

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK WALL POSTINGS ON THE UNIVERSITY OF
HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 COLLEGE RECRUITMENT HISTORY AND ADMISSIONS FUNNEL.....	5
2.2 FACEBOOK BACKGROUND AND COLLEGE RECRUITMENT.....	6
2.3 EMERGING ADULTS AND SOCIAL NETWORK SITES DATA.....	9
2.4 FACEBOOK AND GENDER.....	10
2.5 FACEBOOK AND PROFILE PHOTO.....	11
2.6 FACEBOOK AND INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT.....	12
2.7 FACEBOOK AND WALL POSTS.....	15
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD	
3.1 PARTICIPANTS.....	21
3.2 PROCEDURE.....	21
3.3 DATA DESCRIPTION.....	24
3.4 DATA ANALYSIS.....	24
3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	25
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	26
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS	
5.1 DISCUSSION.....	35
5.2 LIMITATION.....	39
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH	
6.1 CONCLUSION.....	41
6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	42
REFERENCES.....	44

TABLE

Table 1: Wall posting question type categories.....	24
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FIGURES

Figure 1: UHM Office of Admissions Facebook wall page.....	21
Figure 2: Typical wall posting on UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page.....	22
Figure 3: Total number of Facebook wall postings per semester, Spring 2010-Fall 2011.....	25
Figure 4: Gender distribution of participants and wall postings on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook Page.....	27
Figure 5: Participation rate of identified groups using the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page.....	28
Figure 6: User Groups Identified and Gender.....	29
Figure 7: Types of profile photos identified on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page.....	30
Figure 8: Geographic location of users based on Facebook wall posting context.....	31
Figure 9: Geographic location of users and gender.....	31
Figure 10: Percentage of question types identified from wall posting context.....	32
Figure 11: Number of admission-type questions based on wall posting context.....	33
Figure 12: Number of admission-type questions of wall postings by gender.....	34
Figure 13: Number of frequent users and wall postings, Spring 2010-Fall 2011.....	35
Figure 14: Number of frequent postings by gender.....	35

ABSTRACT

Facebook has revolutionized how colleges and universities communicate with prospective students. Public relations aid in relational-building and marketing engages the target audience. Media Richness Theory states that a medium high in richness has the ability to clarify and change understanding, provides instantaneous feedback, and has a personal focus.

This exploratory study describes *who* is visiting and *what* types of information users are seeking on the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Office of Admissions Facebook page. Wall postings (n=285) and profile photos from two academic years were analyzed. Findings show more women participate online than men, and transfer students and high school students frequent the site. Information-seeking users inquired the most about application and admissions requirements. Interestingly, 80% of users did not include their geographic location, but of those who did were from Hawai‘i and the United States Pacific West Coast. Recommendations for future research include analyzing the entire conversation between the user and office of admissions, and comparing trade school and major university Facebook pages.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapid growth of technology and the Internet, social networking sites (SNS) have transformed the college recruitment and admissions process. While high school presentations and campus visits and tours remain the top choices for recruiting prospective students, Web 2.0 is rewriting the rules of college recruitment for both students and admission officers. Web 2.0 has emerged as a place where users are active, co-creators of content and social networking is mainstream. Prospective students look to the Web and social media as a source for information and support while admission officers are searching for and adopting innovative recruitment methods and tools to attract and interact with prospective students.

Instead of attempting to change students' behavior, admissions officers are going to where they are. Prospective students may not be visiting the institution's web site every day, but are likely to be checking their Facebook page. At the end of 2009, 75% of online adults ages 18-24 had a profile on a SNS (Lenhart, 2009). Popular SNS Facebook had 500 million active users who spend over 700 billion minutes per month on the site (Facebook, 2010). Founded in 2004, the SNS allows users to build a profile, share and connect with "friends" through wall postings and comments and chat online in real time. Along with the profile, users are allowed to include a single photo of their choice which is tagged with every posting and comment.

However, before colleges and universities adopt and invest in Facebook, Admission officers may be advised that SNS and college recruitment are connected to a communication theory and strategies from public relations and marketing.

Facebook is a higher education institution's 'face' serving as a public relations blessing or nightmare. Public relations focus on maintaining and promoting an organization's image. Public relations objectives include building awareness, creating interest, providing information, stimulating demand, and reinforcing the brand. Current trends in public relations are 1) blogs, 2) discussion forums, 3) RSS feeds, and 4) podcasting.

Strategic public relations is when the desired outcome contributes to the overall success of the organization's goals and objectives. To be successful, the audience must receive, pay attention, understand, believe, remember, and act upon the message. Strategic public relations objectives aim to purposefully affect the audience's knowledge, attitude, or

behavior that are interdependent to one another. Public relations officers need to set goals and objectives for the campaign, as well as have a plan of action on which tactics to use to achieve the objectives.

Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have become important tools in public relations for an organization. Wright & Hinson (2007) examined the impact of new technologies on public relations and said that social media has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by offering dynamic new media used to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences. In addition to public relations, marketing plays a role in the recruitment process.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, admissions officers began to borrow concepts, ideas, and research techniques from the for-profit and not-for-profit marketing literature. Kotler (1975) wrote the book *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations* which became a primary resource for many admissions professionals. Kotler argued that marketing is a generic concept that could be applied to all organizations. In 1983, Litten, Sullivan, and Brodigan wrote *Applying Market Research in College Admissions*, in which they explained how admissions recruitment efforts could be strengthened through the use of market research. Since then, publications have appeared on topics ranging from the use of focus group research in college admissions (Bers, 1987) to handbooks on admissions marketing (Dehne, Brodigan, and Topping, 1991) and admissions recruitment strategies (Abrahamson and Hossler, 1990).

Social media is one of the fastest growing trends in marketing today. Facebook provides a broad platform for communicating with prospective and current students. Prospective students can learn a breadth of information about a college or university simply by logging onto the school's Facebook page and reading postings. The Facebook Ad feature provides an additional technique for attracting students to a school and moving them through the admissions process.

There has not been a better time to reach the target audience and market to prospective students. Marketing is the "activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" according to the *American Marketing Association* website. Relevant, timely and engaging content are keys in any marketing campaign. A target market

is a group of customers that a business decides to focus its marketing efforts towards (Kurtz & Boone, 2010).

Admission offices need to appropriately utilize Facebook as a marketing tool to promote the college or university's brand. Overall, marketing allows for an organization to communicate and engage with its target audience. Does a school brochure or Admissions Facebook page attract more prospective students? Which has the most influence in a student's enrollment decision: e-mail or Facebook communication? How a school communicates and chooses a particular medium may affect the decision-making process of prospective students. Given the emphasis on communication concerns, Media Richness theory is an appropriate theoretical line of inquiry.

Based on Contingency theory and Information Processing theory (Galbraith, 1977), Media Richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) is the amount of information transmitted in a given time and the effectiveness of media for resolving ambiguity and uncertainty. The medium has an impact on its message. The message can be high or low in richness and is based on instant feedback, personal focus, multiple communication, and language variety. The more equivocal or ambiguous a task is the media needs to be high in richness. Technologies have different levels of richness. Communication that can overcome different frames of reference and clarify ambiguous issues to promote understanding in a timely manner are considered more rich.

Although studies support that Admission offices are increasingly incorporating the use of SNSs with recruitment strategies to attract and increase engagement with these tech-savvy students there is no concrete evidence about a school's social media presence and enrollment. A large fan base and engaged Facebook communities may increase exposure, but not necessarily influence a student's decision to attend the school.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to find the purpose, use, and creators of wall postings on the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) Admissions Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/manoaadmissions>). This study seeks to determine *who* is visiting the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page and *what* types and topics of information visitors are seeking. Selected wall postings are dated from January 2010 to September 2011. This time period will capture postings from four semesters.

This study aims to expand on existing research by analyzing users and information sought on the UHM Office of Admission's Facebook page. Previous Facebook research focused primarily on social media use, photos, narcissism, engagement, and social capital. This study intends to bring together key findings from previous literature with the current analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of current and future challenges posed by admission officers' use of social media during the recruitment process. Findings are intended to aid the UHM Office of Admissions to reveal who is visiting the Facebook page so to improve communication, ultimately to better serve and interact with them. In addition, the study reveals specifically what prospective students and stakeholders are inquiring about allowing the UHM Office of Admissions to tailor the Facebook experience.

The second chapter will review literature from Facebook and the impact of SNSs on the college recruitment process, as well as present the study's research questions. The third chapter will explain the study's method followed by the fourth chapter presenting the study's findings and results. Chapter five will discuss the results compared to previous studies and include the study's limitation. The conclusion will summarize the study and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The University of Hawai‘i (UH) system is comprised of 10 campuses in which the UH at Manoa (UHM) is the flagship campus. Founded in 1907, the UHM is a land-sea-and-space grant research institution known for its research in Astronomy, Oceanography, Pacific Islands, Asian studies, and cancer. The campus attracts students from around the world. In 2011 there were 14,257 undergraduate students and 5,912 graduate and professional students. More women attend the school over men with a ratio of 56 to 44. A majority of the student body identify themselves as Asian (46%), followed by Caucasian (26%), Hawaiian (10%) and other races averaging less than 10%.

The Achieving Our Destiny: The University of Hawaii at Manoa 2011-2015 Strategic Plan states technology is valued:

...effective use of technology is inherently linked to the value of sustainability and the growth of community. Smart technologies will allow us [the University of Hawaii at Manoa] to emerge as a stronger and more organizationally sustainable campus and will expand our connections locally and globally (Achieving Our Destiny, pp. 3).

Student recruitment is not directly stated in the Strategic Plan however utilizing technology on all levels is covered. The UHM initiated a campus-wide social media marketing campaign to increase recruitment of Hawaii high school graduates, Native Hawaiians, international students, and transfer students.

Each UH campus admissions office creates its own campaigns targeted at prospective applicants whereby the UHM employs SNS sites Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for promotion and marketing. This chapter will state the study’s research questions supported by literature related to Facebook and SNSs in college recruitment. Areas presented will be history of college recruiting, Facebook beginnings and its permanence in society and college recruitment, previous studies related to Facebook and gender, photos, and wall posts.

2.1 College Recruitment History and Admissions Funnel

Admission and recruitment practices have evolved over the past 400 years due to historical and demographic influences. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 and the baby boom, in conjunction with land-grant and state-supported universities, increased enrollment and brought an affordable college education closer to more people. College

enrollment and capacity expanded, but declined in the 1980s resulting in modern recruitment practices that were adopted from marketing practices.

This leads to the recruitment funnel (StateUniversity.com, n.d.) that is at the foundation of college recruiting. Known similarly as the Freshman Admission funnel it starts with a high number of inquiries then narrows to and moves toward application, and ultimately a smaller number of matriculated students. Admissions officers design efforts to move prospective students from casual interest to enrollment with the college. This early stage in the process is starting earlier and lasting longer. As a student progresses through the funnel, a variety of recruitment and marketing techniques are employed including: direct mail, campus visits, e-mail, high school presentations, and college fairs. In a traditional college recruitment funnel the areas are suspects, prospects, applicants, admits, enrolled, returnees, and graduates.

