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The Effects of Social Media Use on Community College Students

Lakicha Montgomery

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The effects of social media use on community college students

By

Lakicha Montgomery

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Community College Leadership
in the Department of Educational Leadership

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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Social media is reshaping the way college students communicate within their college community, and higher education has recently begun to embrace social media. The most frequently used social networking site is Facebook, and its usage has increased tremendously among college students, impacting the students both positively and negatively. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites and the effect of that use on learning, GPA, and graduation as well any differences in perceptions based on students demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and living situation).

A 15-item survey was used to collect data from 87 students at one rural community college. The study found that most students use social media often, with their most common social media interaction partners being their close friends and family and the least being professors. In addition, 63.2% agreed that social networking sites were an effective tool for e-learning. Most students took a mixture of online and face-to-face classes, preferred Facebook and Instagram, and felt social networking sites had become either less as important or only as important as they were last year. Other results showed

that 51% agreed that social networking sites help them get educational materials, 39% agreed that social networking sites have supported their progress to graduate, 37% agreed that social networking sites have positively affected learning, and 32% agreed that social networking sites affected their GPA. The study found that Facebook was preferred by students who were 25 and older, Caucasian, and/or living with their spouse. Students who lived with parents used Instagram more than Facebook, and students who lived with their children took more online courses.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my husband, Mr. Ken Jernigan, for his patience, love, encouragement, and prayers during this journey; my parents, Reverend and Mrs. Melvin and Barbara Montgomery; siblings, Melvin Jr. and Bethany Montgomery; the entire Montgomery, Lofton, and Jernigan family who supported, prayed, and encouraged me to keep going forward; and my pastor and his wife, Rev. and Evangelist Anthony and Shirley McIntosh for their prayers, love, encouragement, and support. Most importantly, I would like to give thanks and honor to Jesus Christ for this opportunity and making this possible.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Background

There has been a growing public fascination with the phenomenon of connectedness over the past decade (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010). One of the ways in which society is now connected is through social media (also known as social networking sites). “Social media is redefining how individuals create ties with other individuals as well as how individuals establish relationships with the organizations that serve them” (Rios-Aguilar, Gonzalez Canche, Deil-Amen, & Davis, 2012, p. 9). Social networking sites play a key role in peoples’ lives because they provide a space for people to communicate with friends and peers or share links to websites (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). Through websites and services that encourage and facilitate participation, social media allows a person to collaborate and build communities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). Social media is reshaping the way college students communicate generally and within the community college (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). Social networking sites have attracted the interest of higher education faculty members looking for ways to engage and motivate students to be more active learners (Hughes, 2009). Still, there are researchers trying to understand the new dynamics generated by social media in community colleges. The Higher Education Research Institute reported that 94% of first year college students use

social networking websites and 85% of students have an account with Facebook (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010). Moreover, social networking is an important part of college students' lives and it is important to ask if social networking sites can help within the academic setting.

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of human cognition according to various theories of social development. Vygotsky's (1934) zone of proximal development theory suggests that students can learn more in the presence of a more knowledgeable person (Powers, Alhussain, Averbek, & Warner, 2012). Powers et al. (2012) reported that by students interacting online, they are able to teach other students. One explanation of this change is the concept of paralogy. "Paralogy, or the new andragogy, is a relatively new concept of self-directed learning based on Knowles' (1980) theory of peer-to-peer learning where students learn more from their peers through social media" (Powers et al., 2012, p. 244). This happens every day in social media. "More knowledgeable people are often no longer required as valid information is widely available on the internet. Students must find the information, discern it, put it in context and share with their peers through their social media networks" (Powers et al., 2012, p. 244).

Social media is also reshaping the way college students communicate generally and within their college community. College students are using social media to connect, to create and consume content, to use and generate applications, and thus to experience college in both real and virtual or online communities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). Indeed, college students are shaping their own identities and spaces through their varied engagement and social media (Martinez Aleman, 2014). The Community College

Survey of Student Engagement of 2009 found that the more students use social networking tools to communicate with other students, instructors, and college staff regarding coursework and other academic purposes, the higher their levels of engagement (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012).

Slowly, though, institutions of higher education have recently begun to embrace social media. Studies provide empirical data on how students use social media as well as the effectiveness of the use of social media in promoting learning in community colleges. Studies have shown from institutions who serve a diverse or non-traditional student population, they are extremely active on social media sites (Uversity, 2013). Research shows that students need social connections and support. “While some institutions are currently using tools such as Facebook or Twitter to push out messaging to students, the true nature of social networking is to enable students to connect with each other” (Uversity, 2013, p. 2). Social media provides an outlet for students to share questions and to receive help from fellow students and administrators who can offer support online (Uversity, 2013). According to the Community College Survey for Student Engagement, recent high school graduates attending a 2 year college often have difficulties in navigating the college system, with issues range from enrolling and registering for appropriate classes, to learning about available student aid (Uversity, 2013). In addition, according to the study by the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research, 100% of colleges and universities studied are now using some form of social media, 98% of colleges and universities have a Facebook page, 84% have a school Twitter account, 66% have a blog, Podcasting is being used at 41% of schools, 47% of admissions professionals are using LinkedIn, only 8% of colleges and

universities are using MySpace, and 85% of colleges and universities are using YouTube (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012).

Two recent studies have explored why college students use social networking sites and the factors that affect users joining these sites. They have focused specifically on social media and involvement and have found relationships between time spent on social media and student involvement as described by Astin (1984) and measured through single survey items (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010). Heiberger and Harper (2008) conducted a study of 377 undergraduate students at a Midwestern institution. Both studies found a positive correlation between social networking site use and college student involvement (Junco et al., 2010). For instance, a higher percentage of high users of social networking sites participated in and spent more time in campus organizations than low users (Junco et al., 2010). Additionally, more of the high users reported that they interacted daily in the real world with close friends and felt strong connections to them (Junco et al., 2010). Instructors are now strongly encouraging their students to use Facebook as an educational tool to expose them to contemporary issues that are not covered in core content of face-to-face instruction and to expose students to perspectives of experts external to their college (Cain & Policastri, 2011). This study examined the association between students' social media use, the independent variable, and students' involvement as the dependent variable.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is the extent to which there are differences in the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites and its effects on their learning, Grade Point Average, and graduation

based on their demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and current living situation). Issues leading to the need for this study are that students may experience harmful effects from the use of social network sites if they utilize them inappropriately, and the use of social media networking sites can influence students' learning. Facebook usage has tremendously increased among college students, impacting the students both positively and negatively. The constant distraction that the social networks have affects how one learns and how one's brain absorbs new information. Students who are surfing through their social media networks while they are listening to their teachers' lectures are not using the full potential power of their brains' learning (Paton, 2012). Paton (2012) reported that university and college students go through demanding courses and do many assignments which require the complete focus of the student. Moreover, colleges around the country are increasingly viewing social media as valuable channels to communicate with students, potential students, alumni, and the community in general (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). The most frequently stated benefits of using social media in higher education include: (1) being where your "target" is, (2) increasing cost-effectiveness and time-efficiency, and (3) building relationships (National Council for Continuing Education and Training, 2010).

