

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: EXAMINING THE  
USE OF FACEBOOK AS A RETENTION TOOL AT  
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

By

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

Retention of students is an issue all colleges and universities face. There are many factors that contribute to retention, and no single factor can address retention problems at a college or university. Rather, it is finding the right combination of practices and using them in conjunction with one another to experience successful retention. It is the responsibility of each institution to determine what retention practices will produce maximum results. Universities and colleges are continually seeking new ways to keep retention rates up, and in the world of college retention, building and maintaining a relationship with current students is vital. Effective implementation of public relations (PR) and communication tactics can be key players in the formation of these relationships. Higher education institutions use PR and communication in the recruitment of students and, according to Parnell and Parmley (2009), these same tactics can also be used to retain students. Educational institutions are a business and must create a relationship that is mutually beneficial for the students and the institutions and this relationship must be fostered through effective communication.

A common theme observed in the retention process is connectivity. Creating a community where students feel connected to their institution contributes to successful

retention. Social networking sites have created a new form of communication and an avenue through which public relations can be carried out. These sites have become increasingly popular in today's society, particularly among young adults. According to Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert, "Social networking sites are designed to foster social interaction in a virtual environment" (Pempel, 2008 p.228). Specifically, the social networking site Facebook has more than 500 million active users and has made online communication more interactive and a common practice among college students (Facebook, 2010). While using Facebook alone will not guarantee an increase in retention, as previously mentioned, using Facebook in unison with other retention practices may help increase retention rates.

Increased student retention results in more student dollars being invested into the college or university. According to Parnell and Parmley (2009), "As university costs rise, so has the competition for student dollars. The PR offices in higher education play a major role in boosting enrollment, ranking, and publicity—so it is vital for them to understand and use best practices and social media to accomplish their communication goals" (p.16). Wandel (2008) maintained that colleges and universities must necessarily adapt, or they will fall behind in the realm of the "wired generation." Failing to connect with students where they are, via social media, may be one factor contributing to lower retention rates, resulting in a detrimental impact to educational institutions. Universities and colleges place heavy emphasis on recruitment of potential students, but what happens

once they have acquired those students? Are the higher education institutions placing sufficient emphasis on building lasting relationships to retain students?

Not only does student retention benefit colleges and universities, but also it benefits the students as well. According to Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007), getting a college degree is the American dream of a better way of life. Completion of a degree allows students a better chance of success in the work field after college. Paulsen (2001) noted that receiving a college degree provides numerous social and economic advantages for students, such as students earning more money when entering the workforce.

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study will examine the current methods of using the social networking site, Facebook, as a way to connect and maintain relationships with students, contributing to increased retention at two Oklahoma higher education institutions (Oklahoma State University-OSU and Northwestern Oklahoma State University-NWOSU). Specifically, the study will examine whether these two universities are providing an atmosphere where students can engage and interact with their universities in an online environment. The connectivity of students to their universities will be analyzed to determine whether these universities are fostering and enhancing a positive relationship with their students. In conjunction with examining these universities Facebook practices, the study will also examine the students who attend these universities and their perceptions about the



universities' use of Facebook to engage them. This analysis will aid in the overall understanding of how Facebook can be used by the universities to foster good relationships with their students and in turn how that may impact student retention.

Grunig's Excellence Theory provides the theoretical perspective used to frame this study. According to Grunig (1992), his theory explained the key components of public relations, such as management, organization and communication, are vital in making an organization effective in accomplishing its goals. Excellence Theory examines the conditions that an organization must create in order to make its communications effective. This theory emphasizes the importance of listening and receiving feedback from the organization's immediate publics, something Facebook may help facilitate. In addition, the theory maintains that public relations is practiced best when an organization is not only highly engaged with its publics but it is also willing to adapt and make changes based on the public's wants and needs. The purpose of this study includes exploring how universities are using Facebook to listen, engage and build relationships with students. In this study, Excellence Theory will be applied to examine two Oklahoma universities' use of Facebook. Further application of Excellence Theory will be discussed in the literature review.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1. How are universities (specifically Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University) using Facebook to create “excellent” conditions for communication with students?

RQ2. How are these universities (specifically Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University) using two-way symmetrical model of communication to serve the interest of the students?

RQ3. How will the universities’ use of Facebook impact students’ perceptions of their universities?

RQ4. How does students’ perceptions of their universities use of Facebook affect their feelings of connection to their school?

RQ5. How does students’ feelings of connection to their universities impact their likelihood to engage on their universities’ Facebook page?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study examines the relationship between using social networking to communication with students and Excellence Theory. It will provide insight into how building relationships with students online may provide a building block in contributing to university retention. The study also enhances understanding within the field of

communication. Facebook is a fairly new form of communication, with its creation in 2004. Research that furthers the understanding of its usage and impact will not only benefit communication at the higher education level, but with all practitioners in the field of communication. With Facebook's growing popularity, it is vital that practitioners in the field of communication not only understand how to use the site from a practical perspective, but also how to use it effectively as a communication tool from a theoretical perspective.

A second justification for this research study involves the assistance it will provide to higher education institutions in developing research concerning retention of students. According to Lawrence (2005), colleges and universities are increasingly examining student retention and differing retention models and strategies that can be utilized. Because so many universities are utilizing Facebook as a tool of reaching out to students, examining the strategic use of Facebook will provide insight into what Facebook practices work most effectively to engage those students.

This research study will also advance Excellence Theory in regard to social media and higher education. Excellence Theory provides many key elements to understanding how colleges and universities can use "excellent" public relations to retain and foster relationship between students and institutions. Excellence Theory is one of the dominate paradigms in public relations research. However, most of the existing research pertains to corporations and organizations other than higher education institutions. It has not been

applied to retention issues. Finally, this research will contribute to the understanding and application of Excellence Theory with respect to social media such as Facebook.

The remainder of this thesis is divided into five sections. The first section is the literature review. The literature review (a) defines social networking sites, (b) examines Facebook specifically, (c) discusses higher education institutions and utilization of Facebook as a retention tool, (d) discusses higher education and retention and, (e) details Grunig's Excellence Theory, upon which this research rests. In the second section, research questions will be presented. Third, the research methodology is presented. The fourth section contains the results, and the fifth section is the discussion.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Social Networking Sites*

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social networking sites by three distinct features. First, social networking sites allow members to create a public or semi-public profile. Second, the members can add other users with whom they are connected with. The third feature permits members to communicate and view other members' profiles, connecting people from all areas. Coyle and Vaughn (2008) referred to the act of social networking as members utilizing and interacting via a distinct social networking site. In essence, social networking is the activity a person partakes in, while social networking sites are the instrument through which the activity is conducted.

Tredinnick (2006) maintained that user-participation and user-generated content are the primary contributing forces behind social networking sites. User-generated content includes (a) a member's participation in social networks through the social networking site such as groups, and (b) providing personal elements to the user's profile. Boyd and Ellison (2007) explained that social networking sites permit members to display these social networks, connecting them with people with whom they otherwise would have no association. However, the majority of social networking is with people

members already know. The definition of social networking sites is most readily understood through the explanation of its uses and tools.

Cramer (2009) identified a variety of uses and tools that social networking sites incorporate. These uses and tools include (a) message boards (b) blogs with reader comment options and (c) photo and video-sharing. Included with these options are any other ways of exchanging opinions, knowledge, and information between members online. It must be noted that the usage varies from site to site. Cramer (2009) explained members, through various settings featured on the site, can customize their profiles to display information or feeds pertaining only to their interests.

Social networking sites usage varies between different kinds of users. Individual members, as well as businesses, corporations, and other types of institutions utilize the sites to benefit their particular needs. For example, according to Curtis et al. (2009), social networking sites allow public relations practitioners to communicate their message to their audience quickly and efficiently. This is significant because it suggests higher education institutions can communicate their messages to students and implement public relations practices via social networking sites, thereby enhancing retention.

The use of social networking sites has increased over time. According to John Burbank, chief executive officer of *Nielsen Online*, “While two-thirds of the global online population already accesses member community sites, their vigorous adoption and the migration of time show no signs of slowing. Social networking will continue to alter

not just the global online landscape, but the consumer experience at large” (Nielsen, 2009). Lenhart (2010) observed that almost 73% of teens and 72% of young adults use social networking sites.

The largest populations of people using social networking sites such as Facebook are students at the high school and college levels. Wandel (2008) uses the term “*millenials*” to define this age group. “*Millenials*” are people born between the years of 1981 and 2000. Wandel (2008) notes that millions of students log onto their preferred social networking sites daily and that these students have grown up around computer technology.

Coyle and Vaughn (2008) conducted a study regarding college students’ habits in relation to social networking sites. They observed 37% of the students surveyed access at least one social networking site. Slightly over 50% of those surveyed have two accounts and 9% access at least three accounts. On average, students log onto their social networking site accounts and estimated three times per day. Coyle and Vaughn’s study also found that the main impetus for students’ use of social networking sites is to stay connected with friends, with 41% of the teens claiming this statement to be true (2008). Lenhart and Madden (2007) found 82% of teens also use social networking sites to stay in contact with friends they see less frequently. Additionally, 72% of the teens organize plans via social networking sites.

