gather information from them (Creswell, 2008). As the purpose of this study involved
college freshmen who reflected back on their college choice process, only college
freshmen from Pinnacle University were invited to participate in order to satisfy the
research purpose. I used convenience sampling as all participants were selected from the
research setting where I have relationships with administrators and faculty that gave me
access to the participants resulting in a sample of students who were willing and available
to be studied (Creswell, 2008). Combining these sampling strategies increased the
credibility of the qualitative aspect of study as the potential sample was too large (Miles
& Huberman, 1994).

Pilot focus group. Prior to official data collection, I conducted preliminary data
collection and analysis to further formalize my interview protocol (Rossman & Rallis,
2003). I conducted a pilot focus group which consisted of first-time college freshmen
who reflected back on how they used social media throughout the five stages (Chapman, 1986) of their college choice process. These students were asked a series of simple questions related to how high school students used and perceived the use of social media by colleges and universities throughout their college choice process. The aim was to ask simple questions in a permissive environment to stimulate lively discussion. The purpose of conducting this pilot focus group was to analyze the responses of the students to inform my focus group protocol.

To execute this process, I contacted an administrator on campus who assisted with the identification of a class section with freshmen students to conduct this pilot focus group. I then used this experience to assess the quality of my questions, the order in which they are asked and whether or not questions needed to be added or deleted for this study. For this pilot I asked open-ended, semi-structured questions that pertained to the research questions of this study. I retained the services of a graduate student research assistant who recorded the students’ responses on poster paper during the focus group. Simultaneously, I recorded the entire focus group with a digital audio recording device for reference after the session. When this focus group concluded, my research assistant typed the written responses into a word document for my review. I then compared the transcribed notes with the audio recording for accuracy.

Analysis of the responses of this preliminary focus group confirmed that the questions were appropriate for generating rich information. Further, information gathered from this pilot focus group contributed to the development of the questions and the focus group protocol which were approved by the Institutional Review Board for the actual study.
Focus group protocol and data collection. The qualitative aspect of this mixed methods study included two focus groups consisting respectively of 10 and 11 first time freshmen college students at Pinnacle University. The focus group protocol was used as one of the instruments that contained the purpose of the study, questions closely related to the research questions for this study, and a statement that informed participants of the confidentiality of their identity and responses as well as their voluntary participation as outlined in the informed consent form.

For the focus groups, I first sought the permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pinnacle University to conduct research on the campus. Once approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board to conduct research for this study, I contacted senior administration in Academic Affairs to assist me with the identification of faculty of freshman courses who might be willing to identify student participants. One freshman professor granted permission for her class to participate in the focus groups and she verified that all students met the requisite criteria for this study. After permission was granted, I made arrangements with the professor to meet with her class to introduce the study and distribute consent forms to participate. For this study, students were required to be first time college freshman, 18 years of age, and matriculated students at Pinnacle University. Students who participated in the focus groups were given snacks, t-shirts and other paraphernalia from Pinnacle University. As these were first-time freshmen in their first semester on this campus, this seemed to be a meaningful incentive.

The questions for the focus groups were structured in three phases; warm-up question, specific questions related to the research questions, and a closing question. The warm-up question asked students, “Being that this is your first semester in college, in
your opinion, what is the biggest difference between this college and your high school far?” The purpose of this question was to stimulate dialogue among the group in as least an intrusive manner as possible. I encouraged every participant to respond to this question to ensure that all group members were engaged in the conversation. I then asked questions that related specifically to the research questions of this study.

The focus group questions concluded with the question, “If you had the chance to meet with the President of Pinnacle University how would you advise him/her about the best way for the university to reach prospective students through social media?” This gave students a sense of empowerment as they considered how they might contribute to change. Similar to the pilot focus group, two graduate student research assistants recorded the students’ responses on poster paper during the focus groups while I will recorded the entire focus group sessions with a digital audio recording device for reference after the session. As a compliment to the recording of the dialogue, my assistants and I documented field notes where we recorded observations about the setting, the group dynamics and the non-verbal communication that may not have otherwise been identified. Again, when these focus groups concluded, my research assistants typed the written responses into a word document for my review and I compared the transcribed notes with the audio recording for accuracy. The focus group protocol can be found in the appendix.

The locations for this study were on the campus of Pinnacle University and were as private, yet comfortable as possible in the effort of giving students a relaxed atmosphere to share liberally. For the focus groups, the setting was a classroom with which they were familiar. Upon arrival, I introduced myself, the research assistants, the
purpose of the study and the reason they were selected as participants. I then collected the focus group protocols which were distributed to the participants by the teacher prior to the interviews. The focus group protocol can be found in the appendix of this dissertation. Questions were asked in a semi-structured format giving me the flexibility to elaborate on certain important elements that arose during the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Focus group data analysis.** First my research assistant transcribed the recordings from the focus groups. I then read the transcriptions and reviewed the audio recordings of the focus groups. The intense process of listening to and reading the responses gathered allowed me to become intimately familiar with what was learned (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Next, my research assistant conducted Computer Analysis by using Microsoft Excel to store, organize and assign labels and codes to the data collected from interviews and focus groups (Creswell, 2008). I then reviewed the codes and developed categories and themes in attempting to discern meaning from the data collected as it pertained to the research questions that incorporated Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model which serves as the theoretical framework for this study.

In the efforts of maintaining integrity and credibility in this study, I insured that multiple perspectives were conveyed, and welcomed contradictory evidence. This was also a stage in the process where my researcher roles and biases were observed as I refrained from editorializing data collected and altering the context in which it was given.

The focus groups provided information on social media terminology and newer social media channels used by students. I also heard students’ perceptions of how they
believed different social media channels were used by students, and how they should or should not be used by colleges and universities.

**Research Invitation and Informed Consent**

The invitation to participate in research and the informed consent form were combined into one document and provided to the participants. These documents introduced who I am as the researcher and described the nature of the study. Further, I explained the nature of participation, and any potential risks involved due to the nature of the questions. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that, at any point, they could have refused to answer questions or discontinued their participation. The consent forms contained information about the duration of the focus groups and outlined the benefits to the participants and the academic community at-large. I also addressed the confidentiality of their identity and their responses, their right to withdraw from the study at any time and any potential risks that could have been involved. This and all other instruments can be found in the appendix.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine how college freshmen used social media throughout the college choice process. Using Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model as the theoretical framework, this study’s design involved the use of mixed methods consisting of a survey and focus groups of first-time college freshmen to examine how high school students use social media throughout the five stages of the college choice process (Chapman, 1986). I developed and administered a questionnaire to a sample of all first-time freshmen that required them to reflect back on the various stages of their college choice process in order to gather information on how they used social media through each stage. I also conducted focus groups to ascertain student perceptions of how they used social media through each of the five college choice stages, and how they perceive colleges and universities that advertise in various social media channels. First, I gathered survey data of first-time freshmen at Pinnacle University. I performed descriptive statistical analysis, used inferential statistics to compare the experience of subgroups, and regression analysis to find the relationship of student characteristic to social media use. Data from two focus groups were analyzed to identify themes to supplement the information gathered from the surveys.

Chapter organization. This chapter will be organized by the research questions identified for this study as follows:

1. At what stage of the college choice process did prospective college students use social media?
2. Which social media platforms did prospective college students use in their college choice process?

3. What are prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process?

4. How do prospective college students perceive colleges that advertise in social media realms?

5. How do prospective college students prefer to receive communications from four-year colleges?

6. How do different subgroups of prospective college students use social media differently throughout each stage of the college choice process?

For each research question, I will describe the type of analysis performed and results conveyed by the data. I will present tables and figures for the quantitative data and narrative findings including direct quotations from participant comments for the qualitative data.

Before answering the research question, there is one important foundational question that was asked on the survey. The question, “Did you use social media when searching for colleges/universities?” was instrumental to this study. According to the results as displayed in Table 4.1, 62.1% of respondents indicated that they did use social media when searching for colleges and universities versus 37% of respondents who indicated that they did not.
Table 4.1 – Did you use social media when searching for colleges/universities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this data, the majority of respondents did use social media in their college choice process. Answers to the research question from both surveys and focus groups will add further details to define what communication channels are considered social media by the respondents, and how they used it in their college choice process.
Question #1: At what stage of the college choice process prospective college students used social media?

As summarized in the literature review, prospective college students today, also known as the millennial generation, have acquired advanced information navigation skills in technological realms which raise challenges for universities to be innovative in the distribution of information through digital media. One challenge in particular is for colleges and universities to maintain awareness of the online channels that students choose in searching for information in general (Rich, 2008).

Research shows that technology is fundamentally changing the landscape of college admissions, from the modes of communication between colleges and students and families to processes for enrollment management and strategic planning (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). According to Noel-Levitz (2009), communicating with prospective students has changed significantly in the past ten years as campus marketing has adapted first to the use of the internet and e-mail and now to the use of newer social media formats like social networking. For example, Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, (2011) report that in 2010 colleges and universities indicated that 40% of all inquiries from prospective students were received by email or internet. Today, internet presence of colleges and universities and the internet search experience for prospective students is highly significant.

The purpose of the first research question was to determine at what stage in Chapman’s (1986) five stages of college choice prospective college students used social media. This question was answered through quantitative methodology with the survey. Again, my survey questions were incorporated in a pre-established survey developed by
Pinnacle University. Therefore, to ascertain student social media use I asked students to share their social media use by stage. The survey question was, “For what purpose did you use social media to search for colleges/universities?” Respondents had to opportunity to choose more than one option. The options provided for this question were:

1) Before search
2) During search
3) During application process
4) After being admitted
5) Final enrollment

According to the data, 21.3% of respondents indicated that they used social media in the pre-search stage, 30.8% indicated that they used social media during their search, 18.3% indicated they used social media during the application process, 16.5% stated they used social media after being admitted and 13.7 indicated they used social media after the enrolled in college. Figure 4.1 presents a summary of the percentages of students surveyed who indicated that they used social media in the college choice process.
The graph illustrates that the number of responses in stage one begins at 21.3%, peaks in stage two, then declines in stages three and four with the lowest point, 13.7% in stage five. What this seems to demonstrate is that social media use is higher in pre-search and search stages, with the search stage being the highest. Students seem to use social media less in the last three stages. Thus, the data indicates that social media use declines significantly after the search stage. What is also reflected is the percentage of respondents who indicated their use of social media. If these numbers are conveyed conversely, in stage one 79.7% did not indicate that they used social media. Further, in stage two which reflected the highest use of social media, 70% of respondents did not indicate that they used social media. As this graph declines in the latter stages, stage five conveys that 86.3% of respondents did not indicate their social media use in this stage. Therefore, data seems to indicate that social media is not highly used in any stage and
when it is used, students are more likely to use it in the pre-search and search stages than the latter three stages of the college choice process.
Question 2: Which social media platforms did prospective college students use in their college choice process?

According to the Pew Institute, people ages 18-25 are more likely to engage in multiple realms of social media as demonstrated by an 83% participation rate among this demographic (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). As for teens, in 2007 93% of youth ages 12-17 were internet users who created webpages, uploaded photos and videos, shared personal information, maintained blogs and journals and engaged with other teens on a daily basis (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2009).

This research question was answered through both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. To determine which social media channels and websites students used throughout their college choice process, I asked, “If any of the following websites were influential during the different phases of your college search, when did they first influence you?” Again, because the survey was in partnership with the university, there were 22 options provided for respondents:

1) Pinnacle University Admissions & Records
2) Pinnacle University Homepage
3) Pinnacle University Financial Aid & Scholarships website
4) Pinnacle University [Web] Portal
5) Pinnacle University Recruitment website
6) College Board website
7) College Confidential website
8) College Portrait website
9) College Prowler website
10) College View website
11) [Anonymous college application] website
12) Facebook
13) Fastweb
14) Flickr
15) Google
16) LinkedIn
17) Naviance
18) Pinterest
19) Reddit
20) Tumblr
21) Twitter
22) You Tube

Among the 22 options, there were eight options specifically related to social media channels. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the results of those eight survey questions to provide information for this research question. For each option given, respondents had the opportunity to answer in a “yes” “no” format indicating whether or not they used any of these platforms in their college choice process.

Overall research results indicate that the 58.1% of the respondents said they did not use social media at some point in the college choice process. In figure 4.2 you will notice that 41.9% responded that they used Facebook in their college choice process, 32.5% used You Tube, 17.1% used Twitter, 11.1% indicated that they used Tumblr, 7.1%
responded that they used Pinterest, 6.6% indicated that they used Reddit, 6.3% indicated that they used Flickr and 5.7% responded that they used LinkedIn. In descending order, Facebook was the most used and LinkedIn was least used.

Figure 4.2 – Social media platforms used by prospective college students: Percent of all respondents

It is important to note the converse of these data which indicate that although Facebook was the most used social media channel of the eight, 58.1% were non-users. Further, 67.5% of respondents did not use You Tube, 82.9% did not use Twitter, 88.9% did not use Tumblr, 92.9% did not use Pinterest, 93.4% did not use Reddit, 93.6% did not use Flicker and 94.3% did not use LinkedIn at any point in the college choice process.

Focus group interviews revealed 17 social media channels used by participants with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and You Tube leading the frequency of use:

1) Facebook
2) Twitter
3) Instagram
4) You Tube
5) Snapchat
6) Tumblr
7) WhatsApp
8) Kik
9) Pinterest
10) Google Chat
11) Myspace
12) Facetime
13) Email
14) Blogspot
15) AIM
16) Zynga Zynga
17) Text messaging

However, of the 21 focus group participants only six indicated that they used social media in their college choice process. Alyssa stated, “I used Instagram because I was moving into the dorms so I wanted to see if like anyone posted like #dormlife you know? So I like looked at people and like the dorm rooms that they posted pictures of.” Selena said, “I used Facebook a lot to like see [where] people in my graduation class before me went. Like most of the people I was not a fan of went to [anonymous university] so I was not trying to go there.” Adam stated that, “Pinnacle University asked me to join a group of [students] who were interested in the [anonymous] major so I was
able to see who would possibly be in the same group as me or anyone who would have the same classes or umm someone older that would sell their books so I would find like books for a cheaper price. I was already coming [to Pinnacle] so I joined the group.”