Still, while both students and higher education institutions seem to be utilizing social media more and more, there still exist enormous challenges in trying to understand the new dynamics generated by social media in higher education, particularly for the context of community colleges. For instance, very little is known about: "(1) how effectively community colleges use social media to accomplish their mission, (2) how community colleges train staff and faculty to use these tools on the job, (3) the challenges

social media pose for operation of these institutions, (4) the value of social media, or (5) the potential benefits of social media use for specific purposes (e.g., recruitment or social and academic engagement of students)” (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012, p. 11).

The biggest challenge for community college leaders, practitioners, and educators today is skillfully negotiating these technologies to develop tools that can help students succeed given the impressive presence of social media in modern society. Research has not paid sufficient attention to the role social media plays in community colleges. Moreover, little is known about community college leaders’ perceptions of the role social media should play in their organizations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites and the effect of that use on learning, GPA, and graduation as well as any differences in perceptions based on students demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and living situation). A 15-item survey was used to collect these data. The survey consisted of a section to collect demographic information and a section to collect students’ perceptions about social media uses. The participants’ responses provide insight into their perceptions about how using social networking sites may benefit or harm community college students.

Research Questions

The study design employed a quantitative approach to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites?
2. What are the perceptions of community college students' regarding the effects of the use of social media and social networking sites on their learning, GPA, and graduation at community colleges?
3. Are there relationships between perceptions of community college students regarding the use and effects of the use of social media and social networking sites with their demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and current living situation)?

Definitions

“College student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological time or energy used by a college student devoted to a particular college-related experience or activity. A college student involved is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (Astin, 1984, p. 298).

“College student satisfaction refers to the level of enjoyment or realization of a requirement, aspiration, or expectation involving the college experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 299).

“Facebook is a social networking website designed by college students for college student interaction, networking with peers, and identity-sharing” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 1143).

“Involvements refer to the specific involvement variables themselves, which include both physical (in-person, student experience, how many hours the student spends studying, or the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program) and electronic (social networking sites usage) involvement variables” (Astin, 1984, p. 298).

“Online social networking is treated as the concept of individuals being able to access existing social network websites, construct a public or semi-public profile within the website, engage in communication with other users, and connect with other individuals whose electronic profiles they have examined within the social network” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 1144).

“Social connectedness refers to the unique sense of interpersonal closeness and belongingness to a person’s social environment” (Lee, 2012, p. 336).

“Social media refers to a group of websites based on user participation and content. They include social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook and other sites that are centered on user interaction” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, p. 1145).

“Social networking sites (SNS) are websites housed on the Internet designed to foster social interactions among users through electronic messaging, live chat-room web links, and the creation and maintenance of a self-designed electronic profile. Information within this profile can include demographics, personal feelings, choices, points of interest, and social, academic, and/or professional opinions” (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1145).

Theoretical Framework

The focus of this study was the effect of social networking sites on community college students' learning, with the assumption that use of social networking sites may decrease student involvement both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. Astin's (1984) student involvement theory offers two distinct perspectives. One view expresses the quantity of physical and mental input that the learner invests in the learning process. The second view focuses on what the learner actually participates in as one's thinking process and/or motivation, and it argues that the quantity of time spent by the learner is related to the amount of time that the learner is engaged in his/her studies.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations of the study include the participants selected and procedures to be used. The only people invited to participate in the study were community college students at one Mississippi community college. The only instrument used to gather information about their perceptions was a survey. Both delimitations will enhance the researcher's ability to complete the study in an efficient and cost effective manner.

This study was conducted with a diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, income, and academic majors, but was only conducted with community college students. This allowed the researcher to determine whether using a social network site can help involve students who have historically not been engaged, such as those who may not be adequately prepared for college, those from minority backgrounds, and those who are first-generation students (Kuh, 2009).

There are factors which limit the ability of the study to be generalized to the outside, larger groups. This study is limited by the items contained on the survey. This

study is limited by the timeframe since only one semester was used. This study is limited by the fact that the entire population was not used. This reduces the external validity and thus the ability to generalize to the entire population.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the extensive body of research that exists on social media and student use. The study furthers the strength of the argument that students' use of sites is a critical field of study with respect to students' outcomes. More importantly, this study introduces to the body of research a new phenomenon within higher education, technology-driven involvement activities. Since there is a limited amount of research on technology-based activities such as Facebook, this study paves the way for more detailed examinations of the impact of technology on the college experience. Findings from this study have implications for college students and faculty within the community colleges. Higher education benefits from this relationship to better serve students. Students may benefit from this analysis by coming to understand the importance of utilizing social networking sites as well as understanding how Facebook usage impacts the students' college experience. Faculty can also benefit by learning how to harness such technology to improve the role in student's success. These technology-driven types of involvements allow faculty to foster new strategies of mentorship and relationship-building with students, a key element of student success (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Large numbers of college students are migrating to Facebook, utilizing it as a communication tool as well as an activity (Bugeja, 2006). Thus, social networking and student involvement is very innovative and, regardless of the risks, appears to be here to

stay in the college environment. Therefore, this study serves as a beginning point for future research on social networking sites.

The findings from these data will help other researchers by providing a foundation for future research upon which to expand. In addition, this research study utilized the student perspective to examine the effect of student use of online social networking sites on their personal experiences, campus communities, and involvement. By knowing the participant's usage of social networking sites such as chatting, uploading pictures, and downloading movies or songs, the researcher can use that information to encourage students and faculty to use social networking sites as an educational tool for classroom assignments. This can be used by getting feedback from the instructors, engaging in dialogue with other students, and researching students' academic performance progress. Overall, the practical implication of this study is that the findings or data collected will provide recommendations on how to actively involve students using social media sites.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social networking sites or social media has become a great interest for college students in higher education. The use of social media has been on the rise in the last few years in public and academic use. Most of the well-known social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace. Examining the effect of social networking sites and social media on students' involvement requires an in-depth understanding of the usage in higher education. This literature review presents a discussion about social media usage by college students, effects of use, and usage in academics and learning in community colleges.

Social Media in Community Colleges

Researchers have found that community colleges have recently tapped into the potential opportunities that social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and even LinkedIn can offer. The obvious fascination college students have with social media has caused some community colleges to engage enthusiastically with social media as a strategy to gain more exposure for their institution, promote their campuses, encourage more students to consider pursuing the community college route, and help current students become more engaged with their classes and extracurricular activities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012).

Most recently, community colleges have been recognized as leaders in the use of technology. The Digital Community Colleges Survey (2011) reported on how institutions are using technology to improve services to students, faculty, and staff. The Center for Digital Education identified the top five digital community college trends from 2010: (1) mobile access; (2) technical support; (3) video, social networking, and webcasts; (4) career guidance; and (5) distance and blended courses (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). Two years before, in 2009, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, which included more than 400,000 students from 663 institutions, described the potential of online connections to increase student involvement (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). One of the most important findings in the report is that student involvement level increases when social networking is used for academically purposeful activities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012). Another important role community colleges play regarding social media is related to training students on social media skills. The *Community College Times* recently reported that some community colleges are now offering social media certificate programs in an effort to adjust to changing workforce needs and to provide students with skills they will need to obtain jobs (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012).

