

Social Media Research Survey:
College Students/Faculty Communications

Professor Lana Brackett and Professor Ben Carr
Mario J. Gabelli School of Business, Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI

Abstract

This paper discusses a student/faculty communications survey of traditional marketing principles students to determine their preferences for the use of social media to communicate with faculty.

Three fundamental questions anchor this research: 1: Do students have a favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class? 2: Do students have a favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class when using Social Media? 3: Do students have a favorite method of communication with faculty outside of class which generates the best results? The findings indicate that social media is not a preferred method for students to communicate with faculty.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a research study of college students' preferences with regard to out of class communication with their faculty. It has been suggested that teachers should use Social Media to interact with these Net Generation students since this is where they like to spend their time (Lillie et al, 2011). However, the authors' informal preliminary investigation, based on a student key informants methodology, revealed that students might not prefer to communicate with faculty using social media. According to Homburg et al (2012, p.594), the key informant method is an essential data source in marketing and management research. In light of the above noted conflicting preliminary propositions, a formal survey was administered to a group of traditional daytime undergraduate Marketing Principles students to ascertain greater clarity on their preferred out of class methods to communicate with their faculty.

Literature Search

The number of published articles by marketing educators within the leading marketing educational journals exalting the use of social media as an innovative technology has exploded over the past decade and a half. According to Gray, Peltier and Schibrowsky (2012), the percentage of published *Journal of Marketing Education* (JME) technology articles rose from approximate 6% during the period of 1979 through 1999, to 11% during the period of 2000 through 2009 and to 25% during the period of 2010 through 2012. The same pattern is reflected within the *Marketing Education Review* (MER) during the period of 2000 through 2009 where 14.83% of their published articles were of the same technology focus (Abernethy and Padgett, 2011). In addition, a cursory count of MER articles published after 2009 reveals that approximately 25% had a technology focus.

Both JME and MER later year increases in technology focus articles are directly attributable to the evolving interest in the pedagogical value of utilizing social media. This utilization comports with the two dimensions of teaching about new technology used for marketing and using new technology to teach about marketing as noted by Granitz and Pitt (2011). Within the later vein of using new technology to teach about marketing, there has been a broad diversity of social media platforms operationalized e.g. networking (Schlee et al, 2013; Kurthakoti et al, 2013; Schirr, 2013); web-based benchmarking (Raska et al, 2013); LinkedIn (Peterson and Dover, 2014; McCorkle and McCorkle); CRM 2.0 system (Wang et al, 2013); interactive whiteboard (Greene and Kirpalani, 2013); E-Tailing on Zazzle.com (Ashley, 2013); Klout Challenge on Klout.com (Bacile, 2013); Wikipedia (Munoz 2012); Netnography (O'Reilly 2007) and twitter (Rinaldo et al 2011; Lowe and Laffey 2011).

In light of the recent existing abundance of research in using new technology to teach about marketing, it is surprising to uncover basically no recent articles by marketing educators which have an out of class student-teacher communications focus. This void is also surprising due to the importance of the student-teacher rapport contribution to the learning process ascribed to and prescribed by those who promote the development of excellence in teaching (Conant, 1988; Kelly, 1991; Smart, 2003; Faranda, 2004; Granitz, 2009; Grember, 2002; Koernig, 2009; and Gruber, 2012). The present research study was undertaken as a means of addressing this void by providing exploratory generated answers to three fundamentally insightful ground level questions:

1. *Research Question 1:* Do students have a favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class?

2. *Research Question 2*: Do students have a favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class when using Social Media?
3. *Research Question 3*: Do students have a favorite method of communication with faculty outside of class which generates the best results?

Methodology

The informal preliminary investigation guided the selection of questions for the survey. With the promise of anonymity, a one page survey was handed out during Marketing Principles classes. The survey consists of 6 questions which include spaces for students to identify social media and to provide any other comments. It is interesting to note that in the preliminary investigation, students did not consider E-mail to be Social Media, and also, there was not a gender difference in responses.

Sample

This research was conducted at a small east coast liberal arts university. During the spring 2014 semester, a one page questionnaire, anchored in the KISS principle, was administered to students in five principles of marketing course sections which were taught by the two senior members of the marketing department. These students were directly asked to reveal their preferences with regard to out of class communication with their professors. A total of 142 students were given the questionnaire and surprisingly, all 142 completed it without being provided any form of incentive.

Although marketing principles is a core requirement for all Business School majors, it is also a requirement and/or elective within the curriculum of the liberal arts and engineering programs. As a result, the composition of the sample consisted of 80 business majors, 29 general liberal arts

majors, 17 liberal arts communications majors and 16 engineering majors. In addition, there were 30 freshman, 88 sophomores and 24 juniors. In an attempt to promote the promise of anonymity to survey respondents and in adherence to the desired one page condition stipulated by the KISS principle, a declaration of gender was not solicited.