The funnel can be broken down to three main areas of recruitment--seek, engage, and retain. Facebook is a tool for seeking potential applicants and can be a platform for question and answer. The second area is engagement where colleges need to encourage social engagement and interaction with prospective students. Lastly, retaining prospective students can be achieved through creating a community and allowing interaction with them.

2.2 Facebook Background and College Recruitment

Facebook allows users to connect, communicate, and co-create online. The SNS was originally limited to college students, but since then has expanded to include a high school version (increasing its target market) and communities for commercial organizations. In 2006, Facebook was used at over 2,000 United States colleges (Cassidy, 2006). By 2010, Facebook reported having more than 500 million active users generating more than 1.6 billion page views a day (Facebook, 2011).

A Facebook page is defined as a “public profile that enables business and organizations to share their stories and connect with Facebook users (Facebook, 2012). Facebook is a social channel intended to connect people with similar interests from near and far. The service’s mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (www.facebook.com). A Facebook page is a free public profile that enables someone or an organization to share photos, links and videos, exchange messages, post comments, join groups, and to connect with users.

Much of the existing academic research on Facebook has focused on identity presentation and privacy concerns (Gross and Acquisti, 2005; Stutzman, 2006). Looking at the amount of information Facebook participants provide about themselves, the relatively open nature of the information, and the lack of privacy controls enacted by the users, Gross and Acquisti (2005) argue that users may be putting themselves at risk both offline (e.g., stalking) and online (e.g., identity theft). Other recent Facebook research examines student perceptions of instructor presence and self-disclosure (Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007), temporal patterns of use (Golder, Wilkinson, & Huberman, 2007), and the relationship between profile structure and friendship articulation (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007).

College students use Facebook to maintain relationships (Ellison, et. al, 2006). Facebook is much more populated with college students than any other constituency and has far more college-age students than MySpace. Undergraduates are the largest users of Facebook.

Social networking sites may influence prospective students' decision to enroll in a college or university. A SNS may be the critical link that helps prospective students feel connected to an institution and solidifies their admissions choice. Implementing rich multimedia content that is consistently up-to-date will keep visitors coming back, and managing it can create a powerful social networking experience and recruitment tool.

In 2007, Noel-Levitz estimated that among 18- to 24-year-olds using social networking, 39% use only Facebook, 45% use Facebook and one other site, and 12% use Facebook plus two other sites. In addition, 61% of students thought it was a good idea for colleges and universities to put up SNSs to promote their programs, campuses, and students. Social networking sites have undoubtedly emerged as a powerful communication tool and provide institutions with a new opportunity to better communicate with students on their own turf.

Noel-Levitz (2010) surveyed 1,000 students and found that 76% use Facebook. Respondents affirmed that social media are becoming important parts of e-recruitment campaigns. The study found that 33% of students searched for schools on SNS, 74% thought schools should have a presence on social media sites, with 80% of those students saying they wanted both official and unofficial content through social media, and 67% deemed it

appropriate for admissions counselors to contact them through social media. The study concluded that one way to have more control over a strong connection with admitted students is to create a social network. The students connect with other students, along with campus officials, pushing them toward enrollment.

In contradiction to the Noel-Levitz report, the Hobsons Report on Undergraduate Student Recruitment 2010 by Hobsons Inc. reported that students indicated Facebook, the most used SNS according to the Noel-Levitz data, is not very effective with the college search and application process. Facebook barely registered on the scale with less than 2% of respondents saying they consider Facebook to be most effective. Only 19% of the study's respondents found Facebook to be a reliable source of information about a school. It is also noted that very few students listed Facebook as a way they want Admissions counselors to contact them.

Gruber (2010) found 98% of prospective students and 86% of admission officers use social media making it the ideal tool for recruitment. Facebook is the choice site during prospective students' college search. The study concluded that social media had a positive impact on prospective students' decisions to apply and enroll at colleges.

Hesel and Williams (2008) explored the influence, use, and importance of SNS to high school seniors who are planning to attend college in the Fall of 2009. The study found that majority of those surveyed use SNS on a regular basis. Facebook was the site of choice with an average of 32 minutes per visit. About 200 participants reported using SNS for their college search stating they used these sites to find the social "fit" of the campuses.

As of January 2008, there were 420 universities taking advantage of Facebook's fan page concept (Cheater, 2008). A recent study from the University of Massachusetts by Ganim Barnes and Lescault (2010) shows that 98% of colleges use Facebook. Studies support that college Admissions offices are using social media in the recruitment process (Marklein, 2009; Kaplan, 2010), to contact prospective students (NACAC, (2009), and to market to the school and engage with students (Ganim Barnes & Lescault, 2010).

According to National Association of College Admissions Counseling (2009), 88% of the schools believed social media were either "somewhat" or "very" important to their future recruitment efforts. However, one study (Cappex.com, 2010) found that only 43% of 170

private and public institutions surveyed found social media as “somewhat important” to the college’s recruiting strategy.

Due to a state’s weak economy (public institutions) and school budget cuts, colleges and universities have incorporated SNS into their recruitment campaigns to alleviate financial woes. In the Pacific region, California and Oregon public universities employed SNS to increase enrollment and to aid with budget cutbacks. To overcome the 2010 school year budget shortfall, California public state colleges’ admissions officers decided to boost enrollment by targeting out-of-state and international students to pay the higher tuition--\$23,000. The University of California at San Diego and the University of California at Santa Cruz concentrated on using the Internet and social media sites to contact high-achieving students from other states (Gordon, 2010).

Oregon's public universities have a record-high enrollment of 96,960 students, a 5.9% increase from 2009. The enrollment surge provided Oregon universities an increase in revenue that will help them with expected declines in state funding over the next two years. Few jobs in a weak economy, tuition hikes in neighboring states, and smoother transitions from community colleges to state universities have contributed to the enrollment jump, university officials say. The Southern Oregon University upgraded its website and utilized Facebook and other social media to recruit students resulting in a 38% increase in students from California (The Columbian, 2010).

2.3 Emerging Adults and Social Network Sites Data

Social network sites may provide colleges with a myriad of new tools for reaching a wired generation. Arnett (2000) coined the term emerging adults, a developmental and transition period for 18-29 year olds, who participate in self-focused exploration through different possibilities in career and marriage. Generation-Y, or the Millennial Generation, was born between 1981 and 2000 (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). With about 80 million, these teen and twenty-something year olds were raised on technology. According to Stapleton, Wen, Starrett, and Kilburn (2007), this generation grew up with a widespread access to a variety of technology devices and is more likely to use the Internet for research than the library.

Affectionately known as the “Me Generation,” they use social media to stay connected with friends, watch the latest viral videos, post photos of their adventures, etc. A

national survey of U.S. youth by the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* found 73% of wired teens use SNS, a significant increase from previous studies—55% in 2006 and 65% in 2008 (Lenhart Purcell, Smith, Zickuhr, 2010). The study added that 55% of teenagers online use SNS like Facebook.

Research company *eMarketer* projects that by 2011 half of all online adults and 84% of online teens in the United States (105 million total users) will use social networks (Merker, 2009). From 2006 to 2007, the number of SNS users increased by almost 12 million.

Spending time on SNS appears to be part of most U.S. young adults' daily activities. Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that about half of 12–17 year olds with SNS memberships log on daily-- 22% logged on to SNS several times per day, 26% once a day, 17% three to five days per week, 15% one or two days per week, and only 20% every few weeks or less. Between December 2007 and December 2008, the total time spent by users on Facebook grew “by a massive 566%-- from 3.1 billion minutes to 20.5 billion” (Nielson, 2009). Young adults spend approximately 30 minutes on Facebook per day (Ellison et. al, 2007, Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009).

Nielson’s “State of the Media: The Social Media Report-Q3 2011” discovered that about 23% of total time spent on the Internet was on SNS and blogs. E-mail came in third with 8%. As a whole, Americans spend more time on Facebook than other sites.

By 2012, the number of Millennials is estimated to increase to 13.3 million, or 75% of all students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). According to the *National Association for College Admission Counseling 2010 State of College Admission Report*, the number of high school graduates in the U.S. reached a peak of 3.33 million in 2008-09 after more than a decade of steady growth. An estimated 3.29 million students graduated in 2009-10. The number of graduates will continue to decline through 2014-15, but will rebound to 3.4 million by 2018-19.

2.4 Facebook and Gender

Electronic applications have become a major part of the admission process. The web enables prospective students to apply electronically and allows them to check the status of admission and financial aid applications. Online applications continue to increase. For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, four-year colleges and universities received an average of 80% of

their applications online, up from 72% in Fall 2008, 68% in Fall 2007 and 58% in Fall 2006 (*National Association for College Admission Counseling*, 2010).

However, colleges need to be aware of students' varying access to a computer and the Internet, as well as comfort level with technology. A "technological gender gap" may be present in high schools, according to Houtz and Gupta (2001). Fey (2001) found that females tend to defer to males when dealing with computer issues. There may also be a socioeconomic gap with access to computers (Poock, 2001) in which minority groups lag behind the majority of population in overall use (Jones, 2003). With a similar conclusion, Solomon (2002), states that socioeconomic status surpasses all other considerations related to the access to technology including ethnic or minority group affiliation. According to Nielson's "State of the Media: The Social Media Report-Q3 2011," females aged 18-34 were 8% more likely than average to visit SNS and blogs.

Browning Budden et. al (2007) distributed 272 diaries (journal) to undergraduate and graduate students from different departments at a state public university. Participants were asked to track and compile their Internet and media usage information in the diary for one week. The study found that more females spend more time using Facebook and MySpace.

Based on the aforementioned findings from previous studies this leads to the first and second research questions which explores Facebook user's gender:

RQ1) Which gender is posting most frequently on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ2) What is the participation rate of different groups identified on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

2.5 Facebook and Profile Photo

The profile photo acts as a primary identity marker and serves as a first impression. Photo selection varies and may fall into categories such as: portrait, full length, close-up, scrapbook, pet, family, wedding, pop culture reference, art work, cartoon, or party. A user's profile photo is not the deciding factor for admittance in which grades, test scores, extracurricular activities, student essays and recommendations weigh the most. However, 82% of Admission officers do visit an applicant's Facebook profile (Kaplan, 2010).

Users may store and post photo albums on their Facebook page and may select their profile photo from one of these albums. One study found that females posted alcohol-related photos more often and men posted marijuana-related photos (Morgan, Snelson, and Alison-Bowers, 2010). Likewise, another study supports these findings that females “include images of friends, family, significant others, holidays, school, and alcohol” (p. 5) more often than males (Bond, 2009). The study also found that males had more sports-related photos.

According to Reichart Smith and Cooley (2008), face-ism is a cross-cultural form of gender stereotyping that says the focus of males is on the face and head whereas for females it is the body. They concluded that gender stereotypes are still present even when the user selects the profile photo. According to Young and Quan-Haase (2009), 98.7% of college students reported that they posted a photo of themselves on Facebook.

Hum, et. al (2011) studied Facebook profile photos and gender differences in photo content. They reported that college students may be aware of identity construction and that they are aware that potential employers may be viewing their Facebook pages. Profile photos were found to be inactive, posed, appropriate, and contained only the subject. The study suggests that students may be creating a professional identity in preparation for entering the job market.

