GENERATIONAL INFLUENCES ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

IN SPECIAL EVENT COMPANIES


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ABSTRACT

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Utilizing social media has become a lifestyle component for many individuals, and an

inexpensive marketing tool for businesses. As the popularity of social media marketing

rises, it would behoove any business to create and maintain a social media site to stay in

contact with their consumers and to market their products. The purpose of this study was

to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry. The researcher

created an online questionnaire and distributed it to special event industry professionals.

A relationship exists between number of years of experience in the special events

industry and comfort level with the use of industry software and social media sites.

Further research should be conducted to test how financially beneficial social media

marketing is to an organization.


Keywords: social media, special events industry, social media marketing, event

marketing, generational influences

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

<u>Background of Study</u>

Social media became popular in 1995 with the establishment of Craigslist, an online platform used to promote events and advertisements through relevant boards, forums, and networks (Funk, 2011). The emergence of this site paved the way for a slew of social media sites that grabbed the attention of individuals, companies, and organizations alike because it was an innovative mode for connecting with individuals in a simple manner.

Using social media sites has become a lifestyle component for many individuals. Prior to the introduction of social media, individuals might have gone home after a long day at work and relaxed by watching television. However, recent studies have shown that the percentage of individuals using social media sites on a monthly basis is nearly equal to those watching television (Forrester Research, 2010). It would behoove any company to utilize these sites as a marketing tool due to the magnitude of individuals using social media, as well as the minimal cost to promote brands on them.

Special event organizations have increasingly been using social media as a part of their marketing strategy for years. An April 2011 poll showed that 60% of special event organizations use Facebook, 55% use Twitter, 52% use LinkedIn, and 20% used an alternative social media platform for their business purposes (Edelstein, 2011). The top motivations of corporate brand marketers and exhibition management to use social media

were to extend the reach of their marketing efforts and to best engage their target audience (Harris, 2009).

The explosive growth in the use of social media by event management companies suggests that employees should be familiar with the use of social media sites and be able to utilize these sites to promote their company's events. Although members of the Millennial Generation entering the workforce are accustomed to using this type of technology, all generations working within an organization should be knowledgeable and comfortable working with these marketing outlets to more effectively promote their company and their company's product. This study will assess the use of technology in general, and social media in particular, of Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials to market events to specific target markets. The results of this study will be beneficial to any organization beginning to market their company, events, and products through social media outlets. The purpose of this study was to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Elite, Expanded Academic ASAP, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, PsycINFO, ABI/INFORM, Educational Resource Information Center, Sociological Abstracts, LexisNexis and Google Scholar. This review of literature is organized into the

following topic areas: generational education and use of technology and marketing and the use of social media.

Generational education and use of technology. Due to the current degree of generational diversity in the workplace, it is important to examine what technological knowledge and strengths each generation has to offer a company. In most event planning workplaces, there is a span of three generational groups: the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X (Gen-X) and Generation Y (commonly referred to as Millennials) (Mann, 2006). Therefore, employees should know what their co-workers bring to the table to work together and produce a cohesive unit. As the training director for the Louisiana School Psychology Internship Consortium, Dr. Patterson states in a 2005 issue of *Monitor on Psychology*, "a lack of understanding across generations can have detrimental effects on communication and working relationships and undermine effective services" within a company (Dittman, 2005, para. 6). The literature in this section investigates the background and technological learning curves of the Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y.

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are the oldest individuals in most companies. This generation generally has a strong work ethic and is eager to keep up to date on methods utilized on a daily basis by cohorts in their industry. Baby Boomers willingly work the longer, more tedious hours that are necessary to finish a job, with the assumption that they will earn more money for doing so (Mann, 2006). Baby Boomers may not have grown up in an environment with the technological advancements that are currently being experienced, however this generation is making a strong effort toward becoming familiar with technology and the use of social media sites. In 2009,

iStrategyLabs found that Baby Boomers were very knowledgeable about social media and extremely comfortable with using technology (Corbett, 2009). The study also illustrated that the use of Facebook among individuals in the 55 years and older age range has increased 513% throughout the six-month period that the study was conducted (Corbett).