Survey Instrument

In total the survey questionnaire consisted of six questions. As is reflected by the above stated sample characteristics, students were asked to provide their class year and major. While the answers to these first two questions are valuable demographic markers they also served as effective foot-in-door compliance technique constructs (Tybout, 1978; and Hansen and Robinson, 1980). Questions 3, 4, and 5 were framed to represent the three research questions. As such, question 3 asked students to rank order their favor out of class way of communicating with faculty across five options The five options operationalized as constructs - Phone, Email, In Person, On line (an endogenous University platform similar to Blackboard) and Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) - were identified during the student key informant preliminary investigation.

Question 4 asked students to rank order their favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class using Social Media across three options. The three options operationalized as constructs - Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn – were also identified during the student key informant preliminary investigation. Question 5 asked students to indicate – with no options provided - their favorite method of communication with faculty outside of class which generates the best results. Space was provided within questions 3 and 4 for students to write in an

additional option of their choice. The final question, number 6, asked students to register any comments they may desire.

Results and Discussion

Following are 8 tables and one figure that analyze the results for the three fundamentally insightful ground level research questions:

1. *Research Question 1*: Do students have a favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class? *Research Question 2*: Do students have a favorite way to communicate with faculty outside of class when using Social Media? *Research Question 3*: Do students have a favorite method of communication with faculty outside of class which generates the best results?

Research Question 1

Table 1 of descriptive results presents some very obvious findings. Most notable is the ranked order differential between Social Media at (154) and In Person at (587) registered by students with regard to their favor way to communicate outside of class with faculty. The explanation for this result lies within an assessment of their respective count distributions. While 108 students ranked Social Media as (0) or (1), In Person was ranked a (0) or (1) by only 5 students. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 113 students ranked In Person as (4) or (5) while only 6 students ranked Social Media as (4) or (5).

Place Table 1 about here.

In total these results are suggestive that students have tacitly operationalized the Awareness Set Model - the set of options of which an individual is aware – Narayana (1975), see Figure 1. More specifically, In Person and Email appear to be put forth as first choice options (evoked set), given their respective ranked scores of 587 and 550. Online and Phone appear to serve as backups (Inert set), given their respective ranked scores of 313 and 293. This leaves Social Media presented as an undesired option (Inept set) with its ranked score of 142. This observation is highlighted by what the authors have constructed and titled a *Comparative Favorability Index* (CFI). When the five ranked scores are summed the result is 1897. To find the CFI for any one option, simply divide that option's ranked score by the summed result i.e. In Person's CFI is 31.0, (587/1897). While it is generally not statistically appropriate to apply this type of mathematical operation to ordinal scaled data, in this case as applied to the CFI, it does allow for a more descriptive insightful assessment. When a Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test is run on all 10 paired samples, this observation is further buttressed – see Table 2. Eight of the ten pairs generate significance levels of (.000) indicating independence, while significance test on two pairs (In Person vs. Email) and (Online vs. Phone) the levels were (.071) and (.317) respectively indicating relatedness. Thus, the answer to *Research Question 1* is that students' favorite way of communicating with faculty outside of class is relatively equal by way of In Person or Email.

Place Figure 1 about here.

Place Table 2 about here.

Research Question 2

The descriptive results presented in Table (3) are not surprising, in light of the low ranking given Social Media by students within their *Research Question 1* responses. Most obvious is the

number of *I don't use "0"* responses, which amounts to 51.4% of the total 426 responses provided across the three Social Media options. This is yet a further indication that students perceive Social Media as an inept set alternative choice for communicating with their faculty outside of class.

Place Table 3 about here.

Although Social Media registers a low ranking in the aggregate, a silver lining can be found. When a Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test is run on the 3 paired samples of Social Media options only the two pairs associated with LinkedIn were statistically independent as is revealed in Table 4. An explanation for this observation resides in Table 5 where a student's major was found to be significantly related to the LinkedIn rankings but not with those of Facebook or Twitter. To be specific, professional students ranked LinkedIn significantly higher than did their liberal arts counterparts. This would suggest that students studying in the professions i.e. marketing have been made more keenly aware of LinkedIn's value as a tool for net-working (Albrecht, 2011).

Place Table 4 about here.

Place Table 5 about here.

Research Question 3

As recorded in Table (6), students clearly identified Email and In Person as their first and second respectively favored methods of communication with faculty outside of class as means of generates the best results. This observation was somewhat predictable given the student rankings observed within *Research Question 1* responses. Only somewhat because In Person at 46.5% was not expected to occupy a second place position to Email at 63.4%.

