

Paper presented at the 35th Annual Conference
California Association for Institutional Research

**Meeting the Millennial College Students: Examining Their Social Media
Usage and Establishing Effective Strategies**

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San Diego

November 17-19, 2010

ABSTRACT

Social media usage is permeated in every aspect of the lives of the Millennial Generation. However, most colleges and universities do not make the efforts to understand such social media usage or have clear strategies on how to harness the power (or get rid of the problems). This study first reviews literatures on how social media are or can be used in college administration and academic learning. It then analyzes how the newly-admitted college undergraduate students use social media, and what they prefer in adopting social media for college academic and extracurricular activities. The analysis reveals that social media is major source for the newly-enrolled college students; their communication methods are different from the generations that universities and colleges are familiar with; their social media usage behavior have changed since high school; they have preferences in whether and what social media tools can be used for college academic and social activities; common factors are associated with social media usage in high school and college, although the patterns may be different.

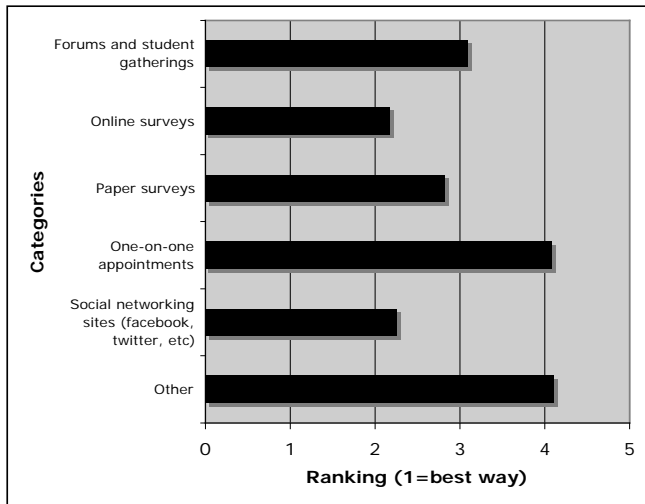
INTRODUCTION

Social media usage has been the most prominent characteristics of the Millennial Generation, also known as Generation Y, Generation Next, Net Generation, Digital Natives, or Generation Me (Agozzino, 2010; Baird & Fisher, 2005; Bracy, Bevill, & Roach, 2010; Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Reports show that this generation of college students spends a considerable amount of time on different kinds of networking sites and virtual communities (Bowley, 2010); they spend much less time on study and research (Babcock & Marks, 2010). With a population varies from 75 million to 100 million and being born anywhere beginning from 1977-1982 and ending from 1994-2003, this generation is very tech savvy and tending to be visual learner ((Bracy et al., 2010).

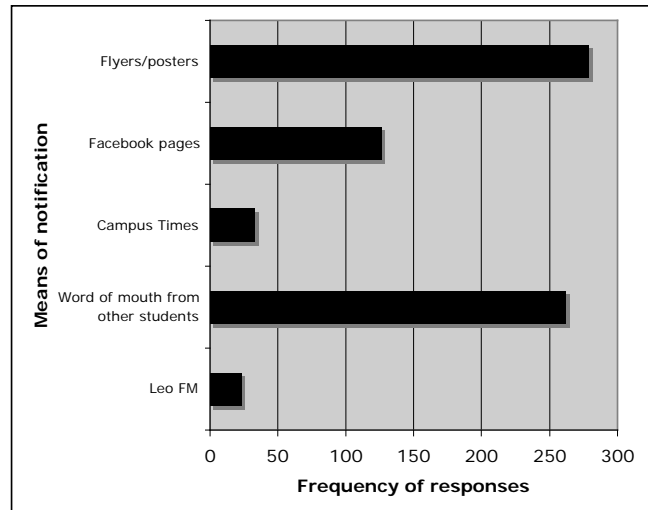
As this generation of new students enter colleges and mix with the existing college student groups, we treat them mostly the same as what we have been used to treating all other generations, students, faculty, and administrators alike. However, existing research and anecdotal experiences show that they are different from the other generations of university community members, especially the generations who teach and administrate colleges and universities, in the ways that they communicate and act as well as the values that they hold (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007). For example, several studies indicate that the millennium students tend to embrace diversity more than previous generations. They are more global-centric, socially responsible, and civic-minded. They also prefer multi-tasking and bore easily while desiring a fun, laid back environment and typically enjoying a more relaxed dress code, team collaboration, and flexible (Bracy et al., 2010). The author notices that some teachers have informed that they interact with other students differently.

Almost importantly, a survey of the entering college students of the university studied reveals that they prefer to social media in university communication and social media, including word-of-mouth method. These avenues are the main resources from which they have obtained information about school events and activities. Of the 475 newly-enrolled undergraduates (both first-time freshman and transfers) who had responded to a supplementary survey to CIRP in Fall 2010, the most preferred way of providing feedback about student government and events were social networking sites and online surveys. In responding to what means of notifications for student events that they have obtained, about a quarter of the students chose Facebook page as the source and another more than half of the students selected word-of-mouth, while flyers and posters are still among the main sources. Given that Facebook was recently adopted, a quarter of the entering new students receive information from Facebook page is fact that we have to deal with. Additionally, the word-of-mouth methods in the social media age has new meaning, since phone texting and other social media applications can also function as tools for word-of-mouth information spreading. The details of the two sets of responses are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Preferred Student Feedback Communication and Current Means of Event Notification



Student's preferred way of giving feedback



Usual means of notification of student events

Therefore, it is likely that the methods that are used to treat with other groups of students in teaching and managing may not be as effective as with these millennial students. Considering the unique characteristics of this the Millennial Generation students, Bracy et al. (2010) recommend: in teaching, various technology should be used, timing and much feedback be provided, options and relaxing environment be offered, and finally adjustment with this generation as many professors done have for previous generations be prepared. Coomes & DeBard (2004) state that student affairs practitioners are required to adopt new learning and service strategies, rethink student development theories, employ new learning technologies, and modify educational environments, considering their distinct attitudes, beliefs, culture, and behaviors.