According to O'Bannon, many Gen-Xers, born between 1965 and 1979, grew up as "latchkey children" (children who return to an empty home after school) with Pre-Boomer and Boomer parents who had long work hours. These children saw the toll that working long hours took on their parents' marriages and the resulting effects on their families (O'Bannon, 2001). Thus, this generation is "reluctant to place themselves in the same situation" and thoroughly value their free time off work (O'Bannon, 2001, para. 8). Gen-Xers have also proven to be less loyal to their place of work, "wanting to be promoted more quickly and being more 'me-oriented' than Baby Boomers" (Dittmann, 2005, para. 9). This idea of being "me-oriented" stems from the personal challenges this generation has faced. Gen-Xers hit tough economic landmarks in their young adulthood; they invested large amounts of time and money to pay for their college education, which paid off significantly because they are now the most credentialed generation to date (Erickson, 2010). As far as Gen-Xers' relationship with technology, this generation did not grow up spending their childhood playing on computers and watching music videos on a daily basis. Gen-Xers did, however, grow with technology and began their relationship with technology in their pre-teen years playing video games such as Pong and Pac Man (Erickson, 2010). While Gen-Xers are almost as technologically savvy as Millennials, the main difference between the two generations is Gen-Xers prefer to use

technology when it relates to a lifestyle need as opposed to Millennials who use it for function as well as pleasure (Ferguson, 2008).

Millennials, born between 1980 and 1994, are currently the youngest generation in the event management workforce. This generation's "exposure to technology from birth has produced a generation of technologically savvy multi-taskers" (Kennedy, 2004, para. 9). This generation, sometimes called "Digital Natives," has become accustomed to a world of instant gratification and communication with the use of instant messaging, cell phones, and blogging sites (Kennedy, para. 9). Charles Golvin, principal analyst at Forrester Research, says "…technology is embedded into everything Millennials do making them the first 'native online population'" (Ferguson, 2008, para. 7). Millennials' technology investment can be seen in the 2008 study conducted by Forrester Research. Results showed 90% of Millennials own a computer, 82% own a cell phone, and 72% of Millennial cell phone users utilize text messaging (Ferguson).

Marketing and the use of social media. David Parulo, president of the Woodfield Chicago Northwest Convention Bureau, stated that, in general, social media is the new way of marketing and selling business events (Klicki, 2011). According to Funk (2011), there are multiple benefits behind utilizing social media as a means to reach target markets. These benefits include utilizing social media to create additional revenue, as well as enhancing networking and collaboration opportunities. Funk pointed out that there has never "been a communications medium offering business[es] access to hundred[s] of millions of consumers that was so fast and so inexpensive" as social media marketing (p. 4). The literature in this section analyzes the growth of social media and its importance within special event companies.

Social media sites have become one of the largest outlets for marketing in the United States. The utilization of "social media communication tools are proving to be valuable resources for successful event marketing" (Aiello & Nicholson, 2010, para. 2). Using these tools helps to create a buzz about an event and tends to increase attendance rates; it also helps promote interaction and feedback about an event after the event has taken place (Aiello & Nicholson, 2010). The best part about using these tools is that they do "not require substantial technical knowledge or equipment beyond that used in normal operations" (Dysart, 2011, para. 17).

Marketing through online networking sites is an almost instantaneous means to reach consumers without companies doing extensive research to locate potential consumers. Sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube "serve a stunning 80 percent of online Americans every month; that's 127 million people in the United States" (Funk, 2011, p. 2). Eighty percent of online Americans using social media every month shows that "any ambitious business or organization should be trying to understand, participate in, and benefit from social media" (Funk, 2011, p. 3). Making use of videos to market to a target audience is also an appealing sales tool (Klicki, 2011). In addition to being a more accessible way to reach consumers, social media marketing offers a cheaper alternative to traditional event marketing for corporations and organizations (Harris, 2009).

