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# Psychographic factors and prospective students' use of interactive features on admissions websites of institutes of higher education

Nicholas Cheong

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Running head: PSYCHOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND INTERACTIVE FEATURES

The Rochester Institute of Technology

Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Psychographic Factors and Prospective Students' Use of Interactive Features on Admissions

Websites of Institutes of Higher Education

by

Nicholas Cheong

*A Thesis submitted*

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:  
July 19, 2010

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PSYCHOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS' USE OF INTERACTIVE FEATURES ON ADMISSIONS WEBSITES OF INSTITUTES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study assessed the relationship between psychographic factors and the liking and use of interactive features. Prospective and freshman college students were surveyed regarding their activities, interests and opinions, and on their liking and use of interactive features on Websites of Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). Price consciousness was related to the following: liking of Frequently Asked Questions and blogs; and to the use of tuition cost estimators, instant messaging with current students; and links to student run magazines, and student and alumni success stories. Active users of social media Websites did not differ significantly from non-users in their liking and use of computer-mediated communication features.

Keywords: institute of higher education admissions Websites, interactivity, student recruitment, psychographics, Activities, Interests and Opinions (AIOs)

## Psychographic Factors and Prospective Students' Use of Interactive Features on Admissions Websites of Institutes of Higher Education

Institutes of higher education (IHEs) have not always led in the adoption of new technologies for operational purposes. This includes the adoption of the Internet and the incorporation of interactive features in IHE admissions Websites in reaching out to prospective students.

Interactive features on IHE admissions Websites are helpful in reaching out to prospective students because the site might be the first point of contact with a student (Ayouch, 2007). Guillory & Sundar (2008) report that individuals' attitudes towards an organization and its Website become more positive in general as the individual's perceptions of interactivity of the organization's Website increases.

Even though making positive a prospective student's perception of an IHE admissions Website's interactivity might not be an end in itself, it is important for IHE admissions offices to know what prospective students like and are likely to use instead of incorporating as many interactive features as possible. These features might end up cluttering the Website thus making it difficult for the student to use the features (Thurrow & Musca, 2009). McMillan (2000) agrees and adds that it may be more important to know the audience and determine what will be both interactive and involving for that audience than adding the latest interactive features.

### Rationale

Traditionally, enrollment management personnel (a.k.a. admissions officers) have relied heavily on demographic factors such as gender, family income, race, and geographic location, as well as standardized test scores (e.g. SAT and ACT), for market segmentation purposes

(Dolence, 1991). The main reason for the heavy reliance of demographic factors and standardized test scores for the market segmentation, as is the case with marketing most other products and services, is that demographics and standardized test scores are generally objective, empirical, and/or readily available. Consequently, it is tempting for IHE admissions offices to use demographic factors and standardized test scores as variables to determine the kind of prospective students to attract when considering which interactive features should be incorporated into the IHE admissions Website. That would be a mistake, as no significant relationships have been found between demographics and the perceptions of a Website's degree of interactivity (McMillan, 2000). Hence, admissions offices need to find and use other variables to determine whether the interactive features on their Websites are attracting the colleges' prospective students.

According to Vyncke (2002), variables that are used to segment consumers can be grouped into three general categories: "product-specific behavioral attribute segmentations," "general physical attribute segmentations," and "general psychological attribute segmentations" (or psychographics) (p. 446). The first category classifies consumers by looking at "their purchase behavior within the relevant product category or the benefits the consumer expects to derive from a product category" (p. 446). The second refers to demographic variables. The third category utilizes profiles of customers developed from standardized personality questionnaires or lifestyle analyses. Admissions offices could find out the benefits that prospective students expect from higher education (i.e. the first category), as well as the lifestyle and attitude profiles of prospective students (i.e. the third category) in addition to the demographic profiles that they

already employ. This would help enrollment management personnel when planning their marketing strategies.

Robert (2009) investigated what interactive features on IHE admissions Websites prospective students reported were important in making IHE application decisions. The study did not explore any links between psychographic factors with prospective students' preferences and actual uses of specific interactive features. Watson (2000) reports in her study that in the United States, western public colleges and universities identified the market of prospective students with the following variables: "institution's missions and goals," "environmental scans," "econometric modeling," "geodemographic models," "demographic data," "tracking," "demographic and statistical data," "system guidelines," and "through the Board of Regents" (p. 86). It is apparent that colleges do not consider the use of psychographics when doing market segmentation.

It is therefore the aim of this study to find out which psychographic variables affect prospective students' interest in and use of specific interactive features on IHE admissions Websites. It will focus on traditional-aged, college-bound students. The findings from the study will be useful for IHE admissions offices and individual academic departments in determining how to allocate human and financial resources for interactive features on admissions Websites, as well as to determine which interactive features should be employed to maximize outreach to prospective students.

## Literature Review

### *Limitations of Using Demographics in Market Segmentation*

There are inherent flaws to using demographics in market segmentation. These limitations are elegantly summarized by Ziff (1974) into "The Fictitious Average," "The Minority Skew,"

“The Insightless Numbers,” and “The Homogeneity Myth” (p. 131-133). “The Fictitious Average” refers to the fact that statistical averages in marketing research often reduce the “average consumer” of a particular product or service to mere numbers which are of little or no help in developing an advertising strategy (p. 131). “The Minority Skew” points out that there are often no major differences in demographic variables between users and nonusers of a product or service and that consistent and substantial demographic skews do not occur for the major brands within a product class, which once again is of little or no help in developing an advertising strategy. “The Insightless Numbers” tells of how marketing and advertising professionals are not able to attract a particular segment unless they also know why the distinctions exist. Finally, “The Homogeneity Myth” reminds us that one crucial assumption of demographic analysis is that individual demographic groups are homogeneous – they are not. As an example, Ziff says that “we hear of the ‘working women’ as though all working women were alike” (p. 132).

Hustad & Pessemier (1974) say that the business community is “disenchanted” (p. 35) with the traditional demographic and socioeconomic data that have been used in developing market segments and in the prediction of individuals’ market behavior. Hence, it is important for enrollment management personnel, who are marketers, to look for other ways to segment the higher education market.

### *Psychographics in Market Segmentation*

One of the most commonly used segmentation schemes used by marketers is psychographic analysis. An example of a psychographic segmentation is SRI Consulting Business Intelligence’s Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles, or VALS (Piiro, 1991). Another

example of psychographics in market segmentation is William Wells' and Douglas Tigert's use of Activities, Interests, and Opinions (AIO) as variables in their research (Wells & Tigert, 1971, p. 35). Their work was often cited by subsequent researchers in the field, and the AIO variables "became the standard by which many later psychographic researchers designed their survey instruments" (Piiro, 1991, p. 24-25).

Demby (1974) argues that "psychographic research represents a major step forward in marketing research because it is oriented towards understanding the total human being as he goes through the purchase decision-making process, enabling the marketer to develop meaningful strategies to solve marketing problems" (p. 28). Piiro (1991) agrees, saying that psychographics "provides a way to separate groups by shared characteristics beyond [demographic factors]," and furthermore, psychographics "tries to create order out of the chaos of wants, needs, motivations, activities, interests, opinions, and personality variables comprising... the American consumer" (p. 244).