The third research question is:

RQ3) What type of profile photo was selected by the user when posting on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

2.6 Facebook and International Recruitment

Social recruiting is about engaging with users and using social media tools to source and recruit talent. Social networking site use continues to grow on a global scale. Facebook leads SNS with a global reach of 29.9% (Nielson, 2009). In the U.S., Facebook served more than 117 million visitors. Cultural contexts shape the way people make use of and their motivations and reasons for interacting with communication technology.

Some survey participants pointed out that geography is no longer an obstacle and the Internet is also eliminating some or all of the constraints of time and cost when it comes to human connection and sharing. Some said that it is possible that these new ways to interact will inspire more tolerance and global understanding (Pew Internet, 2010).

One area where the inclusion of SNS in admissions shows great promise is reaching international students who have little access to information about schools beyond official, university-released content. For students committing their college experience to a school sight-unseen, universities that can develop a positive online relationship with prospective students are likely to recruit more committed individuals.

Kim, Sohn, and Choi (2011) report the major motives for using SNS are similar between America and Korea. Three hundred forty-nine undergraduate students at a U.S. southwestern university and 240 undergraduates in five different universities in metropolitan areas in Korea were surveyed which found that seeking friends, social support, entertainment, information, and convenience were motives for using SNS. Results showed that Korean college students placed more emphasis on obtaining social support from existing social relationships, while American students emphasized seeking entertainment.

About 75% of Facebook users are outside the U.S. and there are 70 translations available on the site, with over 300,000 users helping translate the site through the translations application (Facebook Statistics, 2011). The video-sharing SNS YouTube may be used to reach and communicate with more prospective applicants and admitted students. YouTube is localized in 25 countries across 43 languages, and 70% of the traffic comes from outside the U.S., as stated on YouTube's website.

According to the UHM Institutional Research Board, in the Fall 2010 semester the total student population was 20,337 (13,912 undergraduate and 6,425 graduate/professional). Nearly 70% of students were from (in-state) Hawaii, 20% out-of-state and 10% were considered international students. The student body comprised all 50 United States and 108 countries worldwide. In 2009, the total number of incoming Freshmen applications was 17,961, of this about 47% were from Hawaii, 44% from the U.S. mainland, and 10% were foreign. That year 11,942 applicants were accepted into the UHM, but only 6,294 enrolled into the college.

In the Fall of 2009, the UHM received 1,753 applications from foreign students interested in attending. The top 10 countries represented were China, Japan, Korea, Canada, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, and Iran. Of the applications received 540 enrolled into the university.

Results from a 2011 i-Graduate survey of 150,000 international students from 1,200 higher education institutions found that only 4% of international students use social media to select a foreign university (Grove, 2011). The importance of interaction via Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube is overestimated by universities said the director of i-Graduate. The research also found that 45% of students said friend recommendations were the most important factor, followed by 41% by the institution's website, 32% by parents, 22% by the prospectus, 17% by meeting current students, 16% by teachers' guidance and ranking placements, 11% by visiting the institution, and 6% by information from staff at college fairs.

Also noted was once enrolled at the college/university, internet access, meeting staff and the official welcome were important factors when arriving at the college/university. Grove concluded that social media may have limited use in recruiting the students, but was found to be useful when communicating with international students when they arrive and for addressing complaints.

A study by Bos et. al (2008) found that certain behavior in online social interactions fosters a sense of trust and builds relationships. Expanding prospective students' college search experience can be achieved by painting a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the college which may positively affect the decision-making process. An inviting Facebook page that serves as a vital source for information provides prospective international students with an opportunity to not only learn about the college or university, but to also communicate and connect with faculty and current students. During that time of online relationship building prospective students may garner a welcoming experience and apply to the higher education institution.

A major caveat in using Facebook to recruit prospective international students is that the SNS is banned in some countries and computer and Internet availability are limited. In China, Facebook is banned so students use renren.com. Nonetheless, foreign students may provide a college or university a more enriching mix of student body and broaden the experience for faculty, staff, and all students. This leads to the third research question, which seeks to identify what geographic region most users on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page are located.

RQ4) Where is the most common geographic location of users posting on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

2.7 Facebook and Wall Posts

Social networking sites are interactive in nature and have transformed one-way communication to facilitating a dialogue between admission officer and prospective student. Facebook allows users to post messages to each other's walls like a message board, or to send messages to one another via an internal mail system. Students are already actively using these messaging systems, perhaps even more frequently than they use traditional email or instant messaging.

According to Facebook (2009), "the Wall is the center of your profile for adding new things like photos, videos, notes, and other application content." A wall post is a text-based communication message that can be posted by users of the site (e.g. prospective student, current student, alumni, faculty and staff, community member). However, not all visitors to the site will post or comment on the page. Suzuki and Calzo (2004) found that many site visitors spend considerable time "lurking" or viewing others' posts without posting any reply.

Diffusion of Innovation theory (Rogers, 2003) presents communication channels as either mass media or interpersonal. Mass media allows a source of one or few to reach an audience of many by spreading information, creating knowledge, and changing attitudes. Interpersonal channels allow social exchanges between two or more whereby one person obtains information from another. Wall postings may be divided into two types of communication: reciprocal or direct. Reciprocal communication is where messages are exchanged back and forth between two parties. Direct communication occurs with sending a message but with no expectation of a reply.

It can be useful to cultivate a responsive environment that encourages enrollment and promotes streamlined institutional enrollment processes. In the case of colleges and universities, the appeal of lower costs makes social media an attractive recruiting tool and more importantly it helps fulfill the institution's mission of engaging and sharing knowledge.

The Cappex.com's 2010 Social Media and College Admissions Benchmarking Study found six key findings and, of that, four pertained to the SNS Facebook. The first and second findings found that admission officers use Facebook most frequently and that colleges' Facebook fan pages were directed at prospects, enrolled students, and alumni, and have goals of providing campus news and answering questions. Facebook is most frequently used with 66% of college admission officers using it regularly because of its popularity among

prospective students. Students respond quicker to Facebook than email and admission officers are better able to connect with students.

The next finding was that Admission officers believed that prospective students use Facebook to get a realistic view of what a college is like; therefore 27% of admission departments post to Facebook at least two to three times per week was another finding. Admission officers listed two goals for using Facebook use: to engage students by posting relevant news and events; and to serve as a resource for students by monitoring wall posts and answering questions from students and parents. With the interaction of the three audiences on the Facebook page, a college community atmosphere is generated which may help prospective students get a “feel” for the college. Of the 170 colleges surveyed, 36% of Junior admission officers did the posting in Facebook, while Senior admission officers and the marketing department each had 32%.

McRory (2009) states on official admission office Facebook pages colleges are posting orientation information, important deadlines, and allowing students to meet each other before they arrive on campus. Some admission offices are directly contacting students through Facebook and reaching out via friend requests and wall posts (California State University – Northridge, 2009).

Ringel et al. (2010) explored the use of social network status messages to ask questions to a person’s social network. They conducted a survey of 624 people, asking them to share the questions they have asked and answered on their online social networks. Data presented included frequency of types of questions asked, and respondents’ motivations for asking their social networks rather than using more traditional search tools like Web search engines. They reported on the perceived speed and quality of the answers received, as well as what motivates people to respond to questions seen in their friends' status messages.

Based on questions people asked their social network, they examined question phrasing, to question types and topics asked, who asked the question, and motivations. Recommendation and opinion questions were most popular of the eight question types defined in the study. In addition, question topic or subject matter of the question was looked at. Technology questions were the most popular followed by entertainment, home and family. The fourth most popular topic was professional questions about jobs, education, and events.

In another study by Wohn, et. al (2011) they found three types of information uses of Facebook: seeking information, organizing events, and establishing common ground. “Adult participants noted that Facebook was more reliable than sending an email or making a phone call and found it easier to access a wide range of people quickly.” One major benefit was the ability to broadcast (post) a message requesting assistance to their “friend” network and quickly receiving help from someone.

Walther (1992) argued that computer-mediated communication helps establish relationships between communicators. One way of socially connecting is by seeking support from others. In a study by Lasker, Sogolow, and Sharim (2005), messages posted on a listserv for people with a chronic liver disease related to information seeking and support. Messages were categorized into biomedical, socio-emotional, and organizational and systems, then identified 12 topics in each. The study found that the message board was particularly valuable for those who were newly diagnosed and in need of health information, as well as offering support to others. This builds a support system or group for people sharing the same experience.

Social networking via campus websites gives prospective students and parents a unique forum for building relationships and learning more about an institution. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 14). Previous research has found a relationship between SNS use and social capital (Burke, Marlow, and Lento, 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park, and Kee, 2009). According to Kennan and Hazleton (2006), social capital enables an organization to create, maintain, and use relationships to achieve desirable organizational goals.

Lee & Crawley (2009) claim that online interactions “further intensifies existing relationships and creates the possibility of establishing new ones” therefore providing a significant channel to the market.

Facebook is ideal when sharing updates, news, information, photos, videos, etc. with a defined group of people. The Admissions Facebook page is efficient by means of a central location, can easily be updated, and houses a shared discussion space for questions and answers (posts/comments). This study seeks to collect and analyze public Facebook wall

postings and identify the main subjects of information sought. The fifth and sixth research questions are related to the type and frequency of information users are seeking through Facebook wall posts.

RQ5) What are the main topics/subjects of postings on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ6) How frequent are new postings added by a single user on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

Some colleges are taking it one step further by employing a complete social media blanket utilizing Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and online chats – all at the same time (Brownlee & Mays, 2009).

College recruiters may rejuvenate recruitment strategies by incorporating and utilizing the SNS Facebook into the marketing plan to encourage high quality students to apply, to expedite the circulation of information, and reach and engage with an unlimited number of prospective students across the nation and abroad. Facebook serves as a dynamic and interactive communication tool which may result in reducing a school's recruitment budget by cutting out-of-state trips. These tools include increased flexibility, creativity, and efficiency in the recruitment communication and the way student inquiries are generated. College admission officers need to understand who is visiting and what information prospective students are seeking.

This chapter presented literature and information of the history of college recruitment, Facebook background, Facebook and gender, profile photo, international recruitment use and wall postings, and other SNSs use in college recruitment. The study's six research questions were stated and are repeated here:

RQ1) Which gender is posting most frequently on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ2) What is the participation rate of different groups identified on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ3) What type of profile photo was selected by the user when posting on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ4) Where is the most common geographic location of users posting on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ5) What are the main topics/subjects of postings on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

RQ6) How frequent are new postings added by a single user on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

This exploratory study describes UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page wall postings. The wall postings were available for public viewing and were analyzed to determine *who* was posting *what* on the site. Krippendorff (1980) and GAO (1996) defined content analysis as a “systematic, replicable technique for condensing text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding.” Further, Holsti (1969) defined it as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 14).

The scope of the study was:

- To find which gender was posting most frequently
- To find what type of profile photo was selected by the user when posting
- To find the most common geographic location of users
- To discover the most common question topics
- To discover the most common question types
- To find how frequent repeat users were to the page
- To find whether Facebook can be an effective “tool” for prospective students and stakeholders to communicate with a college admissions officer

To this end, the researcher selected the flagship campus of the University of Hawai‘i System. The UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page had a sufficient number of wall postings over a period of time. Analyzed wall postings provide insight on the type of communication between college admissions officers and prospective students and stakeholders on the social media network. The UHM Office of Admissions joined Facebook on August 5, 2009. This study gathered and examined wall postings five months after launching a page on the social media network.