Blogging is one of many different types of social media communication tools. Funk (2011) discussed some of the advantages of a company utilizing a blog: "closer, more human contact with [a company's consumers] and prospects," addressing emerging opportunities in a timely fashion, the ability to link the corporation's website to the

posting, and quickly rise "to prominent rank in search results" (p. 27). Funk also went on to mention that a "2009 study by HubSpot found that businesses that blog get 55 percent more traffic than non-blogging businesses" (p. 27).

Facebook is another popular social media communication tool. With Facebook receiving almost as many American visitors on a daily basis as the number of individuals who watch TV, this site is "by far the most popular social network and one of the most visited websites in the world" (Funk, 2011, p. 54). Through the use of this site, companies have the ability to post photos and videos promoting upcoming product releases and events. One of the best ways for a company to begin making their customers aware of the fact that they are on Facebook is to put the Facebook logo onto the company's existing website. By clicking on the logo, consumers are directed to the company's Facebook page where they are able to "like" and post comments about the company.

Rounding out the top three social media marketing tools is Twitter. Twitter was started as a way to communicate between decentralized employees in a development company. Today, more than 100 million users have accounts on this network (Funk, 2011). By signing up for an account, users are able to "follow" various other accounts. When a Twitter user follows a company, he or she is able to see what is occurring within the company, what events are coming up, etc. It depends on each company's preferences as to what they chose to share on their Twitter page. An example of how a company may use this social media tool, would be to promote the launch of a new fashion line. Twitter has grown so fast in the past three years that it is now "the fastest-growing communications medium in the history of the world" (Funk, p. 58).

Summary. Patterson insists "each generation brings a unique perspective to work-related tasks" (Dittmann, 2005, para. 17). When companies understand what their specific generational demographics are, the workplace can become a more manageable environment for communication and task completion. With the rates of Americans' social media usage growing on a daily basis, it is easy for companies to access their target markets and save money at the same time. This marketing strategy is proving to be a growing trend among event companies who are successfully promoting their events. Due to the large number of event planning companies successfully utilizing this tool, it is critical that competitors begin marketing on social media sites.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the special events industry use social media to market events and reach consumers?

2. Is there a relationship between years of experience in the special events industry and comfort level with the use of social marketing?

3. Do special event organizations have specific positions that manage their social media site(s)?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Data on employees' technology use, skills, and degree types were gathered from employees in the special event industry from the Community Relations and Development Department at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, the Event Management Department at the San Diego Convention Center, as well as independent event coordinators throughout Southern California.

2. Educational background, technological knowledge and use, and types of social media usage and knowledge were analyzed.

3. The data were collected during the winter of 2012.

4. Information for this study was gathered using an online questionnaire.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. Data collection was limited by individuals who do not have email addresses.

2. Data collection was also limited by individuals who do not check their email on a regular basis and respond in a timely manner.

3. Data collection was limited to participants who received the questionnaire rather than the questionnaire being sent to their spam folder.

4. The instrument in this study was not tested for validity or reliability.

<u>Assumptions</u>

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that email addresses for participants' were current and valid.

2. It was assumed that respondents were the participants intended to take the survey.

3. It was assumed that participants took the time to honestly and to the best of their ability answer the questionnaire.

4. It was assumed that participants understood each question.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

The following are terms defined as used in the study:

<u>Baby Boomer</u>. Individuals born between 1946 and 1964 (Attorney's Process & Investigation Services, Inc., n.d.)

<u>Generation X (Gen-Xers)</u>. Individuals born between 1965 and 1979 (Attorney's Process & Investigation Services, Inc., n.d.)

<u>Generation Y (Millennials)</u>. Individuals born between 1980 and 1994 (Attorney's Process & Investigation Services, Inc., n.d.)

