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December 6, 2021

Final Secondary Research

1. Introduction

As COVID-19 continues to impact educational institutions, communication, related to the pandemic and the subsequent vaccine, has been crucial to maintain students and staff healthy and safe (Johnson, 2021). Choosing what platforms to employ communication has been a challenge for various institutions (Inside Higher Ed, 2020). The most crucial elements in keeping their publics informed have been to employ quick and accurate information as it is received (Johnson, 2021). This has been done through several outlets. Many include the university's own resources but many have also been through social media platforms, specifically, Instagram (Inside Higher Ed, 2020). This platform has been chosen by various institutions to provide information to its students and staff (Inside Higher Ed, 2020). Instagram is one of the most popular choices of social media as a communication platform (Pew Research Center et al., 2021).

Universities should make the commitment to communicate clearly and in a timely manner, says Johnson (2021). The students' stress and anxiety are alleviated by concise messages, which are considerate of their time and requirements (Johnson, 2021).

2. Rationale/Literature Review

2.1. Colleges and social media

Most college students use Instagram as their main tool to connect with other people (Knight-McCord et al., n.d.). The second most popular social media among college students are Snapchat and Facebook (Knight-McCord et al., n.d.). College students prefer Instagram because it allows them to post and see photos and videos (Knight-McCord et al., n.d.). In general, they don't prioritize social media platforms which may help develop their professional network, such as the platform, LinkedIn (Knight-McCord et al., n.d.). Instagram targets a young and diverse audience (Salomon, 2017). Furthermore, the audience of Instagram allows the platform to be an asset for colleges (Salomon, 2017). The use of Instagram by colleges can be an effective means to reach their undergraduate students. Undergraduate students are very impacted when their colleges post photos and post about topics that raise their attention (Salomon, 2017). This knowledge can be used in classes and by colleges in order to communicate more effectively and encourage further interactions between the faculty, the staff and the students (Knight-McCord et al., n.d.).

For example, using social media is useful for college libraries (Burkhardt, 2017). It is a means to provide information about the library and to encourage interaction with the students (Burkhardt, 2017). Effective communication in libraries' social media includes a link to the website of the college, some information about the community, some feedback, and answers to the commentaries. Maintaining constant communication is important, the relationship between the owner of the account and the follower should be seen as a friendship (Burkhardt, 2017).

Social media is a part of most college students' routines. In fact, only 11 percent of college students had never used social media in 2008 (Lewis, 2009). Thus, being present on social media is very important for college students as well as the students who turn toward social media as their first means of getting the news. Those individuals tend to be very receptive to social media as a communication tool (Lewis, 2009). Colleges use social media for different purposes, for example, they use it to recruit their potential new students (Lewis, 2009). Social media has a real impact on college student life as students have a positive perception about social media. Platforms have improved engagement and collaboration between the students, but also between the students and their professors and the campus's staff (Mbodila, 2014).

2.2 Colleges' utilization of social media for communicating health information to students

Examining the true effectiveness of social media on communication, a study by Prybutok & Ryan (2015) found that 18- to 30-year-old college students have social health information source preferences, reasons for seeking health information on the Internet, and message design factors that improve their perception of site and message credibility. The preference to find health information through social media sites can be utilized by health educators to present important risk management/disease prevention information to college students. Not only do college students prefer a social media interface, social media is advocated as a prime channel through which to reach this population with health-related messaging (Shi, Poorisat, & Salmon, 2018). Educational institutions, with an understanding of student's habits, may find social media to be a beneficial medium for health-related messages (Paige et al., 2017). According to Waters et al. (2011), colleges, specifically campus health centers, have begun to utilize social media for

health communication, for initiatives such as alcohol use, widespread pandemics, and wellness practices. Health risk communication and social media use were important in determining psychological symptoms, especially health anxiety in college-aged students (Li et al., 2020). Paige et al. (2017) points out that college students tend to depend on social media platforms, specifically Instagram, for all their health information. Those with lower electronic health literacy, or the ability to understand health information disseminated through technology, are more likely to utilize social media for their health information (Paige et al., 2017). According to a study done by Waters et al. (2011), Facebook is found to be used in correlation with campus websites to provide college-specific health news as well as external resources, such as news reports. About half of these health messages on Facebook include timely materials and an identification of a mission and audience (Waters et al., 2011). While most campuses provide information on their upcoming events (Waters et al., 2011). Additionally, an experimental study conducted by Arceneaux and Dinu (2018) showed that college students' information retention is greater on the visual platform, Instagram, rather than the text-based platform, Twitter.

2.3 Use of Instagram

With roughly one billion monthly active users, Instagram belongs to the most popular social networks worldwide. The social photo sharing app is especially popular in India and in the United States (Statista, 2021). Instagram is the fastest growing social media network globally (Sheldon, 2016). The younger generation actively uses Instagram due to its attractive and enhanced visual functions (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). These visual features allow Instagram users to share, view, and comment on photos, videos, and stories; publish their daily lives, memories, and emotional status as visuals or in texts; make a friend or continue existing

relationships; and interact with the other people from all around the world (Lee et al., 2015; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). Though the social network is based in visual elements, it encompasses the centrality and specificity of its visual identity in shaping the platform's culture and functionality (Leaver, 2020). Instagram sets a tone for cultural practices, norms and genres in society (Leaver, 2020). Instagram creates a culture with the rule of pictures first, texts second which makes it unique (Lee et al., 2015) Instagram is now being used for more purposes and communication, whether commercial or social, has developed to be personal and intimate for the user (Leaver, 2020).

3. Research Questions

RQ 1: Did colleges use Instagram to communicate COVID-19 information?

- a. Did the posts feature keywords related to COVID-19 and the vaccine in the caption?
- b. Did the colleges use static images to communicate COVID-19 information?
 - i. Did these static images feature real elements?
 - ii. Did these static images feature digitally developed elements?
 - iii. Did these static images include information related to preventative measures regarding COVID-19?
- c. Did the colleges use video to communicate COVID-19 information ?
 - i. Did these videos feature real elements?
 - ii. Did these videos feature digitally developed elements?

- iii. Did these videos include information related to preventative measures regarding COVID-19?
- d. Did the colleges use a combination of both video and static image to communicate COVID-19 information?
 - i. Did the video and static image combination post feature real elements?
 - ii. Did the video and static image combination post feature digitally developed elements?
 - iii. Did the video and static image combination post include information related to preventative measures regarding COVID-19?

Link to Qualtrics Survey: https://flagler.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0kvnbcGgBJzk5o2

Link to drive:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1KZ3zzpiWiXfOjL0uwaH1bRnbOkNomtXk?usp=sharing>

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