## *Facebook*

According to Kord (2008), “Students use the Facebook website as a place where they can express themselves, share their daily lives with others, keep in constant contact with a group of friends, and stay in the know about what is happening around them” (Kord, 2008 p.7). Facebook allows students to communicate instantaneously. The site was originally created for college students, who had to have an e-mail account ending with an “.edu”. According to Bugeja (2006), Facebook is unique in that it is the only social networking site that is institution specific. Today, any person or organization can now create a profile as long as that entity has a working e-mail account. Waters et al. (2009) noted that when Facebook opened its site up to anyone or any institution in April of 2006, an estimated 4,000 organizations created accounts within a two-week time span. This demonstrated the extreme popularity and networking power Facebook possess. According to the Facebook website (2010), the social networking site is one of the most trafficked hypertext preprocessing social networking sites in the world. It allows for easy navigation and houses a number of different applications such as (a) uploading photos, (b) notes, and (c) games, fitting almost every member’s needs. Facebook is also internationally efficient, providing its members with the ability to have their profile specifically adapted to their native language. This feature allows for global communication (2010).



The Facebook website also provides up-to-date statistics regarding its usage. On average, a member spends approximately 55 minutes on the site daily and each user has 130 online friends, with 8 new friends request per month. Every month, 3 billion photos are uploaded to the Facebook website from a combination of its members. In relation to the web content posted on Facebook, such as links, blogs, and stories, and estimated 5 billion web content posts are uploaded onto the site weekly (Facebook, 2010). According to Wandel (2008), 85% of the Facebook market is comprised of college students.

Researchers have examined the use of Facebook by first-year college students and how it was being used for social integration into campus life and for educational purposes. According to Madge et al. (2009), slightly more than half of the respondents were using Facebook before entering college. The authors found that many students specifically joined Facebook because it was directly related to “university-level education” (Madge et al. 2009 p. 144). Interestingly, the study noted three aspects in which the students’ methods for using Facebook had changed throughout the year. The first and most obvious aspect involved use of the site to stay in touch with friends and to relate the college experience to their friends. The second aspect involved using Facebook to coordinate social events, join college groups and stay socially integrated with current students at the college. In regard to the second aspect, one student from the survey responded saying, “I now use it to keep up-to-date with current university affairs through the Events section of the Facebook website, along with the many groups, etc., which have been created for that purpose” (Madge et al., 2009 p.146). Third, Facebook is used as a

way for students to connect with other students at different universities. In their conclusion, the authors note that Facebook brings students together, aids in communication and keeps them connected to the university community. Cramer (2009) found that millennials have grown up with the Internet at their fingertips, and it is extremely important for institutions to develop strategies to connect with them.

### *Higher Education and Facebook*

A higher education institution is a business; therefore it must seek to maintain its customers' happiness. At a college or university students' are the customers, and if they prefer to use Facebook to communicate, the institution must become an expert on how to use the site to effectively communicate with them. Wandel (2008) observed that many colleges and universities want to incorporate a specific discipline, such as social networking sites, to communicate with students. Wandel also noted that students have a desire to feel welcomed and invited on a campus, and communication is an important aspect of meeting that need. Noel-Levits (2000) found 72% of perspective students correspond, or would like to correspond, by using instant messages with a higher education admissions counselor or the institution's student workers. Additionally, 64% of perspective students wish to read about faculty on social networking site profiles. Similarly, between 60% and 64% of students desired to read blogs of faculty and current students, and to take a virtual tour of the campus via the Internet.

Wandel (2008) reported that times of bereavement often hinder some students' ability to successfully experience college life, and it is crucial for administrators at higher education institutions to connect and communicate with students during these times. Direct personal communication may be difficult for students when experiencing a tragedy; however, uploading a wall post or sending a private message is a less intrusive technique that proves effective. Wandel described the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre and how Facebook provided a place for students to console one another. Groups were created to remember those who had been killed. Many people who joined the group had no association with Virginia Tech but felt sympathetic to the people directly experiencing the tragedy. By reaching out to students at the difficult time, the college encouraged retention by enhancing the connection that students felt toward the university.

Another feature of Facebook that encourages retention of students involves promotion of campus events. Wandel (2008) noted 83% of Facebook members have used the site to inform other members of an upcoming event through status updates, bulletins, group updates, notes, and various other applications. With Facebook's ability to instantly post information, colleges and universities can benefit by keeping students informed in real time. Such information can also encompass alerts and warning of hazardous issues that need to be delivered to students immediately. Because students tend to check their profiles frequently, this is an efficient way to communicate important messages to students.

### *Retention at Higher Education Institutions*

According to a study conducted by the Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities (MACU) and compiled by Pennington (2008), America is a society that places a heavy emphasis upon a college degree or some type of postsecondary education, and that higher education allows American to remain competitive globally. The United States Department of Labor (2009) reported 2.9 million students graduated from high school between January and October of 2009. Of these high school graduates, 2.1 million, or a little over 70% were enrolled in college by October 2009. This is the highest enrollment number recorded since 1959. The *US News and World Report*, Bowler (2009) reports and estimated 30% of college students drop out before their third semester of school, and half never graduate. Thus, retention of students is increasingly important.

In a study prepared by Noel-Levitz (2007), 193 non-profit, degree-granting U.S. colleges and universities were examine for retention practices. Of those 193 institutions, 72 were public institutions and 121 were private. The study observed that only 3.1% of public universities' graduation rates increased by 10% or more, while 35.4% remained stable and 4.6% decreased by 5% to 9.9% in a year. In regard to private universities, 4% of the universities graduation rates increased by 10% or more and 43.2% remained stable with a 2.5% decrease of 5% to 9.9%. These numbers are important because, as the author points out, graduation rates are directly related to retention. The study noted that many

colleges and universities are not placing sufficient emphasis in the development of second-year and transfer-student programs, nor continually updating retention plans. Several universities that provided feedback in the MACU study expressed concerns about retention, “but only a few indicated that they had conducted a thorough systematic analysis of the characteristics of their students” (Pennington, 2008 p.25).

Countless strategies for increasing retention are available. In 2006, The Diversity Academic Support department at Oklahoma State University developed a retention program called RISE (Retention Initiative for Student Excellence) aimed at helping first-year college students ease into the transition of college. RISE provides students with a five-week summer program that prepared them for their first year of college life. Throughout the first year, RISE connects students with mentors, provides them with one-on-one tutoring and opportunities for leadership roles, schedules group study sessions, and puts on a number of different social activities (RISE website, <http://das.okstate.edu/rise.html>). Recently, Northwestern Oklahoma State University added a retention coordinator to aid in the retention of students. The retention coordinator focuses on student intervention if a student is excessively missing class. Also, the coordinator teaches a peak performance class for those students who are considered a high risk for dropout due to ACT score or enrollment in remedial courses.

### *Excellence Theory*

The theoretical framework for this study is Grunig's Excellence Theory. Excellence Theory research began in the 1960s by Grunig and has become the primary way to examine organizational public relations practices. The primary study underlying the development of Excellence Theory was the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) study. The IABC Research Foundation wanted to determine how public relations communication helped an organization reach its overall goals. Two research questions were asked: (1) How, why and to what extent does public relations make an organization more effective, and how much is that contribution worth in a monetary sense and (2) What characteristics of the public relations function increase the contribution that communication management makes to organization effectiveness? (Heath, 2001 p.21).

In the study, Grunig and the research team conceptualized how excellent public relations could enhance an organization's overall effectiveness. According to Grunig "The study showed the value of public relations comes from the relationships that organizations develop and maintain with public" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006 p.55). The study also found that the quality of relationships was enhanced more by the behaviors of the organization, rather than the actual message the organization produced.

Grunig discovered that organizations utilizing the two-way symmetrical model of communication experienced more excellent public relations. According to Grunig

(2008), in two-way symmetrical public relations, communication is used to improve public involvement, as well as control conflict with the strategic publics. This model produces more long-lasting relationships with any of the other public relations models. The two-way symmetrical model stays connected to the customer and keeps the interest of both the organization and public in balance. Two-way symmetrical public relations allows for a participative culture where people can be involved in the overall success of the organization. Grunig (1992) noted, not only do ideas come from within an organization, but also directly from people outside the hierarchy of the organization. According to Grunig (2008), the IABC study suggested that public relations must be organized so it can identify publics within the strategic management process. This allows for long-term relationships to be built through a symmetrical communication program.

Grunig's research (2006) provides the field of public relations with theoretical propositions that organizations with excellent public relations possess. The two propositions that will be applied to this research are: (a) Participative rather than authoritarian organizational cultures and (b) symmetrical system of internal communication.

### *Applying Excellence Theory to Higher Education Institutions*

Excellence Theory must first be applied generally to higher education institutions before applying it specifically to retention. Colleges and universities are organizations that can use "excellent" public relations tactics to enhance relationships with their

students. According to Grunig's Excellence Theory, as previously noted, it is the behaviors of the organization rather than the actual message that affects the public the most. In this case, students are the public and the relationship between students and the institutions can be enhanced by the actions of the university, which speaks louder than words and have a more direct influence on the students. Use of social networking by the institution reflects a positive behavior to the students.

According to Grunig (2008), higher education institutions should use two-way symmetrical communication to deliver messages. Two-way symmetrical communication allows for a participative atmosphere, one of Grunig's propositions for "excellent" public relations. This allows students to become more involved in the communication process as well as controlling conflict that might arise with students. If students feel that they can participate in the communication process, they are more likely to have positive attitudes toward their university.