<u>Social media</u>. "An umbrella term describing all Web-based and mobile services that give individuals the ability to establish a personal profile, connect with other users, and create, publish, and respond to content-whether to share with a network of friends or with the Internet as a whole" (Funk, 2011, p. 8)

<u>Social-media sites</u>. "Services designed around a form of media – videos, photos, articles, and Web pages – that allow individuals to publish rate, and comment upon the

media. Examples of social media include YouTube video sharing, Flickr photo sharing, etc." (Funk, 2011, p. 8)

      <u>Social-networking sites</u>. "Services that allow individuals to create a personal or business network. Social networks allow individuals to (1) establish a public or semipublic profile, (2) build a network of friends on the site, and (3) publish comments, messages, images, videos, and other content for their friends or the site at large. Examples of social-networking platforms include MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and dating sites like Match.com" (Funk, 2011, p. 8)

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry. This chapter includes the description of subjects, description of the instrument, description of procedures, and the method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

The subjects in this study were professionals in the event planning industry. Each subject being evaluated was a Baby Boomer (born between 1946 and 1964), Gen Xer (born between 1965 and 1979) or Millennial (born between 1980 and 1994). These subjects were evaluated to assist in the compilation of information of technological marketing knowledge and usage among the three generational groups working in the event planning industry. These subjects were selected through convenience sampling.

Description of Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a one-page, 12-item online questionnaire created by the researcher (Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of items designed to determine generational influences on social media marketing in special event companies. A pilot test was conducted on December 20, 2012 with eight professional event planners; from the pilot test no changes were made to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of items to determine the age, technological skill set, and social media usage of professionals in the event planning industry. Demographic

questions, items eleven and three, were asked to determine gender and the type of special event company the subjects work for, respectively. There were a combination of fill in the blank, yes/no, multiple-choice, and Likert-type scale questions to determine the participant's skill set with technology and their social media usage.

Items one and two were designed to inquire about the participant's knowledge of, and familiarity with, social media marketing. These items were in a yes/no format. Item four was created to decipher how comfortable the participant was with using various types of computer software programs and social media sites. This question was a Likert-type scale to analyze the participant's comfort level on eight items. Items five through seven were created to determine the prevalence of social media use in the participants' business as well as to inquire about companies' social media marketing techniques. These questions were a combination of multiple-choice, open-ended, and select all that apply questions, respectively.

Item eight was created to gather information on whether or not the participant received a college degree. Item nine was created as a follow up question to item eight asking about degree type and year. Item 10 inquired how many years the participant has been working in the special event industry in an open-ended question format. Finally, item 12 asked which generational group the participant was born in by providing multiple-choice options with dates ranging from prior to 1946 to after 1994.

The instrument was submitted to and approved by Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee. An informed consent letter preceded each questionnaire. A copy of this consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

Description of Procedures

The researcher created a questionnaire on Zoomerang.com; the questionnaire was then approved by RPTA department head, Dr. Bill Hendricks, on December 1, 2011. On January 10, 2012, questionnaires were sent via email to corporate and independent event coordinators throughout Southern California. Attached with each email questionnaire was a letter of informed consent notifying the participant about the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary and anonymous; participation in the study was the participant's agreement of consent. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher was not able to be present while each participant filled out the questionnaire; however, contact information for the researcher was provided in every email should the participant have any questions, comments, or concerns. Participants were given until January 25, 2012 to complete the survey, at which time all data were collected.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using the online 12-item questionnaire. Nine of the 12 questions were created to assist in the findings of at least one of the five research questions of the study; the other two questions, items 3 and 11, were demographic questions which were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

The first research question inquired about whether or not the special events industry uses social media to market events and reach consumers. Items 1, 2, and 12 were measured by asking if the respondent has ever used social media to market an event, ever been invited to participate in an event through a social media outlet, and when the respondent was born, respectively. These questions were analyzed by using frequencies

and percentages. The highest frequency or percentage allowed the researcher to determine which social media outlet the subjects used the most to market events and reach their consumers.