With a quantitative research method, this study focuses on one of the most distinctive characteristics of this generation – Web 2.0 applications and social media tools usage. The purpose of this study is to analyze the patterns of millennial students in social media usage and establish effective management strategy for relevant academic and student services. Specifically, it is to find out answers to the following five questions:

- How the millennial college students have used social media?
- How they review the role of social media in their life and for their study?
- How they think social media can be used for academic activities?
- How they think social media can be used for student affairs and extracurricular purposes; and
- What strategies that colleges and universities can adopt to harness the power of social media to their advantage?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is the actual part of the paper, please ask the author for detail.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study has a quantitative research design with a questionnaire survey. The survey asks the newly-enrolled first-time freshmen questions about social media usage and their opinions on adopting social media for various college administrative and academic purposes. The questions of the survey are organized around three major sections. The first section of the survey asks the first-time freshmen about their social media usage behavior in high school. The questions are about the various social media tools that they had used, the total amount of time spent on social media, their high school overall average grade, opinions on the effectiveness of college social media usage during their admissions process, as well as their reflection on their agreement on a series statements about campus engagement, family/relative relationship, peer relationship, student and teacher relationship, interference and interrelation of social media with academic study and school events, intervention from schools and parents, their skills with computer and internet. Similar questions around social media tools, time spent, agreements with various statements are also asked in the second section. The similar questions asked in the second section are only different from those in first section in their foci on student current behaviors. Beside, the second section also asks question about student engagement in academic and students club/organizations, their preference of social media tools that the college can potentially adopt, and the type of various academic and extracurricular activities that the students would choose with social media delivery methods. Instead of actual overall grade, the expected average final term grade is asked. The third section asks about student demographic information in regard to gender, ethnicity, and major.

This study adopts online survey. The survey was posted on the university website and requested response from the newly-enrolled undergraduate students of a private four-year Hispanic-Serving institution in the west of the United States during the middle of Fall 2010 semester. 43 samples were collected through a two-staged survey process.

Research methodology is an actual part of the paper, please ask the author for detail.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Social Media v. Mass Media/Traditional Media

The sampling process reveals one important fact about the communication methods that the newly-enrolled first-time freshmen have used: social media tools are more popular among them than mass media or traditional media.

Social Media Usage in High School

In high school, almost all students used social media tools, which include Web 2.0 applications and smartphone devices and mobile texting. They often used various social media on a weekly or daily basis.

The students were also asked to reflect on the effectiveness of college social media usage in their admissions process. Among the different tools, those who responded indicate that the use of Facebook is the most effective among the colleges that used it.

No significant relationships are found between the hours spent on social media and student average grades, gender, and ethnicity, although female spent slight more time than male and white students spend more time than Hispanic students.

Social Media Usage in College

In college, the newly-enrolled freshmen have kept their habits of social media usage in high school, while they have changed.

In turns of time spent on various social media tools in college, the students vary, with lower participation than they were in high school.

Social Media Usage and Institutional Management

The study intends to understand how the newly-enrolled students view the application of social media tools to various college activities around both academic studies and social life.

Firstly, the study tries to provide insights on what tools that colleges should use to communicate with students. The questionnaire of the study asks students about their preferred social media and the results are shown by Table 10. Among ten or so choices, the students prefer Facebook the most.

The study also makes effort to determine what activities that students prefer to be contacted through social media. The questionnaire of the study asks students on the agreement level of faculty or administrators using social media to contact them around 18 activities. Different categories of activities are preferred differently.

Social Media Usage and Student Engagement

The study examines student college engagement and their relationships with social media usage. It finds no significant relationship in student college engagement and the time they spent on social media.

Factors Associated with Social Media Usage

The questionnaire of the survey asks the students 20 questions around campus engagement, family/relative relationship, peer relationship, student and teacher relationship, interference and interrelation of social media with academic study and school events, intervention from schools and parents, their skills with computer and internet. Similar factors are extracted that seems to have relationship with social media usage.

Data Analysis is an actual part of the paper, please ask the author for detail.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several conclusions can be made about student social media usage and the relationships between social media usage and other factors:

- They are different from what they used to be;
- They prefer social media over traditional communication tools, such as email;
- Institutions have to manage to accommodate their needs in academic and student affairs;
- It is unclear how social media usage can affect student engagement, but several factors are associated with social media usage.

Recommendations can be made for institutional management in academic and student related matters.

The pilot study points out directions for future work:

- Literature review on factors and relationships
- Revise questionnaire
- Build up a research model that describes the relationships between the factors, student social media usage, student engagement, and academic performance
- Survey (Welcome your participation or co-study!)
- Structural equation model analysis
- Managerial implications

Conclusions and recommendations is an actual part of the paper, please ask the author for detail.

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