This study analyzed Facebook wall postings available for public view. It should be noted that private communication between a participant and the UHM Office of Admissions were not captured in this study. The Facebook page owner (UHM Office of Admissions) has the ability to remove selected postings and to block users from posting altogether. Wall postings by the UHM Office of Admissions were not included in this study.

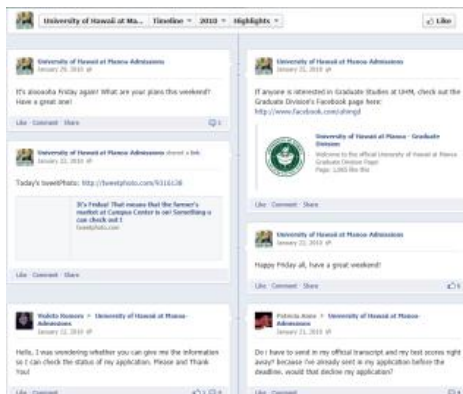
3.1 Participants

A total of 285 UHM Office of Admissions Facebook wall postings from two academic years were included in this study. The profile photo and wall posting were treated as one “participant.” The study looked at only the initial wall posting even though a wall post may have comments in response to the initial wall post. Participant gender was based on the profile photo attached with the wall posting. Women (n=138) were more frequent to post than men (n=114). Participant geographic location was determined from the wall post context. Of the 285 wall postings only 56 users included their current geographic location. The participant stated his/her state or country in the wall posting. The location where the most postings were submitted from was Hawai‘i (n=24), followed by United States Southwest (n=8), then United States West (n=6), and Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Canada, Europe, Pacific Region, United States Midwest averaging less than five wall postings each. Participants were mostly transfer students (n=49), and at a distant second were high school students (n=17), followed by undergraduate students (n=12). Based on the frequency of wall postings, the typical UHM Office of Admissions Facebook user is a woman who is a transfer student in Hawai‘i.

3.2 Procedure

All wall postings were manually copied and transferred into the research software program NVivo which was used to organize, manage, code and analyze the data. While there were participants who frequently posted on the Facebook page each wall posting was considered unique or as a new participant. A clip of the UHM Office of Admissions wall is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: UHM Office of Admissions Facebook wall page



A clip of a wall post is shown in Figure 2. The date/time stamp determined the semester assignment. The profile photo was used to determine gender, photo type, and appropriateness. In duo or group shots, the user's name and/or perceived age was used to infer the gender. Photo type was categorized into six groups: animal, animated, architecture, human, nature, and other. Animal group was determined when a profile photo included an animal whether with a human and animal or only an animal. A cartoon image, Japanese anime were placed in the animated group. The third group, architecture, was a profile photo with a building in the background or only a structure. Nature profile photos were defined as an outdoor or environment image, however no human was included, and profile photos that did not fit into a predetermined group was coded as other. The geographic location was cited by the context of the post whether it was mentioned directly (e.g. "I live in (insert state or country)) or indirectly (eg. "I attend (insert college name)"). The United States Census Regions and Divisions map¹ was¹ utilized to categorize geographic location. Demographic variables were included in its own category because previous research has found an important effect of gender, socioeconomic status, and/or ethnicity in relation to technology use (Cooper & Weaver, 2003; Junco, Merson et al., 2010).

Figure 2: Typical wall posting on UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page



To answer research question 5, two major categories—question topic and question type—were developed. These categories were formed from two approaches. First, the researcher designed basic categories based on personal experience and perception of

¹ United States Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration U.S. Census Bureau Prepared by the Geography Division, n.d. Census Regions and Divisions of the United States [Map], Retrieved February 2012, from www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf.

Facebook use. Second, an initial investigation of other college Admissions Facebook wall posts was conducted in order to identify additional categories.

Question topic contained seven major categories, and question type contained these majors plus sub-categories. The question topic categories were: admissions (notification/letter, requirements), academic information (major/minor, departments), general information about the UHM (housing, student life, clubs/organizations), social connection (self-introductory, seeking friendship), and miscellaneous. Furthermore, the question type sectioned the major category (Table 1). Social connection and opinion are based on Ringel, et. al (2010) study of what people ask their social networks and why they prefer SNS for communication over other mediums.

Table 1: Wall posting question type categories

Question Type	
Academics	advisors/counselors, classes/departments, credits, internships/careers, major/minor, registration, study abroad/student exchange
Activities	campus events, clubs/organizations, fraternity/sorority
Admission	acceptance letter/notification, admission requirements (e.g. grades/GPA, test scores, transcript, transferring), application deadline, application status, other
Athletics	college teams, gym facility, intramural teams
Campus & College Life	campus, neighborhood
Campus Security & Safety	crime rate, security patrol
Dorm & Housing	application, housing facility, meal plans, moving in/out, on/off campus housing options, payment, roommates
Opinion	personal opinion
Other	
Social Connection	
Tuition & Financial Aid	tuition, financial aid

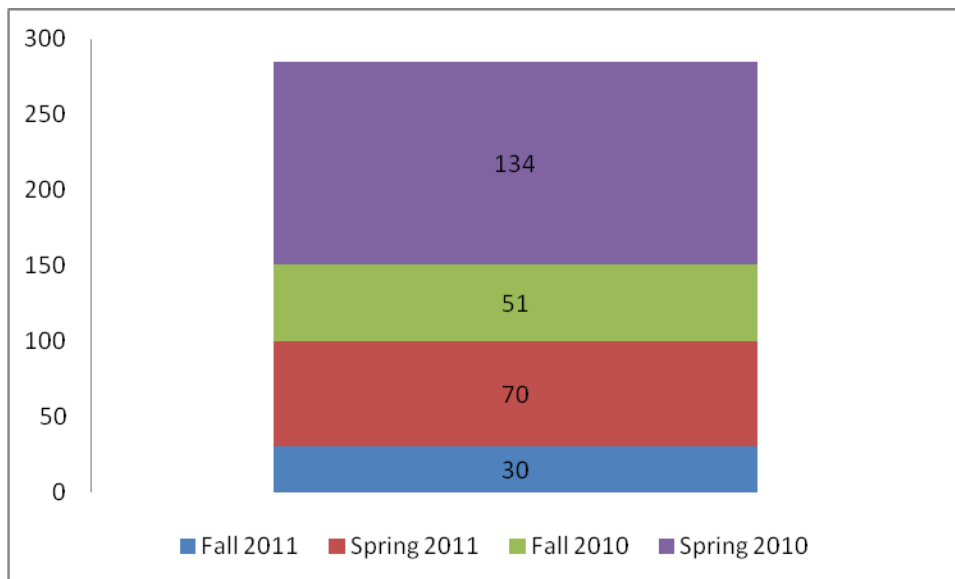
3.3 Data Description

A Facebook wall is “unthreaded public forums where registered users can share and post their thoughts” (Robertson, et. al, 2010). The wall is a public writing space so others who view the profile can see what has been written.

Facebook walls are intended to connect people who typically know each other. A wall post is a text message available for public viewing, and the owner/administrator of the page can remove a wall post. A profile photo is an image that is next to a wall post. Based on previous research, these identifying features of the user are typically true representations of the user (Robertson, et. al, 2010; Acquisti & Gross, 2005).

Wall posts analyzed were from January 2010 (Spring) and December 2011 (Fall) which consisted of four school semesters or two academic school years. All of the 285 wall postings were collected during December 2011. See Figure 3 for number of wall postings per academic semester.

Figure 3: Total number of Facebook wall postings per semester, Spring 2010-Fall 2011



3.4 Data Analysis

Data was coded and analyzed using NVivo. Microsoft Excel was utilized to show meaningful figures and reveal relationships of the data.

3.5 Research Design

This study is a quantitative content analysis both descriptive and exploratory in nature. The unit of analysis was an individual wall posting and profile photo. The categories coded

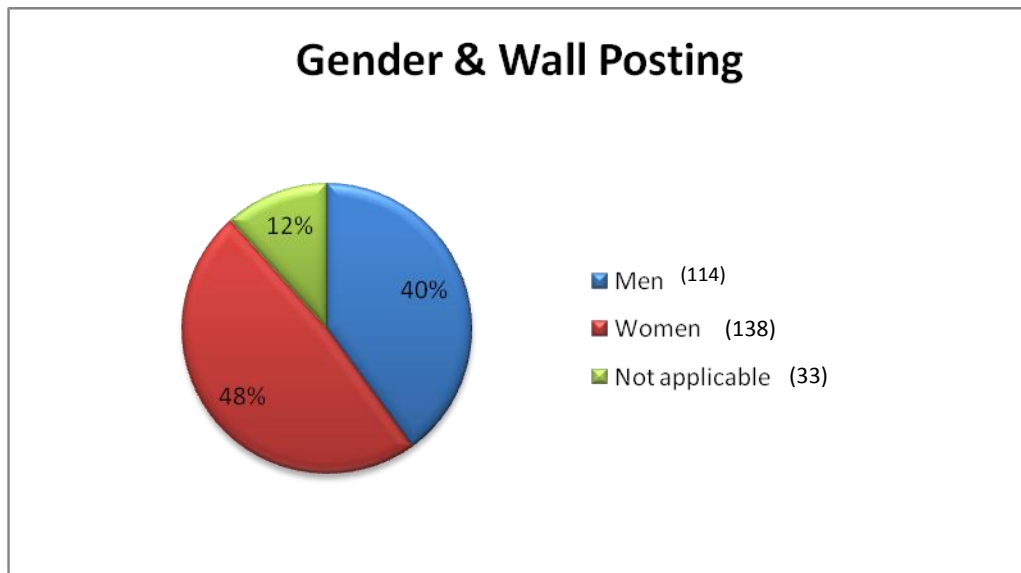
for each wall posting were: geographic location, user type, and main topic of context. The profile photo categories were: gender, number of subjects, and level of appropriateness.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to find *who* is visiting the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page and *what* types and topics of information they are seeking. This chapter will attempt to answer the study's six research questions.

Research question 1 aimed to find which gender posted most frequently on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. To answer this question, without accessing the profile page, the participant's gender was based on the profile photo attached with the wall posting. Women (n=138) were more frequent to post than men (n=114) while the remaining profile photos (n=33) did not present a human being therefore no gender could be determined (see Figure 4). In couple or group shots, the participant's name and/or likelihood to attend college was used to infer the gender. It should be noted that wall postings were collected up to two years after posting therefore participant profile photos may have been changed since the initial time of posting.

Figure 4: Gender distribution of participants and wall postings on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook Page



Research question 2 intended to find the participation rate of the different groups identified on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. More than half of the participants did not specify or identify with a group in their wall posting (see Figure 5).

Participation rate of groups identified were transfer students (17%, n=49), high school students (6%, n=17), and undergraduate students and current UHM students (4%). Other groups identified were UHM faculty and staff, graduate students, and parents all rating 2% or less.