Current research has shown that “according to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of undergraduate students taking at least one online class grew from 8 to 20 percent” (Cavanagh, 2012, p. 1). Also, research has shown that approximately 5.6 million students enrolled in at least one online course during fall 2009, and nearly 30% of all higher education students now take at least one course online (Cavanagh, 2012). Clearly, the percentage of students taking one or more courses online is trending upwards. Other examples from schools regarding the

movement of online learning include the University of Central Florida and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The University of Central Florida began its online learning enterprise in the mid-1990s. It quickly discovered that 75% of online students were already on campus or lived nearby (Cavanagh, 2012). That gave rise to the university's blended learning initiative, which mixes both face-to-face and online learning.

University of Central Florida's students mix and match in a variety of ways. For example, during the fall 2010, almost 2,700 students took face-to-face, online, and blended courses at the same time (Cavanagh, 2012). The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which is similar to University of Central Florida, indicated that online and face-to-face learning have proved to be key strategies for the university to serve its students. The research showed 7,017 students taking at least one fully online course (fall 2011) and 5,654 of them also taking face-to-face courses (Cavanagh, 2012).

These findings are important because they illustrate students' involvement in social media. Astin's (1993) study defines involvement as participation in activities that are considered educationally meaningful and includes items that specifically measure student perceptions of the "time and energy" spent on these activities (McClenney, 2006). In addition, full-time and part-time students exhibit differing levels of involvement (Lester, 2013). Part-time students are significantly less likely to interact with instructors, make class presentations, or work with other students in or outside of class (Greene, 2008). Age also factors into the involvement of community college students. First-year students who are above the age of 25 engage in more purposeful activities than younger students, and the correlation between involvement and the quality of relationships is consequently higher for older students (Gibson & Slate, 2010). Differences in student

involvement also exist for community college students of color. Swigart and Murrell (2001) found that African American community college students get greater gains from efforts in class assignments and discussions and from using campus services. In addition, male students of color reported higher levels of student engagement (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Another study found Hispanic college students were less likely than African American and White students to use the Internet to communicate with their professors (Jones, 2009).

Numerous studies have reported that males spend more time on the Internet and are more likely than females to become dependent on the Internet (Millermaier & Perez, 2009). Males are more likely to use the Internet for entertainment, daily news, games, and downloading music, while females are more likely to use it for email, school, or work (Padilla-Walker, 2010). Moreover, male college students are more likely than female college students to go online at night (Jones, 2009). Still, many students report no desire to reduce the amount of time they spend online, while some students recognize that the Internet causes them to waste time and may lead to a decline in both the quality and the size of their social circles (Clark, 2004). *The effects of social media use on the mental health and well-being of college students* reported that approximately 52% of users saw Facebook as being less important to them now than it was a year ago (Meador, 2013).

Pew Research Center (2015) reported a number of trends across demographic groups. First, there were age differences: Young adults (ages 18 to 29) were the most likely to use social media-fully; 90% did. There were also gender differences, with women being more likely than men to use social networking sites for a number of years. The research showed that 68% of all women used social media, compared with 62% of

all men. But, there were not notable differences by racial or ethnic group; 65% of whites, 65% of Hispanics, and 56% of African Americans used social media.

New conceptual models are needed to better understand the dynamics of how connections to college happen for non-traditional, commuter, and community college students, especially in online environments (Jones, 2009). Routinely, these moments occur within and just beyond the classroom, often the most common place where commuting students meet other students and instructors. There they develop feelings of belonging and involvement, and they learn success strategies (Karp, 2010). “Socio-academic” interactions play a prominent role in 2-year students’ sense of connection and motivation to persist (Astin, 1984).

Social Media

Social media for the purpose of this study include social networking sites. Social media, derived from the social software movement, are a collection of Internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation, and sharing (Junco et al., 2010). As defined by Bryer and Zavatarro (2001), “Social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders” (p. 327). The use of social media has surged globally in recent years. Research has shown as of July 2011, Facebook passed 750 million users, LinkedIn had over 100 million members, Twitter had over 177 million tweets per day, and YouTube reached three billion views per day (Chen & Bryer, 2012). Despite the popularity, social media’s big draw is that it is a quick and easy way to connect with friends and loved ones. People can share exciting news about their life through statuses, pictures, and videos. Moreover, the best social networking site for this purpose is

Facebook because it combines statuses, photos, video and more for sharing one's life with others (Patton-Carson, 2014). However, a low percentage of students and faculty use them for academic practice (Lenhart, 2010). As educators look for ways to engage and motivate students, social media technologies are becoming a viable supplement to the traditional learning environment (Ebner, Lienhardt, Rohs, & Meyer, 2010). Also, educators are examining the combination of distance education delivery with instructional social media, thus, providing new approaches to teaching and learning that blends pedagogy and technology (Brady, Holcomb, & Smith, 2010).

Current literature has reported that the effect of social media use will depend on the type of social networking sites the student is using (Napoleon, 2013). If the student uses the internet for the purpose of leisure activity that interferes with academic work, it will affect the student's academic performance negatively (Napoleon, 2013). Current college students grew up in the technology era, and social networking is now just a part of a student's daily routine. Research showed that 63% of heavy users received high grades, compared to 65% of light users (Napoleon, 2013).

Facebook has become the primary social networking site among college students (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). Facebook's emergence is due in part to its original intent, which was to provide a social network only for college students. MySpace evolved for anyone and everyone, while Facebook stuck to its college student focus, including alumni. Researchers have found that in academics, college professors have begun utilizing Facebook to communicate with students, conduct broader research across multiple community colleges, and to demonstrate their collegiality with their students through relationship building (Heiberger & Harper, 2008).

The average Facebook user gets more from their friends on Facebook than they give to their friends (Pew Research Center, 2014). A study was conducted using first-time users and server logs of Facebook activity that explored the structure of Facebook friendship networks and measured their social well-being. The data were then matched with survey responses. The following findings showed that over a 1 month period:

- 40% of Facebook users made a friend request, but 63% received at least one request.
- Users pressed the like button next to friends' content an average of 14 times, but had their content "liked" an average of 20 times.
- Users sent 9 personal messages, but received 12.
- 12% of users tagged a friend in a photo, but 35% were themselves tagged in a photo (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Moreover, students utilize Facebook primarily for social reasons, but a growing trend among students is the use of Facebook for co-curricular activities. Researchers found that academic clubs, groups, class announcements, and invitations to academic engagements are all being fostered by students, for students (Sisson & Wiley, 2007). This growing usage no doubt impacts student involvement with existing activities, along with impacting the overall college student experience (Astin, 1993). As Facebook involvement grows among university stakeholders, community colleges can emerge that could create a host of implications for student's learning and success.

Student Engagement

Astin (1984) proposed a developmental theory for college students that focused on the concept of involvement, which he later renamed engagement (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010). Astin defined engagement as the “amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Today, engagement is conceptualized as the time and effort students invest in educational activities that are empirically linked to desired college outcomes (Kuh, 2009). Engagement compasses various factors, including investment in the academic experience of college, interactions with faculty, involvement in co-curricular activities, and interactions with peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kuh (2009) emphasizes two major facets: in-class (or academic) engagement and out-of-class engagement in educationally relevant (or co-curricular) activities, both of which are important to student success.