When individuals have a wide range of sufficiently different choices from which to choose, it seems logical that they would select the option that is most consistent with their values (Shrum & McCarty, 1997). When faced with similar products, individuals may choose the option "toward which they feel emotional bonds and which fulfills their emotional needs" (O'Connor, 1997, p. 236-237) – in other words, opinions and attitudes.

Piiro (1991) states that researchers "can identify heavy, medium or light users of a product and then cross-tabulate with other questions (in previously completed surveys) to gain more insight" (p. 114). Wells (1974) writes that psychographics variables can be used to study lifestyle similarities and differences among geographic areas, especially when markets are limited

geographically, and even when they are not. He also argues that lifestyle and psychographic data can tell us more about *how* groups across demographic variables differ, for example: “How do people who live in the city differ from people who live in the suburbs?” (p. 339). Demby (1974) explains, using examples, how psychographic research might help marketing professionals:

The purpose of psychographic research is to develop the relationship between the three classes of variables (product attributes; lifestyle; psychological variables, which include interests and opinions) so that one can say “Consumer in Segment A have the highest propensity to purchase a product because its attribute ‘fit’ the lifestyle that results from self-concept, interests and opinion”, or “Consumers in Segment B might have a higher propensity to purchase a product if certain attributes can be modified so that they are more relevant in life style and psychological attributes”, or “Consumers in Segment C have a low propensity to purchase a product because its attributes do not relate to either life style or self concept” (p. 18).

It would be unwise for marketing researchers to ignore the use of demographics in their research, as pointed out by Shrum & McCarty (1997), who suggest that “value-behavior relationships may be driven by demographic variables” (p. 150). Therefore, it is proposed that psychographic factors be used in conjunction with demographics as variables to determine whether the individual interactive features on IHE admissions Websites are of interest to prospective students, and whether prospective students actually use those interactive features.

#### *Definitions of Psychographics*

As is the case with interactivity, there is disagreement among scholars on the precise definition of the term “psychographics.” Piirto (1991, p. 1) writes that there is a “lack of

consensus about something as basic as the definition of the term.” Many scholars disagree on whether lifestyle should be considered separate from psychographics (Piirto, 1991). This author’s literature review yielded three definitions of psychographics, all of which include attitudes and lifestyles, although they treat each one with different importance. Piirto (1991) defines psychographics as follows:

“Psychographics” in its broadest sense encompasses not only demographics, but all aspects of an individual’s way of living. The most widely accepted definition of psychographics and lifestyle includes: the activities that occupy leisure time; interests... and people’s opinions – about themselves, social and cultural issues, the future, and products. In its broadest sense, “psychographics” also includes the underlying emotions that drive brand choice (p. 1).

Demby (1974) defines psychographics as follows:

Psychographics is a quantitative research procedure which seeks to explain why people behave as they do and why they hold their current attitudes. It seeks to take quantitative research beyond demographic, socioeconomic, and user/nonuser analysis, but also employs these variables in the research... Psychographics may be viewed as the practical application of the behavioral and social sciences to marketing research... It seeks to measure the consumer’s predisposition to buy a product, the influences that stimulate buying behavior and the relationship between the consumer’s perception of product benefits and his life style, self-concept and material needs (p. 28).

Weinstein (1987) writes that “Psychographics = Personality traits (sociability, self-reliance, assertiveness etc) + Lifestyles (Attitudes, Interests, and Opinions)” (p. 109). He argues that

lifestyles are the more useful factor, and that both personality traits and lifestyles “need to be considered collectively to provide meaningful marketing information” (p. 109).

Piirto (1991) and Weinstein (1987) agree that the most widely published definition of psychographics was by Emanuel Demby in his essay “*Psychographics and From Whence It Came,*” in the American Marketing Association’s publication *LifeStyle and Psychographics* in 1974. Piirto (1991, p. 26) and Weinstein (1987, p. 109) quote Demby (1974, p. 13) as saying that psychographics had three levels:

1. Psychographics is the practical application of the behavioral sciences to marketing research;
2. It is a quantitative research procedure that is indicated when demographic, socioeconomic, and user/nonuser analyses are not sufficient to explain and predict consumer behavior.
3. It seeks to describe the human characteristics of consumers that may have bearing on their response to products, packaging, advertising, and public relations efforts. Such variables may span a spectrum from self-concept and lifestyle to attitudes, interests, and opinions, as well as perceptions of product attributes.

Vyncke (2002) cites Plummer (1974, p. 34) in defining “Activities, Interests, and Opinions” for researchers who want to operationalize variables for psychographic research:

Activities are manifest actions (work, hobbies, social events, vacation, entertainment, clubs, community, shopping, sports, etc.). Interest in some objects, events or topics (family, home, job, community, recreation, fashion, food, media, achievements, etc.) is the degree of excitement that accompanies both special and continuing attention to it. Finally,

opinions are descriptive beliefs (of oneself, social issues, politics, business, economics, education, products, future, culture, etc.) (p. 448).

#### *Advantages and Limitations of Using Psychographics for Market Segmentation*

Gould (1997) conducted a survey among research directors in the largest American advertising agencies “with billings of \$100 million or more as given in the 1992 issue of the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies” (p. 218). Most respondents of the survey thought psychographics to be “not very useful” or somewhat useful” (as opposed to a minority who felt that it was “quite useful” or “very useful”) and that psychographics were either extremely costly or somewhat costly relative to their benefit (p. 219-220). Wansink (1997) agrees with the respondents on that last point, saying that psychographic data frequently lack objectivity, are costly to assemble, and are limited in their ease of interpretation (p. 183).

The respondents to Gould’s (1997) survey were evenly split on the perceived validity and credibility of psychographic research. Many respondents found major problems with the use of psychographics in market segmentation. A summary of some the respondents’ open-ended responses in Gould’s survey reveals that the use of psychographics in market segmentation produced “extremely disappointing results;” that the term “psychographics” is “ill-defined;” that using psychographics in market segmentation “ [doesn’t] take into account that the same person may have a very different mindset when buying different categories of product”; and that psychographics “often simply restate (in an unnecessarily complicated and expensive way) what should be obvious from demographics” (p. 221).

Piirto (1991) writes that academics in the field of psychology ignored VALS, and those who noticed it did not like its “unorthodoxy” and dismissed it as unscientific, claiming that “the

model was based on little actual research, either in a field or laboratory situation” (p. 68). Other critics argued that values were not useful in predicting consumer behavior, because people do not always act consistently with their stated values due to constraints and previous experiences.

Demby (1974) was probably one of the critics that Piirto (1991) writes about; Demby finds two problems with using psychological variables as the basis for psychographic segmentation:

1. The literature is lacking in reliable empirical evidence that standard personality tests actually measure what they purport to measure...
2. In cases where standardized personality inventories have been applied to the marketing area, they have often not been proven to be especially strong in discriminating between groups (p. 24).

Wells (1974) points out other problems in using psychographics in market segmentation. He says that there were “cross tabulation problems,” where extremes in data cancel variables out, leaving no discernable differences between target market and the general population. There are also “segmentation problems” because of unknown segment sizes and low reliability of psychographic tests due to self reported data and validity issues (p. 348-351).

There are also problems with using the data that have been generated. Piirto (1991) argues that Wells & Tigert’s (1971) AIO (Activities, Interests, and Opinions) variables in market segmentation “split the market into segments that required separate target-marketing plans” (p. 111).