#### *Applying Excellence Theory to Retention*

As mentioned above, Excellence Theory has been the most widely used paradigm, to examine public relations practices. However, it primarily has been applied to organizations other than higher education institutions and not specifically for purposes of retention. Previous literature regarding Excellence Theory and retention is therefore limited. Thus, a knowledge gap exists, creating a need for the application of Excellence Theory to retention, more specifically, the student's connections to the university and the



impact on retention. General research for Excellence Theory, and the theoretical propositions introduced by Grunig, provides many useful insights that may be applied to a students' connection to the university.

First, a college or university is an organization, and like the organizations involved in research of Excellence Theory, it has goals and profitable desires. According to Grunig's research (2006), these goals are carried out by means of communication. The use of public relations tactics increased the chances of achieving the desired goals. Many higher education institutions have a specifically designed public relations department to effectively communicate the institution's message. In the process of communicating the messages, relationships are formed with the targeted public. According to Grunig's research (2006), such relationships can increase the value of public relations.

In the IABC study, Grunig (2006) found an organization's behaviors have more of an impact than the actual message being communicated. In essence, the way the message is disseminated is more influential to the public than the actual content of the message. Applying this concept to higher education institutions and retention, students who represent the target public may be more concerned with how the institutions are trying to communicate with them, than what the institutions are actually saying. Using Facebook to communicate with students may impress the students for the reason the institution is utilizing the social networking site they actively use. The use of Facebook reflects a popular behavior that so many students are exhibiting. A combination of

Facebook behaviors and other retention practices outside of Facebook may increase the likelihood of student retention.

The connection that an organization makes with its public is the most important aspect of Excellence Theory. If no connection is made, then the organization is not creating an “excellent” environment where a positive relationship can be formed. Differing elements are important to the process of successful retention. Retention and public relations practices go hand-in-hand, and the question proposed is whether Facebook can provide an atmosphere for excellent public relations among current students, fostering a connection of the students to the university, contributing to the process of retention. The first proposition of creating a participative culture rather than authoritarian culture directly applies to Facebook. According to Grunig (1992), an organization that allows for public to participate and feel connected to the organization helps the organization reach some of its goals. This study will help answer whether colleges and universities using Facebook allows students to participate on the interactive Facebook page and likely help foster a positive relationship between the students and the institution.

The second proposition emphasizes the importance of using two-way symmetrical communication as opposed to the other models of public relations communication. According to Grunig (2006), two-way symmetrical models are more ethical because they attempt to balance the interest of the organization and the public. Higher education

institutions wishing to increase retention must balance the interest of what the students want and need in relationship to the wants and needs of the university. Using Facebook can assist in this balance. According to Noel-Levitz (2000), 72% of perspective students correspond or would like to correspond by using instant message with a higher education admissions counselor or the institution's student workers. This interest in corresponding with faculty and staff via instant message could occur via Facebook. Thus, students would have their interest met, which may influence their decisions to keep attending the institution, thereby aiding in the retention needs of the institution.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Overview

This study was designed to understand how colleges and universities are using Facebook to communicate and connect with students, as well as understanding how college students perceive their universities' Facebook use. The study employed two different quantitative methods: content analysis and a survey. The purpose of using two different quantitative methods allowed for a better understanding of not only the universities' use of Facebook but also the perceptions of the students. Using two methods increases the likelihood of more significant results and more useful information to be acquired. According to Krippendorff (2004), a content analysis views data as a representation of text, expressions and images that are meant to be read and interpreted for their meanings. Krippendorff also noted this method is powerful and unobtrusive. Creswell (2009) describes survey research as providing numeric descriptions to trends, beliefs, attitudes and opinions of a studied population.

#### *Sample of Content Analysis*

The sample of the content analysis was Oklahoma State University (research institution) and Northwestern Oklahoma State University (regional institution) main

Facebook profile page. Both universities have many Facebook pages that are related to the university that focus on particular organizations such as Oklahoma State University Alumni and NWOSU Foundation, respectively, but for the purposes of this research project only the main profile page was examined. By selecting the main profile page at both universities this allowed for more general information regarding the schools to be collected than if a specific organization such as Oklahoma State University Athletics Facebook page was chosen. The athletics Facebook page would have wall posts specifically written about athletics, thus only a particular type of student (those interested in athletics) and particular type of wall posts would be on that page limiting the generalization of this study. At Oklahoma State University, the Communications Office operates the main Facebook profile page. Northwestern Oklahoma State University's main Facebook profile page is operated by the office of University Relations. According to Oklahoma State University (2011), a little over 23,000 students are enrolled at the main Stillwater campus. According to Northwestern Oklahoma State University (2011) a little over 2,000 students are enrolled at the main Alva campus. The main premise for using these two Oklahoma universities is because of the researcher's direct ties to the institutions. However, examining a research institution and regional institution will give useful information about two universities of different size.

### *Sample of Survey*

The sample for the survey was undergraduate students enrolled at Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University. To make the sample consistent

and comparable between the two universities, two classes from each university that are similar in subject matter and are general education classes were selected. At Oklahoma State University, the sample was collected from the course title, Media in a Diverse Society, and at Northwestern Oklahoma State University the sample was collected from the Introduction to Mass Communications course. By collecting a sample of students from similar courses at each university, the researcher yielded a very similar pool of students. The courses are offered as elective courses with the general education designation.

## Research Approach

### *Content Analysis*

The content analysis was of two Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University Facebook profile pages. A content analysis was chosen because the researcher wanted to interpret and examine whether the universities were using the wall posts for communication with students and also to interpret what kind of communication was taking place. Content on the profile pages was coded to determine whether the universities are implementing tactics to increase connectivity on Facebook and whether they provide an atmosphere for “excellent” public relations, focusing specifically on the act of increasing student connectivity to the university and contributing to the overall process of retention. Each university's wall posts dating from September 1, 2010 through January 31, 2011, were viewed and recorded by copying and pasting the text from the profile into a word document. This allowed for five months of

content, a sufficient amount of time to determine whether the universities are using Facebook to foster student connections. After researching previous literature it was found that a study specifically involving Facebook, retention, and coding of wall posts had not been done. Therefore, the researcher developed a codebook that was framed around Grunig's Excellence Theory specifically addressing two-way symmetrical model of communication and participative culture.

#### *Content Analysis Codebook*

The data was coded according to six different factors: (a) three or more comments on the wall posts (b) three or more likes of the wall posts (c) the wall posts contained a photo (d) the university responded to the wall posts (e) the tone of the wall posts (positive, neutral, and negative) and (f) type of wall posts (athletic, academic, alert, and general). These factors were chosen because they indicate the universities are using Facebook to engage their audience and build/foster relationships. Also, these factors helped determine whether two-way symmetrical communication was taking place. For example, photos increase engagement, and three or more likes and comments suggests two-way symmetrical communication is taking place. Positive, neutral and negative tone helps to understand student's attitudes and connection to their university. The codebook for this study is provided in Appendix A.

Defining tone and type of wall posts helps the reader better understand exactly what criteria the researcher was looking for when coding. Positive tone are wall post

saying something nice about the university such as, “I love OSU”. Negative tone are wall posts indicating a problem with the university, criticizing or being sarcastic about the university such as, “NWOSU did a horrible job cleaning off snow from the sidewalks”. Neutral tone includes wall posts that are neither positive nor negative such as, “Where can I find information regarding enrollment?” In regard to type of wall posts, athletic wall posts mentions school team or cheers for mascot such as, “Go Pokes”. Academic wall posts mentions academic standards, faculty or class work such as, “All forms for graduation must be submitted to the graduate school”. Alert wall posts relays information such as hazardous weather or school closings such as, “Due to the snow Northwestern will cancel all afternoon classes”. General wall posts are not associated with athletics, academics, or alerts.

### *Survey*

The second research method for this study was a survey. The survey examined students' perceptions of the respective universities using Facebook as a communication tool aiding in retention. Only students who have a Facebook account were asked to complete the survey in its entirety and those who did not have a Facebook account were asked to continue to the demographic question at the end of the survey. The survey mainly consisted of 5-point Likert type questions. The survey also included general statements asking students to rate their feelings of connectedness to their universities and whether they stay up-to-date with current events involving their universities. Statements



such as “I feel connected to my university” and “I stay up-to-date with events involving my university” were posed and the students were asked to rate their agreement with these statements ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The remainder of the survey asked for information specifically regarding the two universities’ Facebook profile pages and how the students communicate or would like to communicate on these pages. The procedure consisted of a one-time survey of undergraduate students enrolled at Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University. The survey was administered in the middle of the spring semester and permission to administer the survey during a regular scheduled class time was requested for in advance. Students were asked to fill out a consent form before the survey was administered. The consent form informed the students on (a) the purpose of the study, (b) an estimated time of how long the questionnaire should take to complete, (c) the risk of completing the survey (minimal risk involved in this study), (d) confidentiality requirements, (e) contact information of the researcher, (f) and also the contact information of the IRB for any questions the subject might have about their rights involved in this study. The survey and consent form for this study are provided in Appendix 2.

The researcher completed the proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and was approved by IRB of the research project and use of human subjects. Human subjects who participated in the survey did not asked to provide any information that would identify them thus ensuring confidentiality. The surveys were only examined by

the primary researcher and the primary researcher's advisor. The researcher kept the IRB up-to-date on all information in regard to the research project.