Place Table 6 about here.

The cross tabulation percentages displayed in Table 7 offer an explanation of the position reversal between In Person and Email noted above. As can be seen, while the Email best results opinion held by students decreases from a high of 76.7% for Freshman to a low of 41.7% for Juniors, the very opposite is observed with regard to In Person where there is an increase from a low of 26.7% for Freshman to a high of 70.8% for Juniors. In both cases, Sophomore's percentages of 64.8 and 46.6 are closer to those of Freshman. Freshman and Sophomore amount to 83.1% of the sample and are more inclined to view Email as the method for generating the best results. Therefore, the observed reversal of positions is understandable. This explanation is further supported by the statistically significance relationships between a student's year, Email and In Person as reported in Table 8. In addition, it could be argued that the survey data suggest as students matriculate through the years, their growth in maturity corresponds to an increase opinion that the In Person method of communication generates the best out of class results.

Place Table 7 about here.

Place Table 8 about here.

Conclusions and Limitations

The three research questions addressed within the present study should be viewed as only an initial step taken to provide additional insight with regard to student-faculty out- of- class communication. As such, the corresponding answers herein uncovered should be received as only internally valid situational information. The authors are keenly aware of a number of limitations which diminish the external validity of these findings. An obvious limitation is that only students in a marketing principles course within a small traditional daytime classroom

setting were surveyed. Additional research needs to be undertaken to determine the views of students in other settings such as continuing studies and online. Given these other settings, it may be found that students consider email as a social media method for communicating with faculty out of class, unlike students in the present study.

Within the present study, business students indicated a preference for LinkedIn while liberal arts students demonstrated no such social media preference. In the future, a companion faculty survey could be administered to determine the degree to which student preferences are dictated by those of their faculty. Since there are new social media sources constantly being generated this type of dual approach could tap into the fluidity of student-faculty out of class communications preferences. When combined with additional demographic markers, such as gender and ethnicity, a dual approach could provide a rich dynamic vein of insight.

With all of the above noted, the authors are of the opinion that in person office hour meetings could continue to be in high demand because of the results they produce even as other communication methods are promoted. This point was the singular and only comment registered by fourteen of the 142 students in the present study. As a result, the real challenge confronting faculty in the future is how to extract and integrate the beneficial attributes of in-person communication with the ever expanding social media platforms. The very essence of this type of integration is exhibited by Li and Pitts (2009) where they indicate that their findings suggest that students' use of virtual office hours was not significantly different from their use of traditional office hours.

The pivotal existence and educational value of a robust out- of- class communications channel between students and faculty can't be overstated. Its development and maintenance should be

considered an important contributing factor to achieving educational goals and objectives. Therefore, it behooves educators of every persuasion to determine which out-of-class communication platforms best promote the fruitful exchange between students and their faculty. The present research study represents an effort with regard to that charge and the authors sincerely hope it spurs future research.

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Table 1

Research Question (1) Descriptive Results

| | <u>Social Media</u> | | <u>Phone</u> | | <u>Online</u> | |
|------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <u>Scale</u> | Count | Scal*Count | Count | Scal*Count | Count | Scal*Count |
| 0 | 42 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 20 | 0 |
| 1 | 66 | 66 | 19 | 19 | 16 | 16 |
| 2 | 23 | 46 | 44 | 88 | 38 | 76 |
| 3 | 5 | 15 | 43 | 129 | 52 | 156 |
| 4 | 3 | 12 | 8 | 32 | 15 | 60 |
| 5 | 3 | 15 | 5 | 25 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 142 | | 142 | | 142 | |
| Total | | 154 | | 293 | | 313 |
| % of 1897 | | 8.0 | | 15.5 | | 16.5 |

| | <u>Email</u> | | <u>In Person</u> | | <u>(A)</u> | <u>(B)</u> |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| <u>Scale</u> | Count | Scal*Count | Count | Scal*Count | Total | No (0) |
| 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 91 | |
| 1 | 19 | 19 | 1 | 1 | 121 | 121 |
| 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 111 | 111 |
| 3 | 6 | 18 | 20 | 60 | 126 | 126 |
| 4 | 56 | 224 | 47 | 188 | 129 | 129 |
| 5 | 57 | 285 | 66 | 330 | 132 | 132 |
| Total | 142 | | 142 | | 710 | 619 |
| Total | | 550 | | 587 | | 1897 |
| % of 1897 | | 29.0 | | 31.0 | | |

Scale: [(5) = most favorite, (1) = least favorite, and (0) = Don't use]