Weinstein (1987) argues that psychographics helps to identify and explain target markets in advanced analyses, because psychographic research must “probe into an individual’s state of mind (their AIOs) to piece together the total ‘market puzzle’” (p. 109). He also says that market

characteristics can be analyzed from new perspectives with psychographic research, and that with psychographic research, instead of just knowing who its customers are (as is the case with demographics), a company could know why its customers buy its products. The resulting information could be used to design better marketing plans and to offer similar benefits to new customers, and that has the benefit of minimizing the risk of a new product being a failure upon launching.

Wells (1974) argues that psychographic variables are simple, “familiar and personal” because they describe consumers in “the language of everyday conversation and thought,” are more detailed and interesting than demographic profiles, and are easier to grasp than technical and abstract terms (p. 318). He quotes Demby (1974, p. 13) as saying that the research output is “humanized” (p. 318). Wells (1974) also says that because psychographic studies employ objective questions with precoded answers, surveys can be self-administered and thus research studies can be conducted at a relatively low cost; results are quantitative and thus multivariate analyses can be carried out.

#### *Definitions of “Interactivity”*

Even though the word “interactivity” is used widely by communication scholars in the context of Internet communication, there is no standard definition of the concept. For examples, Kiousis (2002) writes that there is “a lack of theoretical consensus” (p. 357) regarding the definition of the concept of interactivity; Ferber, Foltz & Pugliese (2005) say that the term is “easy to form a simple and casual understanding but rather difficult to arrive at a precise definition” (p. 403), that the term is “frequently used in a positive, yet often vague, manner” (p. 409); McMillan (2002) states that the concept of interactivity needs to be more clearly defined,

even as “(m)uch of the literature on computer-mediated communication assumes that it is interactive” (p. 272).

Since there is no standard definition of the concept of interactivity, scholars offer different definitions, using different dimensions to measure interactivity. Ferber et al. (2005) say that some researchers “define interactivity as a combination of process, features, and/or perception” (p.404). Agreeing with them, Kiouisis (2002) found that some scholars see interactivity as a perception. These scholars do not consider the dimension of time in their definitions of interactivity, contrary to what McMillan (2000) says about some scholars suggesting that “interactivity must occur in ‘real-time’” (p. 2).

Kiouisis (2002) defines interactivity as “[t]he degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many), both synchronously and asynchronously, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency)” (p.372). Sundar, Kalyanaraman & Brown (2003) refer to interactivity as “users having the potential to be both sources and recipients of content and interaction” as media increasingly converge (p. 32). Richards (2006) argues that the concept of interactivity is not merely an exchange, but also generation of content, and that it is important to ask the question of who the generator of the content is. He believes that interactivity can be a property, an activity, or both.

Much as different scholars have vastly different ways of defining and measuring interactivity, most of them agree that interactivity in the context of Internet Websites involves allowing the receivers of the messages to respond quickly, easily, and cheaply with the provider of the content, other receivers of the same messages, or both.

*Interactive Features on IHE Admissions Websites*

Since the definition of interactivity is not agreed upon by scholars, it is unsurprising to find that scholars use different dimensions to classify interactive features. As a result, a feature that is considered interactive in one study may not be considered so in another. This is particularly so when the scholars write in different contexts.

Robert's (2009) research on the interactivity of IHE admissions Websites divides 32 interactive features into five dimensions: "navigation, personalized content, delivery of messages, communication, and feedback" (p. 25). The features are:

Internal links; external links; search engine; site map; FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions); consistent main menu; prospective student link; pull down menu; site registration; online registration for campus tour/visit; online application; application status; use of audio; use of video; text only; use of graphics; [availability of] RSS feed; podcasting; instant messaging with current students; instant messaging with admissions officers; message board; blogs of current students; chat room with current students; chat room with admissions officers; chat room with other applicants/prospective students; virtual tour; survey; contact Webmaster (active e-mail); contact admissions (active e-mail); request more information; e-mail; mailing address; and cookies (p. 26).

In evaluating IHE admissions Websites for interactivity, Ayouch (2007) looks at whether the following features were present:

Financial aid estimator; tuition calculator; electronic application; campus visit request form; instant messaging [other] student[s]; instant messaging college professional; RSVP college events; online inquiry; faculty e-mail; student e-mail; blogs; virtual tours;

personalized brochures; camera feeds; downloadable Podcast; mobile phone feeds; customized user login; virtual open house (p. 67).

Ferber et al. (2005) write that McMillan (2002) uses the level of receiver control and direction of communication (one-way or two-way) in her four-part model of interactivity to classify interactive features. Writing in the political context, Ferber et al. (2005) modified McMillan's model to "make provision for three-way communication aimed at influencing other parties or, in other words, providing a mechanism for public deliberation" (p. 393). They include the following features as interactive:

[P]ublic forums; active e-mail [addresses] to organization personnel, Webmasters or other technical personnel; site search engines; personalized site layouts; e-subscriptions; options to determine information... by entering zip codes or other individual information or clicking on a map; and online polls (p. 394).

Lilleker & Jackson (2008) verify the existence of the following in their assessment of Web 2.0 tools and features on party and party leader Websites and social network profiles in the United Kingdom using Ferber et al.'s (2005) model:

Contact details; search engine; enmeshing; interactive navigation aids; questionnaires; visitor initiated questionnaires; polls; visitor initiated polls; petitions; Flickr (a Website for uploading photographs); RSS feeds; Twitter; videos uploaded; [whether] visitors can upload material; use of networks; use of fora; ability of all visitors to share information; ability of all visitors to update information; private conversation; public conversations (p. 14).

Guillory & Sundar (2008) write that interactive features in computer-mediated communication include “contingency (whether answers are provided to users’ questions), participation (whether users can participate in communication, or must simply observe), and synchronicity (whether there is real-time or delayed exchange of communication)” (p. 6). Thus, in classifying interactive features on IHE admissions Websites, it is proposed that the following dimensions be considered:

1. Customization: the ability of the feature to allow a visitor to choose his/her perspective (e.g. prospective freshman student, prospective transfer student, international applicants etc)
2. Static content: a page retrieved by different users at different times is always the same
3. Participation: the ability of the feature to allow for a visitor to communicate with other people (not necessarily other visitors)
4. Synchronicity: the ability of the feature to allow people (not necessarily other visitors) to respond to a visitor’s inquiries such that the visitor gets his/her answers instantaneously
5. User-to-site interaction: the ability of the feature to allow a visitor to find information on the Website by logging in, inputting personal data, or typing search terms, or to find more information which is less relevant on other Websites via links

The features are thus classified into the following categories, according to the dimensions that they have in common (Table 1):

1. Static content features

2. Dynamic content features
3. Computer-mediated communication features
4. Links

Table 1: Classification of interactive features on institute of higher education admissions

Websites

**Static content features**

#	Features	Customiza-tion	Static content	Participa-tion	Synchroni-city	User-to-site interaction
1	Virtual tour of campus		Yes			
2	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)		Yes			
3	Videos		Yes			
4	Blogs		Yes	Possibly*	Possibly*	
5	Site map		Yes			

\*With comments feature

**Dynamic content features**

#	Features	Customiza-tion	Static content	Participa-tion	Synchroni-city	User-to-site interaction
6	Choice of status (prospective freshman, transfer student etc)	Yes				Yes
7	Tuition cost estimator	Yes				Yes
8	Search engine	Yes				Yes
9	Online application	Yes				Yes