Figure 5: Participation rate of identified groups using the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page

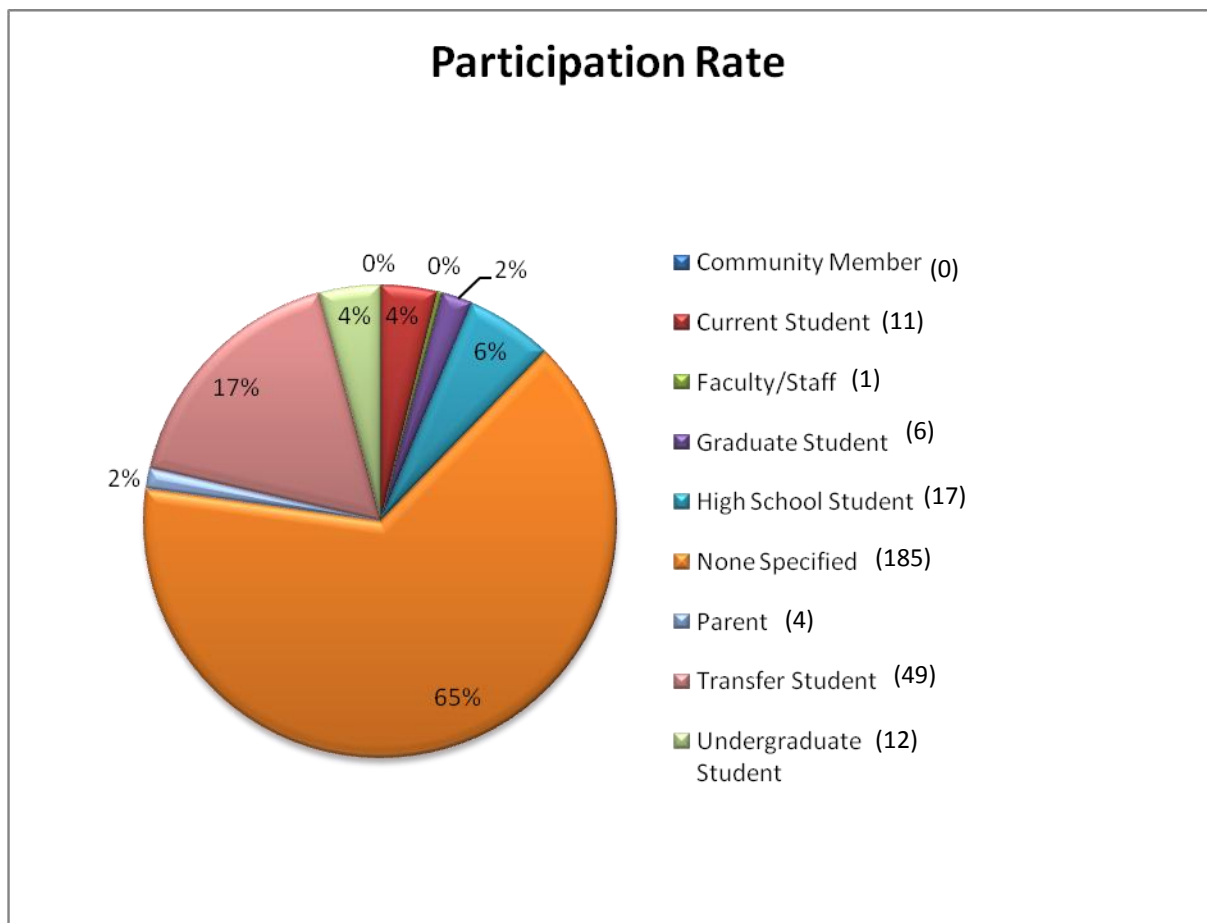
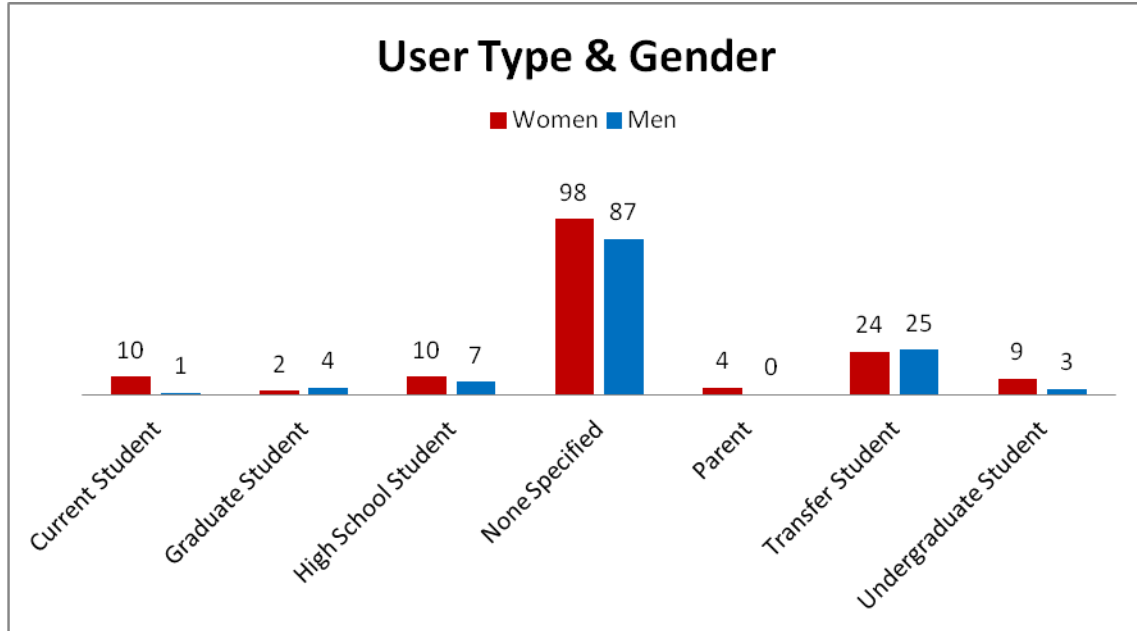


Figure 6: User Groups Identified and Gender



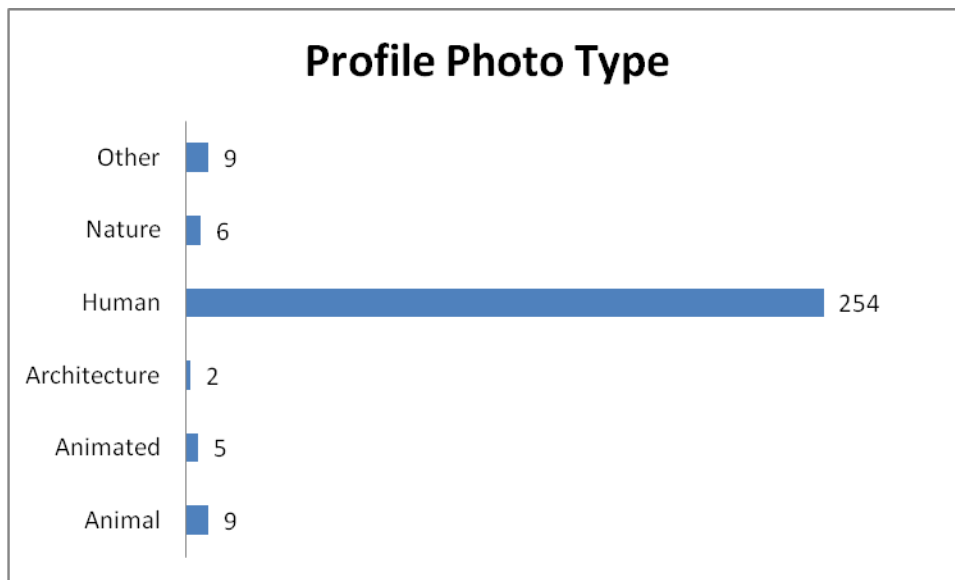
Research question 3 explored what type of profile photo was selected by the participant when posting on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. Participant profile photo was coded to find the type of photo, the level of appropriateness, and as previously mentioned participant gender. Profile photos were found to be solely of the participant and appropriate.

There were six groups in profile photo type: animal, animated, architecture, human, nature, and other. Predominantly, profile photos were found to include the participant (89.1%, n=254) or human(s) followed by the other and animal group both with nine profile photos. The number of subjects in the profile photo was also surveyed. The participant was alone (49.1%, n=140) in the profile photo, or as a couple (24.9%, n=71), followed by group (three or more people) (15.4%, n=44), and 30 profile photos were not applicable to this coding.

There were six groups in profile photo type: animal, animated, architecture, human, nature, and other. Predominantly, profile photos were found to include the participant (89.1%, n=254) or human(s) followed by the other and animal group both with nine profile photos. There were no differences in profile type by gender.

This study also categorized the profile photo level of appropriateness. Profile photo appropriateness was found to be at 89% (n=254) and 10.9% was accounted for profile photo in the other group. No profile photos were determined to be inappropriate.

Figure 7: Types of profile photos identified on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page



Research question 4 surveyed where the most common geographic location of participants posting on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. Results showed that most participants did not include their geographic location in the wall postings (see Figure 8). Only 56 (19.6%) participants out of a total 285 included their current geographic location in the context of the wall posting. The highest number of wall postings were from participants residing in Hawai‘i (8.4%, n=24), followed by the United States Pacific West -- including Washington, Oregon, and California— (3.5%, n=10). The remaining United States regions and international countries rated below two-percent.