Social media can also be used for student engagement. Kuh (2009) states: “student engagement and its historical antecedents...are supported by decades of research showing positive associations with a range of desired outcomes of college” (p. 698). Chickering and Gamson (1987) proposed seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, all of which are related to student engagement. They are the following: (a) student/faculty engagement, (b) cooperation among students, (c) active learning, (d) prompt feedback, (e) emphasizing time on task, (f) communicating high expectations, and (g) respecting diversity. Later, Ehrmann (1996) gave examples of how technology can be used to help implement the seven principles. Kuh (2009) reported that institutions of higher education can directly influence engagements by implementing

these seven principles. Furthermore, social media are powerful forces in both student psychological development and academic success with academic and co-curricular engagement.

Current literature reports that there are a number of concerns from professionals in higher education when considering using or embracing social media. One concern is loss of control. Blogs are used for many purposes; in higher education, they are used by admissions to enlist currently enrolled students to blog about their lives to attract future students to their college. An example of the loss of control relates to blogs and their “comments” feature (Reuben, 2008). Negative commentary, at the very least, is truly an opportunity to change the perception that did or did not exist (Solis, 2008). A second concern is the time commitment since workload is something that many professionals in higher education deal with. Many play multiple roles and struggle to stay afloat, and adding social media into the mix can become time intensive. Third, information overload can be a concern. The advent of social media has created so many forms of media that those who follow blogs, Twitter friends, Facebook friends, MySpace friends, and other media outlets can easily find themselves overloaded when trying to keep up with “traditional media,” such as email, print publications, and instant messaging (Reuben, 2008). Finally, anyone can create an account for an institution. For example, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and YouTube do not do background checks on individuals wanting to create an account with a college name (Reuben, 2008). Therefore, if an institution does not reserve the school name, someone else may, whether it is an unassuming staff member with good intentions, or a disgruntled student (Reuben, 2008).

Some studies investigated the effectiveness of the use of social networking sites on college students' academic lives. One study related to college students' feelings about having their professors on Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006), and another looked at how a faculty presence on Facebook impacts student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). Both studies indicated that college students liked having professors join them on Facebook. A few studies investigated activities on which college students spend the most amount of time when on social networking sites. The findings of the National School Board Association (2007) indicated that 60% of the college respondents talked about education topics, and 50% of the students talked particularly about school work by using social networking sites. Salaway, Borreson, and Nelson's (2008) study of US college students (ages 18-25) indicated 85% of college students spent an average of 19.6 hours per week on online network sites (primarily Facebook) for work, school, or recreational activities. Younger respondents reported spending more time on social networking sites than older respondents.

A study with 483 first-year female college students from a college in the northeastern US found that they spend close to 12 hours a day using social media. The study's findings reported that social media had a negative effect on GPA (Pew Research Internet, 2014). However, it was determined that music and newspaper reading, unlike other forms of social media, are beneficial to student GPA (Pew Research Internet, 2014).

Social Media and Student Involvement

Researchers have found that today's college students have integrated various forms of social media and technology into their everyday supply of communication and

connection tools (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). There is a great amount of professional and academic interest in the effects of social media on college student development, involvement, engagement, and success (Abramson, 2011). Similar studies have found a number of relationships between technology use and involvement. In a study using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Chen (2010) found significant correlations between the use of educational technology and student involvement. While these studies have made important contributions to the research on technology involvement, they have been limited by either their measurement of involvement (single variables) or their scope (cross-sectional).

Junco (2011) discussed student use and involvement with Facebook. Junco (2011) adapted existing premises of student involvement to an online context. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy. By this definition, according to Junco (2011), evidence abounds that students are highly involved with Facebook. For instance, as reported in Heiberger and Harper (2008), almost half of the 100 million active Facebook users are members of a college network. Involvement occurs along a continuum. This tenant states that “students will invest varying amounts of energy” in different areas (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 53). This concretely means that some students are more engaged online than others, while some do not use social media at all. “Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features” (Pascarella et. al, 2005, p. 53). This point references the fact that students can spend a great deal of time using Facebook (quantitative feature) and may have different levels of engagement and are involved in a wide variety of activities on the platform (qualitative features). Heiberger’s (2007) study showed that students spend an average of one to two hours a

day on Facebook, logging in an average of three times per day. Qualitative features, on the other hand, have not been examined in depth by researchers but refer to how specific Facebook activities add to (or subtract from) college students' lives and experiences. The amount of student learning and development associated with an educational program is directly related to the quality and quantity of student engagement in that program (Pascarella et. al, 2005). This tenant claims that students will develop in proportion to the amount of time spent and nature of their involvement in an activity (Astin, 1984). It is possible that Facebook use is correlated to college students' social, cognitive, or academic development, as well as to real-world student engagement in some tangible ways. Such relationship might be revealed as either positive or negative. The effectiveness of any educational practice is directly related to the ability of that practice to increase student involvement (Pascarella et. al., 2005). Astin (1984) stated that programs and services that colleges offer should be assessed in terms of their ability to induce greater student involvement. In an online context, this means that if Facebook indeed increases engagement, it is possible for Facebook to be used in educationally-relevant ways to improve student academic outcomes.

Junco (2011) claims that Facebook offers college students ample opportunities for extracurricular activities, peer group interactions, social integration, and faculty-staff interactions. Involvement with Facebook may therefore help or hinder a student's academic performance, integration, and connection with his/her college community. Another concept that can be helpful in understanding social media use among college students is that of critical engagement (Martínez-Alemán, 2014). The authors argue that scholars must scrutinize traditional definitions of student involvement, particularly when

studying the college experiences of certain sub-groups of students such as first-generation college students.

A recent report from the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010) highlights the use of social media in the United States. A cohort of 2,253 adults (18 and older) was surveyed in September 2009. The findings indicate that 72% of survey respondents use social networking sites with an increase in the number of profiles maintained on multiple sites compared to the prior year. Among profile owners, Facebook was the social network of choice (73%), whereas only 48% and 14% maintained profiles on MySpace and LinkedIn, respectively. Additionally, 19% of the survey respondents used Twitter, while only 4% used virtual worlds such as Second Life. A number of survey respondents reported participating in content creation activities with 30% "sharing" self-created content such as photos, videos, and artwork; 15% "remixing" material such as songs or images to showcase their artistic abilities; and 11% "blogging" to inform, update, or notify readers about specific topics and/or events.

In similar research, Liu (2010) investigated students' use of different social media tools and their attitudes and perceptions towards these tools. The author sought to identify the knowledge and trends of using 16 social media tools that included Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, Bulletin Board, LinkedIn, blogs, Twitter, podcasts, virtual worlds, RSS, StumbleUpon, Netlog, Delicious, Digg, Plurk, and Jaiku. Through an online survey, 221 students were asked to rate their knowledge level of each social media tool using a Likert scale of 1-4 (1=not at all knowledgeable, 2=somewhat knowledgeable, 3=knowledgeable, and 4=very knowledgeable). The results revealed the following: (a)

82%, 77%, and 70% were either “very knowledgeable” or “knowledgeable” about YouTube, Wiki, and Facebook, respectively; (b) 42%, 41%, and 39% were “somewhat knowledgeable” about podcasts, blogs, and forums, respectively; and (c) 42%, 40% and 25% were “not at all knowledgeable” about virtual worlds, RSS, and Twitter, respectively.