10	Check application status					Yes
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### Computer-mediated communication features

#	Features	Customization	Static content	Participation	Synchronicity	User-to-site interaction
11	Comments			Yes		
12	Forums			Yes		
13	Instant messaging with current students	Possibly*		Yes	Yes	
14	Instant messaging with admissions officers	Possibly*		Yes	Yes	
15	Skype's "call phone" feature	Possibly*		Yes	Yes	

**\*If the design of the feature allows for it, so as to direct user to the correct department or staff member to handle inquiries**

**Links**

#	Features	Customiza- -tion	Static content	Participa- -tion	Synchroni- -city	User-to- -site interaction
16	Link to join Facebook fan page		Yes			Yes
17	Link to follow college on Twitter		Yes			Yes
18	Links to colleges		Yes			Yes
19	Links to departments		Yes			Yes
20	Links to other offices (such as Student Life, Residential Life)		Yes			Yes
21	Links to student organizations (Student Government, student clubs etc.)		Yes			Yes
22	Link to college/university news		Yes			Yes
23	Links to student- run magazines		Yes			Yes
24	Links to student success stories		Yes			Yes
25	Links to alumni success stories		Yes			Yes

## Methodology

Self reported data were collected in the form of an online survey hosted by the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). An online survey was chosen as the sole medium of conducting this research because it is useful to use the medium to study the medium. A convenience sample was identified and easily communicated with through the popular social networking Website, *Facebook.com*. About 1000 fans of the RIT Undergraduate Admissions Office fan page<sup>1</sup> and the 700 or so members of the group titled “RIT Accepted Students – 2010<sup>2</sup>” on *Facebook.com* formed the sample.

A total of three messages were sent between mid March and mid April 2010 to the sample by Ashley Hennigan, Admissions Counselor at RIT and the administrator of both the fan page and the group on *Facebook.com*, inviting the members of the targeted sample to participate in the online survey. All three messages were identical and can be found in Appendix A.

The respondents were first asked if they were willing to participate in the survey, and if they were willing to, they proceeded to the next question which asked if they were prospective students or freshman students at RIT at the time the survey was conducted. Only if they answered “Yes” to both questions were they immediately directed to the survey. The survey asked first respondents to rank how much they agreed or disagreed with 52 Activities, Interests and Opinions (AIO) statements (see Appendix B). The options for the responses to the AIO statements were “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly disagree.” The AIO statements are mostly adapted from Wells & Tigert (1971), Sun, Horn & Merritt (2004), and Swinyard & Smith (2003) and includes general, as well as education and media-specific categories of the following (Plummer, 1974):

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/RITAdmissions?ref=ts>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=219397322645&ref=ts>

1. Activities (such as work, hobbies, social events, vacation, entertainment, clubs, community, shopping, sports, and use of traditional mass media, social media and interactive features on Websites)
2. Interests (such as family, home, job, community, recreation, fashion, food, media, achievements, as well as interest in traditional mass media, social media and interactive features on Websites)
3. Opinions (such as on the importance of social media and of interactive features on Websites, as well as opinions about co-curricular activities) (p. 34).

The next part of the survey asked the respondents if they recalled using and liking specific interactive features during their search for more information on colleges of their choice (see Appendices C and D respectively). The options for the answers to this part of the survey were “Yes,” “No,” “Don’t remember,” and “Don’t know what this feature is.” The close-ended option was chosen for this part of the survey because respondents might not remember exactly how much they liked or used specific features in their search for and research on institutes of higher education.

Finally, the last part of the survey asks the respondents for demographic information (see Appendix E).

Respondents to the survey consisted of prospective students at RIT and RIT freshman students. The first group of respondents is important to the study for obvious reasons. The responses of the second group are also considered for this study because these students are presumed to be able to reasonably recall answers to the questions regarding the liking and the use of interactive features on IHE admissions Websites during their search for and research on institutes of higher education just about a year ago.

At the time of the third and final message sent to the sample, there were a total of 1753 members on both the *Facebook.com* page and group. It may be assumed that there was an overlap in the membership of both the fan page and the group due to their nature. There were 268 responses, out of which 195 were usable. This gives us a response rate of about 15% (even assuming that there was no overlap in the membership of both the fan page and the group), and a completion rate of almost 73%. The data were then analyzed.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

With college tuition affordability at the forefront of many students' and parents' minds nowadays, understanding price consciousness and its related behavior on IHE admissions Websites will help enrollment management staff better understand how to present the Institute's image. Prospective students who are price conscious would most probably place affordability at the top of their list of criteria when considering colleges. Such information can be found in the form of dynamic content and static content features. Price conscious prospective students would thus be less likely to want to bother with computer-mediated communication features, especially since they will have to interact with others or read through dozens or even hundreds of comments – rather time consuming activities – to get an answer to a rather direct question. Price conscious prospective students might also like links, since links take users directly to the type of information the users are seeking. Hence, we want to test the following hypotheses:

H1. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H2. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H3. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H4. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H5. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

H6. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

H7. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of links on IHE admissions Websites.

H8. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of links on IHE admissions Websites.

Advice seekers, as the label suggests, would prefer to seek advice from non-official sources, usually through a process of interaction with other people. These come in the form of comments, forums and instant messaging with other students. Advice seekers might also be less likely to like links because using links does not allow them to interact with other people or to hear what they have to say. Hence:

H9. There is a significant and positive relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported liking of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

H10. There is a significant and positive relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

H11. There is a significant and negative relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported liking of links on IHE admissions Websites.

H12. There is a significant and negative relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported use of links on IHE admissions Websites.

Sports fans tend to be sports blog readers. From personal anecdotal evidence, many college students tend to be avid sports fans. It will thus be useful to find out if sports fans' interest in blogs is merely restricted to sports, or carried across other areas of interest. Hence:

H13. Sports spectators are more likely to report liking blogs on IHE admissions Websites than non-sports spectators.

H14. Sports spectators are more likely to report using blogs on IHE admissions Websites than non-sports spectators.

Prospective students with high self-confidence are likely to be sure about the kind of information that they need or to expect from an IHE admissions Website. They are thus likely to actively search for the information that they need through the use of dynamic content features. Conversely, prospective students with low self-confidence are probably unsure about the kind of information to look for and to expect on an IHE admissions Website. Thus, they are more likely to learn about the IHE and the admissions process passively, through information that is readily and prominently available on the Website. These arguments provide us with the basis for the following hypotheses:

H15. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported liking of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H16. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported use of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H17. There is a significant and negative relationship between self confidence and the self-reported liking of links on IHE admissions Websites.

H18. There is a significant and negative relationship between self confidence and the self-reported use of links on IHE admissions Websites.

H19. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported liking of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.

H20. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported use of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.

Intuitively, active users of social media Websites are likely to be more sociable and participative in online forums and discussions than non-active users. We thus have reason to hypothesize that active users of social media Websites like and use computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites more than non-active users:

H21. There is a significant and positive relationship between active usages of social media Websites and the self-reported liking of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

H22. There is a significant and positive relationship between active usages of social media Websites and the self-reported use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

Travelers are presumed to be more adventurous by nature and therefore are more likely to demand customization from Websites than non-travelers. Thus:

H23. Travelers are more likely to report liking dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.