## Data Analysis

### *Data Analysis of Content Analysis*

Initially, the data was copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document allowing the research to have easy access to the information without having to be logged onto the Facebook website. A codebook developed by the research aided in this analysis by providing a "checklist" to follow. The content analysis data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, which allowed the data to be transferred to SPSS statistical software for analysis. The content analysis data was first screened to determine if there was any missing data. After screening the data it was found that no data was missing. Descriptive statistics contains central tendency measures which determined that the data was free from entry error. A Chi-square Test of Independence was used to analyze the wall posts contents of the two Oklahoma universities' Facebook pages. To ensure inter-coder reliability, another coder, besides the primary researcher, was selected and trained to code the two universities Facebook wall posts. Ten percent of the wall posts were coded by both the primary researcher and the other trained coder. There were 1,400 total wall posts thus 140 wall posts were coded by both individuals. After the coding was completed separately by each coder, the total number of disagreements was calculated (25

disagreements) and then divided by the total number of wall posts coded by both individuals (140 wall posts). The percentage of disagreements was 5.6% therefore the inter-coder agreement was 94.4%, which is well above industry standards of .80. This indicated there was little discrepancy between terms and the understanding of how the wall posts were being coded. This also established that the primary research/coder had little bias when coding.

#### *Analysis of Survey Data*

The data from the surveys was entered into an Excel spreadsheet where the data was then transferred to SPSS statistical software for analysis. The survey data was first screened to determine if there was any missing data. After screening the data it was found that no data was missing. Descriptive statistics contains central tendency measures which determined that the data was free from entry error. The survey data was then analyzed by conducting a t-test. A t-test was selected because two means were compared, Oklahoma State University student survey responses and Northwestern Oklahoma State University student survey responses. An independent t-test determined whether a statistically significant difference existed between the two universities student survey responses. This permitted the researcher to identify which university's students feel the most connected to their university, and thereby more likely to continue enrollment.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

A study examining the current methods of using the social networking site Facebook as a way to connect and maintain relationships with students is important to study because despite its enormous popularity since its inception seven years ago, little empirical research on its use as a strategic communication tool. This study asks five specific research questions. These questions were explored by collecting quantitative data in the form of a survey and content analysis of wall posts on Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University's Facebook pages. College students' uses, attitudes and perceptions of their universities' Facebook use were explored by analyzing survey data. Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University's wall posts activity was explored by coding the posts for type, tone, comments, likes and photos. The findings are presented in two sections: research questions one and two are explored through quantitative analysis of the two universities' coded wall posts, and research questions three through five are explored through analysis of survey data.

#### Quantitative Findings of Analysis of Wall Posts

This section will first explain the profile of the wall posts that were coded. Next, it will address findings associated with research questions one and two.

### *Profile of Wall Posts*

Fourteen-hundred wall posts were gathered and coded from Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University's Facebook pages. Nine-hundred and nineteen of the wall posts were from Oklahoma State University and 481 belonged to Northwestern Oklahoma State University. The wall posts were gathered from September 1, 2010, through January 31, 2011.

### *Analysis of Wall Posts Findings*

Out of the five research questions posed in this study, research questions one and two directly pertained to the analysis of the wall posts on Oklahoma State University's and Northwestern Oklahoma State University's Facebook pages. The two research questions addressed specifically by the analysis of the two university wall posts are: How are universities (specifically Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University) using Facebook to create "excellent" conditions for communication with students and how are these universities using two-way symmetrical model of communication to serve the interest of the students?

The wall posts were coded according to six different factors: (a) three or more additional comments on the original wall post, (b) three or more likes of the wall post, (c) the wall post contained a photo, (d) the university responded to the wall post, (e) the tone of the wall post (positive, neutral, and negative), (f) and type of wall posts (athletic, academic, alert, and general). The codebook for analysis of the universities wall posts can be found in Appendix 1.

The frequency table indicated no missing cases for the variable of wall posts with three or more additional comments. Wall posts with three or more additional comments had only one value. The valid percent indicates a 100% for this variable thus no data was out of range. Because this study involved a 2 x 2 design, the assumption was a minimum expected frequency of 5 in each cell (Agresti & Finlay, 1986, p.209). Expected frequency is the expected cell count if no relationship exists. A chi-square analysis was generated to assess the assumption and all cells had an expected frequency of at least 5, with the lowest at 37.79. Thus, the assumption was satisfied allowing conduction of the Chi-square Test of Independence.

Overall for wall posts with three or more return comments Oklahoma State University (10.1%) was higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (3.5%). For wall posts without three or more return comments Northwestern Oklahoma State University (96.5%) The Pearson Chi-Square had a significance of .0005, which was statistically significant because it is less than alpha of .05 ( $X^2(d.f.=1, N=1400)=18.91, p=.0005$ ). The significant chi-square meant school and wall posts with or without three or more additional comments were related and statistically dependent.

A post-hoc analysis of standardized residuals was conducted to determine which cells contributed significantly to the finding (Kennedy, 1983, pp.61-66). Alpha was set at .05 which is the equivalent to a z-score of  $\pm 1.96$ . The analysis indicated significantly more Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=2.4$ ) had three or more additional

comments than would be expected if school did not matter (Schwab, 2004). They also indicated significantly more Northwestern Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=-3.4$ ) had three or more additional comments that would be expected if school did not matter.

The test of association was conducted to determine the strength of association and the effect size. Because the study involved a 2 x 2 design, Phi was selected. Phi is a symmetric measure of effect size, and it was significant ( $\Phi=.116$ ,  $p=.0005$ ). To get the effect size the phi was squared ( $\Phi^2=.013$ ). After moving the decimal two places, school explained 1.3% of the variation in wall posts with or without three or more return comments. According to Frankfort-Nachmias and Leon-Guerrero's guidelines (2002, p.253), the association between the variables was very weak.

In regard to wall posts with three or more likes, the frequency table indicated no missing cases for the variable. Wall posts with three or more likes had only one value which was a valid percent of 100 thus no data was out of range. For wall posts with three or more likes Northwestern Oklahoma State University (32.8%) was higher than Oklahoma State University (22.9%). For wall posts without three or more likes Oklahoma State University (77.1%) was higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (67.2%). The assumption that the cells should have an expected frequency of at least five was met with the lowest at 126.43. The Pearson Chi-Square had a significance of .0005, which is statistically significant ( $X^2(d.f.=1, N=1400)=16.29, p=.0005$ ).

A post-hoc analysis of standardized residuals indicated significantly more Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=-2.0$ ) had three or more likes than would be expected if school did not matter. The analysis also indicated that significantly more Northwestern Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=2.8$ ) had three or more likes than would be expected if school did not matter. A post-hoc analysis indicated the value of Phi was significant ( $\Phi=-.108$ ,  $p=.0005$ ). To get the effect size Phi was squared ( $\Phi^2=.012$ ). After moving the decimal two places, school explained 1.2% of the variation in wall posts with or without three or more likes. Again, according to Frankfort-Nachmias and Leon-Guerro (2002, p.253) the association between the variables was very weak.

The frequency table for wall posts containing photos indicated no missing cases for the variable. This variable had only one value at a valid percent of 100 thus no data was out of range. The assumption of an expected frequency of at least five was met with the lowest being 127.12. The percentages were compared across the columns. Overall, for wall posts with photos, Northwestern Oklahoma State University (55.5%) was higher than Oklahoma State University (11.2%) and for wall posts without photos Oklahoma State University (88.8%) was higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (44.5%). The Pearson Chi-Square had a significance of .0005, which is statistically significant ( $X^2(d.f.=1, N=1400)=318.70$ ,  $p=.0005$ ).

A post-hoc analysis of the standardized residuals indicated significantly more Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=-9.0$ ) had photos than would be expected if



school did not matter. Northwestern Oklahoma State University had significantly more wall posts ( $z=12.4$ ) containing photos than would be expected if school did not matter. Also the analysis indicated Oklahoma State University ( $z=5.4$ ) and Northwestern Oklahoma State University ( $z=-7.4$ ) had significantly more wall posts without photos than would be expected if school did not matter. A test of association was conducted and Phi was significant ( $\Phi=-.477$ ,  $p=.0005$ ). To get the effect size the phi was squared ( $\Phi^2=.228$ ). After moving the decimal two places, school explained 22.8% of the variation in wall posts with or without photos. The association between variables was weak.

The frequency table for wall posts in which the universities responded back indicated no missing cases for the variable. Again, this variable had only one value at a 100% thus no data was out of range. The assumption of an expected frequency of at least five was met with the lowest being 13.06. For wall posts in which the university responded back Oklahoma State University (3.3%) was slightly higher than Oklahoma State University (1.7%). For wall posts in which the university did not respond back Northwestern Oklahoma State University (98.3%) was slightly higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (96.7%). The Pearson Chi-square was not significant.

In regard to tone of wall posts, the frequency table indicated no missing cases for the variable. There was only one value for this variable and it had a valid percent of 100 thus no data was missing. The assumption of expected frequency was met with the lowest being 162.25. The results indicated that Oklahoma State University (44.5%) had more

wall posts with positive tone than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (14.6%). For wall posts with neutral tone Northwestern Oklahoma State University (85.4%) had more comments with neutral tone than Oklahoma State University (55.5%). Negative tone had to be discarded because Northwestern Oklahoma State University had zero wall posts with negative tone. Oklahoma State University only had six negative wall posts. The Pearson Chi-Square had a significance of .0005, which is statistically significant ( $X^2(d.f.=2, N=1340)=123.46, p=.0005$ ).