The study results also revealed the top four reasons why students use social media tools. As reported, 85% use such tools for social engagement, 56% use them for direct communications, 48% use them for speed of feedback/results, and 47% use them for relationship building; however, fewer than 10% of the students mentioned using social media tools for academic practice (Liu, 2010). In a similar study, Browning, Gerlich, and Westermann (2011) surveyed 141 undergraduate students regarding their perceptions and beliefs about social media. A paper-and-pencil survey revealed strong favorable perceptions of social media in general and a high degree of readiness to embrace social media portals as a way to deliver course content. Poellhuber and Anderson (2011) worked together to conduct a study aimed at describing the use of and interest in social media. A 90-item online questionnaire was completed by 3,462 students between July, 2009 and February, 2010. The demographic characteristics included a large percentage of females (75.3%) and students of varying ages categorized by five 8-year spans: Generation Z, 16-24 (37.2%); Generation Y, 25-32 (27.2%); Generation X2, 33-40 (16.1%); Generation X1, 41-48 (10.5%); and Baby Boomers, 49 and over (5.3%) (Poellhuber & Anderson, 2011). In terms of interest in using social media for academic practice, the study respondents demonstrated a higher interest in using those social media tools with which they were most familiar.

Summary

Social media is broadly used across colleges and universities. Community colleges are finding ways to use social media to reach out to students. Most importantly, community colleges are creating opportunities for current and future students to use social media in academic practice and learning. Researchers are finding ways to conduct or collaborate systematic research that illustrates the role of social media in colleges and universities and among students.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Overview of Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the methods and procedures used to facilitate the study. The chapter includes a description of the research design, research questions, research site, population, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design with five independent demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and current living situation) and the two dependent variables (i.e., perceptions regarding use and perceptions regarding effects of use.) The main purpose of the study was to investigate community college students' perceptions of the use of social media and how those perceptions differ based on demographic characteristics.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites?

2. What are the perceptions of community college students' regarding the effects of the use of social media and social networking sites on their learning, GPA, and graduation at community colleges?
3. Are there relationships between perceptions of community college students regarding the use and effects of the use of social media and social networking sites based on their demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and current living situation)?

Table 1

Research Questions

Research Question	Instrument	Analysis Procedures
Perceptions regarding use	Survey items 6-10	Descriptive statistics (percentages)
Perceptions regarding effects of use	Survey items 11-15	Descriptive statistics (percentages)
Differences in perceptions based on demographic characteristics	Survey items 1-15	Correlation

Research Site

One community college in Mississippi was the research site for this study. This community college operates two campuses and two centers, each found in a nine-county district in Central Mississippi. This Mississippi community college is one of the 15

public community colleges in the state and evolved from a Mississippi County Agricultural High School. The enrollment on the campus is approximately 6,000 students. This community college was chosen because of its utilization of social media. According to the community college, their resources enable them to share what is happening on campus with the world. More importantly, the students, faculty, staff, parents, fans, and friends' voices are heard.

Population

All students currently enrolled at the college at the time of the study were asked to complete the survey. Response rates to surveys are often low, and by asking all students to participate, the researcher hoped to receive an adequate number of responses.

Instrumentation

A survey was used to analyze students' perceptions of the effects of the use of social networking sites. Survey questions related to social media were adapted from the following resources: Social Media Use Survey (Pew Internet, 2013) and Social Media Survey (2014). The researcher obtained permission from each survey's author to use a portion of his or her survey. This survey included five items designed to document students' demographic characteristics, five items designed to capture students' perceptions regarding the use of social media, and five items designed to capture students' perceptions regarding the effects of that use.

Data Collection Procedures

After approval was obtained from Mississippi State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; Appendix B), the researcher asked an administrator at the college to

email each student an email with a link to the survey. Students were made aware that participation was voluntary. Respondents were first routed to the informed consent form before beginning the survey. Once the form had been read and the students' age verified, respondents were able to access the survey instrument.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were generated to examine survey items in order to provide information about the percentages of participants who identified with each demographic characteristic as well as the percentages of participants who chose each answer to the ten items related to social media use and the effects of that use. Correlation was used to identify relationships between perceptions among participants and various demographic categories. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the survey responses. SPSS is a widely used program for statistical analysis in social science. Survey response data was first re-coded in the SPSS software, and then survey responses were aggregated and percentages calculated; these results were compared to the results from a similar survey to validate the study findings. Results were displayed in narrative, table, and graphic formats. The data collected from the participant survey were analyzed to gain an understanding about students' perceptions regarding the use of social media networking sites. This study examined the perceptions of the effect of students' use of social networking sites on their learning, GPA, and graduation. The positive consequences of having a better understanding of students' perceptions of the effects of social media use on college students' experiences assists community college personnel in having a well-rounded sense of how to work with students in this particular field of collegiate experience. Specifically, this study may help professionals in this field to

understand what social networking site communities and social networking sites are and how they function, the role they play in the college student experience, and how professionals can interact with students using social networking site communities.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites and the effect of that use on learning, GPA, and graduation as well as any differences in perceptions based on students demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and living situation). Data from 87 students were used for this study.

Demographic Data

All students enrolled at the community college at the time of the study were asked to participate; 87 students chose to participate, and the data from those 87 students were used for this study. Table 2 displays the frequency counts for selected variables. Ages of the students ranged from “18-19 years” (31.0%) to “25 and above” (36.8%). Most of the participants (81.6%) were female and most were sophomores (82.8%). The most common racial/ethnic groups were White/Caucasian (55.2%) and African-American/Black (37.9%).

Table 2

Frequency Counts for Selected Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age Group			
	18-19	27	31.0
	20-21	18	20.7
	22-24	10	11.5
	25 and above	32	36.8
Gender			
	Female	71	81.6
	Male	16	18.4
Class Status			
	Freshman	15	17.2
	Sophomore	72	82.8
Race/Ethnicity			
	African American/Black	33	37.9
	Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2.3
	Multiracial	4	4.6
	White/Caucasian	48	55.2

(*N* = 87)

Table 3 displays the frequency counts for the student's living situation sorted by the highest frequency. The most common was "I live with parent(s), relative(s), or

guardian(s)” (49.4%). The least common were “I live alone” (2.3%) and “I live with roommates who are not students” (2.3%).

Table 3

Frequency Counts for Living Situation Sorted by Highest Frequency

Living Situation	<i>n</i>	%
5d. I live with parent(s), relative(s), or guardian(s)	43	49.4
5e. I live with my husband/wife/domestic partner/significant other	25	28.7
5f. I live with my child/children	23	26.4
5b. I live with other students	9	10.3
5c. I live with roommates who are not students	2	2.3
5a. I live alone	2	2.3

(*N* = 87)

Note. Participants were allowed to endorse multiple responses.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was “What are the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites?” This question was answered using data from survey items 6-10. Data are reported in Tables 4 and 5. Most students (89.7%) had at least some online courses with the most common choice being a “mixture of online and face-to-face” (73.6%). Sixty-two percent reported that they used social media “more often” with another 25.3% reporting their use to be “often.” The preferred social media websites were “Facebook” (47.1%) and “Instagram” (37.9%). When asked about changes in importance of social media for them personally, 79.3% reported that the importance was either “as important” or “less important” than last year.