H24. Travelers are more likely to report the use of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.

H25. Travelers are less likely to report liking static content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.

H26. Travelers are less likely to report the use of static content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.

Self-designated opinion leaders are likely to seek out what others think before forming their own opinions, or to participate in online discussions so as to make themselves heard. Therefore:

H27. Self-designated opinion leaders are more likely to report liking computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites than those who do not see themselves as opinion leaders.

H28. Self-designated opinion leaders are more likely to report the use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites more often than those who do not see themselves as opinion leaders.

Some Institutes, like RIT, have a gender ratio that is heavily tilted to one side. It might be important for senior management staff, in their enrollment strategy, to attract more members of the less represented gender to apply and enroll to the Institute. Hence, it will be useful to find significant relationships between gender and the liking and use of the interactive features. We thus ask:

RQ1. What is the relationship between gender and the liking and use of the different types of interactive features on IHE admissions Websites?

## Results

*H1. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking the dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. choice of Status, tuition cost estimator, search engine, online application, and check application status) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H2. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using the tuition cost estimator feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.023$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. choice of status, search engine, online application, and check application status) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H3. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.011$ ). Those who reported liking blogs on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.047$ ). However, those who reported liking the other static content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. virtual tour of campus, videos, site map) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H4. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using the static content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. virtual tour of campus, Frequently Asked Questions, videos, blogs and site map) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H5. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported liking of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. comments, forums, instant messaging with current students, instant messaging with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H6. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self-reported use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using the instant messaging with current students feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.045$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other computer mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. comments, forums, instant messaging with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H7. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self reported liking of links on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking links on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. to join Facebook fan page, to follow college on Twitter, to colleges, to departments, to other offices, to student organizations, to college/university news, to student-run magazines, to student success stories, and to alumni success stories) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H8. There is a significant and positive relationship between price consciousness and the self reported use of links on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using links to student run magazines on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.005$ ). Respondents who reported using links to student success stories on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.040$ ) Respondents who reported using links to alumni success stories on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more price conscious than those who did not ( $p=.003$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other links on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. to join Facebook fan page, to follow college on Twitter, to colleges, to departments, to other offices, and to college/university news) were no more price conscious than those who did not.

*H9. There is a significant and positive relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported liking of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. comments, forums, instant messaging with students, instant messaging

with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more advice seeking than those who did not.

*H10. There is a significant and positive relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using the instant messaging with current students feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more advice seeking than those who did not ( $p=.030$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. comments, forums, instant messaging with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more advice seeking than those who did not.

*H11. There is a significant and negative relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported liking of links on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking the link to join Facebook on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more advice seeking than those who did not ( $p=.035$ ). Respondents who reported liking the link to follow the college on Twitter on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more advice seeking than those who did not ( $p=.030$ ). Respondents who reported liking the link to alumni success stories on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more advice seeking than those who did not ( $p=.033$ ).

However, respondents who reported liking the other links on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. to other offices, to student organizations, to college/university news, to student-run magazines, and to student success stories) were no more advice seeking than those who did not.

*H12. There is a significant and negative relationship between advice seeking and the self-reported use of links on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using links to colleges on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more advice seeking than those who did not ( $p=.029$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other links on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. to join Facebook fan page, to follow college on Twitter, to other offices, to student organizations, to college/university news, to student-run magazines, to student success stories, and to alumni success stories) were no more advice seeking than those who did not.

*H13. Sports spectators are more likely to report liking blogs on IHE admissions Websites than non-sports spectators.*

Respondents who reported liking blogs on IHE admissions Websites were no more likely to be sports spectators than non-sports spectators.

*H14. Sports spectators are more likely to report using blogs on IHE admissions Websites than non-sports spectators.*

Respondents who reported using blogs on IHE admissions Websites were no more likely to be sports spectators than non-sports spectators.

*H15. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported liking of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. choice of Status, tuition cost estimator, search engine, online application, and check application status) were no more self confident than those who did not.

*H16. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported use of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. choice of Status, tuition cost estimator, search engine, online application, and check application status) were no more self confident than those who did not.

*H17. There is a significant and negative relationship between self confidence and the self-reported liking of links on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking links to student organizations on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more self confident than those who did not ( $p=.034$ ). However, respondents who reported liking the other links on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. to join Facebook fan page, to follow college on Twitter, to colleges, to departments, to other offices, to college/university news, to student run magazines, to student success stories, and to alumni success stories) were no more self confident than those who did not.

*H18. There is a significant and negative relationship between self confidence and the self-reported use of links on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using links to student run magazines on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more self confident than those who did not ( $p=.018$ ). Respondents who reported using links to alumni success stories on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more self confident than those who did not ( $p=.045$ ).

However, respondents who reported using the other links on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. to join Facebook fan page, to follow college on Twitter, to colleges, to departments, to other

offices, to student organizations, to college/university news, and to student success stories) were no more self confident than those who did not.

*H19. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported liking of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking static content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. virtual tour of campus, Frequently Asked Questions, videos, blogs, and site map) were no more self confident than those who did not.

*H20. There is a significant and positive relationship between self confidence and the self-reported use of static content features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using static content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. virtual tour of campus, Frequently Asked Questions, videos, blogs, and site map) were no more self confident than those who did not.

*H21. There is a significant and positive relationship between active usages of social media Websites and the self-reported liking of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported liking computer-mediated features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. comments, forums, instant messaging with current students, instant messaging with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more active in using social media Websites than those who did not.

*H22. There is a significant and positive relationship between active usages of social media Websites and the self-reported use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.*

Respondents who reported using computer-mediated features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. comments, forums, instant messaging with current students, instant messaging with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more active in using social media Websites than those who did not.

*H23. Travelers are more likely to report liking dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.*

Respondents who reported liking the choice of status feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be travelers than those who did not ( $p=.015$ ). However, respondents who reported liking the other dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. tuition cost estimator, search engine, online application, and check application status) were no more likely to be travelers than those who did not.

*H24. Travelers are more likely to report the use of dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.*

Respondents who reported using the tuition cost estimator feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be travelers than those who did not ( $p=.002$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other dynamic content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. choice of status, search engine, online application, and check application status) were no more likely to be travelers than those who did not.

*H25. Travelers are less likely to report liking static content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.*

Respondents who reported liking static content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. virtual tour of campus, Frequently Asked Questions, videos, blogs, and site map) were no more likely to be travelers than those who did not.

*H26. Travelers are less likely to report the use of static content features on IHE admissions Websites than non-travelers.*

Respondents who reported using static content features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. virtual tour of campus, Frequently Asked Questions, videos, blogs, and site map) were no more likely to be travelers than those who did not.

*H27. Self-designated opinion leaders are more likely to report liking computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites than those who do not see themselves as opinion leaders.*

Respondents who reported liking computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites were no more likely to be self-designated opinion leaders than those who did not.

*H28. Self-designated opinion leaders are more likely to report the use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites more often than those who do not see themselves as opinion leaders.*

Respondents who reported using the comments feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be self-designated opinion leaders than those who did not ( $p=.014$ ). Respondents who reported using the forums on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be self-designated opinion leaders than those who did not ( $p=.037$ ). Respondents who reported using the instant messaging with current students feature on IHE admissions

Websites were significantly more likely to be self-designated opinion leaders than those who did not ( $p=.046$ ). However, respondents who reported using the other computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites (i.e. instant messaging with admissions officers, and Skype's "call phone" feature) were no more likely to be self-designated opinion leaders than those who did not.