The second research question explores whether there is a relationship between years of experience in the special events industry and comfort level with the use of social marketing. Item 4 attempts to answer this question by asking the respondent's comfort level with various electronic programs and social networking sites. Item 10 also attempts to answer the third research question by asking how many years the respondent has been working in the special events industry. A Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to determine the relationship between comfort level with various programs used within the industry and the number of years working in the special events industry.

The third and final research question was asked to determine if organizations have specific positions that manage their social media site(s). Items 5, 6, and 7 were created to find an answer to this question. Item 5 inquires about which type of social media site(s) the respondent's company currently has a current account with. Items 6 and 7 inquire about which position in the respondent's company is responsible for updating the company's social media marketing site(s), and the age of that individual. Each of these items were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS


The purpose of the study was to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry. The data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via email between January 10, 2012 and January 23, 2012. There was a 41.86% response rate, which resulted in a sample size of 18 subjects.


Demographics

Demographics measured included gender, age, location of work, and college degree concentration. Of the 18 participants, females (n = 15, 83.33%) outnumbered males (n = 3, 16.67%). Four of the 18 participants were Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964 (22.22%), 3 participants were Gen-Xers born between 1965 and 1979 (16.67%), and 11 were Millenials born between 1980 and 1994(61.11%). The majority of participants indicated they have had between five and nine years of experience in the special events industry, as is indicated in Table 1.


Table 1
Years of Experience According to Frequency and Percentage

| Years of experience in Special Events Industry | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| 0.5-4 Years | 5 | 29.41 |
| 5-9 Years | 7 | 41.18 |
| 10-14 Years | 1 | 5.88 |
| 15-19 Years | 0 | 0.00 |
| 20-24 Years | 2 | 11.76 |
| 25-29 Years | 2 | 11.76 |

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

The participants were asked to state the type of special event planning company they currently worked for. Non-profits (n = 6, 33.33%) and wedding planning companies (n = 5, 27.78%) comprised more than 58% of the responses. A complete distribution of participants' industry locations have been included in Table 2.

Table 2
Industry Location According to Frequency and Percentage

| Location | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Non-Profit | 6 | 33.33 |
| Wedding Planning | 5 | 27.78 |
| Convention Center | 3 | 16.67 |
| Hotel | 2 | 11.11 |
| DMC | 1 | 5.56 |
| Corporate | 1 | 5.56 |

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are greater than 100%.

Each participant in the study revealed that they have earned a college degree. Eight of the participants majored in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration (47.06%). Please refer to Table 3 for the presentation of degrees received by each participant.

Table 3
College Degree According to Frequency and Percentage

| Major/Degree | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration | 8 | 47.06 |
| Communications | 3 | 17.56 |
| Sociology | 2 | 11.76 |
| Theater | 1 | 5.88 |
| Radiological Sciences | 1 | 5.88 |
| Foods and Nutrition | 1 | 5.88 |
| Finance and Real Estate | 1 | 5.88 |

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

Comfort Level with Databases and Social Media Sites

The participants were asked to rate their level of comfort with various databases and programs related to the special events industry as well as with popular social media sites. The rating system was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 being the most comfortable and 5 being the least comfortable. Participants overall rated being most comfortable with the use Microsoft Word (mean = 1.39, SD = 1.037), Microsoft Excel (mean = 1.61, SD = 1.145), and Facebook (mean = 1.72, SD = 1.179); meanwhile, Dashboard was rated as being the least comfortable program (mean = 4.06, SD = 1.589). All of the results have been tabulated and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Comfort Level with Industry Software Programs and Social Media Sites According to Mean and Standard Deviation

| Program/Social Networking Site | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Microsoft Word | 1.39 | 1.037 |
| Microsoft Excel | 1.61 | 1.145 |
| Facebook | 1.72 | 1.179 |
| Blogging Site | 2.33 | 1.328 |
| Twitter | 2.39 | 1.037 |
| Opera Software | 3.78 | 1.734 |
| Raiser's Edge | 3.83 | 1.757 |
| Dashboard | 4.06 | 1.589 |