Table 4

Frequency Counts for Perceptions Regarding Use Variables

Variable	Category	n	%
Extent Online Coursework			
	Face-to-face	9	10.3
	Mixture of online and face-to face	64	73.6
	Online only	14	16.1
Use of Social Media			
	Seldom (once per month or less)	11	12.6
	Often (least once per week)	22	25.3
	More Often (at least one per day)	54	62.1
Preferred Social Media Website			
	Facebook	41	47.1
	Instagram	33	37.9
	Pinterest	4	4.6
	Other	9	10.3
Importance Compared to Last Year			
	Less Important	40	46.0
	As Important	29	33.3
	More Important	18	20.7

(N = 87)

Table 5 displays the frequency counts for the student's social media interaction partners sorted by the highest frequency. The most common were "close friends" (92.0%) and "family" (78.2%). The least common was "professors/teachers" (14.9%).

Table 5

Frequency Counts for Social Media Interaction Partner Sorted by Highest Frequency

Interaction Partner	<i>n</i>	%
9a. Close friends	80	92.0
9d. Family	68	78.2
9b. Classmates	44	50.6
9e. Partner/Lover	36	41.4
9f. Coworkers	30	34.5
9c. Professors/teachers	13	14.9

(*N* = 87)

Note. Participants were allowed to endorse multiple interaction partners.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was “What are the perceptions of community college students’ regarding the effects of the use of social media and social networking sites on their learning, GPA, and graduation at community colleges?” To answer this question, survey items 11-15 were used. Table 6 displays the frequency counts for the student’s perceptions regarding the effects of social media use sorted by the highest level of agreement. “Agreement” was defined as a survey response of either *agreed* or *strongly agreed*. The highest level of agreement was for item 13, “Social networking sites are an effective tool for e-learning (interacting with other students on a particular subject and sharing ideas)” (63.2%) while the lowest amount of agreement was for Item 14, “Social networking sites have positively affected my GPA” (32.2%).

Table 6

Frequency Counts for Perceptions Regarding Effects of Use Sorted by the Highest Level Of Agreement

Effect of Use	<i>n</i>	%
13. Social networking sites are an effective tool for e-learning (interacting with other students on a particular subject and sharing ideas)	55	63.2
12. Social networking sites help me academically in getting educational materials for my assignments or project work in my classes.	44	50.6
15. Social networking sites have been effective in supporting my progress toward graduation	34	39.1
11. The amount of time I spend on social media network sites has positively affected my learning (i.e., teamwork, discussions with peers/teachers, peer-to-peer interactions, activities outside of class)	32	36.8
14. Social networking sites have positively affected my GPA	28	32.2

(*N* = 87)

Note. Frequencies represent the number of participants who either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with each statement.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was “Are there relationships between perceptions of community college students regarding the use and effects of the use of social media and social networking sites with their demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and current living situation)?”

Cohen (1988) suggested some guidelines for interpreting the strength of linear correlations. He suggested that a weak correlation typically had an absolute value of $r = .10$ ($r^2 = 1\%$ of the variance explained), a moderate correlation typically had an absolute value of $r = .30$ ($r^2 = 9\%$ of the variance explained), and a strong correlation typically had an absolute value of $r = .50$ ($r^2 = 25\%$ of the variance explained).

Therefore, this chapter will primarily highlight those correlations that were of at least moderate strength to minimize the potential of numerous Type I errors stemming from interpreting and drawing conclusions based on potentially spurious correlations.

To answer this question, a series of Spearman rank-ordered correlations were calculated comparing the 10 perception questions with seven demographic factors (age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, live with parents, live with spouse/partner, and live with child/children). For the resulting 112 correlations, 22 were significant at the $p < .05$ level and eight were of moderate strength based on the Cohen (1988) criteria. Older students were: (a) more likely to use Facebook ($r_s = .39, p = .001$); (b) less likely to use Instagram ($r_s = -.46, p = .001$); and (c) less likely to use social media to connect with close friends ($r_s = -.30, p = .004$). Caucasian students were more likely to use social media more often ($r_s = .38, p = .001$). Those who lived with their parents were less likely to use Facebook ($r_s = -.34, p = .002$) but more likely to use Instagram ($r_s = .32, p = .003$). Students who lived with their spouse/partner were more likely to use Facebook ($r_s = .32, p = .002$). In addition, students with children were more likely to take online classes ($r_s = .39, p = .001$).

In conclusion, this study used data from 87 students to explore the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites

and the effect of that use on learning, GPA, and graduation as well as any differences in perceptions based on students demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and living situation). Research Question 1 (perceptions regarding use) found most students to use social media often or more often (see Table 4) with their most common social media interaction partners being their close friends and/or family (see Table 5). Research Question 2 (perceptions regarding the effects of use) found that 63.2% agreed that social networking sites were an effective tool for e-learning, but 32.2% believed that social networking had positively affected their GPA (see Table 6). Research Question 3 (relationships based on demographic characteristics) found relationships between perception and usage based on age, race/ethnicity, and living situation. In the final chapter, these findings will be compared to the literature, conclusions and implications will be drawn, and a series of recommendations will be suggested.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, comparisons of results are made to the literature, and conclusions, limitations, and a series of recommendations are offered. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites and the effect of that use on learning, GPA, and graduation as well as relationships between perceptions of students' demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and living situation).

Summary

The first chapter of this study provided information on how social media is reshaping the way college students communicate within their college community. College students are using social media to connect, create, and generate real and virtual online communities. Therefore, higher education practitioners have developed an interest in learning how to engage and motivate students to be more active learners using social networking sites.

The three research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of community college students regarding the use of social media and social networking sites?

2. What are the perceptions of community college students' regarding the effects of the use of social media and social networking sites on their learning, GPA, and graduation at community colleges?
3. Are there relationships between perceptions of community college students regarding the use and effects of the use of social media and social networking sites with their demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, class status, race/ethnicity, and current living situation)?

The second chapter provided a review of the literature on social media usage on college students, the effects of use, and usage in academics and learning in community colleges. The literature review included current literature of community colleges finding ways to use social media to reach out to students. The chapter included research that illustrated the role of social media in colleges and universities and among students.

The studies included in chapter two provided findings that students can spend a great deal of time using social networking sites such as Facebook and may have different levels of engagement. Liu (2010) investigated students' use of different social media tools and their attitudes and perceptions towards these tools.

Chapter three provided the research design, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures used in this study. This quantitative, cross-sectional research design included data collected from one community college in Mississippi. All students currently enrolled at the college at the time of the study were asked to complete the survey. There were 87 respondents to the survey. SPSS was utilized to analyze the survey responses.