*RQ1. What is the relationship between gender and the liking and the use of the different types of interactive features on IHE admissions Websites?*

There were no significant relationships between gender and the self reported liking of the interactive features on IHE admissions Websites.

Female respondents were significantly less likely to report the use of forums than male respondents on IHE admissions Websites ( $p=.003$ ). Female respondents were also significantly less likely than male respondents to report the use of links to other offices on IHE admissions Websites ( $p=.044$ ). There were no significant relationships between gender and the use of the other interactive features on IHE admissions Websites.

#### *Other Significant Findings*

Respondents who reported using the comments feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be self-reported active users of media than who did not ( $p=.035$ ). Respondents who reported using the forums on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be self-reported active users of media than who did not ( $p=.019$ ). Respondents who reported using the instant messaging with current students feature on IHE admissions Websites were significantly more likely to be self-reported active users of media than who did not ( $p=.021$ ). Respondents who reported using the instant messaging with admissions officers

feature were significantly more likely to be self-reported active users of media than who did not ( $p=.041$ ).

Thus, there is overall very strong support for a positive and significant relationship between self-reported active usage of media and the use of computer-mediated communication features on IHE admissions Websites.

The summary of statistically significant  $p$  values of Activities, Interests and Opinions with the liking and the use of interactive features can be found in Appendix F.

#### Limitations and Future Research

The study's sample consisted of prospective, accepted and freshman students of the Rochester Institute of Technology, an institute of higher education with more than 16,000 students enrolled in the fall of 2009 in Northeastern United States (*RIT Overview*). The sample cannot be said to be representative of the entire United States. The results of the study are limited to the respondents surveyed; at best, they can only relate to Websites of IHEs owing to the similarities of high school audiences. For example, the virtual tour feature would not apply to most organizations selling only products.

The sample consisted of prospective, accepted and freshman students of RIT who were willing members of a fan page and a group associated with RIT on *Facebook.com*. These students' responses might not be representative of that of high school prospective students in general. A more comprehensive and inclusive sample across regions and types of schools might be more representative.

The survey did not ask respondents why they liked or disliked features and why they used or did not use features. Future studies could incorporate these questions to try to explain why certain types of people like certain features.

The content provided with each feature was not considered. Respondents might have liked or used a particular feature only because the feature was the only place with which they could find the information they wanted. Further research which allows for the same information to be presented in different formats using different interactive features might reveal what prospective students would use or would like to use. Such a study might consider the use of a laboratory experiment in conjunction with a survey

Due to the need for recollection, the survey merely asked respondents close-ended questions (i.e. “Yes-No”) about their liking and use of interactive features on IHE admissions Websites. For a more descriptive analysis, a similar survey could instead ask respondents how much they liked and used those interactive features on a Likert scale. The respondents could be asked to participate in such a survey immediately after they leave the Website (e.g. a message could pop up in a new window asking site visitors if they were interested in participating in a survey) so that the memories of their liking and use of individual features are still fresh in their minds, thus allowing for more accurate responses in that part of the survey.

Features, their nature and their content change with time. The liking and the use of certain interactive features might change with the passage of time too, thus rendering some of the findings of the study inapplicable in the future.

The study was conducted using self reported data in the form of online surveys. Responses might not be entirely accurate due to the forgetfulness, embarrassment, exaggeration, fatigue or

misunderstanding of the questions by the respondents. Such issues were considered and were minimized by the design of the survey.

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**Appendix A: Message to Facebook.com fans of RIT's Undergraduate Admissions Office and members of the "RIT Accepted Students – 2010" group**

Dear Prospective/Freshman Student

I am a graduate student at RIT. I am doing a research study on how attitudes, opinions and interests affect prospective students' use of interactive features on college admissions websites.

If you are in 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, or are a college freshman, please help us by participating in this study by completing this online survey (<https://clipboard.rit.edu/take.cfm?sid=F79A9443>). The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete.

Your individual responses will not be revealed. All data collected will be presented in only in an aggregated form. The findings of the study will be made known to the RIT Undergraduate Admissions Office so as to help them better serve your and other prospective students' needs.

Thank you for your help!

Best regards,

Nicholas Cheong  
M.S. Candidate  
Department of Communication  
College of Liberal Arts  
Rochester Institute of Technology

**Appendix B: Activities, Interests, and Opinions (AIO) Statements**

Please read each statement carefully and state whether you “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.”

**PRICE CONSCIOUS**

#	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	I shop a lot for “specials”.					
2	I find myself comparing prices of identical items between brick-and-mortar stores and online retailers before I make the decision to buy.					
3	I usually watch the advertisements for announcements of sales.					
4	A person can save a lot of money by shopping around for bargains.					
5	I often wait until a store has a sale to shop.					

**COMMUNITY MINDED**

#	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		1	2	3	4	5
6	I am an active member of at least one service organization.					
7	I do volunteer work for a hospital or service organization on a fairly regular basis.					
8	I like to work on community projects.					
9	I have personally worked in a political campaign or for a candidate or an issue.					
10	I like to know what is happening in					

	the community I live in.					
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**SPORTS SPECTATOR**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
11	I like to watch or listen to baseball or football games.					
12	I usually read the sports page in the daily news.					
13	I thoroughly enjoy conversations about sports.					
14	I would rather go to a sporting event than a dance.					

**SELF-CONFIDENT**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
15	I think I have more self-confidence than most people.					
16	I am more independent than most people.					
17	I think I am generally more capable than the average person in most tasks.					
18	I like to be considered a leader.					

**SELF-DESIGNATED OPINION LEADER**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
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19	My friends, relatives, family members or neighbors often come to me for advice.					
20	I sometimes influence what my friends buy.					
21	People come to me more often than I go to them for information about brands.					

**ADVICE SEEKER**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
22	I often seek out the advice of my friends regarding which brand to buy.					
23	I spend a lot of time talking with my friends about products and brands.					
24	My neighbors or friends usually give me good advice on what brands to buy.					

**BRAND NAME CONSCIOUSNESS**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
25	I try to stick to well-known brand names.					
26	It is usually worthwhile to pay a premium for brands of goods/services which are well-known.					

**TRAVEL**

#	Statement	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
27	I like to visit places that are totally different from my home.					
28	Seeing the world is very important for my personal development.					

**IN-GROUP CONTACT/INFLUENCE**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
29	I like to be sure to see the movies everybody is talking about.					
30	My opinions on things do not count very much.					
31	I hate to lose even in friendly competition.					

**USE OF MEDIA**

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
32	I play games online.					
33	I read the news regularly.					
34	I like Websites that allow me to customize settings (such as to change the color, to turn off auto play on videos etc).					
35	I use the Internet to expand my world of fascinating hobbies,					

	interests, and activities.					
36	I visit third-party Websites (such as US News, Wikipedia etc) to read about the college of my choice.					
37	I would rather spend my evening in front of the computer than in front of the TV.					
38	I am an active user of Facebook.					
39	I am an active user of MySpace.					
40	I am an active user of Twitter.					
41	I log into a social media Website (Facebook, MySpace, Friendster etc) at least once a day.					