The results for the number of years the participants have been working in the special events industry was correlated with their comfort levels with different types of industry software and social media sites in Table 5. The data were tabulated using an $r^2$ score, which measures the relationship between two variables between -1 and 1. If the $r^2$ score is negative it means that the two variables have a negative correlation, meaning as one variable increases the other variable decreases. If the score is positive, the two

18

variables have a positive correlation, which means that both variables move in the same direction. The only two programs with a negative correlation were Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word; meaning that as years of experience increase, participants' comfort level with these programs decrease. On the other hand, comfort levels with every other program increase as years of experience increase. In fact, there is a significant positive relationship between the comfort level with the use of Facebook and the increase in the number of years of experience in the special events industry.

Table 5
Correlation Between Years of Experience in the Special Events Industry and Comfort Levels

| Program/Social Media Site | $r^2$ |
|---|---|
| Microsoft Excel | -.143 |
| Microsoft Word | -.120 |
| Raiser's Edge | .231 |
| Dashboard | .070 |
| Opera Software | .440 |
| Facebook | .545 |
| Twitter | .417 |
| Blogging Site | .264 |

Event Marketing Through Social Media

Participants were asked if they have ever utilized social media to market an event. The largest percentage of participants (n = 13, 72.22%) responded that they have utilized social media to market an event, and 28.78% (n = 5) of the participants responded that they have never marketed an event through a social media site. Participants were also asked if they have ever been invited to participate in an event through a social media outlet; all participants (n = 18, 100%) have been invited to do so.

19

The participants were then asked which social media sites their business has an account with to the best of their knowledge. The results, which are presented in Table 6, indicated that Facebook (n = 16, 88.89%) and Twitter (n = 14, 77.78%) were the most frequently used accounts.

Table 6
Companies' Use of Social Media Sites According to Frequency and Percentage

| Social Media Site | $f$ | % |
|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 16 | 88.89 |
| Twitter | 14 | 77.78 |
| Blogging Site | 7 | 38.89 |
| Other | 6 | 33.33 |
| None | 1 | 5.56 |
| I'm not sure | 1 | 5.56 |

After stating which social media sites their company had an account with, participants were asked which position within their company is in charge of updating and maintaining these sites. Table 7 displays the array of positions listed for this question. Once the positions were listed, the participants were asked to state the age of the individual in these positions. A majority (n = 10, 66.67%) said that the person in charge of maintaining the social media account in their organization is between 18 and 31 years old. Of the responses, 26.67% (n = 4) are between 32 and 46 years old, and 6.67% (n = 1) is between 47 and 65 years old. Three of the participants in this study refrained from answering this question due to the fact that they did not personally know the employee from their company in charge of their social media accounts.

Table 7

Position in Charge of Maintaining Social Media Accounts According to Frequency and Percentage

| Position Title | *f* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Marketing Manager | 4 | 22.22 |
| Public Affairs | 4 | 22.22 |
| Web Communications/ Media Specialist | 3 | 16.67 |
| Corporate Office | 2 | 11.11 |
| Unsure of Title | 2 | 11.11 |
| Communications Manager | 1 | 5.56 |
| Interns | 1 | 5.56 |
| Owner of Company | 1 | 5.56 |

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are greater than 100%.

Summary

The results in this chapter indicate that utilizing social media sites to market events in the special events industry has become increasingly popular. A detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS


The research in this study helped to identify the popularity of utilizing social media marketing in the special events industry, as well as the comfort level of using technology among industry professionals. This concluding chapter will include the following: summary of the study, a discussion of the findings including limitations, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for future research.


Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry. The rise of sites such as Facebook and Twitter has led to an increase in the industry of marketing through social media. Although there are various generations currently working in the special events industry, it is necessary that employees of every age have knowledge of how to utilize these sites to market their events.

The research for this study was conducted via an online survey, which was created on Zoomerang.com. Each questionnaire was delivered electronically, via email, to each participant. Attached to the email message was a letter of informed consent and the researcher's contact information should the participants have any questions or concerns. The data were collected during January 2012 from 18 subjects.