Figure 8: Geographic location of users based on Facebook wall posting context

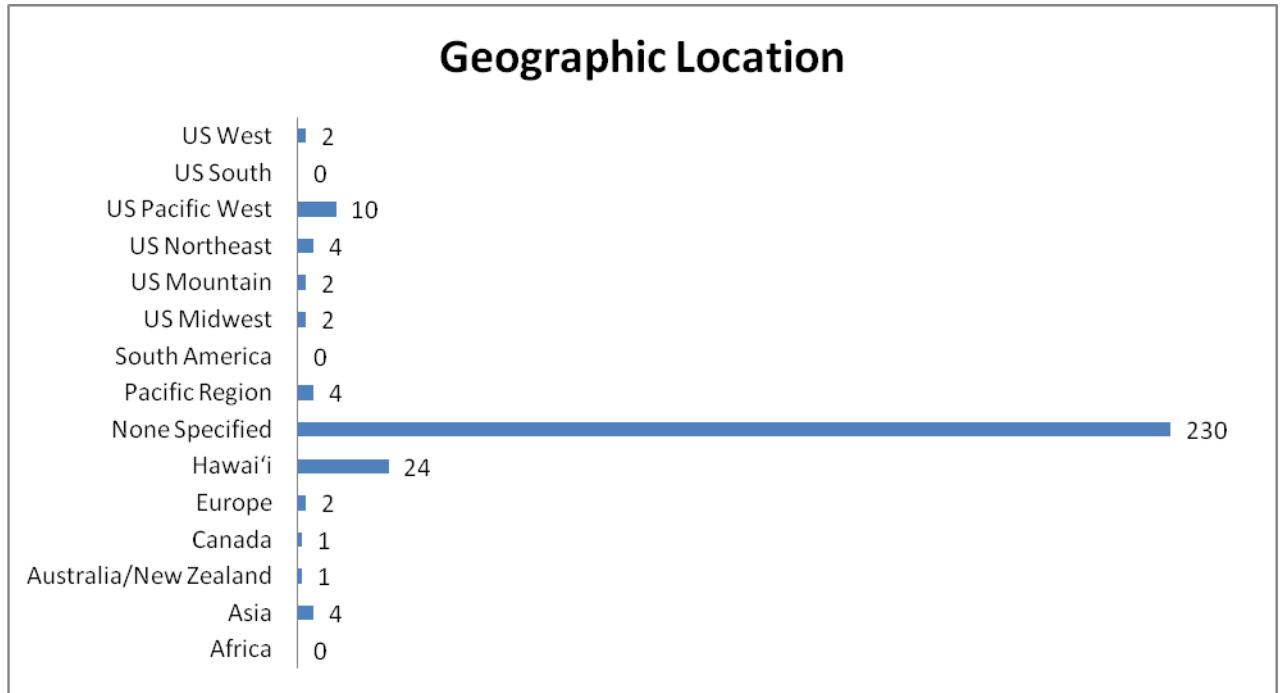
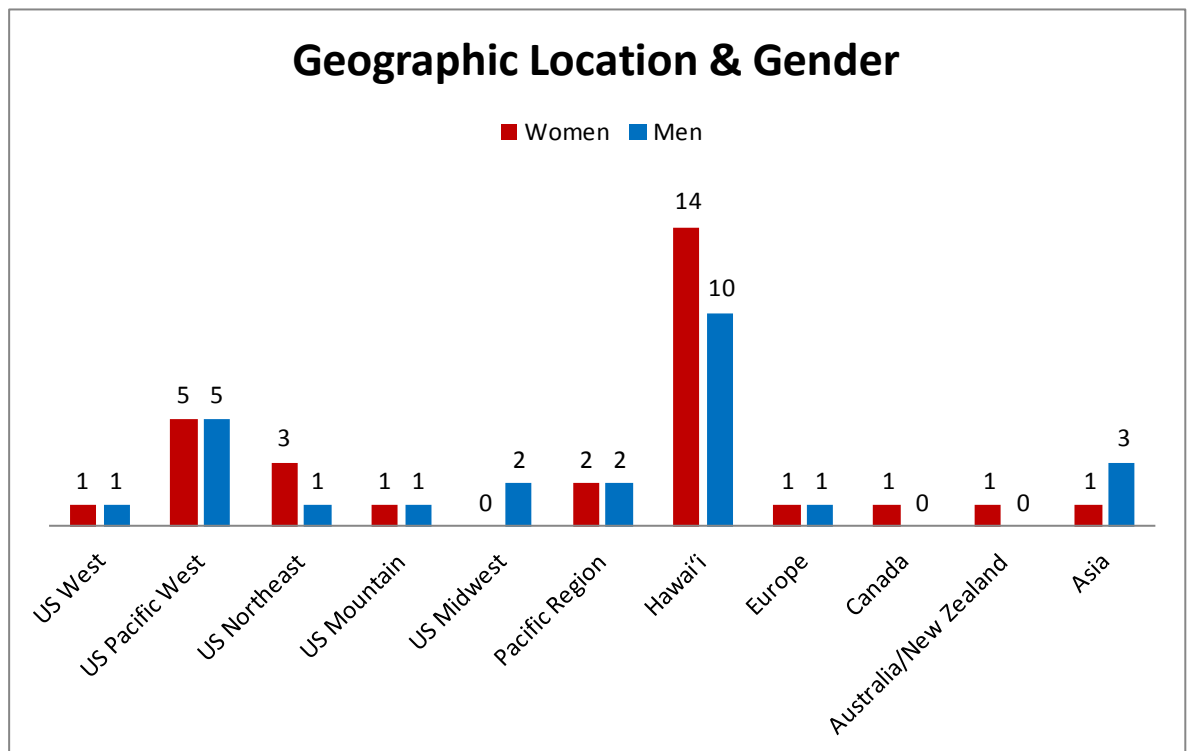


Figure 9: Geographic location of users and gender



Research question 5 was interested in finding the main topics of wall postings on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. This was found by developing two categories: question type and question topic.

Results showed the most common question topic pertained to UHM admissions (n=143) (see Figure 10). Admission-type questions covered acceptance letter and notification, admission requirements (e.g. grades/grade point average, test scores, transcript, and transferring), application deadlines, application status, and other. Within admission-type questions (see Figure 11), the top three questions pertained to: admission requirements (38.5%, n=55) followed by other (32.9%, n=47), and application status inquiries (25.9%, n=37).

More women asked questions about their application status (n=22) and test score requirements (n=10) than men (n=15, n=6). However, more men inquired about deadlines and grades.

Figure 10: Percentage of question types identified from wall posting context

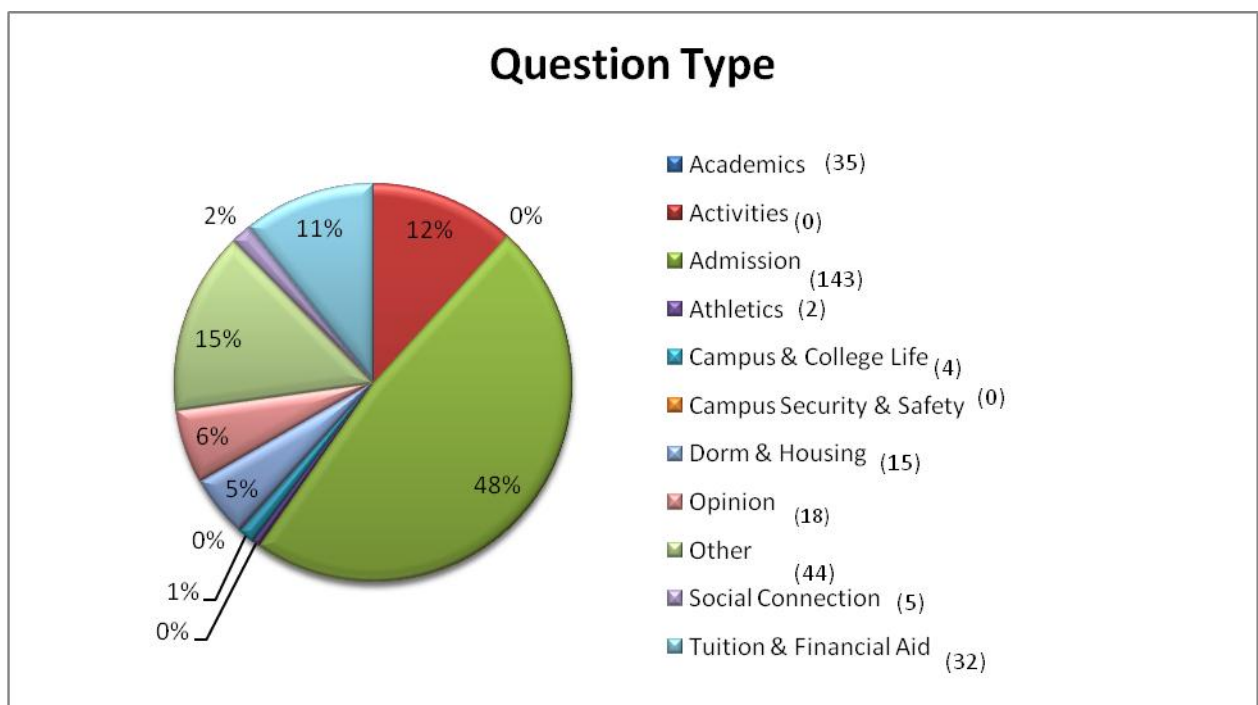


Figure 11: Number of admission-type questions based on wall posting context

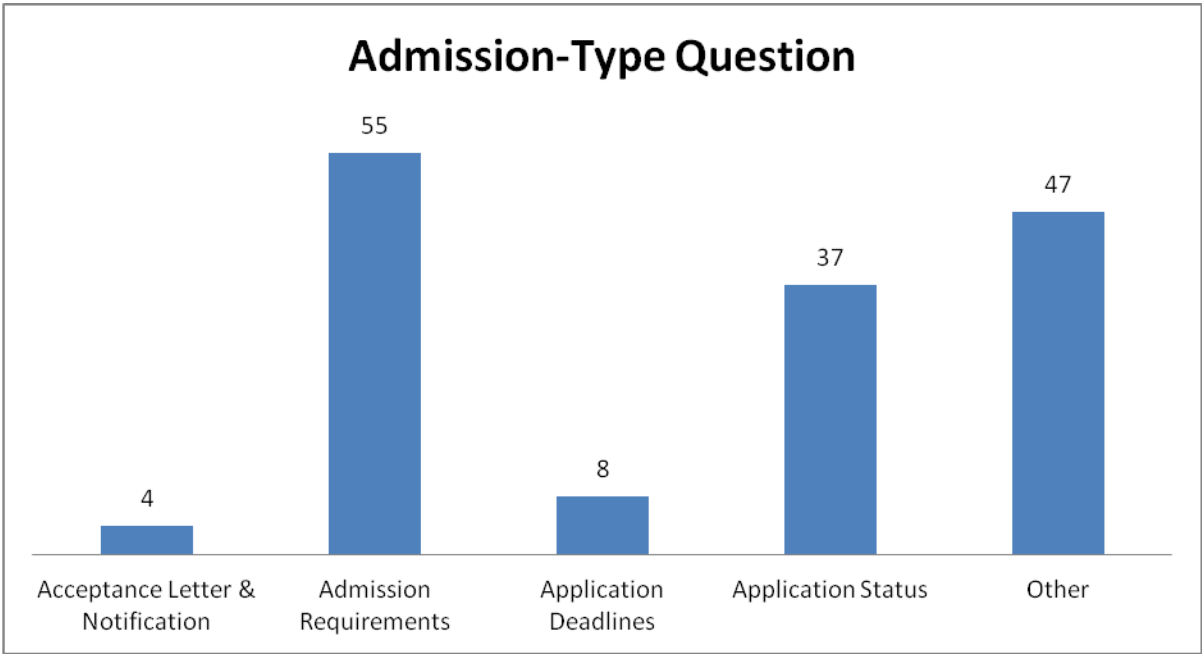
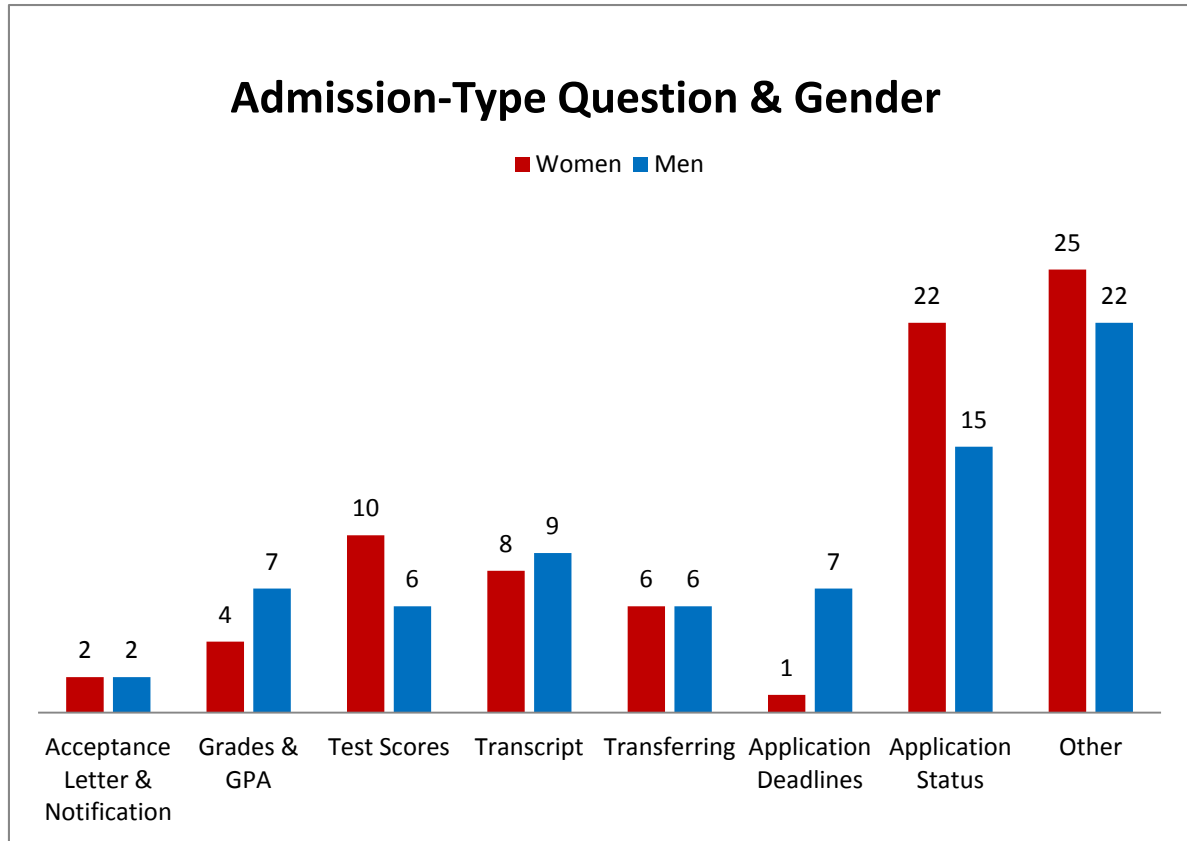