## EDUCATION

#	Statement	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
42	A college education is essential to success in life.					
43	A college education is necessary for me to discover myself.					
44	It is important to have diversity in the classroom.					
45	Availability of non-academic activities in a college is important to me.					
46	Those who can do, do. Those who can't do, teach.					
47	Other things being equal, I would like to go to a college near home.					
48	It is important for the college of my choice to have as many opportunities for extra-curricular activities as possible.					
49	I would like to pay for my college education as much as possible to reduce the financial burden on my parents.					

**TECHNOLOGY**

#	Statement	Strongly agree  1	Agree  2	Neither agree nor disagree  3	Disagree  4	Strongly disagree  5
50	I am excited by having a million web pages to explore.					
51	I often have a hard time figuring out how to use current internet technology.					
52	When people have questions about the internet or computers, I always have the answer.					

**Appendix C: Use of Interactive Features**

Please check only one box for each feature.

I USED the following interactive features in my search for a college (please check only box for each item):

**Static content features**

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
1	Virtual tour of campus				
2	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)				
3	Videos				
4	Blogs				
5	Site map				

**Dynamic content features**

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
6	Choice of status (prospective freshman, transfer student etc)				
7	Tuition cost estimator				
8	Search engine				

9	Online application				
10	Check application status				

### Computer-mediated communication features

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
11	Comments				
12	Forums				
13	Instant messaging with current students				
14	Instant messaging with admissions officers				
15	Skype's "call phone" feature				

### Links

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
16	Link to join Facebook fan page				
17	Link to follow college on Twitter				

18	Links to colleges				
19	Links to departments				
20	Links to other offices (such as Student Life, Residential Life)				
21	Links to student organizations (Student Government, student clubs etc.)				
22	Link to college/university news				
23	Links to student-run magazines				
24	Links to student success stories				
25	Links to alumni success stories				

**Appendix D: Liking of Interactive Features**

Please check only one box for each feature.

I LIKED / WOULD HAVE LIKED the following interactive features on a college admissions Website:

**Static content features**

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
1	Virtual tour of campus				
2	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)				
3	Videos				
4	Blogs				
5	Site map				

**Dynamic content features**

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
6	Choice of status (prospective freshman, transfer student etc)				
7	Tuition cost estimator				

8	Search engine				
9	Online application				
10	Check application status				

### Computer-mediated communication features

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
11	Comments				
12	Forums				
13	Instant messaging with current students				
14	Instant messaging with admissions officers				
15	Skype's "call phone" feature				

### Links

#	Features	Yes	No	Don't remember	Don't know what this feature is
16	Link to join Facebook fan page				

17	Link to follow college on Twitter				
18	Links to colleges				
19	Links to departments				
20	Links to other offices (such as Student Life, Residential Life)				
21	Links to student organizations (Student Government, student clubs etc.)				
22	Link to college/university news				
23	Links to student-run magazines				
24	Links to student success stories				
25	Links to alumni success stories				

**Appendix E: Demographics**

1. Age next birthday:
2. Gender: Male / Female
3. Grade level: 9<sup>th</sup> / 10<sup>th</sup> / 11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> / College Freshman
4. High school GPA (current if 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades; cumulative if college freshman):
5. SAT score: Writing, Math, Critical reading
6. ACT score: English, Math, Reading, Science, Writing
7. Currently taking (or have taken) Advanced Placement (AP) classes: Yes / No
8. Used Common Application forms: Yes / No / Not sure
9. Total annual family income (approximate):
10. Family size:
11. Type of dwelling: Urban / Suburban / Rural
12. I most closely identify with the follow race(s): White / African-American / American Indian and Alaska Native / Asian / Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander / Some other race
13. Ethnicity: Hispanic / Non-Hispanic
14. United States student / International student
15. Subscription to unlimited broadband Internet at home: Yes/No

## Appendix F: Summary of Significant Findings

Table 3

*Summary of statistically significant p values of Activities, Interests and Opinions with the liking of interactive features*

Liking of features	Price Conscious	Advice Seeker	Self Confident	Travel	Opinion Leader	Use of Media
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)	.011					
Blogs	.047					
Choice of status link to join Facebook fan page				.015		
Link to follow college on Twitter		.035				
Links to student organizations			.034			
Links to alumni success stories		.033				

Table 4

*Summary of statistically significant p values of Activities, Interests and Opinions with the use of interactive features*

Use of features	Price Conscious	Advice Seeker	Self Confident	Travel	Opinion Leader	Use of Media
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)	.011					
Tuition cost estimator	.023			.002		
Comments					.014	.035
Forums					.037	.019
Instant messaging with current students	.045	.030			.046	.021
Instant messaging with admissions officers						.041
Links to Colleges		.029				
Links to student-run magazines	.005		.018			
Links to student success stories	.040					
Links to alumni	.003		.045			

success stories

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**Appendix G: Significant Findings***Price Conscious and Use of Tuition Cost Estimator (H2)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
	Tuition cost estimator	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	142	85.11	12085.00
	No	36	106.83	3846.00
	Total	178		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	1932.000
Wilcoxon W	12085.000
Z	-2.271
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.023

a. Grouping Variable: Tuition cost estimator

*Price Conscious and Liking of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (H3)*

**Mann-Whitney Test**

**Ranks**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	174	89.02	15489.50
	No	7	140.21	981.50
	Total	181		

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	264.500
Wilcoxon W	15489.500
Z	-2.548
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.011

a. Grouping Variable: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

*Price Conscious and Liking of Blogs (H3)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Blogs		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	124	82.26	10200.50
	No	49	98.99	4850.50
	Total	173		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	2450.500
Wilcoxon W	10200.500
Z	-1.989
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.047

a. Grouping Variable: Blogs

*Price Conscious and Use of Instant Messaging with Current Students (H6)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Instant messaging with current students		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	59	81.95	4835.00
	No	127	98.87	12556.00
	Total	186		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	3065.000
Wilcoxon W	4835.000
Z	-2.004
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.045

a. Grouping Variable: Instant messaging with current students

*Price Conscious and Use of Links to Student run Magazines (H8)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to student-run magazines		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	61	76.13	4644.00
	No	121	99.25	12009.00
	Total	182		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	2753.000
Wilcoxon W	4644.000
Z	-2.809
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.005

a. Grouping Variable: Links to student-run magazines

*Price Conscious and Use of Links to Student Success Stories (H8)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to student success stories		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	71	81.94	5818.00
	No	112	98.38	11018.00
	Total	183		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	3262.000
Wilcoxon W	5818.000
Z	-2.055
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.040

a. Grouping Variable: Links to student success stories

*Price Conscious and Use of Links to Alumni Success Stories (H8)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to alumni success stories		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Price Conscious	Yes	63	75.00	4725.00
	No	117	98.85	11565.00
	Total	180		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Price Conscious
Mann-Whitney U	2709.000
Wilcoxon W	4725.000
Z	-2.944
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.003

a. Grouping Variable: Links to alumni success stories

*Advice Seeker and Use of Instant Messaging with current students (H10)*

### Mann-Whitney Test

		Ranks		
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Instant messaging with current students				
Advice Seeker	Yes	58	80.40	4663.00
	No	127	98.76	12542.00
	Total	185		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Advice Seeker
Mann-Whitney U	2952.000
Wilcoxon W	4663.000
Z	-2.169
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.030