The results from this study indicated that social media marketing among special event industry professionals is on the rise. Most companies have developed a specific

position that controls all of their social media. By doing so, this allow the organization to stay in constant communication with their consumers. While Facebook and Twitter were the two most commonly used social media sites to connect with companies' consumers, other social media sites are being utilized as well.

Discussion

This study has shown that regardless of an individual's age or position within an organization, having knowledge of how to use social media sites for marketing is an essential tool. The findings of this study reveal that, no matter what their age, the subjects have earned a college degree. The most popular degree among participants is Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration. On average, the participants have been professionals in the industry for 10 years. Most commonly, these professionals are working for non-profits or wedding planning companies. The study's participants span three generations: The Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, and Generation Y. Most participants have previously used social media to market an event, and all participants have been invited to an event through social media at least once.

As previously researched, a study published in April of 2011 in *Meetings & Conventions Magazine* stated that 60% of special event organizations use Facebook and 55% use Twitter as social media platforms for business purposes (Edelstein, 2011). This smaller study reveals that a higher percentage of special event organizations utilize these social media platforms for business purposes, with 88.89% using Facebook and 77.78% using Twitter. Other studies have shown that 80% of online Americans are using social media sites every month, which is equal to approximately 127 million people (Funk,

2011). Another interesting finding, is that businesses that use blogging as a social media communication tool has on average 55% more traffic than non-blogging businesses (Funk, 2011). Interestingly, even though blogging is a powerful social media communication tool, only 38.89% of respondents in this study stated that their company has active blogging websites.

The participants in this study disclosed that, for the most part, there are specific positions within their company that maintain and control the company's social media sites. In fact, 66.67% of individuals working in these social media maintenance positions are between the ages of 18 and 31. The discovery that a majority of the individuals in these social media service positions are Millennials provides additional evidence that Generation Y is more social media savvy in the workplace than other generations.

The results of the relationship between participants' years of experience and their comfort level with programs and social media sites show that the two variables have a positive correlation. As years of experience in the special events industry increases, so does comfort level with programs and software commonly used in the industry. Interestingly, there is a negative correlation between years of experience and proficiency with basic programs such as Microsoft Word and Excel.

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study and the impact they have on the results. Due to the fact that the information has been collected via a convenience sample, the data may be biased. In addition, because the instrument has not been tested for validity or reliability, the data may be skewed. The researcher sent the online questionnaire out via email, therefore individuals who do not check their email regularly may not have received the questionnaire prior to the closing of the study. In terms of the

18 responses received, only two were from event planning professionals outside of Southern California. In addition, generalizations and conclusions cannot be drawn due to the small sample size.

The results of this study support prior research that although Generation Y is the generation that has been immersed in technology since birth, Baby Boomers are becoming familiar with technology and the use of social media sites. This study demonstrates that a majority of individuals working specifically with social media are from the Millennial generation. However, Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers are continuing to gain more experience with social media sites. There is a positive correlation between years of experience in the industry and comfort level of working with sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. This means that individuals from all areas within companies are making strides to understand how social media impacts their consumers. In addition, by the response of participants listing the age of the individual in their company who is in charge of their company's social media sites, it illustrates that other positions within the company take note of who does what within the company. Knowing which individuals hold which positions within a company assists in playing off others' strengths and weaknesses. As Dr. Patterson of the Louisiana School Internship Consortium stated, "a lack of understanding across generations can have detrimental effects on communication and working relationships and undermine effective services" within a company (Dittman, 2005, para. 6).

While this study has assisted in determining the comfort levels among various generations with different industry programs and social media sites, future studies should be conducted to better understand the impact working with social media sites has on

consumer trends. Future studies should also investigate how financially beneficial social media marketing is to organizations.

Conclusions

 Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The subjects use social media to market events and reach consumers.

2. As an individual's years of experience increases, comfort levels with the use of social media marketing tend to increase.