Figure 12: Number of admission-type questions of wall postings by gender



Research question 6 sought to find the frequency of new postings by a single participant on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. Gender was not a determining factor based on the total number of frequent wall postings. Altogether women (n=15) and men (n=15) were the same, however more women (n=9) posted during the Spring semesters and men (n=7) in the Fall semesters.

During the 2010 semesters, there were a total of 20 repeat participants with 10 women and 10 men. A total of ten participants posted twice during a semester and six posted three times. The most significance came during the Spring 2010 semester. The study found that 15 participants posted a total of 54 wall postings constituting 40% of the total wall postings (n=134), with the remaining 80 wall postings from a single-time participant. Frequent participants in the Spring 2010 semester were nine women and six men. The most wall postings (n=10) was by one man followed by a woman with eight wall postings.

Figure 13: Number of frequent users and wall postings, Spring 2010-Fall 2011

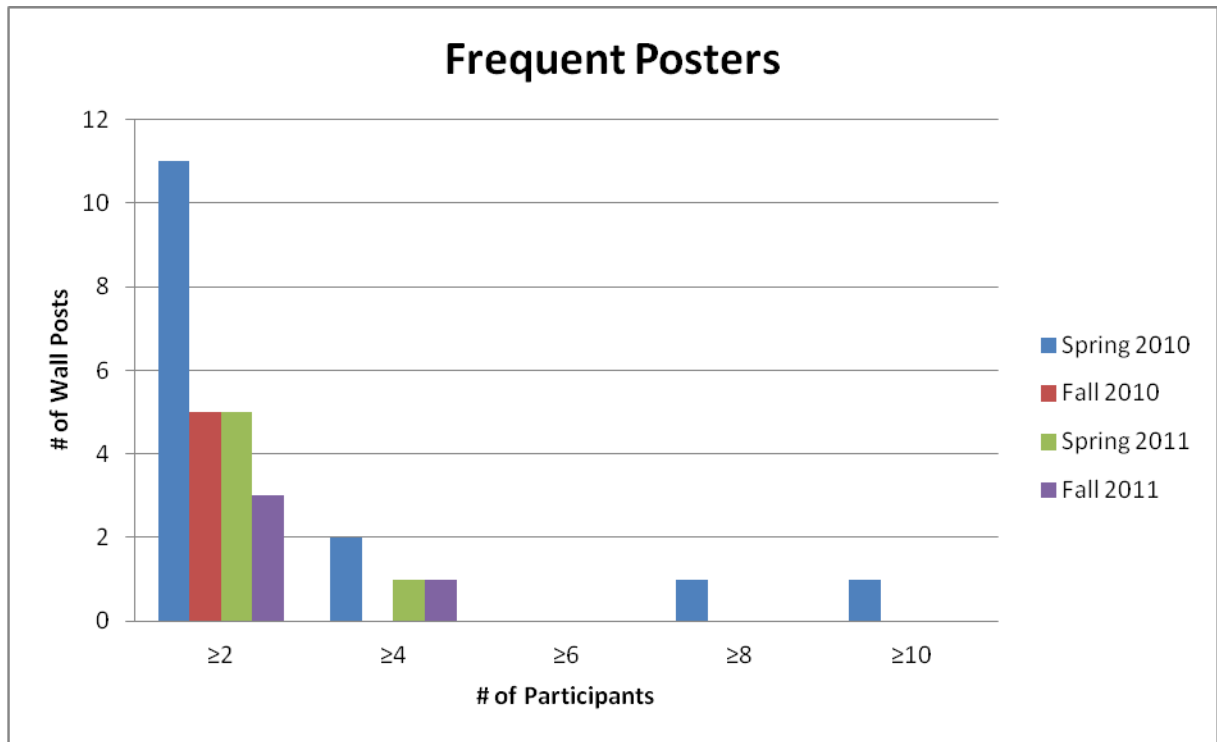
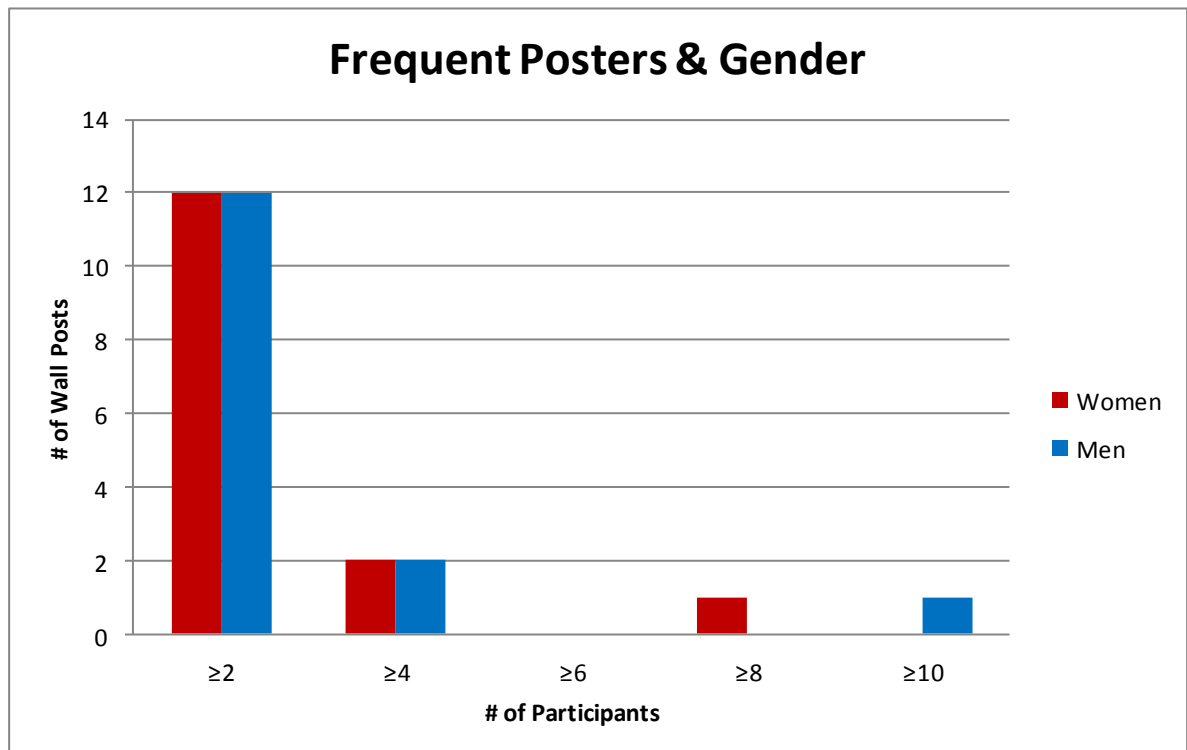


Figure 14: Number of frequent postings by gender



CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND LIMITATION

5.1 Discussion

This study was designed to determine *who* is visiting the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page and *what* types and topics of information they were seeking. Wall postings were gathered from two academic school years and analyzed in the computer program NVivo.

Previous studies identified motives of using SNS including meeting new people, entertainment, maintaining relationships, social events, and media creation (Nyland, et. al, 2007) and the formation and maintenance of social capital (Ellison, 2007). Results showed the average number of wall postings per semester was 71 and the Spring semesters received more wall postings than Fall semesters. This may be due to the fact that most students apply in the Spring and enter in the Fall semester at the UHM.

A participant's Facebook profile photo determined gender, photo appropriateness, and type of photo. Results showed that more women posted than men however, based on the UHM Undergraduate Admissions Freshman Class Profile, user participation is representative of the incoming class. The UHM Freshman Class has 44.3% men and 55% women compared to the study with 40% men and 48.4% women.

Regarding photo appropriateness, results showed 89% of profile photos were appropriate. Results concur with previous studies that college students' profile photos are appropriate in nature and did not contain alcohol, drugs, or sexually suggestive content (Watson, et. al., 2006; Hum, et. al, 2011). College students may be aware that admission offices and potential employers are viewing their Facebook page. Subsequently, college students may be selecting an appropriate profile photo and creating an online identity that is professional to enter the job market. This may be evidence that college students may want their profile photo to make a positive "first impression" to the college similar to a job interview.

Young & Quan-Haase (2009) reported that 98.7% of college students post a photo of themselves on Facebook. Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin (2008) found that group identity is apparent in Facebook profile images with 38.1% containing a profile photo with two or more persons and Hum, et. al (2011) findings revealed 56% (n=84) profile photos included two or more persons. This study found 15.4% (n=44) of users choosing a group profile photo and 24.9% (n=71) selected a couple photo. Siibak (2007) found that female users (65%) of an

online dating site were more likely to display a profile photo of themselves smiling than men (24%) and include a headshot.