a. Grouping Variable: Instant messaging with current students

*Advice Seeker and Liking of Link to join Facebook (H11)*

## Mann-Whitney Test

		Ranks		
Link to join Facebook fan page		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Advice Seeker	Yes	174	92.14	16032.00
	No	14	123.86	1734.00
	Total	188		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Advice Seeker
Mann-Whitney U	807.000
Wilcoxon W	16032.000
Z	-2.104
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.035

a. Grouping Variable: Link to join Facebook fan page

*Advice Seeker and Liking of Link to follow College on Twitter (H11)*

### Mann-Whitney Test

		Ranks		
Link to follow college on Twitter		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Advice Seeker	Yes	91	79.18	7205.00
	No	82	95.68	7846.00
	Total	173		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Advice Seeker
Mann-Whitney U	3019.000
Wilcoxon W	7205.000
Z	-2.170
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.030

a. Grouping Variable: Link to follow college on Twitter

*Advice Seeker and Liking of Link to Alumni Success Stories (H11)*

**Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to alumni success stories		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Advice Seeker	Yes	131	84.60	11082.00
	No	47	103.17	4849.00
	Total	178		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Advice Seeker
Mann-Whitney U	2436.000
Wilcoxon W	11082.000
Z	-2.126
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.033

a. Grouping Variable: Links to alumni success stories

*Advice Seeker and Use of Links to Colleges (H12)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
	Links to colleges	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Advice Seeker	Yes	153	96.36	14742.50
	No	31	73.47	2277.50
	Total	184		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Advice Seeker
Mann-Whitney U	1781.500
Wilcoxon W	2277.500
Z	-2.188
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.029

a. Grouping Variable: Links to colleges

*Self Confident and Liking of Links to Student Organizations (H17)*

**Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to student organizations (Student Government, student clubs etc.)		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self Confident	Yes	170	90.54	15392.00
	No	15	120.87	1813.00
	Total	185		

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	Self Confident
Mann-Whitney U	857.000
Wilcoxon W	15392.000
Z	-2.118
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.034

. Grouping Variable: Links to student organizations (Student Government, student clubs etc.)

*Self Confident and Use of Link to Student Run Magazines (H18)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to student-run magazines		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self Confident	Yes	61	78.62	4796.00
	No	121	97.99	11857.00
	Total	182		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Self Confident
Mann-Whitney U	2905.000
Wilcoxon W	4796.000
Z	-2.359
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.018

a. Grouping Variable: Links to student-run magazines

*Self Confident and Use of Links to Alumni Success Stories (H18)*

**Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Links to alumni success stories		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self Confident	Yes	63	79.95	5037.00
	No	117	96.18	11253.00
	Total	180		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Self Confident
Mann-Whitney U	3021.000
Wilcoxon W	5037.000
Z	-2.008
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.045

a. Grouping Variable: Links to alumni success stories

*Travel and Liking of Choice of Status (H23)***Mann-Whitney Test****Ranks**

Choice of status (prospective freshman, transfer student etc)		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Travel	Yes	161	88.19	14198.00
	No	10	50.80	508.00
	Total	171		

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	Travel
Mann-Whitney U	453.000
Wilcoxon W	508.000
Z	-2.439
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.015

a. Grouping Variable: Choice of status (prospective freshman, transfer student etc)

*Travel and Use of Tuition Cost Estimator (H24)***Mann-Whitney Test**

**Ranks**

Tuition cost estimator		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Travel	Yes	141	83.23	11735.50
	No	36	111.60	4017.50
	Total	177		

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	Travel
Mann-Whitney U	1724.500
Wilcoxon W	11735.500
Z	-3.138
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002

a. Grouping Variable: Tuition cost estimator

*Self-Designated Opinion Leader and Use of Comments (H28)***Mann-Whitney Test**

**Ranks**

	Comments	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self designated opinion leader	Yes	91	82.88	7542.50
	No	93	101.91	9477.50
	Total	184		

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	Self designated opinion leader
Mann-Whitney U	3356.500
Wilcoxon W	7542.500
Z	-2.463
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.014

a. Grouping Variable: Comments

*Self-Designated Opinion Leader and Use of Forums (H28)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
	Forums	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self designated opinion leader	Yes	70	80.10	5607.00
	No	109	96.36	10503.00
	Total	179		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Self designated opinion leader
Mann-Whitney U	3122.000
Wilcoxon W	5607.000
Z	-2.084
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.037

a. Grouping Variable: Forums

*Self-Designated Opinion Leader and Use of Instant Messaging with Current Students (H28)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Instant messaging with current students		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self designated opinion leader	Yes	59	82.13	4845.50
	No	127	98.78	12545.50
	Total	186		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Self designated opinion leader
Mann-Whitney U	3075.500
Wilcoxon W	4845.500
Z	-1.996
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.046

a. Grouping Variable: Instant messaging with current students

*Use of Media and Use of Comments (Other significant findings)*

### Mann-Whitney Test

		Ranks		
Comments		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Use of media	Yes	91	84.14	7656.50
	No	93	100.68	9363.50
	Total	184		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Use of media
Mann-Whitney U	3470.500
Wilcoxon W	7656.500
Z	-2.110
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.035

a. Grouping Variable: Comments

*Use of Media and Use of Forums (Other significant findings)*

### Mann-Whitney Test

		Ranks		
Forums		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Use of media	Yes	70	78.73	5511.00
	No	109	97.24	10599.00
	Total	179		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Use of media
Mann-Whitney U	3026.000
Wilcoxon W	5511.000
Z	-2.336
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.019

a. Grouping Variable: Forums

*Use of Media and Use of Instant Messaging with Current Students (Other significant findings)***Mann-Whitney Test**

		Ranks		
Instant messaging with current students		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Use of media	Yes	59	80.18	4730.50
	No	127	99.69	12660.50
	Total	186		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Use of media
Mann-Whitney U	2960.500
Wilcoxon W	4730.500
Z	-2.304
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.021

a. Grouping Variable: Instant messaging with current students

*Use of Media and Use of Instant Messaging with Admissions Officers (Other significant findings)*

**Mann-Whitney Test**

**Ranks**

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Use of media	Yes	31	74.31	2303.50
	No	152	95.61	14532.50
	Total	183		

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	Use of media
Mann-Whitney U	1807.500
Wilcoxon W	2303.500
Z	-2.044
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.041

a. Grouping Variable: Instant messaging with admissions officers

*Use of Forums and Gender (RQ1)***Crosstab**

Count		Gender / Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Forums	Yes	45	25	70
	No	52	56	108
	Don't Remember	2	5	7
	Don't know what this feature is	0	7	7
Total		99	93	192

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.974 <sup>a</sup>	3	.003
Likelihood Ratio	16.788	3	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.544	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	192		

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.39.

*Use of Links to other offices (such as Student Life, Residential Life) and Gender (RQ1)***Crosstab**

Count

		Gender / Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Links to other offices (such as Student Life, Residential Life)	Yes	80	78	158
	No	19	9	28
	Don't Remember	1	5	6
	Don't know what this feature is	0	2	2
Total		100	94	194

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.086 <sup>a</sup>	3	.044
Likelihood Ratio	9.175	3	.027
Linear-by-Linear Association	.496	1	.481
N of Valid Cases	194		

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .97.