A post-hoc analysis of standardized residuals indicated Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=5.4$ ) had more positive tone than would be expected if school did not matter. Similarly, Northwestern Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=-7.2$ ) had more positive tone than would be expected if school did not matter. The analysis also indicated Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=-3.9$ ) and Northwestern Oklahoma State University wall posts ( $z=5.2$ ) had more neutral tone than would be expected if school did not matter. A test of association was conducted and Phi was significant ( $\Phi=-.304, p=.0005$ ). To get the effect size the phi was squared ( $\Phi^2=.092$ ). After moving the decimal two places, school explained 9.2% of the variation in wall posts with or without photos. The association between variables was weak.

The last factor in coding Facebook wall posts for the two universities was the type of post. The types of posts were categorized into athletic, academic, alert, and general. For clarification, athletic posts mentions schools team or cheers for mascot, academic

posts mentions academic standards, faculty or class work, alerts contain information about hazardous weather and school closings, and general is posts not associated with athletics, academics or alerts. Frequency tables indicated that there were no missing cases for the variable of tone. Again, there was only one value for this variable and it was 100% thus no data is out of range. The assumption of expected frequency was met with the lowest at 34.36. Overall, the results indicated that Northwestern Oklahoma State University (51.5%) had slightly more academic wall posts than Oklahoma State University (57.4%). For athletic wall posts, Northwestern Oklahoma State University had more athletic comments than Oklahoma State University (4.1%). Northwestern Oklahoma State University (8.1%) had slightly more alert wall posts than Oklahoma State University (7.3%). Oklahoma State University (37.1%) had more general wall posts than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (21.6%).

A Pearson Chi-Square had a significance of .0005, which is statistically significant ( $X^2(d.f.=3, N=1400)=60.04, p=.0005$ ). A post-hoc analysis of the standardized residuals indicated that Oklahoma State University ( $z=-3.4$ ) had more athletic wall posts than would be expected if school did not matter. Northwestern Oklahoma State University ( $z=4.7$ ) had more athletic wall posts than would be expected if school did not matter. Also the analysis indicated that Oklahoma State University ( $z=2.9$ ) and Northwestern Oklahoma State University ( $z=-4.0$ ) had more general wall posts than would be expected if school did not matter. A test of association was conducted and Phi was significant ( $\Phi=-.207, p=.0005$ ). To get the effect size the phi was squared ( $\Phi^2=.043$ ).

After moving the decimal two places, school explained 4.3% of the variation in wall posts with or without photos. The association between variables was very weak.

Information regarding the Chi-Square tests can be found in Tables two through seven on the additional pages.

**Table 2***Chi-Square Test of Independence Involving School and 3 or More Comments*

3 or More Comments	<u>OSU</u>			<u>NWOSU</u>		
	n	%	z	n	%	z
Yes	93	10.1%	2.4*	17	3.5%	-3.4*
No	826	89.9%	-.7	464	96.5%	1.0

$X^2(d.f.=1, N=1400)=18.91, p=.0005, \Phi=.0005; *p<.05$

**Table 3***Chi-Square Test of Independence Involving School and 3 or More Likes*

3 or More Likes	<u>OSU</u>			<u>NWOSU</u>		
	n	%	z	n	%	z
Yes	210	22.9%	-2.0*	158	32.8%	2.8*
No	709	77.1%	1.2	323	67.2%	-1.7

$X^2(d.f.=1, N=1400)=16.29, p=.0005, \Phi=.0005; *p<.05$

**Table 4***Chi-Square Test of Independence Involving School and Photos*

Photos	<u>OSU</u>			<u>NWOSU</u>		
	n	%	z	n	%	z
Yes	103	11.2%	-9.0*	267	55.5%	12.4*
No	816	88.8%	5.4*	214	44.5%	-7.4*

$X^2(d.f.=1, N=1400)=318.7, p=.0005, \Phi=.0005; *p<.05$

**Table 5***Chi-Square Test of Independence Involving School and Univ. Response*

University Response	<u>OSU</u>			<u>NWOSU</u>		
	n	%	z	n	%	z
Yes	30	3.3%	.0	8	1.7%	-1.4
No	889	96.7%	-.2	473	98.3%	.2

$X^2(d.f.=1, N=1340)=123.46, p=.0005, \Phi=.0005; *p<.05$

**Table 6***Chi-Square Test of Independence Involving School and Type*

Type	<u>OSU</u>			<u>NWOSU</u>		
	n	%	z	n	%	z
Academic	473	51.5%	-.8	276	57.4%	1.2
Athletic	38	4.1%	-3.4*	62	12.9%	4.7*
Alert	67	7.3%	-.3	39	8.1%	.4
General	341	37.1%	2.9*	104	21.6%	4.0*

$X^2(d.f.=3, N=1400)=60.04, p=.0005, \Phi=.0005; *p<.05$

**Table 7***Chi-Square Test of Independence Involving School and Tone*

Tone	<u>OSU</u>			<u>NWOSU</u>		
	n	%	z	n	%	z
Positive	382	44.5%	5.4*	70	14.6%	-7.2*
Neutral	477	55.5%	-3.9*	411	85.4%	5.2*

$X^2(d.f.=2, N=1340)=158.78, p=.0005, \Phi=.0005; *p<.05$

## Quantitative Findings of Survey

This section will first report the respondent profile of the survey instrument employed in this study. Next, it will address findings associated with research questions three through five.

### *Respondent Profile*

The participants in this study were 185 undergraduate students enrolled at Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University. Two classes from each university that were comparable in subject matter and that were general education classes were selected to administer the survey. At Oklahoma State University, 163 students were surveyed from the course titled, *Media in a Diverse Society*. At Northwestern Oklahoma State University, 22 students were surveyed from the course titled, *Introduction to Mass Communications*. Of the total number of students surveyed 50% were males and 48% were females. Two percent of those surveyed did not specify a gender. Class level or standing was 25.5% (n=47) freshman, 41.3% (n=76) sophomores, 22.3% (n=41) juniors, and 10.9% (n=20) seniors. The participants were asked if they had transferred to the university and 75.7% were not transfer students and 23.8% were transfer students. Twenty-four different schools were reported by the participants of where they had previously transferred. Thirty-eight students from Oklahoma State University were transfer students and six from Northwestern Oklahoma State University

were transfer students. Out of the 185 participants, 181 reported their major. Fifty different majors were indicated.

Of the 185 surveyed, 94.6% (n=175) had a Facebook account and 5.4% (n=10) did not have an account. Out of those participants who had a Facebook account it was reported that 57.1% (n=100) logged onto the account an average of three times or more a day, 22.9% (n=40) logged on twice a day, 10.3% (n=18) logged on an average of two to three times a week, and 2.9% (n=5) logged on about once a week. A respondent profile can be found in Table 1.



**Table 1:** Respondent Profile

Demographics	Frequency	Percent
<b>School</b>		
OSU	163	88.1
NWOSU	22	11.9
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	93	51.4
Female	88	48.6
<b>Class Standing</b>		
Freshman	47	25.5
Sophomore	76	41.3
Junior	41	22.3
Senior	20	10.9
<b>Transfer</b>		
Yes	44	23.8
No	140	75.7
<b>Facebook Account</b>		
Yes	175	94.6
No	10	5.4
<b>Average Log On</b>		
Once a week	5	2.9
Two to three times/week	12	6.9
Once/day	18	10.3
Twice/day	40	22.9
Three times or more/day	100	57.1

### *Survey Findings*

Five research questions were asked and of those five research questions, research questions three through five directly pertained to the survey. The three research questions addressed specifically by the survey are: How will the universities' use of Facebook impact students' perception of their universities? How does students' perception of their universities' use of Facebook affect their feelings of connection to their schools? How does students feelings of connection to their universities impact their likelihood to engage on their universities' Facebook page?

The survey consisted of 15 five-point Likert-type scale statements ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) and designed to measure students' Facebook use and students' perceptions about their universities' use of Facebook. The survey also consisted of yes or no questions, as well as demographic questions including gender, class standing, transfer, transfer from where and major. To determine the significance of the difference between Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University group means, independent t-tests were used for the survey statements relating to the understanding of students' Facebook use and students' perceptions about their universities' Facebook use. The survey can be found in Appendix B.

Research question three asks how will the universities' use of Facebook impact students' perceptions of their universities. An important factor of students' perception of their universities' Facebook use is whether they are "friends" (the student has added the

university to their friend list) with their universities and whether they are viewing their universities' Facebook page. In combining the 185 total students from both universities, 55.7% (n=98) of students are friends with their university and 44.3% (n=78) were not friends with their university. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances had a significance of .001; therefore equal variances not assumed must be used to determine whether the t-test is significant. In this case, the t-test was not significant ( $t(df=26.15)=1.11, p=ns$ ).