Paula said, “I used You Tube but more for the social aspect of things.” Likewise, Martha said, “I used the Pinnacle University hash tag on Instagram just to check out the social stuff.” Finally, Katie stated that, “I went on Facebook but I just looked at where everyone was going to see if I know people that would be there.”
Question #3: What are prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process?

As outlined in the literature review, research shows that technology is fundamentally changing the landscape of college admissions, from the modes of communication between colleges and students and families to processes for enrollment management and strategic planning (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). According to Noel-Levitz (2009), communicating with prospective students has changed significantly in the past ten years as campus marketing has adapted first to the use of the internet and e-mail and now to the use of newer social media formats like social networking.

Today, internet presence of colleges and universities and the internet search experience for prospective students is highly significant. In a 2010 study, 24% of high school seniors indicated that they removed a college from their consideration after a negative experience on their website, compared to 65% of high school students who stated that their opinion of a college improved based on their website experience (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2010).

Today, technology has emerged and is an integral aspect throughout students’ transition from secondary to postsecondary education, particularly as students engage in information exchange with colleges pertaining to the admissions process (Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007). In fact, according to the findings from recent survey data, 88% of prospective college students stated that they would be disappointed or possibly eliminate a school from consideration if the web site at that school did not meet their expectations (Lindbeck & Fodrey 2009).
With technology playing such a strong role in general, this research question addresses prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in the college choice process. To answer this research question, both quantitative and qualitative methods were engaged through survey and focus groups. For the survey the question was asked directly, “How important was social media throughout your college search and decision process?” Respondents were asked to respond using a four-point Likert scale with the following options:

1. Not important
2. Somewhat important
3. Important
4. Very important

As displayed in figure 4.3, there were 216 respondents. Of the 216 respondents, 11.5% indicated that social media was not important, 38.7% indicated that social media was somewhat important, 23% indicated that social media was important and 26% indicated that social media was very important in the college choice process.
These data can be interpreted in multiple directions. It could be interpreted that more than 50% of respondents indicated that social media was somewhat or not important in their college choice process. On the other hand, it could be interpreted that 88.4% found some importance in the use of social media in the college choice process. The latter would appear to be a discrepancy when compared to research question one which indicated that no fewer than 58.1% of respondents were non-users through the identified social media channels.

Therefore, data from the focus groups may shed light on this potential discrepancy. Again, only six of the 21 focus group participants stated that they used social media in the college choice process. Of the focus group participants who did not use social media in their college choice process and elected to comment on their non-use, they seemed to indicate that their non-use was due to them already having a sense of what colleges they were interested in. For example, Alana stated that, “I knew I wanted to come to Pinnacle University because of the [anonymous major] program so I didn’t need
to look into anything else. I learned about the program at Pinnacle through my high school and I had talked to teachers there and they were all saying that Pinnacle had one of the best programs to go into.” Amber said, “Well money was like a big issue for my family because umm I have four siblings and I am only the second one to go to college so like I couldn’t really pick like an expensive college and I knew that Pinnacle was cheap…so I decide to come here based on money.”

Gretchen stated, “I really didn’t think about [social media] cause I already had an idea of where I wanted to go so wasn’t really looking. I would use their school websites, not like Facebook or Instagram or anything like that.” Karen agreed stating, “Same as Gretchen where I didn’t think to use social media mostly because I wasn’t mostly interested in going to college for the social aspect. That sounds bad but I wanted to go to some place where education was high, or like [focus on] academics.” Finally Judy said, “My brother went [to school] here so I just relied on what he told me. I looked up the school but not really like on Facebook or Instagram and I heard about the [anonymous major] program ant that is what convinced me to come here.”
Question #4: How do prospective college students perceive colleges that advertise in social media realms?

As conveyed in the review of literature, The Center for Marketing Research at The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth conducted one of the first longitudinal studies and one of the most comprehensive studies on the use of social media in college admissions (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). This study consisted of a nationwide telephone survey of 478 Admissions Directors, Deans and Admissions Officers from accredited colleges and universities in all 50 states. One of the results of this survey indicated that 91% of colleges and universities feel that social media is either “very important” or “somewhat important” to their future strategy which was far greater than the perceptions of Fortune 500 businesses (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). In response to this phenomenon, college admissions offices have adapted their communication efforts by increasing their usage of social as evidenced by 85% of the respondents reporting that they utilized at least one form of social media (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). With more and more schools moving into multiple channels of social media, and with colleges learning to use social media more effectively, research suggests that schools that don’t allow for conversation will be quickly passed by (Barnes & Mattson, 2008).

Organizations overall are changing their marketing strategies to meet the changing phenomenon of social networking especially given the age and technological sophistication of their audience, thus placing colleges and universities in position to strategically market on social network platforms (Noel-Levitz, 2009). In fact, The University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research found that usage of social media by college admissions offices increased from 61% in 2007 to 95% in
2009 (Glassford, 2010). Colleges have come to the understanding that through social media prospective students are able to learn more about the college while also connecting with current students in a genuine and personal way from other students not just the talking heads from admissions offices (Cappex.com, 2010). For colleges, one of the benefits of using social media in marketing to prospective students is the unique opportunities to present accurate observations of campus life and the sharing of messages about real experiences to balance the unfiltered information that students share with one another (Glassford, 2010).

As colleges are embarking on social media campaigns to reach students, this research question was developed to learn students’ perceptions of colleges and universities that advertise in social media channels. This question was answered through both quantitative and qualitative methodologies with survey questions and focus groups. There were two survey questions developed to learn different aspects of student perceptions. The first survey question was, “How do you perceive the reputations of colleges that place advertisements on social media sites?” This question was designed to ascertain prospective students’ overall perception of a colleges’ reputation when the college placed advertisements in various social media channels. The second question was, “How do you perceive the admission standards of colleges that place advertisements on social media sites?” This question was designed to learn how students perceived difficulty or ease of gaining entrance into a college that advertises in social media.

For question one, respondents were presented with a four-point Likert Scale to express their perception of college reputation with the following range:

1) Not prestigious at all
2) Fairly prestigious
3) Prestigious
4) Very prestigious

As illustrated in figure 4.4, the results indicated that 23.5% of respondents indicated that colleges that advertise in social media channels are not prestigious at all; 37.1% indicated that colleges that advertise in social media are fairly prestigious; 30.7% indicated that colleges are prestigious; and 8.7% indicated that colleges who advertise in social media are very prestigious.

Figure 4.4 – Summary of perception of reputation of colleges that advertise in social media

For question two, were presented with a four-point Likert Scale to express their perception of the admissions standards of college that advertise in social media with the following range:

1) Very difficult to get in
2) Difficult to get in
3) Easy to get in

4) Very easy to get in

As illustrated in figure 4.5, 3.8% of respondents indicated their belief that colleges that advertise in social media channels are very difficult to get in; 25.5% believed that colleges who advertise in social media are difficult to get in; 54.8% believed that colleges who advertise in these spaces are easy to get in; and 15.9% of respondents indicated they believe that colleges that advertise in social media are very easy to get in.

Figure 4.5 – Summary of perception of admissions standards of colleges that advertise in social media

These data reveal conflicting results. 76% of respondents believe that colleges that advertise in social media are fairly prestigious, prestigious or very prestigious. However, over 70% also believe that colleges that advertise in social media are easy or very easy to get into. This appears to be a discrepancy in the results as it is unlikely that
a college can be both prestigious and easy to get into. However, focus group results may provide clarity for this question.

When asked the question, “How do you perceive colleges and universities that advertise in social media?” Lily stated, “I think that they are not like real colleges. Colleges don’t need to advertise [in social media] if they are already getting students.” Likewise, Alex stated, “I feel like they are trying too hard like maybe a small town college they need people to go [to their college] so maybe that’s why they are trying to advertise because no one has heard of them.”

Regina said, “I feel like the reputation of those colleges is not that great because they are not getting that many freshmen and they have to advertise in social media.” Judy agreed saying, “Yeah, like if you are popular then you don’t have to advertise on social media.”

Of the 21 focus group participants, only two students disagreed with the majority sentiment. Adam said, “I actually disagree. I got an advertisement from [a university in California] and I clicked on it to see what they would have in there and their programs.” Gretchen also disagreed with the populous stating, “I don’t think it’s a negative thing. I don’t think [advertising in social media] gives the school a negative image. I think that it’s just [the colleges’] way to make money. Like for me personally if there was some school that I’ve never heard of and there was an ad and I clicked on and said, ‘Oh wow this school seems really interesting’ then maybe I’ll want to go. It could be that I haven’t heard [of that school].

Some of the focus group participants commented on the personal nature of social media. For example Alana stated, “I think that if [colleges] are trying to get to you on
like Facebook or Tumblr or whatever, it’s kind of like your own personal thing with your friends and stuff. College is more professional and [advertising in social media] is kind of invading your privacy so I don’t like it.” Gina said, “I agree with Alana. It’s like Instagram, Facebook and all that is like my own personal bubble of privacy away from school. So for colleges to come in and be like, ‘Oh we are interested in you going here,’ it’s like kind of invading my personal space and I don’t appreciate that.”

Two participants drew contrasts between email and social media. Morgan said, “Um, I feel like email is more professional whereas with like Facebook it’s more of a social aspect of [college] like the kind of events they have.” Alyssa responded, “I kind of agree with what Morgan was saying about how email is more professional, but Facebooking feels like more informal.”

Though the survey data are conflicting when it comes to student perceptions of the reputations of colleges and universities that advertise in social media, focus group responses seem to be clear. The majority of participants expressed that colleges that advertise in social media do not have strong reputations. Further, participants seem to have an expectation that colleges and universities convey themselves in a professional manner. According to their comments, social media is informal space. Therefore, colleges who advertise in the spaces appear to be informal. Finally, participants’ comments seem to indicate that social media space is designated for personal interaction between friends and acquaintances. Therefore, when colleges conduct business in these channels is perceived as a violation of students’ personal space.
Question #5: How do prospective college students prefer to receive communications from four-year colleges?

Another point of note from this survey was that from a student perspective 74% of current, college-bound high school seniors said they think colleges should have a presence on social media sites, and 81% of these students acknowledged that they look for both official and unofficial content about colleges when they go online (Noel-Levitz, 2010). On the contrary, in a parallel survey of more than 1,000 colleges and universities in the U.S. conducted by Noel-Levitz (2010) less than 40% of the colleges and universities offered direct links to social media resources like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn from their websites even though students expect colleges to have a greater social media presence.

In yet another survey of 1,000 college-bound seniors focusing on their practices and expectations, 41% stated that they found colleges online by conducting searches through Google or other search engines, however, only 3% stated that they found colleges online by conducting research through MySpace or Facebook (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Even with the rise of social media, 87% of respondents surveyed said they would be willing to give colleges their e-mail addresses, 67% said they would provide their personal e-mail address that they check most often and 23% said they would use an e-mail address dedicated to their college searches thus indicating that 18-24 year olds are still more receptive to e-mail marketing than marketing through social networking (Noel-Levitz, 2009).

Despite the collaborative and trendy technology preferences of Millennials, many colleges and universities continue to use one way (i.e. school Web sites) and more
traditionally established technologies (i.e., email) in their recruitment strategies (Lindbeck and Fodrey 2010). Ironically, based on the data this might not be a bad idea. It would behoove college and university marketing managers to understand that for prospective college students, a social media channel like Facebook is used for visiting fan pages to get an unfiltered view of a particular college through the perceptions of other prospective students and currently enrolled students by reading their comments related to the dynamics of their experiences (Cappex.com, 2010). Students and parents actually preferred to communicate with college representatives through E-mail, live chat or instant messaging considerably more than other forms of electronic communication due to the to the real-time response and more private forum that is not found in social media (Noel-Levitz, 2012).

The purpose of this research question was to learn from students themselves what their preferences were for receiving communications from colleges and universities. This question was answered through both quantitative and qualitative methods with survey and focus group data. This component of the survey contained 15 questions under the heading, “In my dream world of college searches I would prefer that Pinnacle University had communicated with me through the following vehicles during the following times.” Respondents could select their preferences using the following:

1) Alert notifications from the campus
2) Automated phone call
3) Phone call with a live person
4) Pinnacle University mobile application
5) Email
6) Facebook
7) Pinnacle web portal
8) Online chat
9) Text message
10) Twitter
11) Video chat
12) Voicemail
13) Websites (other than web portal or social media)
14) Written mail
15) Other

Respondents were allowed to select their preference for use of each mode of communication, or they could select “not applicable.” Because the emphasis of this study is on how students used social media in their college choice process, I have displayed the results of the two social media channels listed above. Facebook and Twitter were the only two social media channels on the list for two reasons. First, at the time of this study Facebook and Twitter were the two most popular social media channels. Second, at the time of this study Facebook and Twitter were the only two social media channels used by Pinnacle University to communicate with students.

As displayed in table 4.2, all 15 modes of communication are listed in rank order with email as the most desired mode of communication from the university by respondents at 91.2% and “other” listed as the least desired mode of communication at 8.8%.
Table 4.2 – Preferences for receiving communications from Pinnacle University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of communication</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinnacle web portal</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written mail</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinnacle University mobile application</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone call with a live person</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alert notifications from Pinnacle</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated phone call</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online chat</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicemail</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites (other than portal or social media)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video chat</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all 15 modes of communication, the top three modes preferred by respondents were email, campus web portal and written mail. The highest ranking social media channel was Facebook, however it was the 10th ranked mode of choice. Twitter ranked 14th out of 15 communication modes preferred by respondents.

Further insights were found in the focus group results. There were numerous comments from participants pertaining to their preferences for receiving communications from colleges and universities. Thus, I have divided their comments into four categories; Social Media, Email, Mail and In-person.

**Social media.** Morgan stated, “[Colleges shouldn’t] advertise on Twitter or Facebook because I don’t want to see [ads from them].” Gretchen agreed saying, “If a school contacted [me] through Facebook I wouldn’t take it seriously because there are so
many scams going on through social networking. So I don’t think that I would treat it like it was official cause with email you can see who the emails are coming from like their email address and if you are not sure you can verify it with the school. But like if it’s a random Facebook account I don’t [look at it] cause it seems unprofessional. Gretchen added, “Facebook doesn’t seem that professional and even though I following the Pinnacle University Facebook page I don’t think that it is umm that great.”