3. Special event organizations in this study generally create specific positions that manage their social media site(s).

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Continue to encourage employees to understand what their co-workers' strengths and weaknesses are, and to produce the most effective services within the company.

2. In future studies, a larger and more diverse sample size would allow for a more thorough and complete study.

3. Future research should investigate the benefits of social media marketing to organizations in terms of additional profit and value added.

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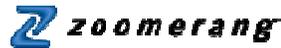
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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

<u>Questionnaire</u>

# Generational Differences on Social Media Marketing in Special Event Companies (1)

Generational Differences on Social Media Marketing in Special Event Companies

Page 1 - Question 1 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

Have you ever used social media to market an event?

○ Yes
○ No

Page 1 - Question 2 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

Have you ever been invited to participate in an event through a social media outlet? (i.e. through Facebook, an Evite, etc.)

○ Yes
○ No

Page 1 - Question 3 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)

What type of special event company do you work for?

❑ Mega Events
❑ Non-Profits
❑ DMC
❑ Wedding Planning
❑ Other, please specify

Page 1 - Question 4 - Rating Scale - Matrix

Please rate your comfort level with working in the following programs.

| | Completely Comfortable | Somewhat Comfortable | Not Very Comfortable | Not Comfortable At All | I've never even atte |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Microsoft Excel | ○  1 | ○  2 | ○  3 | ○  4 | ○ |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| M i c r o s o f t   W o r d   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |
| R a i s e r ' s   E d g e   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |
| D a s h b o a r d   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |
| O p e r a   S o f t w a r e   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |
| F a c e b o o k   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |
| T w i t t e r   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |
| B l o g g i n g   s i t e   ○ | 1 ○ | 2 ○ | 3 ○ | 4 ○ |

Page 1 - Question 5 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)

Which social media sites does your business currently have an account with? (Please select all that apply)

❑ Facebook
❑ Twitter
❑ A blogging site
❑ Other
❑ None
❑ I'm not sure

Page 1 - Question 6 - Open Ended - Comments Box

What position(s) in your company is in charge of your company's social media marketing site(s)? If your company does not utilize social media marketing, please write "N/A".

Page 1 - Question 7 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

What is the age of the individual you listed in number 6? If you wrote "N/A" in number 6, please proceed to number 8.

○ 17 or younger
○ 18 to 31
○ 32 to 46
○ 47 to 65
○ 66 or older

Page 1 - Question 8 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

Did you earn a college degree?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Page 1 - Question 9 - Open Ended - Comments Box

If you answered "yes" to number 8, what was your college degree in and in what year did you earn your degree? If you answered "no" to number 8, please proceed to number 10.

Page 1 - Question 10 - Open Ended - Comments Box

How many years have you been working in the special events industry?

Page 1 - Question 11 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

Page 1 - Question 12 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

In what year were you born?

- ○ Before 1946
- ○ 1946-1964
- ○ 1965-1979
- ○ 1980-1994
- ○ After 1994

Thank You Page

Standard

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Appendix B

<u>Informed Consent Letter</u>

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN GENERATIONAL INFLUENCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN SPECIAL EVENT COMPANIES

Senior project research on generational influences on social media marketing in special event companies is being conducted by Lauren Rosen in the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, under the direct supervision of Dr. Bill Hendricks. The purpose of the study is to examine comfort levels with technology in the special events industry.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached questionnaire. Your participation will require you to answer honestly and to the best of your ability to each question asked. Your participation will take approximately 2 minutes. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire you prefer not to answer.

There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study.

Your responses will be provided anonymously to protect your privacy. Potential benefits associated with the study include increasing awareness of generational uses with technology and social media marketing in special event companies.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Lauren Rosen at lbrosen@calpoly.edu or (661) 877-1885. If you have concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at (805) 756-1508, sopava@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by proceeding to the next page and completing the online questionnaire. Please note that a PDF copy of this form was attached to the email you received. Please print this out now and retain this information for future reference. Thank you for your participation in this research.