This study viewed and analyzed wall posting context to determine a participant's geographic location, to identify the type of user, and the main topic of the wall post. Majority of participants did not disclose their geographic location. College students may control their privacy settings as a result of social influences and online activity (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008). The same study found that women are more likely to have private profiles than men.

Also, it is not known if a university's alumni association has an impact on a participant visiting a college website or Facebook page. However, it should be noted that there are eleven University of Hawai'i Alumni Association (UHAA) Regional Chapters.

Results showed that participants residing on the United States Pacific West Coast posted the second most on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. Of these participants, nine were from California and one lived in Seattle, Washington. Four of the UHAA regional chapters are present in the Pacific West (Los Angeles/Orange County, Pacific Northwest, San Diego, and San Francisco/Bay Area). In the study there were four participants from the Northeast, two were from Massachusetts, and one from New York and Washington, District of Columbia each. There are UHAA chapters in New York and the nation's capital. The Greater Midwest Region UHAA chapter may have prompted the two participants to the Facebook page and likewise for the Colorado chapter. The remaining three UHAA chapters not represented by participants in the study were Japan, Las Vegas, and Florida. It should be noted that the two participants from the United States West asked about the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program, but did not identify which state they were located—possibly Las Vegas, Nevada.

For international students, SNSs serve as a technological outlet to communicate with overseas colleges or universities. In Fall 2010, ten-percent of the UHM student population were international students from 108 countries. Only eight participants from abroad were represented in this study, however, 230 wall posts did not include a geographic location. This is insufficient information to make a conclusion about international students' use of the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. Kim, Sohn, and Choi (2011) found that American and Korean students' motives for using SNS were seeking friends, social support,

and information among others. The UHM Office of Admissions may consider promoting the SNS to current students and alumni who can be encouraged to post their experiences and accomplishments on the site. Building a network of students, alumni, faculty, and prospective students may foster an online college or university connection and provide a positive impression to site visitors.

Although 80% of the participants did not disclose their geographic location some did share and disclose personal information such as grades and test scores. Derlega, Metts, and Petronio (1993) study showed the Internet's anonymity may stimulate online self-disclosure because a person does not fear being ridiculed or rejected. Christofides, et. al. (2009) found that participants perceived they disclosed more information about themselves on Facebook than in general.

Samples of wall postings from the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page are as follows: A Spring 2011 participant posted, "And for the 6th time I was rejected for admission. I shall apply again and hope that 7th time is a charm." Another participant asked, "And how good or bad are my chances of getting in with a GPA of 2.89 and an SAT of 1710: Writing 540, Reading 480, Math 690?" In the Spring 2010, a participant posted, "Are D's in high school classes accepted as long as the cumulative GPA is a 2.8 or above?" Participants appeared to disclose personal information without fear or concern of others knowing. Participant self-disclosure in wall postings on a college office of admissions Facebook page may be further explored.

In addition to geographic location, wall posting context was analyzed to find who was visiting the Facebook page. More than half of the participants did not reveal what type of user they were in the wall posting. For the UHM Office of Admissions, not having information about who is visiting and where they are from may hinder their strategies and future direction for the Facebook page. That is where public relations and marketing may help with relational building, targeting, attracting, and engaging an audience.

Examining question topic revealed participants were seeking UHM admission information on the Facebook page. The frequency of single participant posting on the Facebook page found that most do not post more than one time. This may be discouraging information for a college office of admissions because it is at the Facebook page where a relationship may be formed and prospective students and stakeholders become (more)

interested in the UHM. Repeat users imply that they are benefiting from the relationship which, hopefully, they will share the information learned with friends and family.

Here are samples of wall postings from the study: In the Spring 2010, a participant asked, “I applied to UH over 3 months ago and haven’t received anything. What is taking so long? I’ve called about 7 times already and they keep telling me to wait...” In the Fall 2010, a participant asked, “I was wandering [*sic*] how long will it be before i am accepted? Also is admission based only on Sat scores?” Another participant inquired, “How early can I apply for fall admission to the 2011-2012 year?” The next semester in Spring 2011, a participant posted, “But lets say on my ACT I received All 22’s, but on one of the categories, I scored a 20. Would that penalize my chance of acceptance?”

Some questions asked in the wall posting could have been answered by visiting the school’s website. Some questions pertained to the minimum test score and grade point average, application deadlines, etc. The UHM may consider adding the same information posted on its website to the Office of Admissions Facebook page.

In the business industry, a repeat customer is “someone who returns again and again to purchase a good or service from a business.” This is highly valued because repeat customers typically require less additional marketing efforts to retain. In relationship marketing, creating and maintaining a relationship with a customer may offer positive returns. A frequent poster has two implications: the UHM Office of Admissions fully answered the question and the user wants to return for quality service or a question was not answered and the user needs clarification.

This study incorporated public relations, marketing, and Media Richness Theory. Jo and Kim (2003) found that interactivity and multimedia-oriented websites do not have a significant positive effect on relationship-building when interactivity is high. Online public relations may save schools time and money, but the quality and credibility of information remains the most important aspect in regards to relationship-building (Jo, 2005). Schools need to understand Facebook and how to take the opportunity to communicate with a wide audience. How a school integrates its public relations strategy and social media is important. Wall posts are an opportunity for schools to respond and engage with its target audience. If a school does not respond quickly to a wall post question, it may appear to be unresponsive to the poster or visitors to the page. Online communication allows users to share interests (Kent,

et. al, 2003). Other studies have found that people use Facebook to connect with offline relationships and not to make or engage in new relationships (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Similar to blogs, wall posts should be used to engage in two-way communication. Thus promote openness, leading to sharing, and potentially building a relationship with users.

Based on the number of frequent posters found in this study, it does not support that the UHM Office of Admissions aims to build relationships or engage with its users rather than utilize Facebook as an outlet to answer questions. This is a missed opportunity that the school should consider or needs to strengthen in its public relations strategy. Also, marketing the school on Facebook should be pursued.

Findings contribute to the communication field by adding new data and supporting previous study's results. Results present valuable information to the UHM Office of Admissions regarding their public relations strategy on the Facebook page.

Overall, the UHM Office of Admissions is taking advantage of the opportunities of Facebook, but not utilizing the medium to its fullest extent. Based on the total number of wall postings, the site's activity is low compared to other major universities. User wall posting answers could be found on the school's website. From public relations and marketing perspectives, the UHM should disseminate news and information about the university on the Facebook page and engage users to create, maintain, and build relationships.

5.2 Limitation

The primary concern with this study is the subjectivity of coding Facebook wall posts. Information may be misrepresented or unintended bias by the researcher may occur. As a result of available resources, the reliability of data is limited because the study did not have independent raters. Though this is a limitation another study utilized a similar subjective coding scheme (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Preferably, independent raters with no prior knowledge of the project's objectives would code a sample of the data.

The secondary concern is that only the initial wall posting was analyzed not including the response from the UHM Office of Admissions. As a result, it is not fully known if the UHM Office of Admissions public relations strategy is active and working. Computer-mediated communication, not limited by time and geographic location, promotes meaningful

dialogue and interaction among users. This conversation develops a thread which is captured ultimately recording the communication interaction.

This study was exploratory in nature therefore other researchers should be cautioned when generalizing findings from the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page to other universities. Little was known about the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page, but this study's findings present initial data that can be later used for in-depth study of the Facebook page. The UHM has a diverse student population with over 100 countries represented. The flagship campus of the UH system is known for its research in Astronomy, Oceanography, Pacific Islands, Asian studies, and cancer.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined *who* was visiting and *what* types of information they were seeking on the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. This study offered emerging data about wall posting question types and topics on a college Admissions Facebook page, as well as supporting previous research findings. This information is important for college Admission officers to know what type of information users seek on the Facebook page. In turn, as Facebook continues to grow in popularity, social media may have a larger impact in the college application process and recruitment strategy.

Public relations and social marketing cover the business side of college admissions. According to the *Public Relations Society of America* (PRSA), public relations is defined as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” Public relations-oriented blogs promote sites as relationship-building tools (Dugan, 2007). A blog is an online journal by a writer whereas wall postings are messages. Wall postings may also be utilized as a relationship-building tool as well. Based on question type and topic results, user wall postings requested information, sought advice, and gave opinions. Communication style and strategy may reflect distinct brand characteristics. Wall posts provide an opportunity for the UHM Office of Admissions to build relationships with the user.

Connected to public relations, marketing is the creation, communication, deliverance, and exchange of valued goods or services with an audience. Attracting and engaging prospective users once on the Facebook page are vital to a college. Responding to a wall post is an opportunity to increase user engagement. The UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page is a medium that should be utilized to “sell” the school. Results identified transfer students and high school students as the most common users. Based on findings, transfer students who are women from Hawai‘i frequent the UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page. The UHM seeks to increase recruitment of Hawaii high school graduates, Native Hawaiians, international students, and transfer students. The UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page attains this objective by reaching the target market.

Social media tools are useful by enabling users to communicate with each other anywhere at any time. Media Richness Theory states that richness refers to clarifying ambiguity and the ability to change understanding. According to Daft and Lengel (1994), the

functions of media richness are: instant feedback, language variety, focusing on the recipient, and multiple communication cues and channels. Sham Shahkat Ali (2011) found that Facebook helps users exchange communication quickly, share their opinions, and provides easier explanations. This study's results agree with these previous findings that Facebook is a medium high in richness. Facebook communication is equally rich as face-to-face or phone conversation due to quick clarification by the college admissions office which in turn affects user understanding. From a public relations perspective, communication on a rich medium may influence user decision in the application process or introduction of the college. The frequency of repeat users has two implications: user question was answered in one posting by the UHM Office of Admissions and users frequented the Facebook page because it satisfied one or all of the four media richness functions.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies that share this study's purpose and interest may consider exploring the difference between American and International college admission office Facebook pages (or its equivalent). Another recommendation would be to explore the difference between community colleges and trade schools and major universities admission Facebook pages. The target market and its purpose may influence which social media a college employs in its recruitment and public relations strategy.

Future research should examine the entire conversation from the initial wall posting to include comments in order to observe the communication between a prospective student or stakeholder and the office of admissions. This dialog may provide insight into user decision to apply and attend and understand user experience on the Facebook page.

Users may be checking the Facebook page to view images from events on campus that may provide an impression of the school and college experience. Therefore, analyzing album photos and videos may provide a wider understanding of the school's marketing and public relations strategy. Type of photos, student diversity, coverage of student experience and academics, and type of video production should be included.

Another recommendation is to obtain prior approval from the Committee of Human Studies Institutional Review Board (IRB) to visit participants' profile page and to contact the participants. Participant gender and geographic location could be obtained or verified. Also, no data of submitted applications, acceptance letters, or proof of enrollment is known other

than what a participant stated it in a wall post. Contacting users would provide valuable information for college office of admissions to understand the importance of its SNS presence in the admissions process.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the body of research on Facebook wall posting and communication on a university's Office of Admissions page. Study results show the general UHM Office of Admissions Facebook page user is a woman transfer student from Hawai'i. Users most likely ask admission-type questions, primarily admission requirement inquiries on the SNS page. It should be mentioned that SNS are dynamic and ever-changing communication tools. This study provides only a snapshot of the use of Facebook by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Office of Admissions.

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