Email. As it relates to receiving email from colleges and universities, data indicates that this is the most preferred method of communication desired by prospective students. However, students indicated in focus groups that though they preferred email from colleges and universities, they did not like receiving multiple emails from the same schools, especially from schools in which they had no interest. Students referred to multiple emails as junk mail or spam. Alyssa commented, “I would get so many different emails [from] like random colleges I never even thought about going to. Because I didn’t like getting so many emails, it was like junk mail to me. Also, colleges shouldn’t send me emails that are pointless that I don’t need to read like that has constantly the same information.”

Their frustration seemed to emanate from having to regularly delete numerous emails on a regular basis to keep their inboxes from overflowing. Students also indicated that over-communication from colleges could lead to apathy on behalf of prospective students leading to loss of interest in the school. Amber stated, “I [gave colleges] my dad’s email because I didn’t want to put mine down. He would get twenty emails in a row of spam and he would have to like go through them and delete them all. It [would] be
easier to toss paper into a trash can than to click a button for twenty years.” She further stated, “It gets really annoying if I see the same schools sending me the same emails week after week and I’m just like, ‘I don’t care anymore, I’m not going to your school.’ I remember like a lot of the emails would like try to make it seem [personal] by tailoring their email to you by plugging in your first name. So it would say, ‘Amber, umm we know you want to come to [our college].’ When it was some school I’ve never even heard of I was like, ‘No I don’t really want to go there.”’

However, other students shared their preference for email indicating their ability to control how much, and from whom, they receive email. They shared that students have the ability to filter their emails or simply unsubscribe from the recipient list if they are no longer interested in receiving information from a given institution. Overall, students stated their preference for receiving email from colleges, however their preference is for few meaningful emails rather than a multitude of automatically distributed ongoing emails that will wane their patience and possibly lead to them removing those colleges from consideration.

**Mail.** Other participants expressed their desire to receive paper mail. Interestingly, students shared that they liked receiving information in the mail. Some students preferred paper mail to email because they felt that emails could be accidentally deleted. Gretchen agreed, “I like receiving [information] in the mail also because [with] email what if you accidentally delete the email, or what if it was like spam email? I don’t know there are so many things that can go wrong like when it’s on the internet or just on
the computer things get lost. So if you have paper it’s like actual, like physical, okay this is what this is.”

This is especially true of acceptance letters. Though students stated that they enjoyed the immediacy of receiving their admissions decisions via email, they seemed to look forward to receiving their acceptance letters and information packets via paper mail. Martha commented, “I preferred getting my acceptance letter from Pinnacle University in the mail rather than from email that I got. When I got [the package in] the mail I got like the big envelope and all the stuff that came with the acceptance letter and the email just kind of minimized it.

**In person.** Some focus group participants expressed their thoughts toward speaking with college and university representatives in person. Miley said, “My high school they did a college fair and so [students] could go and like look like at a bunch of different colleges at [their] tables. That was kind of cool because then it’s like you [could] go to them instead of them coming to you. [There should be] less of the social media like going on line [and more] people from colleges going into schools. [Colleges should] send advocates like speakers into the schools and maybe talk to a group of kids and be like well this is what our school offers you and then maybe it’s like more [easy to] understand. The seniors would understand what the school is about more than just a flyer with words on it they might not even read. A Facebook page or something it’s just kind of like information that might be confusing or like [students] might not want to read.

Martha agreed by stating simply stating, “I agree with sending advocates come speak to the high school students about college.” Gretchen agreed and recommended,
“Maybe our current [Pinnacle University] students go and visit high schools and then if [Pinnacle University] is trying to incorporate social media have the student speakers give out the Facebook page so it’s like credible you know? Have the kids go to the Facebook page, don’t have the Facebook page go to the kids cause that way it might look like a scam.

Karen commented, “I think that it’s like more credible and there is more validity to have someone face to face with you. And it’s better for the [college] I think too because with a flyer or a paper you can easily throw it away and cast it off but with someone in your face you really can’t cause that’s really rude. So just having more advocates go to schools to directly speak with students is better and you can get more information about your school to a bigger audience of people.” Alana added, “I think [speaking to college representatives in person] is actually more effective. We had [college representatives visit] my high school where we had I don’t remember what it was called but this one lady from Pinnacle University would come over to the school every Wednesday, and for like a certain amount time, and then we could go and sign up in the college office, and we can ask whatever questions we wanted. I thought that was very helpful finding out how I can enroll and any other questions I had about the school or [the representatives] themselves cause they were actually going to school they understood what goes on what happens. So I think that would be more effective if they actually had people going out from like different departments based on students. Maybe they can send a survey in advance to find out what the kids are interested in at that school and send in people from those departments to go to those classes.”
**Question #6: How do different subgroups of prospective college students use social media differently throughout each stage of the college choice process?**

The previous five questions addressed prospective college student use, perceptions and preferences in general. However, to enrich this study it was important to ascertain any differences of social media use by demographic group. To do so, I created survey questions to identify various demographic subgroups among the participants. The subgroups that were gathered from the survey questions were:

1) Gender
2) Ethnicity
3) Highest level of education of either parent
4) Region of the high school from which student graduated

Before conducting an analysis of this data, I compared the gender and ethnicity distribution of the survey participants to the gender and ethnicity distribution of Pinnacle University to ensure that my sample represented the university.

Table 4.3 indicate that the first time freshman population of Pinnacle University for the Fall of 2013 consisted of 43.2% men and 56.8% women. In comparison, the participants of this study were 33.7% male and 66.3% female. The participants of this survey seemed to be a reasonable representative sample of Pinnacle University at-large, therefore I chose not to weight results by gender.
Table 4.3 – Gender comparison of Pinnacle University to participants in study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Pinnacle University</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>+9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Pinnacle University Office of Institutional Research, 2013)

Table 4.4 is a comparison of the percentage of ethnic groups of first time freshmen at Pinnacle University for Fall 2013 compared to the ethnic groups represented in this study sample.

Table 4.4 – Ethnicity comparison of Pinnacle University to participants in study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Pinnacle University</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>+5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>+3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>+1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>+1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison to the student population of Pinnacle University, the ethnicity of the survey participants are comparable. For example, the African American and Latino population only have a difference of approximately 2%. The Asian American and White populations only have a difference of approximately 5% or less. For this reason, I believe the survey sample is a good ethnic representative of Pinnacle University at-large, therefore I chose not to weight the results by ethnicity.
**Subgroups by stage.** After comparing the sample of the participants to the university demographically, I then ran inferential tests including chi square and p-value for each demographic subgroup of participants in the study. The purpose was to measure statistical significant differences between the social media use of each demographic group in each of Chapman’s (1986) five stages of the college choice process. Beginning with gender, data seems to indicate that overall females used social media more than males in each stage of the college choice process with the exception of the “During search” stage where males’ use is slightly higher than females (see table 4.5). The strongest difference was in the “After admission” stage where females’ use of social media was 9% higher than males. However, it is important to note that though the percentages for use by females were higher, the differences in usage between males and females were not statistically significant.
Table 4.5 – Percentage of each gender using social media at each stage of the college choice process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before search</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>1.267</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During search</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After admission</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>3.376</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After enrollment</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>.757</td>
<td>.384</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next demographic subgroup of participants was analyzed by ethnicity. This information was ascertained through a specific survey question asking participants to select which ethnicity with which they identified. The ethnic groups included were Decline to State, African American, Asian, Caucasian, Latino/a and Other. Decline to State is an option for students who do not wish to select an ethnic group. Other is an identifier for students who may be of mixed ethnicities or who do not align with ethnic options presented on the list. Therefore, for the purpose of analysis, the participants who selected “Decline to State” or “Other” were not included. For the remaining groups, data indicates that a higher percentage of African American participants used social media throughout four of the five stages of college choice than any other group (see table 4.6). Asian students indicated that they use social media in the “Before search” stage than any
other group. However, it is important to note that though the percentages for use by African American and Asian participants were higher, the differences in usage between ethnic groups were not statistically significant.

Table 4.6 – Percentage of each ethnic group using social media at each stage of the college choice process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Latino/a</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before search</td>
<td>27.8 (n=5)</td>
<td>32.1  (n=17)</td>
<td>27.4  (n=17)</td>
<td>27.5  (n=46)</td>
<td>3.166</td>
<td>.674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During search</td>
<td>44.4  (n=8)</td>
<td>43.4  (n=23)</td>
<td>38.7  (n=24)</td>
<td>41.9  (n=70)</td>
<td>1.423</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>38.9  (n=7)</td>
<td>24.5  (n=13)</td>
<td>25.8  (n=16)</td>
<td>26.3  (n=44)</td>
<td>3.012</td>
<td>.698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After admission</td>
<td>38.9  (n=7)</td>
<td>18.9  (n=10)</td>
<td>25.8  (n=16)</td>
<td>21    (n=35)</td>
<td>5.617</td>
<td>.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After enrollment</td>
<td>22.2  (n=4)</td>
<td>17.0  (n=9)</td>
<td>19.4  (n=12)</td>
<td>18    (n=30)</td>
<td>.747</td>
<td>.980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third element of measurement was by the highest level of education attained by the parents of the perspective students. Parent education was divided into the following categories:

1) Attended high school
2) High school diploma
3) Attended college
4) BA degree
5) Beyond BA degree
The purpose of measuring this demographic was to learn if there are differences in the use of social media in the five stages of the college choice process by students of parents with different educational attainment. According to the data (see table 4.7) participants with a parent who attended college used social media at a higher rate in the before search stage than all other participants. Those with a parent who earned a BA degree used social media more during the search stage of the college choice process than the others. Participants with a parent who was educated beyond a BA degree used social media at a higher rate in the application stage than the others. Those who have a parent who attended college used social media more after they were admitted to college and after they enrolled in college than other participants. Thus, according to the data, students with a parent who attended college used social media at a higher rate in three of the five stages of the college choice process. This seems to indicate that students of parents with higher levels of education use social media in the college choice process at a higher rate. This has statistical significance in the application stage.
Table 4.7 – Percentage of students using social media at each stage of the college choice process based on the highest level of education completed by their parents’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Attended High school</th>
<th>HS Diploma</th>
<th>Attended College</th>
<th>BA Degree</th>
<th>Beyond BA degree</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before search</td>
<td>29.5 (n=13)</td>
<td>27.7 (n=28)</td>
<td>40.7 (n=22)</td>
<td>25.5 (n=13)</td>
<td>35.5 (n=11)</td>
<td>6.321</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During search</td>
<td>40.9 (n=18)</td>
<td>45.5 (n=46)</td>
<td>38.9 (n=21)</td>
<td>51 (n=26)</td>
<td>38.7 (n=12)</td>
<td>5.193</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>31.8 (n=14)</td>
<td>27.7 (n=28)</td>
<td>25.9 (n=14)</td>
<td>23.5 (n=12)</td>
<td>38.7 (n=12)</td>
<td>10.100</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After admission</td>
<td>29.5 (n=13)</td>
<td>16.8 (n=17)</td>
<td>31.5 (n=17)</td>
<td>25.5 (n=13)</td>
<td>25.8 (n=8)</td>
<td>6.970</td>
<td>.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After enrollment</td>
<td>20.5 (n=9)</td>
<td>14.9 (n=15)</td>
<td>27.8 (n=15)</td>
<td>19.6 (n=10)</td>
<td>22.6 (n=7)</td>
<td>5.656</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final aspect of the participants analyzed was by the location of the high school from which they graduated. This information was gathered through a specific survey question and divided into the following five categories:

1) Los Angeles County
2) Other Southern California
3) Northern California
4) Other US state
5) Outside the US

Of these five categories, data indicated that participants who attended high school in a Southern California city outside of Los Angeles County used social media at a higher rate in the before search stage of the college choice process (see table 4.8). Participants living in a US state other than California used social media at a higher rate during the
search stage and the application stage at a higher rate than others. Students from Los Angeles county high schools used social media at a higher rate in the after admission stage than others, while students from high schools in Southern California cities outside of Los Angeles County were higher social media users in the after enrollment stage. Again, it is important to note that these differences were not statistically significant. Therefore we cannot assume these differences would be found in the entire population.

Table 4.8 – Percent of students using social media at each stage of the college choice process based on the location of the high school from which they graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Other SO Cal</th>
<th>Northern California</th>
<th>Other US state</th>
<th>Outside US</th>
<th>(X^2)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before search</td>
<td>30.8 (n=72)</td>
<td>33.9 (n=19)</td>
<td>11.5 (n=3)</td>
<td>0 (n=0)</td>
<td>12.5 (n=1)</td>
<td>7.513</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During search</td>
<td>40.6 (n=18)</td>
<td>46.4 (n=46)</td>
<td>46.2 (n=21)</td>
<td>50 (n=26)</td>
<td>12.5 (n=12)</td>
<td>5.525</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>24.4 (n=57)</td>
<td>32.1 (n=18)</td>
<td>23.1 (n=6)</td>
<td>50 (n=1)</td>
<td>25 (n=2)</td>
<td>2.149</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After admission</td>
<td>25.2 (n=59)</td>
<td>25 (n=14)</td>
<td>7.7 (n=2)</td>
<td>0 (n=0)</td>
<td>12.5 (n=1)</td>
<td>6.498</td>
<td>0.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After enrollment</td>
<td>19.7 (n=46)</td>
<td>23.3 (n=13)</td>
<td>11.5 (n=3)</td>
<td>0 (n=0)</td>
<td>0 (n=0)</td>
<td>4.970</td>
<td>0.420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Measurement.** Next, I had to identify a process to measure the social media use of survey participants. Having difficulty finding an existing process of measurement in empirical studies on social media I created a system of measurement for this purpose. The system of measurement that I created for this study is the, “Social Media Intensity
Index (SMII).” The SMII combines multiple variables to create an overall picture of how intensely prospective students used social media in the college choice process. When used in conjunction with survey questions, researchers can use this index to measure three aspects of social media use in the college choice process; Volume, Value, and Variety.