The survey also determined of those 44.3% (n=78) students who were not friends with their university, how many would like to be friends. Data confirmed that 26.5% (n=49) did want to become friends with their university. Again, this t-test was not significant ( $t(df=79)=-.992, p=ns$ ). The data showed that none of the students viewed their universities' Facebook page every day, 4.0% (n=7) viewed the page often, 23.1% (n=40) sometimes viewed the page, 35.3% (n=61) seldom viewed the page, and 37.6% (n=65) never viewed the page. Viewing the university Facebook page was not significant ( $t(df=171)=.073, p=ns$ ).

The student's perceptions of their university's Facebook use might be influenced by whether their university is providing useful information they are seeking. The data showed that 14.6% (n=27) would not view their university's Facebook page, 63.8% (n=118) would view it to be informed about campus events, 4.9% (n=9) would access the page to ask for help concerning issues related to the university, 8.6% (n=16) would view it to communicate with other students, and 6.5% (n=12) selected other as a reason for

viewing their university's Facebook page. Oklahoma State University's mean was higher (M=2.25) than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=1.90) indicating that more Oklahoma State University students agreed that they would view their university's Facebook page to be informed about campus events. Overall, most of the students would use their university's Facebook page to be informed about what events are going on at their campus. This t-test was not significant ( $t(df=171)=1.436$ ,  $p=ns$ ).

In regard to whether or not the students perceived Facebook as an effective tool for universities to use in communicating with students, data confirmed that 21.0% (n=37) strongly agree that Facebook is an effective tool, 55.1% (n=97) agree that it is an effective tool, 18.2% (n=32) are undecided whether Facebook is an effective tool, 2.3% (n=4) disagree that Facebook is an effective tool, and 3.2% (n=6) strongly disagree that Facebook is an effective tool for universities to you use to communicate with students. Oklahoma State University's mean (M=2.29) was slightly higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=2.10) indicating that more Oklahoma State University students agree that Facebook is an effective tool for universities to use. However, the t-test for equality of means was not significant ( $t(df=174)=-.920$ ,  $p=ns$ ).

Data suggests that 34.3% (n=60) strongly agreed that their university uses Facebook to communicate warnings and alerts to students, 24.6% (n=43) agreed, 30.9% (n=54) were undecided, 8.6% (n=15) disagreed, and 1.7% (n=3) strongly disagreed. Northwestern Oklahoma State University's mean was significantly higher (M=2.62) than

Oklahoma State University ( $M=2.13$ ) indicating that the Northwestern students perceived that their university communicated this warnings and alerts much more. The t-test for equality of means was significant ( $t(df=173)=-2.005$ ,  $p=ns$ ).

Students did not perceive that their universities' Facebook page was a place for them to contact their university with a questions or concern. Only 3 students or 1.7% strongly agreed they would use Facebook to relay questions and concerns, 12.6% ( $n=22$ ) agreed, 14.3% ( $n=25$ ) were undecided, 50.9% ( $n=89$ ) disagreed, and 20.6% ( $n=36$ ) strongly disagreed that they would use their university's Facebook page to pose questions or concerns. The t-test was not significant ( $t(df=173)=-.247$ ,  $p=ns$ ). Also, very few students agreed that they would post something that was exciting and associated with their university on their university's Facebook page. Only 4 students or 2.3% strongly agreed that they would post something exciting in relation to their university, 6.3% ( $n=11$ ) agreed, 13.6% ( $n=24$ ) were undecided, 41.5% ( $n=73$ ) disagreed, and 36.4% ( $n=64$ ) strongly disagreed that they would post something on their university's Facebook page when they were excited and it was related to the university. Oklahoma State University's mean ( $M=3.81$ ) was slightly higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University ( $M=3.75$ ) indicating that slightly more students from Oklahoma State University disagreed that they would post something on their university's Facebook page when they were excited and it was related to the university. This t-test was not significant ( $t(df=174)=-.304$ ,  $p=ns$ ).

Similarly, students did not perceive that they would post on their university's Facebook page when they were upset with something associated with the university. Data indicated that 33.0% (n=58) strongly disagreed that they would post on their university's page when they were upset, 36.4% (n=64) disagreed, 11.4% (n=20) were undecided, 17.6% (n=31) agreed they would post when upset, and only 1.7% (n=3) strongly agreed. Oklahoma State University's mean (M=4.10) was barely higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=4.03) indicating that slightly more students disagreed that they would post when they were upset and it was related to the university. The t-test for equality of mean was not significant ( $t(df=174)=-.811$ ;  $p=ns$ ).

Research question four asks how does students' perception of their universities' use of Facebook affect their feelings of connection to their schools. Findings indicate that 5.7% (n=10) strongly agreed that their universities' Facebook pages help connect students to their universities, 47.7% (n=84) agreed, 34.7% (n=61) were undecided, 8.0% (n=14) disagreed, 4.0% (n=7) strongly disagreed. More than half of the students surveyed agreed that their universities' Facebook pages help students to feel connected to their universities. The means between the two universities was exactly the same (M=2.57). The significance of the t-test was well over the standard of .05 ( $t(df=174)=-.018$ ,  $p=ns$ ) indicating that it was not significant.

One way for students to maintain a connection with their university is to stay up-to-date with current events involving their universities. Seventeen students or 9.7% of

students strongly agreed that they use Facebook to stay up-to-date with current events involving their university, 36.4% (n=64) agreed, 17.0% (n=30) were undecided, 26.1% (n=46) disagreed, and 10.8% (n=19) strongly disagreed. Oklahoma State University's mean (M=3.29) was higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=2.87) indicating that more Oklahoma State University students agreed that they use Facebook to stay up-to-date with current events involving their university. However, the t-test for equality of means was not significant ( $t(df=174)=-1.489$ ,  $p=ns$ ).

Slightly more students agreed that they used Facebook specifically to stay connected to their university. Seven students or 4.0% strongly agreed with this statement, 36.4% (n=64) agreed, 21.6% (n=38) were undecided, 30.7% (n=54) disagreed, and 7.4% (n=13) strongly disagreed that they use Facebook specifically to stay connected to their university. Again, Oklahoma State University's mean (M=3.38) was higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=2.96) indicating that more Oklahoma State University students agreed that used Facebook specifically to stay connected to their university than Northwestern Oklahoma State University. The t-test for equality of means was not significant ( $t(df=174)=-1.706$ ,  $p=ns$ ).

Lastly, research question five asks how does students feelings of connection to their universities impact their likelihood to engage on their universities' Facebook page? Data suggest that in general and not through Facebook specifically, 20.1% (n=37) strongly agreed that they felt connected to their university, 64.7% (n=119) agreed, 9.8%

(n=18) were undecided, 4.9% (n=9) disagreed, and .5% (n=1) strongly disagreed that they felt connected to their university. Oklahoma State University's mean (M=2.18) was slightly higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=1.99) indicating that more Oklahoma State University students agreed that in general they feel connected to their university. The t-test did not produce significant findings ( $t(df=182)=-1.157, p=ns$ ).

For students to engage with their university in all facets, and Facebook specifically, they most likely need to feel happy about the university. Data provided that 59.5% (n=110) of students strongly agreed that they were happy at their university and intended to study there until they graduated, 29.2% (n=54) agreed, 7.0% (n=13) were undecided, 2.7% (n=5) disagreed, and 1.6% (n=3) strongly disagreed. Oklahoma State University's mean (M=2.00) was higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State University (M=1.52) indicating that more students at Oklahoma State University strongly agreed that they were happy at their university and intended to study there until they graduated than at Northwestern Oklahoma State University. Levene's test for equality of variances significance was .0005, below the standard of .05, equal variances not assumed must be used to determine the significance of the t-test. The t-test was not significant ( $t(df=22.6)=-1.558, p=ns$ ). Again, in general and not through Facebook specifically, data indicated 13.5% (n=25) of students strongly agreed that they stay up-to-date with current events involving their university, 57.8% (n=107) agreed, 13.5% (n=25) were undecided, 13.0% (n=24) disagreed, and 2.2% (n=4) strongly disagreed. Oklahoma State University's mean (M=2.55) was slightly higher than Northwestern Oklahoma State



University (M=2.29) indicating that more Oklahoma State University students agreed that stay up-to-date with current events involving their university than Northwestern Oklahoma State University. The t-test was not significant ( $t=-1.177$ ;  $p>.241$ ).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### *Summary*

There are many ways for colleges and universities to implement retention practices. However, in doing so it is important for the institution to understand the perceptions of students when it comes to building a lasting connection with them. A number of different factors are utilized in this practice and no single factor can completely increase retention. Rather, it is the mixture of these factors that can enhance retention practices. With Facebook's growing popularity among the teen and young adult generation, it is vital for colleges and universities to utilize this communication tool. Reaching students where they are is essential in connecting with them. A common theme observed in retention is connectivity. Creating an environment where students can connect to their university might increase the chances of students completing their degree at that university.

Grunig's Excellence Theory establishes that the key components of public relations, such as communication, management and organization are important in making an organization effective. Grunig emphasizes the importance of listening to and receiving feedback from the organization's key publics. In applying this theory to higher education institutions, Facebook provides a communication channel to both listen to and

receive feedback from one of the institution's key publics, students. Grunig (1992) also notes that an organization that allows for publics to participate and feel connected to the organization helps the organization reach some of its goals. This study examines the use of Facebook by two Oklahoma universities to explore whether using the social networking site will provide the opportunity to create connections with students that may contribute to retention.