Where: {619 = [Total responses (710) - Don't use (91)],

(1897) = Sum of (Scale*Count) and

(% of 1897) = A comparative favorabilty index

Table 2

Research Question (1) Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

| Ranks | | | | | Test | Statistics ^a |
|------------------|----------------|-----|-------|---------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| InPerson - Email | Negative Ranks | 55 | 67.05 | 3688.00 | -1.808 ^b | 0.071 |
| | Positive Ranks | 78 | 66.96 | 5223.00 | | |
| | Ties | 9 | | | | |
| | Total | 142 | | | | |
| Online - Phone | Negative Ranks | 54 | 68.83 | 3717.00 | -1.000 ^b | 0.317 |
| | Positive Ranks | 74 | 61.34 | 4539.00 | | |
| | Ties | 14 | | | | |
| | Total | 142 | | | | |

a. Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

b. Based on negative ranks

Table 3
Research Question (2) Descriptive Results

| | Facebook4a | | Twitter4a | | LinkedIn4a | | A | B |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|
| Scale | Count | Scal*Count | Count | Scal*Count | Count | Scal*Count | Total | Count |
| 0 | 75 | 0 | 74 | 0 | 70 | 0 | 219 | 0 |
| 1 | 17 | 17 | 28 | 28 | 22 | 22 | 67 | 67 |
| 2 | 30 | 60 | 26 | 52 | 5 | 10 | 61 | 61 |
| 3 | 20 | 60 | 14 | 42 | 45 | 135 | 79 | 79 |
| Total | 142 | | 142 | | 142 | | 426 | 207 |
| Total | | 137 | | 122 | | 167 | | 426^a |
| % of 426 | | 32.2 | | 28.6 | | 39.2 | | |

Scale: [(3) = most favorite, (1) = least favorite, and (0) = Don't use]
Where: {207 = [Total responses (426) - Don't use (219)]
(426^a = Sum of Scale*Count) and
(% of 426^a) = A comparative favorability index

Table 4
Research Question (2) Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

| Ranks | | | | | Test Statistics ^a | |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| | | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks | Z | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Linkedin - Facebook | Negative Ranks | 101 ^d | 71.15 | 7186.00 | -8.659 ^b | .000 |
| | Positive Ranks | 22 ^e | 20.00 | 440.00 | | |
| | Ties | 19 ^f | | | | |
| | Total | 142 | | | | |
| Linkedin - Twitter | Negative Ranks | 30 ^g | 36.62 | 1098.50 | -2.541 ^c | .011 |
| | Positive Ranks | 50 ^h | 42.83 | 2141.50 | | |
| | Ties | 62 ⁱ | | | | |
| | Total | 142 | | | | |

a. Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

b. Based on negative ranks

| Table 5 | | | |
|---|--------|----|--------------------------|
| Research Question (2) Cross Tab Results | | | |
| Pearson Chi-Square Tests | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Major by LinkedIn | 10.575 | 3 | .014 |

| Table 6 | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---------|------------------|---------|
| Research Question (3) Descriptive Results | | | | |
| | <u>E mail</u> | | <u>In Person</u> | |
| Scale | Count | Percent | Count | Percent |
| 0 | 52 | 36.6 | 76 | 53.5 |
| 1 | 90 ^a | 63.4 | 66 ^a | 46.5 |
| Total | 142 | 100 | 142 | 100 |
| Scale: (1) = selected gets the best results | | | | |
| a. 14 students selected both. | | | | |

Table 7

Research Question (3) Crosstabulation %

| | | Email | | |
|-------|-----------|-------|----------------|--------|
| | | 0 | 1 ^a | Total |
| Year | Freshman | 23.3% | 76.7% | 100.0% |
| | Sophomore | 35.2% | 64.8% | 100.0% |
| | Junior | 58.3% | 41.7% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 36.6% | 63.4% | 100.0% |

| | | In Person | | |
|-------|-----------|-----------|----------------|--------|
| | | 0 | 1 ^a | Total |
| Year | Freshman | 73.3% | 26.7% | 100.0% |
| | Sophomore | 53.4% | 46.6% | 100.0% |
| | Junior | 29.2% | 70.8% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 53.5% | 46.5% | 100.0% |

a. Indicates best results.

| Table 8 | | | |
|--|--------|----|--------------------------|
| <u>Research Question (3) Cross Tab Results</u> | | | |
| Chi-Square Tests | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Year by In Person | 10.457 | 2 | .005 |
| Year by Email | 7.231 | 2 | .027 |

Figure 1
Awareness Set

| <u>Evoked</u> | <u>Inert</u> | <u>Inept</u> |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| In Person (CFI = 31.0) | Online (CFI = 16.5) | Social Media |
| Email (CFI = 29.0) | Phone (CFI = 15.5) | (CFI = 8.0) |