**Subscale.** The SMII’s three component subscale consisting of Volume, Value and Variety was established by identifying specific social media questions from the Pinnacle University survey and combining scores from these questions to measure use. After these questions were identified, they were categorized into themes. Once they were categorized, three themes emerged hence creating the three subscales of the SMII. Thus, within each of these three themes exist the survey questions associated with these themes. I then shared these questions and subscales with Pinnacle University administration and agreement was reached that these were appropriate areas of measurement.

**Variables.** Each subscale has at least one variable or question. There are seven total variables in the SMII. For the Volume subscale, the variables are:

1) For what purpose did you use social media?

2) Would you use social media to see your friends’ opinions of colleges and universities?

3) Would you use social media to share your thoughts about colleges and universities?
The Value subscale has only one variable that was identified in the survey. That variable is, “How important was social media in your college choice process?” The third and final subscale, Variety, has three variables which include:

1) Where would you look to find college information?

2) How do you prefer to receive information from colleges and universities?

3) What types of social media did you use in your college choice process?

These variables help to assess the volume of social media use, how participants value the importance of social media, and the variety of types of social media used and how they are used. All of these are variables are assessed through detailed measurements.

**Measurement.** Finally, I wanted to combine all three subscales into an overall index score that would represent how intensely social media was used to in the college search process. I wanted the index to have a potential score of 100 points so it would make intuitive sense to people. I arrived at this number by ascribing a numeric measure for each variable and adding a multiple to each measure to arrive at a total point value for each variable. A detailed description of the calculation of the SMII can be found in the appendix.
Numeric value. To arrive at the measure of each variable a numeric value had to be created. As a reminder, the variable is the actual question from the survey. Thus, the numeric value was created by taking number of possible responses in each question. For example, the first question on the scale is, “For what purpose did you use social media to search for colleges/universities?” There were five possible responses for this question:

1) Before search
2) During search
3) During application process
4) After being admitted
5) Final enrollment

Therefore the measure for this variable is 1-5. All seven variables were valued in the same manner to create a measure for each. For details of conversion from question to multiples, please refer to the appendix.

Multiple/Total. Creating a multiple for each measure required subjectivity of the researcher. I had to determine the importance of the variables and ensure that the most important variables had higher total scores than the least important variables. For the purpose of this study, I determined that the order of importance of the variables from greatest to least was:

1) How important was social media in the college choice process?
2) What types of social media did you use in the college choice process?
3) Where did you look to find college information?
4) How did you prefer to receive communications from colleges and universities?
5) For what purpose did you use social media for colleges/universities?

6) Did you use social media to see your friends’ opinions of colleges and universities?

7) Did you use social media to share what you thought about colleges with your friends?

I arrived at a total score for each variable by assigning a multiple to each measure. For example for the first variable, “How important was social media in the college choice process?” the measure was 1-5. I assigned a multiple of 2 to this measure making the total possible score for this variable 10 points. Based on the hierarchy of importance of the seven variables, I assigned a multiple to each measure to arrive at a total score to reflect the importance of each. When adding the total of each variable, the total measurement of the SMII scale is 100 points (see Table 4.9).
Table 4.9 – Social Media Intensity Index and Subscales Scoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Multiple</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>For what purpose did you use social media?</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>x2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would you use social media to see your friends’ opinions?</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would you use social media to share your thoughts?</td>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>x3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>How important was social media in the college choice process?</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>x8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>Types of social media used</td>
<td>0-8</td>
<td>x2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where would you look to find college information?</td>
<td>0-6</td>
<td>x2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you prefer to receive Communications?</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>x6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first was to create an SMII and subscale scores for each survey respondent in SPSS. Once scores were calculated, I made a frequency distribution of the overall point distribution of social media usage for the participants (see Figure 4.6). Again, the overall usage is on a 100-point scale from zero to 100, low social media use to high social media use respectively throughout the college choice process. The point distribution is in 10-point intervals to show the shape of the distribution. The distribution is bi-modal, with 11-20 and 31-40 each having 77 respondents. No participants scored more than 80 points on the SMII.
Descriptive statistics were performed on the SMII and its subscales to determine the overall mean, median and standard deviation. Again, the subscales for the SMII are Value, Volume and Variety. Based on the results (see Table 4.10), the mean of participants who value social media based on the SMII is 13.8 points with a standard deviation of 8.40. The mean of the participants who are higher volume users is 11 points with a standard deviation of 7.20. Participants who use a variety of social media in the college choice process have a mean of 2.6 points with a standard deviation of 3.78. The overall SMII has a mean of 30.8 points with a standard deviation of 6.6. Based on these results, participants value and use social media more in the college choice process, yet there is little variety in social media channels used. Though prospective students value social media in the college choice process, and use social media with a fair amount of
frequency, the variety is minimal. Overall, however, social media use through all of the subscales and the SMII at-large is very low.

**Table 4.10 – Descriptive statistics for the SMII and subscales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SMII measurement of social media by subgroup.** Having completed an overall analysis of how the participants scored on the SMII and ascertaining the mean, median and standard deviation of the SMII and its subscales, the next step was to learn how the same demographic subgroups that were analyzed by stage of college choice would compare through their use as measured through the SMII. T test analyses were conducted on every subgroup against each other subgroup in each subscale and the SMII overall to learn if there are significant differences in social media use in the college choice process. For each comparison, the mean point average, the t value and the p value as indicated in the 2-tailed significance was gathered. Again, the subgroups compared were gender, ethnicity, highest level of education of parents and location of high school from which participants graduated.
**Gender.** Comparing males to females on the SMII, the usage was very similar (see Table 4.11). On the value subscale, the mean was 15.6 points for males and 16.1 points for females. On the volume subscale, the mean was 11.3 for males and 10.8 for females. The mean was 3.53 points for males and 3.6 points for females on the variety subscale. Overall, the mean for males on the SMII was 30.4 for males versus 30.6 for females. Based on the t score and the p value, the differences between males and females were not statistically significant.

**Table 4.11 – Average (mean) SMII score by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethnic Group.** In comparing the social media use in the college choice process by ethnic group I compared the following ethnicities based on survey data:

1) Caucasian

2) Chicano/Latino

3) African American

4) Asian

5) Other
These subgroups were analyzed by their social media use as measured through the SMII. The first groups compared were Caucasian and Chicano/Latino (see Table 4.12). Based on the data, the Chicano/Latino subgroup had a higher mean in the value and variety subscales than the Caucasian group. The Caucasian group had a slightly higher mean in the volume subscale than the Chicano/Latino group. For the total SMII, the Chicano/Latino group had a higher mean. However, the differences between Caucasian participants’ and Chicano/Latino participants’ use of social media in the college choice process based on the SMII were not statistically significant.

### Table 4.12 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Chicano/Latino</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>.511</td>
<td>.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>.319</td>
<td>.750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Caucasian and African American (see Table 4.13). Based on the data, the African American subgroup had a higher mean in every subscale and in the overall SMII. This would indicate that African American participants were higher social media users in the college choice process than Caucasian participants. However, the differences between Caucasian
participants’ and African American participants’ use of social media in the college choice process based on the SMII were not statistically significant.

Table 4.13 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next I compared Caucasian participants and Asian participants (see Table 4.14). Based on the data, the Asian subgroup had higher means than the Caucasian group in every category. This would indicate that Asian participants are higher social media users in the college choice process than Caucasian students. This was statistically significant in the value subscale where the mean for Asian students was 18.3 and the mean for Caucasian students was 14.6 with a p value of .031. However, the differences between Caucasian participants’ and Asian participants’ use of social media in the college choice process in every other subscale based on the SMII were not statistically significant.
Table 4.14 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Chicano/Latino and African American (see Table 4.15). Based on the data, the African American subgroup had higher means than the Chicano/Latino subgroup in all subscales. The African American subgroup also had a higher mean than the Chicano/Latino subgroup on the total SMII. However, the differences between Chicano/Latino participants’ and African American participants’ use of social media in the college choice process based on the SMII were not statistically significant.

Table 4.15 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Chicano/ Latino</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>.423</td>
<td>.673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In comparing the Chicano/Latino subgroup to the Asian subgroup (see Table 4.16) data indicates that Asian participants had higher means in all subscales and the overall SMII than the Chicano/Latino subgroup. This was statistically significant in the value subscale where the mean for Asian students was 18.2 and the mean for Chicano/Latino students was 15.2 with a p value of .037. However, the differences between Chicano/Latino participants’ and Asian participants’ use of social media in the college choice process in every other subscale based on the SMII were not statistically significant.

Table 4.16 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Chicano/Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td>.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were African American and Asian (see Table 4.17). Based on the data, the Asian subgroup had marginally higher means in the value and volume subscales than the African American group. The African American group had a slightly higher mean in the variety subscale than the Asian group. For the total SMII, the Asian group had a slightly higher mean. It is important to note that of all ethnic subgroup comparisons, the African American subgroup and the Asian subgroup were remarkably
similar across all scales. The differences between these two groups were very minimal and thus not statistically significant.

Table 4.17 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents’ education. In comparing the social media use in the college choice process by highest level of education completed by the participant’s parents, I compared the following education levels of parents based on survey data:

1) Attended high school
2) High school diploma
3) Attended college
4) BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree
5) Beyond a BA degree

These subgroups were analyzed by their social media use as measured through the SMII. The first groups compared were Attended high school and High school diploma (see Table 4.18).
Based on the data, the High school diploma subgroup had a higher means in all subscales and the SMII overall than the Attended high school group. Thus the data suggests that students whose parents have a high school diploma as their highest level of education completed use social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students whose parents attended high school as their highest level of education completed. This is statistically significant in the value subscale and the overall SMII meaning that students whose parents had a high school diploma value social media more and are overall higher users than students whose parents did not.

Table 4.18 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Attended high school</th>
<th>High school diploma</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Attended high school and Attended college (see Table 4.19). Based on the data, the Attended College subgroup had slightly higher means than the Attended high school subgroup in the value and volume subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data seems to indicate that participants whose parents attended college as their highest level of education completed used social media slightly more than
participants who parents attended high school as their highest level of education completed. However, the differences between these participants’ use of social media in the college choice process based on the SMII were not statistically significant.

Table 4.19 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Attended high school</th>
<th>Attended college</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>.949</td>
<td>.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Attended high school and Bachelor’s degree (see table 4.20). Based on the data, the Bachelor’s degree subgroup had higher means than the Attended high school subgroup in the value and volume subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data seems to indicate that participants whose parents earned a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants who parents attended high school as their highest level of education completed. However, the differences between these participants’ use of social media in the college choice process based on the SMII were not statistically significant.
Table 4.20 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Attended high school</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td>.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>.566</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Attended high school and Beyond Bachelor’s degree (see Table 4.21). Based on the data, with the exception of the volume subscale, the Attended high school subgroup had higher means than the Beyond Bachelor’s degree subgroup in the subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data suggests that participants whose parents attended high school as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants who parents were educated beyond a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed. Of particular note is in the variety subscale where the difference was statistically significant meaning participants whose parents attended high school as their highest level of education completed used a greater variety of social media in their college choice process than participants whose parents were educated beyond a Bachelor’s degree based on the SMII. However, the differences between these participants in the other two subscales and the SMII overall were not statistically significant.
Table 4.21 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Attended high school</th>
<th>Beyond a Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>.530</td>
<td>.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.262</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>.450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparing the High school diploma and the Attended college subgroups (see table 4.22), based on the data, High school diploma subgroup had higher means than the Attended college subgroup in all subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data suggests that participants whose parents earned a high school diploma as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants who parents attended college as their highest level of education completed. Of particular note is in the variety subscale where the difference was statistically significant meaning participants whose parents earned a high school diploma as their highest level of education completed used a greater variety of social media in their college choice process than participants whose parents attended college based on the SMII. In essence, data indicates that students from less educated households use a wider variety of social media. However, the differences between these participants in the other two subscales and the SMII overall were not statistically significant.
Table 4.22 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>High school diploma</th>
<th>Attended College</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparing the High school diploma and the Bachelor’s degree subgroups (see Table 4.23), based on the data the High school diploma subgroup had higher means than the Bachelor’s degree subgroup in all subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data suggests that participants whose parents earned a high school diploma as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants who parents earned a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.23 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>High school diploma</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were High school diploma and Beyond Bachelor’s degree (see Table 4.24). Based on the data, the High school diploma subgroup had higher means than the Beyond Bachelor’s degree subgroup in all subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data suggests that participants whose parents earned a high school diploma as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants who parents were educated beyond a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed. Of particular note is with the exception of the volume subscale, the differences in the subscales and the SMII overall were statistically significant meaning participants whose parents attended high school as their highest level of education completed valued social media more, used a greater variety of social media, and were overall higher users of social media in their college choice process than participants whose parents were educated beyond a Bachelor’s degree based on the SMII. Thus, social media use in this major life decision is more characteristic of less educated families.
Table 4.2 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>High school diploma</th>
<th>Beyond a Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Attended college and Bachelor’s degree (see Table 4.25). Based on the data, the Bachelor’s degree subgroup had higher means than the Attended college subgroup in all subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data suggests that participants whose parents earned a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants who parents attended college as their highest level of education completed. However, the differences between the participants of these two subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.25 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Attended College</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>.273</td>
<td>.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>.313</td>
<td>.755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Bachelor’s degree and Beyond Bachelor’s degree (see Table 4.26). Based on the data, the Bachelor’s degree subgroup had higher means than the Beyond Bachelor’s degree subgroup in all subscales and the SMII overall scale. Thus the data suggests that participants whose parents earned a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed used social media more than participants whose parents were educated beyond a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed. Of particular note is in the variety subscale where the difference was statistically significant meaning participants whose parents earned a Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education completed used a greater variety of social media in their college choice process than participants whose parents were educated beyond a Bachelor’s degree based on the SMII. However, in the other subscales and the SMII overall the differences between the participants of these two subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.26 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by highest level of education completed by either parent/guardian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Bachelor’s Degree</th>
<th>Beyond a Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Location of high school.** In comparing the social media use in the college choice process by locations of high schools from which the participants graduated, I compared the following locations based on survey data:

1) Los Angeles County
2) Other Southern California
3) Northern California
4) Other state in the US
5) Outside of US

These subgroups were analyzed by their social media use as measured through the SMII. The first groups compared were Los Angeles County and Other Southern California (see Table 4.27). Based on the data, the Los Angeles County subgroup and the Other Southern California subgroup are very similar. Thus the data seems to indicate that students from Los Angeles County and students from other Southern California counties used social media in the college choice process at a similar rate. This is confirmed in the
high p value of each subscale and the overall SMII that any differences are not statistically significant.