The study used quantitative methods to determine whether Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University are providing an atmosphere where students can engage and interact with their universities on Facebook. The connectivity of students to their universities was analyzed to determine whether these universities were fostering and enhancing positive relationships with their students. This study also examined the students who attend these two universities and their perceptions about their universities' use of Facebook to engage and connect with them.

The sample for the survey consisted of 163 undergraduate students enrolled in Media in a Diverse Society at Oklahoma State University, and 22 undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Mass Communications at Northwestern Oklahoma State University. The chosen classes are comparable in subject matter and class size on the level at which both universities are on, as well as they are both general education classes. The survey mainly consisted of 5-point Likert-type scale questions with a few yes or no

questions, with a demographic section at the end. An Independent t-test for equality of means was conducted to assess the survey data.

Secondly, an analysis of wall posts from the Facebook pages of both Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University was conducted. A codebook was developed to assist in the coding process. A total of 919 wall posts from Oklahoma State University and 481 wall posts from Northwestern Oklahoma State University were coded for engagement, tone, and type. Engagement was measured by looking at the number of comments on a post, the number of “likes” on a post, containment of a photo, and whether the post included a response from the university. A Pearson Chi-square was conducted to assess the wall posts data.

### *Content Analysis Discussion*

In general, the analysis of the coded wall posts provided significant findings. Research question one asked how the universities (specifically Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University) use Facebook to create “excellent” conditions for communication with students. Research question two asked how these universities are using two-way symmetrical model of communication to serve the interest of the students. A Chi-square indicated that there were significantly more wall posts without three or more return comments. Oklahoma State University responded back to wall posts more frequently at 3.3% while Northwestern Oklahoma State University responded back 1.7% of the time. This indicates that two-way symmetrical

communication is rarely taking place on these universities' Facebook wall posts.

According to Grunig (1992) two-way symmetrical model of communication is vital to serve the interest of the organizations publics.

In general there were significantly less wall posts with photos than there were wall posts with photos on both schools Facebook pages. Although Northwestern Oklahoma State University did a much better job of creating a participative culture and creating two-way symmetrical communication by uploading significantly more photos in wall posts than Oklahoma State University. Posting pictures is a non-traditional way for communication to take place. It gives students the opportunity to comment on the photos, essentially engaging them through Facebook. According to Grunig's Excellence Theory creating a participative culture allows for "excellent" conditions for communication to take place. Posting pictures can add to engagement, but universities need to create two-way symmetrical communication by also asking questions, looking for input from students and responding to posts. According to the analysis of the wall posts, neither university is making an effective effort to provide excellent conditions for two-way symmetrical communication.

Overall, the tone of the wall posts were neutral with Oklahoma State University having 51.9% neutral posts and Northwestern Oklahoma State University having significantly higher neutral post of 85.4%. Most of the positive wall posts took place during athletic seasons, and particularly during football for both colleges. Many of the

students posted during this time, cheering for their team. Universities should take note that increased student engagement takes place at these times and they should create more opportunities for engagement. A positive aspect that was found through data analysis was Northwestern Oklahoma State University had zero wall posts with negative tone and Oklahoma State University only had six. This is significant for these universities' because it indicates that when students view these universities' pages they do not see negativity and this might help fuel their connection because the school is portrayed in a more positive light. It also might be concluded that student's at Northwestern Oklahoma State University overall are more satisfied with how their university is running operations.

### *Survey Discussion*

Research question 3 asked how will universities' use of Facebook impact students' perceptions of their universities. In answering this question, it first must be established if students at these two universities are using Facebook. Data showed the 96.2% of the total number of student use social media and 94.6% use Facebook specifically. These percentages show that almost all students are using some type of social media and most of them are using Facebook. More than half (57.1%) of those students who had a Facebook account logged onto their account an average of three times or more a day. Again, these percentages indicate that students are using Facebook, and

they are accessing it quite frequently. These findings support Wandel's (2008) literature that suggests Facebook is a viable communication tool to reach college students.

Another important element in understanding how universities use of Facebook will impact students' perceptions about the university, is answering whether or not the students' are "friends" with their universities through Facebook. For students' to be friends with their university, they have to select the "like" option on the university's Facebook page. Once the student and university are friends via Facebook, anytime the university posts information it will automatically appear on the students news feed when they log onto Facebook. This allows the student to stay up-to-date with his or her university. If the students are not friends with their university on Facebook, the university will not have the opportunity to engage and interact with the students via Facebook. With both universities combined, 55.7% of students are friends with their university, and 44.3% are not friends with their university. In analyzing these percentages and with the numbers split almost down the middle, the missed opportunities to engage with students through Facebook are too high. A key factor that most likely will influence students' perceptions about their university's Facebook use is whether the university's Facebook page is providing them with information they seek to access. Frequencies showed that 63.8% of students surveyed would view their university's Facebook page to be informed about campus events. This suggests that universities should keep their Facebook page constantly updated with events taking place at the campus in order for students to become more engaged via Facebook. Also, it might prove even more beneficial for the university

to allow students involved in organizations on campus to post their events through the university's page. This most likely will increase the number of students accessing their university's Facebook page and the chances for engagement might increase.

Grunig's Excellence Theory (1992) establishes that a participative culture rather than an authoritarian culture makes an organization more "excellent." It is important for universities to provide an atmosphere on Facebook that students can participate. Failure to do so will most likely hinder the perceptions of students about their university's Facebook use. Data found that 82.3% of students never communicate on their university's Facebook page. The findings suggest that both universities must do a better job of engaging students on Facebook in order to create the "excellent" atmosphere that creates feeling of connection and fosters long-term relationships associated with retention. Also, students did not perceive that their university's Facebook page was a place for them to pose questions or concerns. Similarly, very few students agreed that they would post something that was exciting and associated with their university on their university's Facebook page. According to Grunig (2008) two-way symmetrical model of communication improves public involvement and manages conflict. Universities need to provide an atmosphere on Facebook where the students feel they can relay questions, concerns, and excitement. A possible way to provide this atmosphere would be for the university to ask students to post what they thought were the most exciting play of the game or to respond quickly and efficiently to students that do post concerns. However, it is even more important that the university engages in communication with the students



after they have relayed questions, concerns, and excitement. In coding the wall posts, it became quite evident that many times students would ask questions and would never receive any feedback from the university. In one instance a student wrote a wall posts that said, “I am extremely excited about attending OSU and was wondering if anyone could give me information about enrollment?” Oklahoma State University did not respond to the question, missing out a great opportunity to connect a student with their university. A student from Northwestern Oklahoma State University wrote, “Are Northwestern’s campuses closed today?” Again, no return feedback was given. Lack of symmetrical communication can be detrimental to students and detrimental to retention practices. Interestingly, 74% agreed Facebook is an effective tool for universities to use in communicating with them.

Research question four asked how students’ perceptions of their universities use of Facebook affects their feelings of connection to their school. Almost half of the students or 47.7% agreed that their university’s Facebook page helps connect students to the university. More students agreed than disagreed that they use Facebook to stay up-to-date with current events involving their university and 36.4% of students agreed that they used Facebook specifically to stay connected to their university. These percentages indicate that students’ perceptions of their universities use of Facebook affect their feelings of connection to their schools. These findings suggest that Facebook is an area where universities can increase connections with students, and Oklahoma State

University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University are not fully taking advantage of that opportunity.

Research question five asked how students' feelings of connection to their university impact their likelihood to engage on their universities' Facebook page. Frequencies ran on the survey data indicated that 64.7% of the students agreed they felt connected to their university. Data also showed that 59.5% of students strongly agreed that they were happy at their university and planned to graduate from the school. Also, 57.8% of students agreed that they stayed up-to-date with current events involving their university. These percentages indicate that students generally feel connected to their university and are happy with the university, but also this indicates there is room for improvement. Because the students feel connected and are happy with their university, and they overall believe Facebook is an effective tool for universities to use, the opportunities for the students to engage on their universities' Facebook page are considerable. However, according to the perceptions of the students the university must do a better job of providing opportunities for the students to participate and engage on the Facebook page.

### *Implications*

There are many implications that come from this study that not only contribute to higher education institutions but also to many areas of business. First looking specifically at the higher education industry, while the results of this study cannot be generalized to

students at all universities, the data indicates that universities should consider using Facebook as a method of communicating with students, aiding in the retention process. The results of this study indicate that students are using social media and particularly the social networking site Facebook. Generally, students believe Facebook is an effective tool for their university to use in communicating with them. However most students want the communication to relay campus events and alert them of school closings due to weather or other issues. With Facebook's many options for displaying status updates, news feeds and discussion information, universities need to determine what option works best for their school in displaying event information and alerts. Continually updating information in these posts is vital to keeping students informed and content with their university's Facebook use.

The results indicate that little two-way symmetrical communication is taking place. Therefore, universities need to be more attentive and responsive to students via Facebook, which will create more excellent conditions for fostering relationships with students that positively impact retention. In higher education, communicating a positive message to students is vital. If students are asking questions on Facebook and the university does not reply, they have missed out on an excellent opportunity to promote the school and connect with the student. The implication of connecting with one student on Facebook goes far beyond improving the university's image with that one student. Everyone who reads that series of posts will see that the university cares enough about its students to answer their questions or concerns. Thus the university is improving its

image through action. All businesses can benefit from Grunig's two-way symmetrical model of communication and applying it to Facebook, especially businesses targeting college students because they are heavy users of Facebook. Data from this study clearly showed that there was a gap in two-way symmetrical communication between the universities and students. This might be the reason students did not feel they would write on their university's wall during times of excitement, frustration, or when in need of answers.