Chapter four provided a presentation of the survey results and data analysis. Data were analyzed and organized based on the three research questions that guided the study. Descriptive statistics were generated to examine survey items in order to provide information about the percentages of participants who identified with each demographic characteristics. In addition, percentages of participants who chose each answer to the ten items related to social media use and the effects of that use were examined. There were tables with survey items, frequencies, and percentages pertaining to research questions in this chapter.

This final chapter contains the summary, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study. The study is summarized within the context of each of the research questions, and conclusions include comparisons to relevant literature. Recommendations for practitioners and policymakers, as well as for future research, are addressed at the end of chapter five.

Summary of Findings Regarding Social Media Use

Survey item six asked participants' perceptions about the format in which they have taken courses; most students had at least some online courses (16.1%) with the most common choice being a "mixture of online and face-to-face" (73.6%). Current research has shown that "according to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of undergraduate students taking at least one online class grew from 8 to 20 percent" (Cavanagh, 2012, p. 1). Also, research has shown that approximately 5.6 million students enrolled in at least one online course during fall 2009, and nearly 30% of all higher education students now take at least one course online

(Cavanagh, 2012), Clearly, the percentage of students taking one or more courses online is trending upwards.

Survey items seven and eight indicated that social media is used more often (62.1%), and Facebook (47.1%) is the preferred social media website. The findings of this study suggested that many college students use some form of social networking site. According to Junco (2011), students are highly involved with Facebook. Almost half of the 100 million active Facebook users are members of a college network (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). The current study indicated that Facebook and Instagram were the social networking sites of choice, with 47.1% of community college students using Facebook and 37.9% using Instagram. This finding concurred with researchers Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickhur (2010) who found that Facebook is the most popular form of social media. Responses to survey item nine indicated that when using social networking sites, most respondents reported that they interact with close friends (92.0%) and family (78.2%). Staying connected to people they do not talk to or see often is important for the relationships in order to maintain contact and connection. Additionally, social media sites are used to share information, news articles, photos, resources, and links. The least common people participants interacted with were professors/teachers (14.9%). The results of this item could vary; participants may have been active users only with their professors/teachers in their majors, while others may have interacted with professors/teachers during class time.

Survey item 10 indicated that 46% of participants, when asked about changes in the importance of social media for them personally, reported that social media was less important than a year ago. Current research reported that many students report no desire

to reduce the amount of time they spend online, while some students recognize that the Internet causes them to waste time and may lead to a decline in both the quality and the size of their social circles (Clark, 2004). Only 36.8% of respondents indicated the amount of time they spend on social media network sites has positively affected their learning. Furthermore, there were no other references found to demonstrate its relative importance to users over the past year.

Summary of Findings Regarding the Effect of Social Media Use

Survey items 11-15 discussed the effect of social media use. Only 36.8% of respondents indicated that the amount of time they spend on social media networking sites has positively affected their learning. Current literature has reported that the effect of social media use will depend on the type of social networking sites the student is using (Napoleon, 2013). If the student uses the internet for the purpose of leisure activity that interferes with academic pursuits, it will affect the student academic performance negatively (Napoleon, 2013).

Over half of participants (50.6%) agreed or strongly agreed when asked if social networking sites help them get educational materials for assignments or project work in classes. Many participants (63.2%) indicated that social networking sites are an effective tool for e-learning (interacting with other students on a particular subject or sharing ideas). Researchers found that academic clubs, groups, class announcements, and invitations to academic engagements are all being fostered by students and for students (Sisson & Wiley, 2007). Social media sites are convenient to communicate with people around the world. The online social networking sites have been an outlet to exchange messages and share links, information, and resources. In addition, social networking sites

are sources where people can stay socially connected to their friends and family. Only 32.2% of participants indicated that social networking sites had positively affected their GPA.

Some researchers would argue that the negative effects of social networking sites outweigh the positive effects. For example, when a student studies or searches their course material online, they get attracted to these sites to kill the boredom in their study time, diverting their attention from their work. Other negative effects of social networking sites may be: (1) Reduced learning and research capabilities: students have started relying more on the information that is accessible easily on social networking sites. This may reduce their learning and research capabilities. (2) Multitasking: students who get involved in activities on social media sites while studying may see a reduction in their focus of attention. This may cause a reduction in their academic performance and concentration and affect their ability to study well. (3) Time wasted: students, while searching and studying online, get attracted to using social media sites and sometimes forget why they are using the internet. Sometimes students are not able to deliver their work in the specified time frame. (4) Low grades: students get low grades in school due to lack of the desired information and writing skills.

However, the positive effects of social networking sites are that they provide more information and more knowledge, as well as better opportunities to use what is learned. Social media has improved our ability to absorb information. Community colleges are using social media for a lot of good reasons: engaging communities, engaging alumni, and engaging current students. Various researchers have studied users' purposes in using social networking sites. Stutzman (2006) stated that social networking

sites can be used for passing time, learning about other people, maintaining social relations, and following changes at the university. On the other hand, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) explained that social networking sites can be oriented towards work-related contexts, establishing new relationships, or reaching those with shared interests.

Summary Findings on Demographics

There were relationships between perception and demographic characteristics (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, and current living situation). The findings were the following. Older students were: (a) more likely to use Facebook; (b) less likely to use Instagram; and (c) less likely to use social media to connect with close friends. Caucasian students were more likely to use social media more often. Those who lived with their parents were less likely to use Facebook but more likely to use Instagram. Students who lived with their spouse/partner were more likely to use Facebook. In addition, students with children were more likely to take online classes. Greene (2008) indicated part-time students are significantly less likely to interact with instructors, make class presentations, or work with other students in or outside of class. Age also factors into the involvement of community college students. First year students who are above the age of 25 engage in more purposeful activities than younger students, and the correlation between involvement and the quality of relationships is consequently higher for older students (Gibson & Slate, 2010).

Facebook, one of the most commonly used social networking sites, was studied with a focus on gender and usage of social networking sites. The study showed that most of the participants were 18-25 (74.4%) and were university students (73.6%; Mazman & Usluel, 2010). The majority of male users were undergraduate students, whereas most of

the graduate students who used Facebook were females. Females used Facebook for maintaining existing relationships, academic purposes, and following an agenda at higher rates than did males; males used it for making new relationships at a rate higher than did females. The findings showed that males use social networking sites mostly for making new friends and relationships while females used it mostly for finding their old friends and keeping in touch with the existing ones. The reasons for these findings could be explained by the possibility that females tend to hide their identities and personal information to keep their privacy in an Internet environment. Research shows that females do not disclose themselves to people they do not really know because of social pressure and traditional social roles associated with women (Fallows, 2005). Similarly, this study found that social influence on the decisions of females is higher than personal decisions, while personal decisions are more dominant over social influence in males (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). Moreover, social networking sites have millions of users whose numbers increase rapidly. The usage of social networking sites may explain the important role of these sites in people's daily lives, with the 18-25 age group being the main users.