Table 4.27 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of High School</th>
<th>Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Other SO Cal</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volume</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Los Angeles County and Northern California (see Table 4.28). Based on the data, the Los Angeles County subgroup and the Northern California subgroup are very similar. Thus the data seems to indicate that students from Los Angeles County and students from Northern California used social media in the college choice process at a similar rate. This is confirmed in the p value of each subscale and the overall SMII that any differences are not statistically significant.
Table 4.28 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Northern California</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>.362</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.868</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared the Los Angeles County subgroup and the Other US state group (see Table 4.29). Based on the data, the Other US state subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from other US states outside of California used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students in Los Angeles County. It suggests that when prospective students are looking at out-of-state campuses, they may rely on social media more than local students due to the inability to easily access the campus in person. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.29 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Other US State</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td>.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>.778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>.844</td>
<td>.399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared the Los Angeles County subgroup and the Outside of US group (see Table 4.30). Based on the data, the Los Angeles County subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from Los Angeles County used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students outside of the United States. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.30 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of High School</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Outside of US</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next groups compared were Other Southern California and Northern California (see Table 4.31). Based on the data, the Other Southern California subgroup and the Northern California subgroup are very similar. Thus the data seems to indicate that students from Southern California counties outside of Los Angeles County and students from Northern California used social media in the college choice process at a similar rate. This is confirmed in the p value of each subscale and the overall SMII that any differences are not statistically significant.
Table 4.31 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Other SO Cal</th>
<th>Northern California</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>.829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>.369</td>
<td>.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.918</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared the Other Southern California subgroup and the Other US state subgroup (see Table 4.32). Based on the data, the Other US state subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from states in the US outside of California used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students in other Southern California counties outside of Los Angeles County. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.32 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of High School</th>
<th>Other SO Cal</th>
<th>Other US State</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>.457</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared the Other Southern California subgroup and the Outside of US subgroup (see table 4.33). Based on the data, the Other Southern California subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from other Southern California counties outside of Los Angeles County used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students from outside of the United States. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.33 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Other Cal</th>
<th>Outside of US</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared the Northern California subgroup and the Outside of US subgroup (see Table 4.34). Based on the data, the Outside of US subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from outside of the United States used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students from Northern California. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.34 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of High School</th>
<th>Northern California</th>
<th>Outside of US</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td>.435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared the Northern California subgroup and the Other US state subgroup (see Table 4.35). Based on the data, the Northern California subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from Northern California used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students from other US states outside of California. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.3 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of High School</th>
<th>Northern California</th>
<th>Other US State</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, I compared the Other US state subgroup and the Outside of US subgroup (see Table 4.36). Based on the data, the Other US state subgroup had higher means on all subscales and the SMII overall. Thus the data suggests that students from US states outside of California used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate than students from outside of the United States. However, the differences between the participants in these subgroups were not statistically significant.
Table 4.36 – Average (mean) SMII score comparison by location of high school from which students graduated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Other US State</th>
<th>Outside US of US</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SMII</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to conduct an empirical analysis of how students used social media through each stage of the college choice process using Chapman’s (1986) five stage college choice model as the theoretical framework. Chapman’s (1986) five stage college choice model consists of the following stages: Pre-Search Behavior; Search behavior; Application Decision; Choice Decision; and, Matriculation Decision. This chapter discusses the findings of this research, provides recommendations for college and university marketing professionals, recommendations for future research and a concluding statement. The following questions were the focus of this study:

1. At what stage of the college choice process did prospective college students use social media?
2. Which social media platforms did prospective college students use in their college choice process?
3. What are prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process?
4. How do prospective college students perceive colleges that advertise in social media realms?
5. How do prospective college students prefer to receive communications from four-year colleges?
6. How do different subgroups of prospective college students use social media differently throughout each stage of the college choice process?
The aim of this discussion was to provide insights into specific areas of social media marketing to enhance planning and practices for effectively reaching young people through this mode.

Emerging Theory on Social Media and College Choice

One valuable asset from this study was the preliminary creation of the Social Media Intensity Index. Research from this study suggests an emerging theory on social media and college choice. This was revealed through the three dimensions of the Social Media Intensity Index that I created to assist with the measurement of social media use. In establishing a pilot instrument to measure social media use, I consulted with senior administration and marketing professionals at Pinnacle University to determine what aspects of students’ social media use were important for the university. Their desired measurements aligned with select survey questions that were included in this study. Through the expressions of university representatives coupled with specific survey questions, three themes emerged. These themes are Volume, Value and Variety which became the subscales of the Social Media Intensity Index.

The first subscale addresses the volume of social media use by a prospective college student. Through the questions related to this subgroup we were able to learn how much students used social media in the college choice process. Though the focus of this study was for college campuses it is possible that businesses could use this type of a subscale to determine how frequently their customers, or potential customers, use social media in relationship to their type of business. For example, if a movie theater learned
that their customers use Twitter at a high rate, they could offer special promotions distinct to Twitter users thus increasing their ticket sales.

The Value subscale and the survey question associated with it revealed how much students valued social media in their college choice process. What we learned is that prospective students did find social media valuable. Again, this study focused on colleges but this type of subscale might have value to companies to determine how valuable their costumers and potential customers find social media in relation to their business. For example, a car dealership considering social media campaigns might want to know if people care to use social media when navigating the car purchasing process. Whether or not consumers find social media valuable in car buying would determine how much emphasis car dealers would place on social media marketing.

Finally, the Variety subscale gave us information on how many social media channels were used by students in the college choice process. Knowing this gives insight into where marketing efforts might be initiated to reach prospective students. This is helpful to colleges, however it might also be beneficial to companies to learn the different social media channels their costumers and potential customers use in relationship with their business. Restaurants might be interested in where they can offer special dining experiences in social media channels other than YELP (a consumer-driven restaurant search engine) to increase their customer base and their overall revenue.

These subscales can be useful individually. However, collectively the Social Media Intensity Index will give a comprehensive view of consumers social media use. This scale will produce data outcomes that will inform colleges, and possibly various businesses, of the intensity of social media use of their prospects.
How Prospective Students Define Social Media

Prospective college students use social media in the college choice less than college marketing representatives may think. Only 62.1% of the students surveyed indicated that they did use social media when searching for colleges and universities. However, when measuring social media use by stage, at least 70% indicated that they did not use social media in any given stage. Thus we had what appeared to be conflicting information. This conflict was resolved through our focus groups when we asked participants to share what they considered to be social media. Interestingly, among the responses were email and text messaging. In fact, in our preliminary focus group some students mentioned Google search as a social media channel. This was revealing to me as a researcher and a professional in the field of college recruitment and marketing.

Further, I approached this study I was not considering email and text as social media.

Colleges need to recognize that prospective college students do not define social media in the same way as college marketing professionals. Students seem to refer to all online media as “social media” when, in industry terms, it has a much more specific meaning. Social media is defined as an online communications platform which allows users to establish social networks through peer-to-peer communications and connections (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Therefore, when one considers the notion of a user generating information and sharing it with peers in an electronic format, email seems to fit the criteria of social media. However, text messaging does not occur online and Google searches are not actually social networking.

Nonetheless, if students are considering all of these channels as social media then colleges need to be strategic about their presence in these areas. For example, when a
student types in variations of a college’s name into a search engine, what information will the student see first? As a parent of a senior in high school, we conducted a Google search for Sunshine University (this is a pseudonym). We then clicked on images to see pictures. The first pictures we saw were students conducting risqué behavior. This certainly made an impression on our decision to consider applying to that college.

As it pertains to email and text messaging, prospective college students can be reached in these channels and marketing professionals would benefit from including these channels in their communication plans. However, to do so effectively proper strategies must be engaged. Various nuances of strategy implementation will be discussed later in this chapter.

**What Social Media Channels Should Colleges Recognize When Marketing to Students?**

Based on the findings from this study, of the participants who indicated that they used social media in their college choice process 41.9% responded that they used Facebook in their college choice process, 32.5% used YouTube, 17.1% used Twitter, 11.1% indicated that they used Tumblr, 7.1% responded that they used Pinterest, 6.6% indicated that they used Reddit, 6.3% indicated that they used Flickr and 5.7% responded that they used LinkedIn. Thus, in accordance with the review of literature Facebook does, indeed, have the highest teen users among all the social media channels followed by Twitter (Fox, 2013). From the focus groups, 17 social media channels emerged as those currently used by participants. What is important to note from this is that some social media channels may dominate market-share, and new channels may continue to surface.
Therefore, college marketing professionals need to be abreast of these channels and how prospective students use them.

Again, participants in this study identified web search, email and text messaging in their overall definition of “social media”. Both survey and focus group results indicated that industry defined social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and others are not heavily used in the college choice process. Thus, colleges must realize that most students do not use social media in the college choice process, and for those who do their use is in very few channels. Though colleges can list certain channels on their websites and engage their current students to interact with prospective students, they should use caution in following ever-changing fads and evaluate how they will use their resources in this area.

At What Stage Should Colleges Market to Prospective Students Via Social Media?

Data indicated that stages one, the pre-search stage and two, the search stage, reflected the highest use of social media among those surveyed. As students progressed through stages three through five, social media use declined significantly. Therefore, data indicated that though social media is not highly used in any stage, when it is used students are more likely to use it in the pre-search and search stages than the latter three stages of the college choice process. This is important for colleges and universities to know. While it is tempting to launch multi-media campaigns to reach prospective students and draw them to college campuses, these data reveal that placing too much emphasis in social media may not yield the results that might be expected.
Yet, these channels should neither be ignored nor eliminated from colleges’ strategic marketing plans. Through social media, colleges and universities can generate interest in their campuses. However, once prospective students have completed the search process and engaged in the application process, data indicates that they resort to more conventional modes of communication.

Focus group data revealed further information that is noteworthy for colleges and universities. Focus group participants stated that colleges that already have students do not need to advertise in social media. They also shared that colleges that advertise in social media appear desperate and do not have good reputations. In their opinion, popular colleges don’t need to advertise in social media. With this in mind, colleges and universities should use caution when marketing to prospective students in social media channels as this practice could have an adverse impact on their reputation.

**Ethnic Groups**

Another important finding from this research was with respect to the ethnic groups studied. The results revealed an overall absence of statistical significance of the use of social media between the different ethnic groups. There were some exceptions in various stages and on the different SMII subscales, however by and large no one ethnic group consisted of higher users across every stage of the college search process than another. In light of research literature and educational entities that have posed the concern of technological equity among teens of different ethnic groups, findings from this study showed few differences in social media usage.
Among those differences, students who identified as African American and Asian were higher social media users in the pre search and search stages. However, students who identified as Caucasian were relatively higher users in the after admission and after enrollment stages. This is important for college marketing professionals. Having knowledge of these demographics is helpful for creating strategic marketing campaigns.

Having experience working for two globally successful corporate entities, I have witnessed first-hand how corporations use creative approaches and marketing savvy to reach specific ethnic and age-group demographics. Both companies unapologetically used people of color who match the target audience and edgy graphic designs to reach the youth therein. This also seems to be a strategy of the US armed forces recruiting offices.

Having a son and a daughter who were high school, it was uncanny how many creatively personalized advertisements were directed to my son for recruitment purposes. Likewise, college marketing professionals could follow suit by creating cutting-edge marketing to the above demographics in the stages in which they are likely to use social media. Specifically, pre-search and search marketing on social media should include general advertisements on social media sites. For the after admission and after enrollment stages, colleges should use social media along with email, campus web portal and text messages to reach students.

**Level of parent education**

The findings of this study revealed that prospective students whose parents either attended high school or received a high school diploma as their highest level of education used social media more in the search stage. This seems to suggest that students whose
parents did not go to college may see more value in social media than those with more educated households. This is an important finding for college marketing representatives. Knowing that this demographic has this preference is an indicator to when colleges can reach this group of students. Not having parents who are versed in the college choice process can leave prospective college students vulnerable to strong marketing tactics. Thus, colleges should implement special marketing efforts toward students who are in the first generation in their families to go to colleges. First generation students may not have all of the information about college or the steps of the college-going process.

Campaigns to provide specific information about the process in short, easy-to-understand pieces would be helpful for this group. For example, a college could send daily, “Did you know…” messages through social media channels that would be helpful to these students. Along with the messages, students should have access to connect with college admissions professionals or current college students who can engage in meaningful dialogue with them.

On the other hand, though data indicates that prospective students with parents whose highest level of education completed was beyond a bachelor’s degree used social media in the college choice process at a higher rate in the application stage, these students’ overall Social Media Intensity Index (SMII) scores were the lowest of all parent education demographics. This is an indication that they value social media less, they use social media less and they use a lower variety of social media channels in the college choice process than others. This could be a result of parents with higher education attainment having knowledge of the college choice process, access to more information, connections to more people, and the overall ability to assist their children at some level.
Location of students

Based on the findings, participants who attended high school in a Southern California city outside of Los Angeles County used social media at a higher rate before search and after enrollment. Participants living in a US state other than California used social media at a higher rate during the search stage and the application stage at a higher rate than others. Students from Los Angeles county high schools used social media at a higher rate in the after admission stage than others. This seems to indicate that the distance away from a given college campus will determine the use at each particular stage.

Prospective college students who live outside of LA County but in Southern California are likely to entertain college information before their official search begins, and after they enroll in a college. Focus group data revealed that students use social media primarily to engage with peers. Therefore, students in this location exhibit a receptiveness to receive information from colleges that are slightly farther away in the pre-search stage, and a desire to communicate with other students after they have enrolled. Prospective college students who live farthest away from a college are likely to use social media when actively searching for colleges and when applying to colleges. This seems to be due to the fact that students who live farther away from a college may not know other students attending the campus. Thus, social media allows them to connect to others to gather information from a student’s perspective.