### *Limitations*

When analyzing the results of this study, several limitations should be considered. For purposes of this study it must first be noted that only using Oklahoma State University (OSU) and Northwestern Oklahoma State University (NWOSU) is a limitation. For the study to be more precise in its results it would be beneficial to conduct the study with all Oklahoma universities, but for purposes of time and financial limitations only these two universities were used. However, the results should prove helpful to all Oklahoma universities in evaluating Facebook and a student's connection to the university, and the impact on student retention.

A second limitation includes the different size of the two universities. Oklahoma State University is a research institution and according to a press release from the university in August 2010, the total enrollment for OSU-Stillwater and OSU-Tulsa is 23,220 (OSU website). According to Northwestern Oklahoma State University's official

website, as of February 2011, total enrollment is 2,138. This is a significant difference between the two universities enrollment. Because the two universities scales of size were so different this resulted in the t-test ran on the survey data to produce little significant findings. Had the sample sizes been more in conjunction with one another it might be likely that the findings would have been more significant.

### *Future Research*

Facebook usage is growing in popularity, especially in teens and young adults. There has been much written about this age group in relation to higher education and retention, however, there is relatively little scholarly research in regards to how to use Facebook as a form of communicating with students. Future research should further investigate the in-depth behaviors of students Facebook habits. This more thorough examination of students Facebook habits will allow universities to better understand how and in what ways they could most effectively communicate with students. This study utilized a more board survey of student's Facebook usage and their perceptions of their university's Facebook usage. By narrowing the survey down to particular aspects of Facebook such as just examining alerts posted or just athletic events, more specific understanding of student's perceptions might be collected. Administering focus groups with students would allow them to more freely express their ideas about how their university should use Facebook to communicate. Also, by examining more than just wall posts on the university's Facebook page such as, about me sections or discussion threads,

would garner more understanding of the way the university is trying to engage and communicate with students.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### **Codebook for Facebook Study**

##### **Introduction**

This codebook is aimed at assessing Northwestern Oklahoma State University (NWOSU) and Oklahoma State University's (OSU) Facebook profile pages.

##### **Procedure**

The following steps should be taken in the content analysis coding described below (V stands for Variable).

##### **Coder Identification**

The coder for this study is the primary researcher.

##### **Terms**

Tone:

Positive: Comment is saying something nice about the university

Negative: Comment is indicating a problem with the university, criticizing or being sarcastic about the university.

Neutral: Comment is neither positive or negative.

Type:

Athletics: Mentions school team or cheers for mascot, such as Go Pokes.

Academics: Mentions academic standards, faculty or class work

Alerts: such as hazardous weather, school closings

General: Not associated with athletics, academics, or alerts

V1.Number of wall posts:

Engagement: with 3 or more additional comments\_\_\_\_\_

Engagement: with 3 or more likes \_\_\_\_\_

Engagement: containing photos \_\_\_\_\_

Engagement: in which the university was commenting in response to another post \_\_\_\_\_

V2. Number of wall posts:

Tone: Positive \_\_\_\_\_

Tone: Negative \_\_\_\_\_

Tone: Neutral. Number of positive wall posts \_\_\_\_\_

V3. Number of wall posts:

Type: athletics \_\_\_\_\_

Type: academics \_\_\_\_\_

Type: alerts \_\_\_\_\_

Type: general \_\_\_\_\_

***Note: Please read the directions in the following paragraph very carefully before proceeding.***

## Appendix B

### Participant Information Sheet

**Project Title:** Social Networking Sites: Examining the Use of Facebook as a Retention Tool at Colleges and Universities.

**Investigators:** Allison Zimmerman-Graduate Student at Oklahoma State University.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is to find out whether Facebook is an effective tool for universities and colleges to use in connecting and maintaining relationships with students. The purpose is also to determine whether students at universities and colleges feel connected to their university and if they believe that their university is fostering and enhancing a positive relationship with them through the use of Facebook. By filling out this survey it will allow the researcher to better understand students perceptions of their university/college's Facebook usage.

**Procedure:** The participant is asked to please fill out the 25 question survey that consists of multiple choice questions, as well as, open-ended questions. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**Risks of Participation:**

There are no known risks associated with this research project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this research study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely in the Paul Miller Building in Room 206 until July 29, 2011, the end of the summer semester. Only the researcher and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Contacts: If you have any questions about the survey, you may contact: Allison Zimmerman, OSU Graduate Student and Primary Research, 580-748-0571 or [allison.cunningham@okstate.edu](mailto:allison.cunningham@okstate.edu)

Dr. Bobbi Kay Lewis, Advisor, 206 Paul Miller Bldg., Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-2970 or [bobbikay.lewis@okstate.edu](mailto:bobbikay.lewis@okstate.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Shelia Kennison, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74079, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu)

Participants rights:

Participation is voluntary and subjects can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty.

By filling out survey, you are giving consent.

## Student Facebook Survey

**Directions:** Please read each question carefully and select the answer that best fits.

1. I agree to participate                    \_\_\_Yes                    \_\_\_No
  
2. I feel connected to my university.  
\_\_\_ Strongly agree  
\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_ Undecided  
\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_ Strongly Disagree
  
3. I am happy at my university and intend to study here until I graduate.  
\_\_\_ Strongly Agree  
\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_ Undecided  
\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_ Strongly Disagree
  
4. I stay up-to-date with current events involving my university.  
\_\_\_ Strongly Agree  
\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_ Undecided  
\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_ Strongly Disagree
  
5. Do you use social media?            \_\_\_Yes                    \_\_\_No
  
6. Do you have a Facebook account?    \_\_\_Yes                    \_\_\_No (**If yes, please continue with the survey. If no, please continue on to question 21.**)
  
7. On average, how often during the day do you log on to your Facebook account?  
\_\_\_ About once a week  
\_\_\_ Two or three times a week

- Once a day
- Twice a day
- Three times or more a day

8. Are you “friends” with your universities Facebook profile page?  Yes  No

If no, would you like to be “friends” with your universities Facebook profile page?

- Yes  No

9. Do you view the universities Facebook profile page?

- Everyday
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

10. For what reasons do you or would you view the universities Facebook profile page?

- I wouldn't view the profile
- To be informed about campus events
- To ask for help concerning issues related to the university
- To communicate with other students
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. How often do you communicate on your university's Facebook profile page?  
(Such as, leaving comments, wall post, etc)

- Everyday
- Often
- Some
- Seldom



Never

12. Facebook is an effective tool for universities to use in communicating with students?

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

13. My university uses Facebook to communicate warnings and alerts, such as hazardous weather and campus closing, with me and other students.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

14. If I have a question or concern, I would use Facebook to contact my university to get an answer.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

15. When I am excited about something associated with my university, such as the football team winning against a rival team, I write on the university's Facebook page to share my excitement with others.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

16. When I am upset with something associated with my university, such as parking problems, I would I write on the university's Facebook page to share my concern or vent.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

17. My university's Facebook page helps connect students to the university?

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

18. I use Facebook to stay up-to-date with current events involving my university.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

19. I use Facebook to stay connected with my university.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

20. I agree to participate.  Yes  No

21. Gender  M  F

22. Class standing  Fr.  So.  Jr.  Sr.

23. Number of years attended at current university \_\_\_\_\_

24. Did you transfer from another school?  Yes  No

If yes where from \_\_\_\_\_

25. Major \_\_\_\_\_

VITA

Allison Adair Zimmerman

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: EXAMINING THE USE OF FACEBOOK  
AS A RETENTION TOOL AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Major Field: Mass Communications Media Management

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Mass Communications  
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July, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Mass  
Communications Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Alva, Oklahoma in  
May 2009.

Experience:

News Channel 9- Oklahoma City, OK  
Internship (Summer 2008)

Congressman Frank Lucas-Yukon, OK  
Public Relations Internship (Summer 2008)

Professional Memberships:

Oklahoma Broadcast Education Association (OBEA)  
Society of Professional Journalist (SPJ)

Name: Allison A. Zimmerman

Date of Degree: July, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: EXAMING THE USE OF  
FACEBOOK AS A RETENTION TOOL AT COLLEGES AND  
UNIVERSITIES

Pages in Study: 74

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Mass Communications/Media Management

Scope and Method of Study:

This study examines two universities' (Oklahoma State University and Northwestern Oklahoma State University specifically) Facebook use and the perceptions of students about their university's Facebook use. A content analysis of the two universities Facebook wall posts (1,400 total) was conducted. Also, a survey was administered to 163 students enrolled in Media in a Diverse Society at Oklahoma State University and 22 students enrolled in Introduction to Mass Communications at Northwestern Oklahoma State University. Grunig's Excellence Theory was used a theoretical perspective to frame this study.

Findings and Conclusions:

Results indicated that there were little negative posts on the two universities' Facebook pages. Little two-symmetrical communication took place on either of the universities' Facebook pages. The results from the survey indicated that student's did agree Facebook was an effective tool for universities to use. However, student's rarely engaged on their university's Facebook page and agreed that the universities should use it to communicate alerts and campus events.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Bobbi Kay Lewis

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