It is not yet clear that social networking sites have been segmented to one gender over the other. Differences have always existed between men and women using social networking sites. According to Carranza (2012), there are differences between men and women's brains: (1) Emotions. Women typically have a larger deep limbic system than men, which allows them to be more in touch with their feelings and better able to express them. (2) Human relationships. Women tend to communicate more effectively than men, focusing on how to create a solution that works for the group, talking through issues, and

utilizing non-verbal cues such as tone, emotion, and empathy, whereas men tend to be more task-oriented, less talkative, and more isolated. Men have a more difficult time understanding emotions that are not explicitly verbalized, while women tend to intuit emotions and emotional cues. (3) Left brain vs. both hemispheres. Men tend to process better in the left hemisphere of the brain while women tend to process equally well between the two hemispheres. This difference explains why men are generally stronger with left-brain activities and approach problem-solving from a task-oriented perspective while women typically solve problems more creatively and are more aware of feelings while communicating.

Limitations

First, there could have been a more equal gender distribution. Of participants, 81.6% were females and only 18.4% were males. Also, more freshmen participants would have added to the breath of the research; participants included 17.2% freshmen and 82.8% sophomores. This could have been influenced by when the survey was given to the students since many of the students attending the institution in the summer were likely sophomores. The use of more than one institution could have provided more generalizable results as could a longer time frame for participation. Other limitations could be the number of participants, the survey methods, and a possible lack of reflective responses from the participants.

Implications for Future Study

Future studies could focus on why Facebook and Instagram have created such a popular phenomenon compared to other social networking sites. Since there are high

numbers of usage for both social networking sites, it would be interesting to understand why people use these sites so frequently. Another area of research worth pursuing is the usage of social media sites in the age group of 20-24. In addition, further research on students who did interact with professors or teachers in their majors may be useful to the higher education community. Lastly, there should be more research done on gender and usage of social networking sites to better understand the effects on males and females using these sites.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policymakers

Today, community college students across the US have embraced social media networking sites. This research study indicated that social media has value in delivering information to students. However, the significance of social media for other purposes, such as student success in college, is not clear. More research is needed to continue to examine ways social media is used by students in community colleges. The following are recommendations to integrate social media into higher education: (1) Offer free webinars and other training opportunities for staff, administrators, and students. (2) Meet students where they are, and meet the needs of the students. Teachers and professors can use surveys in their classrooms to see if social networking sites are helpful or useful in teaching and learning. (3) Administrators, professors or staff can create a strategic plan to define primary goals and objectives in using social media for their schools/classrooms. For example, find ways to determine if social media will be used to increase retention or graduation rates. (4) Network and collaborate with the community in that particular area, which will provide resources to be use to accomplish goals, to assist with costs of various strategies, and provide ways staff and faculty can be involved. (5) Administrators and

staff should maintain privacy and confidentiality, developing guidelines and regulations, to protect the university/school (Heiberger & Junco, 2009).

Conclusion

The present research suggests that social networking sites have created a phenomenon over the past decade. Facebook and Instagram have emerged as the most popular sites and have continued to grow in popularity. These sites create new ways of communication with friends and family and also influence students' learning. Social networking sites also offer new and innovative ways to communicate with other students in a quick manner. In addition, students are using social media sites at increasing rates and visiting them quite frequently. This study makes an important contribution in understanding community college students' use of social media and its effect on the use of learning.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY

Dear Student:

I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University. I am conducting a research for my dissertation study, and I am asking all students at your community college to complete a brief survey about their use of social media. Please take time to complete the survey. There are no correct or incorrect responses, only your much-needed information. Please respond to all survey items as best you can according to your current thoughts and actions.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your current age?

- Under 18 [please do not participate in study]
- 18-19
- 20-21
- 22-24
- 25 and above

2. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender

3. What is your class status?

- Freshman
- Sophomore

4. What is your race or ethnicity?

- African American/Black
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Multiracial
- Native American/American Indian
- White/Caucasian

5. Which of the following are applicable to your living situation? (Check all that apply)

- I live alone
- I live with other students
- I live with roommates who are not students
- I live with parent(s), relative(s), or guardian(s)
- I live with my husband/wife/domestic partner/significant other
- I live with my child/children

Social Media Use Questions

- 6. In what format have you taken college courses?**
Online only
Face-to-face only
Mixture of online and face-to-face
- 7. Do you ever use social media?**
More often (at least once per day)
Often (least once per week)
Seldom (once per month or less)
Never [Thank you for your time; please do not complete the rest of the survey].
- 8. What is your preferred social media website?**
Facebook
LinkedIn
Twitter
Instagram
Pinterest
Other (please specify) _____
- 9. When you use social networking sites, who are you interacting with?
(Choose all that apply)**
Close friends
Classmates
Professors/teachers
Family
Boyfriend or Girlfriend/Spouse/Significant Other
Coworkers
- 10. Thinking about the impact of social networking sites on your life overall, would you say that over the last year social networking sites have become MORE important to you, LESS important to you, or that they are about as important as they were a year ago?**
More important
Less important
As important
I have used social networking sites less than one year

Effects of Social Media Use Questions

- 11. The amount of time I spend on social media network sites has positively affected my learning (i.e., teamwork, discussions with peers/teachers, peer-to-peer interactions, activities outside of class)?**
- Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree
- 12. Social networking sites help me academically in getting educational materials for my assignments or project work in my classes?**
- Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree
- 13. Social networking sites are an effective tool for e-learning (interacting with other students on a particular subject and sharing ideas)?**
- Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree
- 14. Social networking sites have positively affected my GPA?**
- Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree
- 15. Social networking sites have been effective in supporting my progress toward graduation?**
- Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL

Protocol Title: The Effects of Social Media Use on Community College Students

Protocol Number: 15-209

Principal Investigator: Ms. Lakicha Montgomery

Date of Determination: 6/5/2015

Qualifying Exempt Category: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Attachments: 15-209 - Stamped Consent

Dear Ms. Montgomery:

The Human Research Protection Program has determined the above referenced project exempt from IRB review. Your project is contingently approved pending the receipt of a permission letter from appropriate contact at the study site. You may not begin data collection until we acknowledge receipt of this permission letter.

Please note the following:

- Retain a copy of this correspondence for your records.
- An approval stamp is required on all informed consents. You must use the exact wording of the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.
- Only the MSU staff and students named on the application are approved as MSU investigators and/or key personnel for this study.

- The approved study will expire on 12/31/2016, which was the completion date indicated on your application. If additional time is needed, submit a continuation request. (SOP 01-07 Continuing Review of Approved Applications)
- Any modifications to the project must be reviewed and approved by the HRPP prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project.
- Per university requirement, all research-related records (e.g. application materials, letters of support, signed consent forms, etc.) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least 3 years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under the Mississippi State University's OHRP Federalwide Assurance #FWA00000203. All forms and procedures can be found on the HRPP website: www.orc.msstate.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at kmyhand@orc.msstate.edu or call [662-325-3294](tel:662-325-3294).

Finally, we would greatly appreciate your feedback on the HRPP approval process. Please take a few minutes to complete our survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PPM2FBP>.

Sincerely,

Katie Myhand
Assistant Compliance Administrator

cc: Stephanie B. King, Advisor

Good morning Lakicha,

I apologize for the delay in response. Thanks so much for submitting this permission letter for your IRB file #15-209. You have fulfilled all contingencies for approval and may begin your research study effective immediately. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns throughout your project. Be sure to retain a copy of this email for your records.

All the best,

Katie Myhand

Asst. Compliance Administrator

Office of Research Compliance

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