This information is helpful to college marketing entities as strategies can be developed to reach students in these stages by region. Colleges who are marketing to these students can benefit from knowing that not every family has the financial means or
desire to make multiple visits to a college. Therefore, technology becomes very important for prospects in these stages. Again, this is where the definition of social media bears significance. Students viewed Google searches, email and text messaging as social media. Google searches lead prospective students to campus websites. Therefore, it would behoove colleges and universities to investigate their Google positioning and simplify their websites. Websites will be discussed later in this chapter. However Google positioning refers to where a business or organization is listed on a page when one searches for information using a particular word or phrase. For example, if one searches for, “Colleges in Southern California” where will a given college appear on this list of results? Colleges with financial resources can pay to position themselves at the top of these search lists. Smaller colleges can leverage their positioning by capitalizing on key search words and phrases such as, “Private Colleges” or, “small colleges.” Certain out-of-area niche groups can be reached through targeted marketing through this and other social media channels. However, data indicated that there is a particular manner in which students navigate college information. Details of students’ preferences for receiving communications from colleges and their perceptions of colleges that advertise in social media channels is detailed below.

**How Do Prospective College Students Seek Information About Colleges?**

Based on the literature, Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, (2011) report that in 2010 colleges and universities indicated that 40% of all inquiries from prospective students were received by email or internet. Findings from the focus groups conducted were in agreement with the literature revealing that students preferred to seek college information
through internet searches or email communication with college representatives. In fact, email communication begins with internet searches that lead students to college websites where representatives’ emails are located. Thus, the data seem to indicate that prospective college students’ primary mode of searching for college information is through internet search. Knowing this information, colleges and universities need place more emphasis on investing in and maintaining their web presence and less emphasis on pushing information through social media.

**Web Presence**

Based on the literature, college-bound seniors not only value quality [web] content, they are willing to read a great deal of the most valuable content on college websites (Noel-Levitz, 2009). This debunks the myth that is often heard by college representatives that teens will not read information. In addition, the literature indicated that a majority of students surveyed said that if a college’s web site content did not meet their expectations, they would be disappointed or even consider dropping that college from their search (Noel-Levitz, 2009). This is very important for college representatives to know. Data indicates that prospective college students not only seek college information through web searches that lead them to college websites, their perception of colleges’ websites will have an impact on their decision to pursue the admissions process. Therefore, colleges need to ensure that their websites are easy to navigate and information is current and accessible. As a parent of high school seniors, I can attest to the fact that there was nothing more frustrating than helping my kids search for, what we
perceived as, basic information on a college’s website and having to mine through multiple pages and still not find what we were looking for.

Focus group participants also shared insightful information in this area. Participants stated that when they wanted information about colleges and universities, they went directly to the colleges’ websites not to social media. This should be an area of investment for colleges and universities.

Social Media

Findings from focus groups revealed how students used social media when looking for information about colleges and universities. These results were quite insightful. Participants stated that they used Facebook to see where their peers from the past year’s graduating class were attending college as a barometer of where they might begin their college searches. Interestingly, participants stated that colleges where peers from their high school are in attendance may either persuade or dissuade them from further pursuit of those colleges. Other students stated that they used YouTube or Instagram to evaluate the social climate of a college. Yet, others shared that they used social media to meet and communicate with peers who are interested in the same college and share the same major or interests.

These findings are helpful to college representatives for devising social media marketing plans. First, students will use social media. However, their social media use is for social purposes. Second, data seems to indicate that when students are using social media for social purposes they are engaging with peers, not professionals. Therefore, colleges would benefit from soliciting college students to engage in conversation with
prospective college students in social media channels. For example, Pinnacle University has a Facebook page for international students on campus which is completely run by international students on campus. Prospective students can become friends of current students and make social connections. This is one example of an effective use of social media with prospective college students.

**How Do Prospective College Students Prefer to Receive Information From Colleges?**

Pinnacle University survey participants were asked to rank their preference of 15 modes of communication from the university. The aim was to ascertain how students preferred to receive communications from the university when they were in the college search process. The findings from the results revealed that of all 15 modes of communication, the top three modes preferred by respondents were email, campus web portal and written mail. The highest ranking social media channel was Facebook, which was the 10th ranked mode of choice. Twitter ranked 14th out of 15 communication modes preferred by respondents. Again, this further supports the literature which indicates that prospective colleges prefer email and campus website over social media in the college choice process. This data also reinforces the reality that students use social media for social interaction with peers and seek college information through more formal channels.

**Email**

According to the literature, even with the rise of social media, prospective college students said they would be willing to give colleges their e-mail addresses, they would
provide their personal e-mail address that they check most often and they would use an e-mail address dedicated to their college searches thus indicating they are still more receptive to e-mail marketing than marketing through social networking (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Focus group findings support the literature. Focus group participants stated that engaging with college representatives is like conducting business. They viewed communicating with college representatives as a formal and professional process. This is in contrast to social media which they stated is for social purposes with peers. Colleges and universities should be mindful of this data. College representatives are perceived as professionals and respected by prospective college students. Attempting to engage students in their social space through social media is like a parent attempting to socialize with students at a high school dance. Again, prospective college students prefer to conduct business in a business space, such as email, and socialize in a social space, such as social media channels. Understanding this will help colleges in their prospective student marketing campaigns.

**Paper Mail**

Focus groups unveiled another finding worthy of note. Participants expressed their desire to receive paper mail. Interestingly, students shared that they enjoyed receiving information in the mail. Some students preferred paper mail to email because they felt that emails could be accidently deleted. They also indicate that spam email takes time to delete as opposed to paper mail that can be easily thrown in the trash. This is an area that can be overlooked by colleges and university that are in pursuit of cutting-edge technological advances and creative marketing campaigns. Through focus groups,
students shared how as teens they don’t receive mail in general. For some, the first time they receive mail addressed to them is from colleges and universities. For teens, receiving mail is special even if it is junk mail. Adults, who seem to have the opposite sentiment, can overlook this reality. Thus, marketing representatives should be careful not to become so focused on technology that they miss this opportunity. This is especially true of college acceptance notifications. According to focus groups, though students are anxious to receive admissions decisions and look for them through electronic notifications, they still desire to receive the traditional paper acceptance packet. To them, this is a record of their accomplishment and many times duplicated, framed and shared with family and friends. Colleges need to be aware of the importance traditional paper mail for students.

Summary

Numerous important findings were presented with recommendations for college marketing professionals to consider in their campaigns to reach prospective college students through social media. Below is a summary of five principles for colleges and universities for using social media to market to prospective students:

1. Prospective college students do not define social media in the same way as college marketing professionals. Students refer to all on line media as “social media” including Google searches, email and text messaging. Colleges need to be strategic about their presence in all of these areas.

2. Most students do not use industry-defined social media channels in the college choice process, and for those who do they use very few channels.
Thus, colleges can list certain channels on their websites and engage their current students to interact with prospective students. However, they should use caution in using valuable resources to follow ever-changing fads to reach prospective students.

3. Though social media use in the college choice is nominal, marketing in these channels should neither be ignored nor eliminated from colleges’ strategic marketing plans. Colleges and universities can generate interest in their campuses through social media. However, once prospective students have completed the search process and engaged in the application process, data indicates that they resort to more conventional modes of communication.

4. Prospective college students prefer to conduct business in a business space, such as email, and socialize in a social space, such as social media channels. Therefore, colleges should use students to engage with other students via social media, and college professionals should communicate through email and other formal channels.

5. Paper mail, including direct mail, is special for teens. Teens enjoy receiving college information in the mail, especially acceptance packets. College marketing representatives should be careful not to become so focused on technology that they miss this opportunity.


**Recommendations for Future Research**

As the Social Media Intensity Index suggested an emerging theory in its subscales, the index was piloted in this study. This study was conducted at one public university in California. Though the research site was a large diverse setting, attitudes and behaviors may not be reflective of all students nationwide. This study was also aimed specifically at first time college freshman as they reflected back on their college choice experiences. Further, many demographic groups were considered in this study comparisons made between each group. Specific dynamics to each group were not considered in this study. Therefore, there is ample opportunity for future research in the area of social media and college choice.

**Social Media Intensity Index**

The first recommendation is that the Social Media Intensity Index be further tested. Though the pilot test for this index did yield results, the data set for this study was not large enough to conduct factor analysis and an Alpha Test of reliability to test if subscales measure different dimensions. Therefore, a larger sample would be helpful to determine the full potential of this index. Any university or company can use this index by adding five to seven key questions to their existing surveys that align with the three subscales of the index to measure social media use relative to their interests.

**Multiple Sites**

Another recommendation is that a study on social media and college choice be conducted at multiple colleges and universities, both public and private, in different
regions of the country. This type of study would provide a richness of geographic and
demographic diversity that is could be more dynamic than one site in one location.
Multiple sites would also allow for a larger and more diverse sample for use of the Social
Media Intensity Index.

Longitudinal Study

This study analyzed student perceptions as they reflected back on their
experiences. A longitudinal study should be conducted following students from the ninth
grade through their freshman year of college to determine how they use social media
throughout the college choice process. This would give more detailed information about
behaviors, patterns trends in this area such as which social media channels were used for
what specific information at which stage of the college choice process.

A longitudinal study would also be helpful for studying social media channels
specifically. Social media is an ever-changing field. With the exception of Facebook and
Twitter which have remained the top two channels used by students for the past few
years, other channels are emerging. Studying preferences and changes of these social
media channels over time could be useful for researchers interested in marketing to teens.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected for this study was Chapman’s (1986) five-
stage college choice model. There are other models that have fewer stages, and others
that expand college choice into more stages. Conducting this type of a study using a
different theoretical framework may yield different results.
Demographics

Again, this study focused on first time freshmen. Many 4-year colleges are interested in their marketing and recruitment efforts to transfer students. Transfer students are a very different demographic than prospective students in high school as most transfer students are adults. Social media data for users ages 12-17 may be quite different than for users ages 18-25. A study focusing on how and if transfer students use social media in the college choice process might be beneficial for colleges and universities.

Further, recruitment of international students is of interest to many colleges and universities. For many colleges, international students are not allowed to receive financial aid and are required to pay non-resident tuitions which result in more revenue for the campus. Therefore, marketing to international students is very important. Though some social media channels such as Facebook are global, different countries may have different social media channels that are highly used by prospective college students. A study of how prospective college students in other countries use social media in the college choice process could be valuable to college marketing representatives.

Technocapital

Finally, there is an emerging interest in the field of college choice which is referred to as “Technocapital”. Technocapital suggests that though we live in an information-rich and digital society, there still exists a digital divide between those who have access to information and those who do not (McIntosh, 2005). Therefore, equality in access to technology and education of how to use technology in schools and areas that
have limited resources is an issue that needs reform (Zajda & Gibbs, 2009). Therefore, a future study of how these challenges impact the idea of how students use technology and social media in the college choice process should be explored. Comparing students at schools with a higher Socio-Economic Status (SES) and more technological resources to schools with a lower SES and fewer resources might yield data illustrating differences impacting access to social media and college information. Comparing students by SES might also yield important findings related to access to technology and college information.

Concluding Statement

This purpose of this study was to examine prospective college students’ perspectives and practices of social media in the college choice process in a manner that would significantly contribute to the body of research available to colleges and universities. As a professional in the field of university marketing and recruitment my goal was to perform an empirical analysis that would shed light on student behavior in the area of social media. Through this process there are three statements that summarize the findings.

Social media use is not high

All of the data seems to indicate that prospective college students do not use social media in the college choice process at a high rate. Using the Social Media Intensity Index (SMII), participants valued and used social media in the college choice
process but used few channels for this purpose and overall use was very low. This was further supported by the focus groups conducted.

**There is no “Silver Bullet”**

Although social media use is low in the college choice process, prospective students do use it in their personal lives with high frequency. Therefore, efforts to reach students through this medium should not be abandoned. Further, data indicated that students prefer to receive paper mail, and email from colleges and seek information through internet searches and viewing of websites. Therefore, there is no one channel of communication that will reach all students. Colleges and universities need to strategically use as many avenues as possible to market to students.

**Social Media is “My Space”**

One of the most important outcomes from this study is the undercurrent of repetitive sentiments from students in focus groups that social media is not used for business. Students use social media to express themselves and interact with peers, not to talk to adults and seek important information. Students are very selective about whom they want in their personal social network space and for the most part, it does not include colleges and university personnel.
References


Maitre, M. (2003). CSU, UC go online for 2005 students ; schools will switch completely
to electronic applications in 2 years. Oakland Tribune, 1.


Perna, L. W., & Steele, P. E. (2011). The role of context in understanding the contributions of financial aid to college opportunity. Teachers College Record, 113(5), 895-933.


Appendix A

Student Researcher

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTOCOL APPROVAL FORM
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

1. Title of research Social Media and College Choice

2. Principal Investigator E. Dwayne Cantrell
   Major or Department Ed.D. Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)

3. Home Address 405 Gabriel Drive                              Mobile phone (626)590-6781
   Bakersfield, CA 93309                                      Email Address dwayne.cantrell@csun.edu

4. Co-Investigators: 1. _______________________________ Student: ☐ Faculty: ☐
   2. _______________________________ Student: ☐ Faculty: ☐

5. Name of Faculty Advisor Richard Moore, Ph.D.              Faculty Advisor ext. 2416
   Faculty Advisor email address: richard.moore@csun.edu

6. Projected Dates of Data Collection:
   Begin Subject Recruitment/Data Collection: 9/3/13   End Data Collection: 9/20/13

7. Course prefix and number for thesis/grad. project ELPS 789 Course title Dissertation Seminar

8. Check one: ☒ Unfunded  ☐ Funded  Name of Funding Source: ______  Date (to be) submitted 5/9/14

9. History of Protocol: ☒ New  ☐ Continuing (Previous Approval Date _____)

10. Existing Data: Will this study involve the use of existing data or specimens (Data/specimens currently existing at the time you submitted this project)? ☐ No  ☐ Yes
    If Yes, attach documentation indicating the authorization to access the data if not publicly available and if accessing from an agency outside of CSUN.

11. Subjects to be recruited (Check all that apply)
    a. ☒ Adults (18+ years)
    b. ☐ Minors specify age: _____
    c. ☐ Cognitively or Emotionally Impaired Persons
    e. ☐ CSUN Students
    f. ☐ Others (describe) ____________________________
    g. ☐ Using existing data

12. Data will include (check all variables that apply): You must specify all of this information in the Project Information form.
    a. ☐ names of people
    b. ☐ email address
    c. ☐ street address
    d. ☐ phone numbers
    e. ☒ age
    f. ☒ gender
    g. ☒ ethnicity
    h. ☐ marital status
    i. ☐ income
    j. ☐ social security number
    k. ☐ job title
    l. ☐ names of employers
    m. ☐ types of employers
    n. ☐ physical health report
    o. ☐ zip code
    p. ☐ other, specify: Location of high school or origin

    and highest level of education completed by

162
13. Will subjects be identified by a coding system (i.e., other than by name)? YES ☒ NO ☐

14. Is compensation offered? YES ☐ NO ☒

15. If yes, describe (e.g., gift cert., cash, research credit). ______________

16. Number of Subjects: Approximately 5,000 (the entire first time freshman class (18 or older) at Pinnacle University for fall 2013)

17. Method of recruiting (elaborate in Section 2 of Project Information Form): Student email and campus web portal

18. Will there be any deception (that is, not telling subjects exactly what is being tested)? YES ☐ NO ☒

19. Potential Risk Exposure (cannot leave blank): ☒ Physical ☐ Psychological ☐ Economic ☐ Legal ☐ Social ☐ Other, specify: Boredom, fatigue, eye strain from online survey on computer, stress

20. Data Collection Instruments (Check all that apply)
   a. ☒ standardized tests
   b. ☒ questionnaire
   c. ☒ interview
   d. ☐ other (specify) ________________

21. Recorded by (Check all that apply)
   a. ☒ written notes
   b. ☐ audio tape
   c. ☒ video tape/film
   d. ☒ photography
   e. ☒ observation

22. Administered by (Check all that apply)
   a. ☒ in person (group setting)
   b. ☒ in person (individual)
   c. ☐ telephone
   d. ☒ text message
   e. ☒ email/website
   f. ☒ mail
   g. ☐ other (specify): ________________

23. Findings used for (Check all that apply)
   a. ☐ publication
   b. ☒ evaluation
   c. ☒ needs assessment
   d. ☒ thesis/dissertation
   e. ☒ other (specify): ________________

24. Are drugs or radioactive materials used in this study? YES ☐ NO ☒

25. Are any medical devices or other equipment to be used in this study? YES ☐ NO ☒

26. Did you attach a copy of any questionnaire(s), survey instrument(s) and/or interview schedule(s) referred to in this protocol? YES ☒ NO ☐

27. Is a letter of permission for subject recruitment attached (if recruiting from an organization outside of CSUN)? YES ☐ NO ☒

28. SIGNATURES:

**All Signatures must be obtained prior to submission. Student projects must have faculty advisor’s signature. Faculty signature on this Protocol Approval Form indicates that:**

• You and your student are familiar with the regulations for human subject research as defined by California State University, Northridge’s Standing Advisory Committee for the Protection of Human
Subjects (SACPHS) and you and your student intend to follow those regulations when conducting this study. You have reviewed and approve of this Protocol Approval Form and accompanying documentation. You approve of the manner in which human subjects will be involved in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Faculty Advisor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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**FOR SACPHS AND RESEARCH OFFICE USE ONLY**
- [ ] Noted, exempt
- [ ] Approved, Minimal Risk
- [ ] Approved, Greater than Minimal Risk
- [ ] Approved, Expedited Review

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Appendix B

Project Information Form

Date: July 30, 2013  
Project Title: Social Media and College Choice  
Researcher Name: E. Dwayne Cantrell

All sections of the form must be completed within the field provided (do not attach a separate form with your responses). Type as much as you need, each field will expand to accommodate your answers. You must use 12 pt font. Do not leave any sections blank. Answer all questions asked in each section. Incomplete and/or handwritten forms will be returned.

Section 1 Background and Purpose of the Study

- Provide a concise description of the research project.
- State the objectives, and rationale.
- Provide background information on the hypothesis and/or research question to be tested including references/citations, if applicable.

Do NOT delete the above instructions and type your response below this line.

The purpose of this study is to examine college freshmen as they reflect back on their use of social media throughout college choice process. Using Chapman’s (1986) five-stage college choice model as a theoretical framework, the aim of this study is to conduct an empirical analysis to ascertain how students used social media through each stage of the process. In that past few years, there has been a significant increase in the use of social media in college admissions targeted toward perspective students (Cappex.com, 2010). Thus, through this study, I will conduct an analysis of first-time freshmen at a large comprehensive university. As a professional in the field of university marketing and recruitment my reason for this study is to perform an empirical analysis that will shed light on student behavior in the area of social media. As a researcher, my goal for this study is to better inform the social media marketing and recruitment efforts of colleges and universities nationwide.

Research Questions
The following questions will be the focus of this study:

1. Which social media platforms did prospective college students use through each of Chapman’s (1986) five phases of the decision-making process for four-year colleges?

2. What are prospective college students’ perceptions of the importance of social media in their decision-making process?
3. How do prospective college students perceive colleges that advertise in social media realms?

4. How do prospective college students prefer to receive communications from four-year colleges?

5. How do different subgroups of prospective college students use social media differently?

Section 2 Subject Information and Recruitment Procedures.

Subjects
- Identify the study population (age, gender, health, etc.).
- If vulnerable (such as minors, prisoners or cognitively or emotionally impaired) please describe extra protections of rights and welfare.

Recruitment
- How will subjects be recruited?
- Will a screening device be used to select from the wider subject pool?
- Will there be any deception (that is, not telling subjects exactly what is being tested)? If so, provide a justification and plans for debriefing.
- Describe your procedures for consent (include minors (assent) and adult and/or parental consent)?
- If advertisements (e.g. craigslist, Facebook, newspaper, etc.), a letter of invitation, or fliers will be used to recruit, attach copies.

Do NOT delete the above instructions and type your response below this line.

The research population for this study will be all fall 2013 first-time freshman at Pinnacle University who are 18 years of age or older. Participants will be recruited to participate in this study via email and student web portal. Since this survey will be conducted through an online format, screening will take place through self-identification of students acknowledging that they are 18 years or older and Pinnacle University students. If they are not, they will be instructed to not agree to the online consent for participation. There will be no deception used in this study. Prior to taking the online survey there will be a brief statement of the purpose of the study, the anonymity of participation, a description of potential risks and benefits, and a statement of acknowledgement that the participant is 18 years of age, a first-time freshman at Pinnacle University (the publishing of the results will use a pseudonym for the university to maintain anonymity of the research setting and participants) and that they give their consent to participate in this survey and have the results published in a dissertation.
Section 3 Research Methodology and Study Procedures.

Procedure
- Describe in a step by step fashion, what subjects will experience in the research. For example, what will happen first, next, and so on. This should include the researcher’s introductory remarks to participants, all testing, questions, observations, follow-up and debriefing of the study.
- Include the time duration of each part of the research.
- Will subjects be compensated for their participation? If so, describe. This may include cash or gift certificates or course credit. However, subjects cannot receive both course credit AND compensation.
- Specify the duration of each procedure.
- Identify any new procedures that you are investigating in the study and explain how they differ from standard procedures (medical, psychological, or educational).
- If deception is used, provide justification and plans for debriefing.

Instruments
- Attach the exact data collection instruments to be used in the study. If open-ended questions are asked, give examples of prompts to encourage responses.
- If translations are required, include those as well.
- If permission to use a copyrighted instrument is required, please include that as well.

Do NOT delete the above instructions and type your response below this line.

First, participants will receive the emailed or web portal link to the survey. For those who choose to follow the link they will find the information pertaining to the study and the consent to participate. Should they consent, they will complete the online survey consisting of 50 questions which should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. This will conclude their participation in this survey. Participants will not be compensated for completing this survey. There will be no new procedures that are being investigated in this study and there will be no deception used. A printed version of the online survey questions is included in the attachments.

Section 4 Anticipated Risks and Minimization of Risks
- List any potential risks to subjects and what steps have been or will be taken to minimize these risks.
This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include possible mild fatigue, boredom, and frustration from the perception of redundancy of the questions. Other risks include strain on the eyes from reading content on the computer and stress from students taking time away from their studies to complete the survey. For all of these risks participants will be informed that it is permissible to take breaks if needed and return to the completion of the survey when you feel more comfortable. Participants will also be informed that may discontinue their participation in this survey at any time. Because this is an online survey risk of security breach is a possibility. However, because no personal information will be collected, participants’ identity will remain confidential.

Section 5 Potential Benefits
- Specify the benefits that this project will have to society and specify how the project will directly benefit the subject.
- If the project will not benefit subjects directly then please state so.
- Explain why the risks are reasonable in relation to the potential benefits to subjects and to society.
- Do not include compensation in this section, as it is not a benefit.

The results of this study will better inform the social media marketing and recruitment efforts of colleges and universities nationwide. Participants will not directly benefit from participation in this study. Because the risks associated with this study are minimal, they are reasonable in relation to the data that will be provided to inform university practices.

Section 6 Confidentiality of Research Information/Data
- Explain how confidentiality of subject information will be maintained.
- Specify where study records will be stored, how they will be secured, and who will have access. (Identifiable data and de-identified data cannot be stored in the same location)
- Specify whether data will be collected anonymously (i.e. no direct identifying information such as name, email, address, or birth date, and no codes linking back to identifiers will be created/accessed.)
- If you intend to collect identifiable information specify when identifiable information will be destroyed, who will have access to identifiable information, where it will be stored and how it will be made secure.
• Specify the planned final disposition of all data after the study is complete (e.g. the data will be maintained for 3 years after the conclusion of the study and then destroyed, the data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study, etc.)

Do NOT delete the above instructions and type your response below this line.

Data for this survey will be collected anonymously. Confidentiality of participants will be insured as no personal identifiable information will be requested through the online survey. Though participants will be invited through email, the online survey is designed to allow participants to remain anonymous. Participant names, birthdates, social security numbers, student identification numbers or other personal identifiers are neither needed nor included in this survey. As participants complete the survey in the online system, initial information will be stored in an online cloud accessible by password only. Once the designated timeframe for the completion of surveys has concluded, all information will be downloaded to a password protected computer where information will be stored indefinitely for future reference.

Section 7 Potential Outcomes of Study

• Describe the projected outcomes of the project and how they relate to your hypothesis.

• Include the significance of your project to your discipline, department, school, university, community, etc.

Do NOT delete the above instructions and type your response below this line.

The desired outcome of this study is to learn how prospective students use of social media throughout college choice process relative to the research questions identified for this study. The results of this study will inform the prospective student marketing and recruitment practices of colleges and universities nationwide.

Section 8 Researcher Qualifications and Expertise

• Summarize your qualifications to conduct this project (include prior research and training--resumés may be attached)

Do NOT delete the above instructions and type your response below this line.

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. program at CSUN who has successfully passed the qualifying examinations demonstrating that I have the readiness and competence needed for dissertation-level research and writing. For further experience and training, please see the attached curriculum vita.
Appendix C

California State University, Northridge
ONLINE CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Social Media and College Choice

You are being asked to participate in an online research study entitled Social Media and College Choice conducted by E. Dwayne Cantrell as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM*
Researcher:
E. Dwayne Cantrell
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)
(818)677-4118
dwayne.cantrell@csun.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Richard Moore, Ph.D.
Dissertation Chair
Department of Management
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330- 8245
(818)677-2416
richard.moore@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to examine college freshmen as they reflect back on their use of social media throughout college choice process.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older and are a first-time freshman at Pinnacle University.

Time Commitment
This study will involve approximately 20 minutes of your time.
PROCEDURES
The following procedures will occur: You will complete an online survey consisting of 50 questions which should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. This will conclude your participation in this survey.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include possible mild fatigue, boredom, frustration from the perception of redundancy of the questions and strain on the eyes from reading content on the computer. To account for these risks, it is permissible to take breaks if needed and return to the completion of the survey when you feel more comfortable. You may also discontinue your participation in this survey at any time. Because this is an online survey risk of security breach is a possibility. However, because no personal information will be collected, your identity will remain confidential.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
You will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data
There will be no identifiable information that will be collected about you in this survey.

Data Storage
All research data will be stored electronically on a secure network with password protection, then downloaded to a laptop computer that is password protected.

Data Access (Explain who will have access to the research data)
The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to study records. No information derived from this research project will personally identify you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.
Data Retention
Due to the nature of this survey, there will be no personally identifiable information connected to the participants. Therefore the researchers intend to keep the research data indefinitely for future use. Data will be stored on a password protected computer.

EXPERIMENTAL SUBJECTS BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As an experimental subject I have the following rights:

1) To be told what the study is trying to find out,

2) To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices is different from what would be used in standard practice,

3) To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes,

4) To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be,

5) To be told the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study,

6) To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study,

7) To be told what sort of medical treatment (if needed) is available if any complications arise,

8) To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started. This decision will not affect my right to receive the care I would receive if I were not in the study.

9) To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10) To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form. If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
You should not agree to the information in this form unless you have read it and print a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Pinnacle University.

By clicking “I agree” below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, are a first-time freshman at Pinnacle University and have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this form for your records.

I Agree  I Do Not Agree
Appendix D

CURRICULUM VITA

E. Dwayne Cantrell
Director
Student Outreach and Recruitment Services
Division of Student Affairs
California State University, Northridge

EDUCATION

Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D., Summer 2014
California State University, Northridge
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Michael D. Eisner College of Education
Dissertation: Social Media and College Choice

Doctor of Theology (Th.D.), 2009
Summit Bible College
Theological Studies
Dissertation: Life After Failure: A project to help people to navigate failure to pursue their purpose

M.A. in Theology (M.Th.), 2005
Fuller Theological Seminary
Theological Studies
School of Theology

M.A. in Education (M.Ed.), 2002
San Jose State University
Department of Counselor Education
Connie L. Lurie College of Education

B.S. in Criminal Justice Administration, 1992
San Jose State University
Justice Studies
College of Applied Sciences and Arts

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

University Experience

California State University, Northridge
Division of Student Affairs
Student Outreach and Recruitment Services
Director, September 2010 - Present
Provide leadership and management for the largest outreach department in CSU System; manage recruitment, Student Marketing & Communications, Guest Relations and the university Testing Center; serve as Principal Investigator for seven federal and corporate grant projects including four federal Trio Programs and three GEAR UP partnerships.

California State University, Northridge
Division of Student Affairs
Student Outreach and Recruitment Services
Associate Director, February 2009 – August 2010
Administer and direct outreach and recruitment efforts aimed at prospective students; directly supervise nine professional staff, and indirectly supervise over 15 student staff; responsible for designing, applying and modifying strategic outreach and recruitment plans

University of California, Santa Cruz
Division of Student Affairs
Educational Partnership Center
Regional Coordinator, September 1996 – May 2000
Early Academic Outreach Program development and implementation for 7-12 grade outreach; responsible for developing and managing annual regional budget; responsible for the training and supervision of professional and student staff members

University of California, Santa Cruz
Division of Student Affairs
Undergraduate Admissions
Admissions Counselor, July 1994 – August 1996
Responsible for statewide recruitment to increase and enrich student population; served as outreach and recruitment liaison to the Athletics Department; evaluated undergraduate admissions applications and assisted in admissions decisions

Holy Names University
Academic Affairs
Upward Bound Program
Assistant Director, November 1992 – July 1994
Provided a comprehensive educational support program to students for college preparation; responsible for knowledge of, and adherence to, state and federal program regulations; responsible for conducting activities that foster student development and interventions

K-12 Experience

Maranatha High School
Dean of Guidance and College Counseling, May 2004 – January 2009
Responsible for all guidance department operations, budget and personnel; oversight of guidance, college counseling, career exploration, and learning resource programs; provided counseling and resources for students and families in both exploration and in crisis

Corporate Experience
Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc.
Cold Drink Division
Youth Market Manager and Special Events Coordinator, May 2000 – July 2002
Managed local territory consisting of colleges/universities, schools and youth venues; training and supervision of Account Managers and Campus Marketing Managers; planned and implemented activities to enhance the reputation of Coca-Cola in the community

San Francisco 49ers Entertainment (E2K)
Consultant, April 2000 – December 2000
Served as judge for auditions; assisted with game day entertainment, halftime shows and security

Nike
Regional Sports Marketing
Consultant, 1997 – 1999
Served as liaison for youth sports marketing projects in Northern California; promoted Nike brand and products at various venues and events; coordinated school, community and entertainment activities for the 1999 Women’s Final Four

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

California State University, Northridge

EPC 622 (Educational Psychology & Counseling)
American College Student and Campus Environment
Master’s course that examines developmental theory of traditional and non-traditional college students and explores student development, student service and ecology on college campuses

Summit Bible College

412 (Counseling)
Marriage Counseling
Undergraduate course that examines pre-counseling of engaged couples as well as analyzing temperaments, and moderating remarriage procedures and special problems such as cultural challenges and dysfunctional marriages

441 (Leadership)
Introduction to Leadership
Undergraduate course that introduces students to leadership principles and practices including servant-leadership, exemplary leadership and self-sacrifice

511 (Leadership)
The Leader’s Mindset
Master’s course that examines biblical principles of leadership, and applying those principles to the workplace and community
PUBLICATIONS


PRESENTATIONS


Cantrell, E.D. (2013, March). Communicating to Your Teen. Presentation delivered at the College Making it Happen (CMIH) annual conference at California State University, Northridge. Northridge, CA.

Cantrell, E.D. (2012, October). Preparing Students for College Athletics. Presentation delivered at the California State University Counselor Conferences. Fresno, CA; Ontario, CA; Pasadena, CA; Sacramento, CA; San Diego, CA.


Cantrell, E.D. (2011, October). Preparing Students for College Athletics. Presentation delivered at the California State University Counselor Conferences. Ontario, CA; Pasadena, CA; Sacramento, CA.


Cantrell, E.D. (2010, September). Preparing Students for College Athletics. Presentation delivered at the California State University Counselor Conferences. Pasadena, CA; Santa Clara, CA.


Cantrell, E.D. (2006, February). Dispelling the myths of the college resume. Presentation delivered at The College Board Western Regional Forum. Las Vegas, NV.

**Professional Development**

Cantrell, E.D. (2013, August). CSU System Updates. Presentation delivered for the University of California, Berkeley Pre-College Programs staff. Hayward, CA.


Cantrell, E.D. (2011, August). CSU System Updates. Presentation delivered for the University of California, Berkeley Pre-College Programs staff. Berkeley, CA.


**Grants**

United States Department of Education

*Upward Bound Project – TRIO Programs, 2013*

Principal Investigator, $1.1 million (5-year grant award)
United States Department of Education  
*Talent Search Projects* – TRIO Programs, 2012  
Principal Investigator, $2.2 million (Two 5-year grant awards)

Citi Foundation  
*College Can Happen Initiative (CCHI), 2011*  
Grant Recipient, $10,000  
Citi Foundation  
*College Can Happen Initiative (CCHI), 2010*  
Grant Recipient, $20,000

**SERVICE**

**Member**, California Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC)  
January 2011 – Present  
California Educational Round Table

**Member**, University Enrollment Management Committee  
January 2010 – Present  
California State University, Northridge

**Member**, Recognition of Excellence Awards Committee  
January 2010 – Present  
California State University, Northridge

**Member**, EOPS Advisory Committee  
May 2009 – Present  
Antelope Valley College

**Member**, Directors of Outreach (DOR)  
February 2009 – Present  
California State University

**Member**, Western Regional Forum Planning Committee  
September 2007 – August 2008  
The College Board

**Member**, Advisory Council  
The Flintridge Foundation, Pasadena CA

**MEMBERSHIPS**

American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)

National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC)
Appendix E

Fall 2013 First Time Freshmen Survey

Q1. Are you currently 18 years of age or older
   Yes (please proceed to Q2.)
   No (please end survey here)

Q2. Are you currently attending classes at Pinnacle University?
   Yes (please proceed to Q3)
   No (please end survey here)

Q3. How many colleges/universities did you apply to?
   1
   2
   3
   4 or more

Q4. How many colleges/universities offered you admission?
   1
   2
   3
   4 or more

Q5. Please indicate the types of colleges/universities you applied or were admitted to

   Applied              Admitted
   Community College
   California State University
   University of California
   Private College/University in state
   Public College/University outside California
   Private College/University outside California
   Other (please indicate)

Q6. How did you first find out about Pinnacle University? (Choose one)

   Brochure
   CollegeBoard.org
   CSUMentor.edu
   Driving by
   Email sent by Pinnacle University
   Formal campus tour
   Friends
   High school coach
   High school counselor
   High school teacher
   Media (newspaper, magazine, etc.)
   Online video
Parent
Sibling
Other family member
Website search initiated by you
Website you stumbled upon
Program you were involved with in (please specify the program)
Social Media (ie. Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Pinterest, etc.)
Other (please specify)

Q7. When filling out your college applications and comparing options, how did you rank Pinnacle University?
First Choice
Second Choice
Third Choice
Fourth Choice or more

Q8. When did you decide which university was your first choice?
Prior to my freshmen year of high school
During my freshmen year of high school
During my sophomore year of high school
During the fall semester of my junior year of high school
During the spring semester of my junior year in high school
During the summer months prior to my senior year in high school
During the fall semester of my senior year of high school
During the spring semester of my senior year in high school
Other (please specify)

Q9. If any of the following people were influential during the different phases of your college search, when did they first influence you?
High school guidance counselor
High school teacher
Recruiter
Faculty or staff (other than a recruiter)
Parent/Guardian
Siblings
Other family members
Friends
Current student
Alumni

Q10. If the option were made available to you to speak with a recruiter via a video chat during your college search would you have used this service?
Q 11. If any of the following academic considerations were influential during the different phases of your college search, when did they first influence you?


- Availability of special programs
- Degrees and majors offered
- Overall quality of degree
- Overall quality of faculty
- Quality of academic facilities
- Prestige of the campus
- U.S. News and World Report, Princeton Review and other rankings

Q12. If any of the following financial considerations were influential during the different phases of your college search, when did they first influence you?


- Availability of financial aid
- Availability of scholarships
- Cost of attendance

Q13. If any of the following student life considerations were influential during the different phases of your college search, when did they first influence you?


- Attractiveness of the campus
- Availability of on-campus housing
- Clubs, fraternities and sororities
- Events you attended on campus (i.e. campus tour, open house)
- On-campus activities (i.e. concerts, lectures)
- Quality of facilities
- Sports offerings
- Student recreation center
- Wanted to be close to home
- Wanted to move away from home
Q14. While researching potential college/university options, I chose to apply to Pinnacle University because I felt that I could succeed academically.

   Strongly agree  
   Agree  
   Disagree  
   Strongly disagree

Q15. I believe I will graduate with my degree in:
   3 years  
   4 years  
   5 years  
   6 or more years

Q16. You should have received a formal admission packet from Pinnacle University in the mail. Do you recall receiving this packet?
   Yes (if yes go to Q 16)  
   No (if no go to Q25)

Q17. What impact did the admission packet have in terms of your decision to attend Pinnacle University?
   Very positive (if selected go to Q17)  
   Somewhat positive (if selected go to Q 17)  
   Neither positive nor negative  
   Somewhat negative (if selected go to Q 16)  
   Very negative (If selected go to Q 16)

Q18. Why did the admission packet negatively impact your decision?

Q19. Which piece(s) positively impacted your decision? (Check all that apply)
   Admission letter  
   Parent/guardian letter  
   Certificate in folder  
   Admission information brochure  
   None

Q20. Would you have preferred to receive the admission packet electronically instead of by postal mail?
   Yes  
   No

Q21. Did you receive admission packets from other universities?
   Yes  (if selected go to Q 21)  
   No (if selected go to Q26)
Q22. How were the majority of admission packets from other institutions sent to you?
Postal mail
Email
Other (please specific)

Q23. In addition to the formal admission packets you received, which of the following communication vehicles did the school(s) utilize to notify you of your admittance?
Text message
Email
Phone call
Portal
They did not utilize any other method of communication to notify me of my admittance.
Other (please specify)

Q24. How did Pinnacle University’s formal admission packet compare with the other packets you received?
Much better (if selected go to Q25)
Somewhat better (if selected go to Q25)
Equal to others (if selected go to Q25)
Somewhat worse (if selected go to Q24)
Much worse (if selected go to Q 24)

Q25. Please indicate what made the packet worse than others you received. (Open-ended question)

Q26. Did the packet you received from Pinnacle University portray a deeply rooted tradition of Matador pride?
Yes
No

Q27. Did you utilize social media when searching for colleges/universities?
Yes (if yes go to Q 27)
No

Q28. How important was social media throughout your college search and decision process?

Q29. For what purpose did you use social media to search for colleges/universities? (Open-ended question)
Q. 30. In which phases of your college search did you use social media? (check all that apply)

5. Final enrollment

Q31. If any of the following websites were influential during the different phases of your college search, when did they first influence you?

5. Final enrollment

(These should all be links off to the site)
Admissions & Records
Homepage
Financial Aid & Scholarships
Web Portal (if clicked on this go to Q 29)
Outreach and Recruitment Services
Collegeboard.org
Collegeconfidential.com
Collegeportrait.org
Collegeprowler.com
Collegeview.com
CSUMentor.edu
Facebook
Flickr
Google
LinkedIn
Naviance
Pinterest
Reddit
Tumblr
Twitter
YouTube

Q32. Where are you most likely to look for the following information?


Admissions Requirements
Financial Aid Information
Cost of Attendance
Housing
Clubs and Organizations
Student Perspectives of the Campus
Q33. How do you perceive the reputations of colleges that place advertisements on social media sites?

Very Prestigious  Prestigious  Fairly Prestigious  Not prestigious at all

Q34. How do you perceive the admission standards of colleges that place advertisements on social media sites?

Very difficult to get in  Difficult to get in  Easy to get in  Very easy to get in

Q35. Did you use social media to learn what your friends thought about campuses?

Always   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

Q36. Did you use social media to share what you thought about campuses with friends?

Always   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

Q37. Which features on the Web Portal did you find most influential during the application cycle? (If they select any of these answers go to Q 30)

Ask Matty
Check this Out (games, ringtones, screensavers)
Intro to my Portal video
My Announcements
My Checklist
Student Highlights
Quick links
Other (please specify)

Q38. What did you find, if anything, was missing from the portal experience? (open ended question)

Q 39. Were there any other Pinnacle University websites you explored during the admissions process that you would like to comment on?

Yes (please specify)
No

Q40. How did you go about finding websites during your college search?

brochure
recruiter
High school counselor
Web search (i.e. Google, Yahoo) (please specify)
Other (please specify)

Q41. Did you ever come across a “A Day as a Student” video during your college search?
Yes (if yes go to Q 34)
No

Q42. What impact did this video have in terms of your decision to attend Pinnacle University?
   Very positive
   Somewhat positive
   Neither positive nor negative
   Somewhat negative
   Very negative

Q43. How would you rate the frequency with which Pinnacle University communicated with you during the different phases of your college search?
   Too frequently
   Just right
   Not frequently enough
   Not applicable

5. Final enrollment

Q44. If you could hear from only one type of representative during the application cycle, whom would you have most wanted to hear from?

Current student
President
Athlete
Faculty/Staff
Alumni

Q45. If you could hear from one type of person during the application cycle, whom would you have most wanted to hear from?

Current student
President
Athlete
Faculty member
Staff member
Alumni
Other (please specify)

Q46. In my dream world of college searches I would prefer that had communicated with me through the following vehicles during the following times.

5. Final enrollment
Alert/push notification
Automated phone call
Phone call with a live person
Mobile app
Email
Facebook
Web Portal
Online chat
Text message
Twitter
Video chat
Voicemail
Websites (other than Portal or social media)
Written mail
Other (please specify)

**Please tell us about yourself**

Q47. Male   Female

Q48. How do you identify your ethnicity?

African-American   Asian   Caucasian   Chicano/Latino   Other

Q49. Highest level of education completed by either of your parents/guardians


Q50. Location of high school from which you graduated