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Marketing special academic events to college professors and students

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Department of Communication

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Marketing Special Academic Events to College Professors and Students

by

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A Thesis submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

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MARKETING SPECIAL ACADEMIC EVENTS TO
COLLEGE PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS

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Degree: Master of Science in Communication and Media Technologies

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Abstract

The study examined the communication channels that professors, graduate students, and undergraduates use to learn and tell others about special academic events on college campuses, as well as individuals' motivations for attending academic events and mentioning them to others. Broad similarities emerged among the groups. Email announcement was the most common way to learn about academic events, and face-to-face communication was the most common means of telling others. Beyond the similarities, significant differences emerged. Overall, students showed more diversity in channels of communication for learning and sharing information about academic events, as well as in motivations for attending events and mentioning them to others. The study offers recommendations for marketing special academic events to professors and students.

Keywords: academic events, academic marketing, college students, social media, undergraduate research

Marketing Special Academic Events to College Professors and Students

Thousands of published texts, from how-to books to scholarly articles, exist to help marketing practitioners answer the question of how to reach and motivate their target audiences in the most effective ways. In spite of this, individuals tasked with marketing special academic events to college campus citizens will find their need for advice largely unmet by the extant literature. The present study explores the methods and motivations at play when students and professors receive and disseminate information about special academic events. While ample attention has been given to college marketing in the service of student recruitment (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Lipman Hearne & Case, 2007), far less attention has been paid to how higher education professionals market events to students once enrolled.

In addition to addressing research questions related to academic event marketing, the present research project forms the basis of a marketing strategy for a specific academic event that takes place annually at the Rochester Institute of Technology—the Conference for Undergraduate Research in Communication (CURC). Every spring, undergraduates from across the Northeast (and, more recently, the nation) submit paper and poster proposals for the opportunity to share original research on topics in communication. Since the conference's inception in 2004, participation levels have been adequate but inconsistent from year to year, and the number of schools represented by student participants has grown only slightly (see chart below).¹ The conference's expanded geographical reach in the past several years (2008-2010)

¹ The number of proposals submitted every year would arguably be a better measure of the conference's growth, especially assuming a cap on the number of acceptances due to the conference's small size. Unfortunately, data on submitted proposals is not available for every year of the conference's operation. However, the conference's founder, RIT professor Patrick Scanlon, has indicated that the difference in number of submitted and accepted proposals from year to year has been only slight (personal communication, September 3, 2010).

offers an encouraging glimpse of its potential for growth. The 2008 conference was the first to host a participant from out of state, and the 2009 conference was the first “coast to coast” event, drawing student presenters from Boston, Massachusetts and Bellingham, Washington.

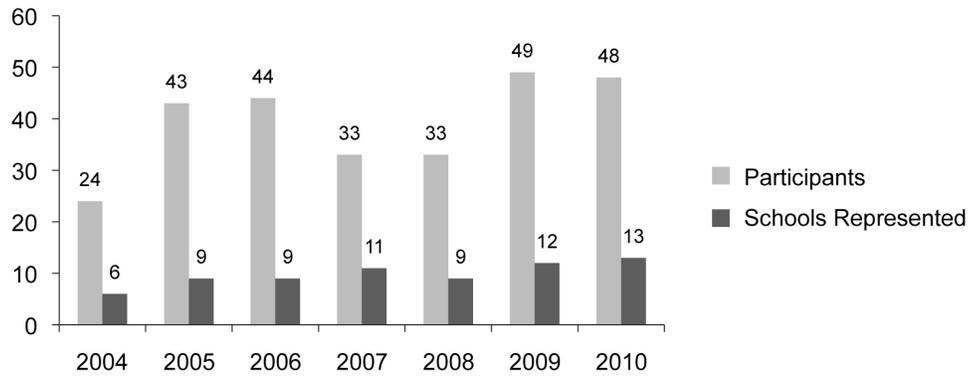


Figure 1: Conference Participation from 2004 to 2010

Chart Source: Data for years 2004-2009 is from the conference programs for those years. Data for 2010 is from the conference website (<http://www.rit.edu/cla/curc/participants.html>) taken on April 16, 2010.

The discussion below takes inventory of industry data and scholarly literature on three topics relevant to the present study: the dissemination of information in today's media marketplace; the connection between media, opinion leadership, and behavior; and current practices in college marketing (a potential proxy for academic event marketing). A primer in these topics informs and contextualizes our research questions and survey instrument, and sets the stage for interpreting the instrument's results in meaningful ways. The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What do professors, graduate students, and undergraduates say their media habits are today?
2. Which media do professors, graduate students, and undergraduates say they use to *learn about* academic events?
3. Which media do professors, graduate students, and undergraduates say they use to *share information with others* about academic events?
4. What motivates professors, graduate students, and undergraduates to *attend* academic events?
5. What motivates professors, graduate students, and undergraduates to *tell others* about academic events?

Rationale

The scholarly impetus for the present research speaks to the study's broad purpose mentioned above—expanding the research on event marketing on college campuses. Scholarly publications such as the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* and the *Journal of College Admission* provide a forum for scholars to discuss the marketing of institutions to aspiring attendees, but there is little discourse on the various ways to draw students, once enrolled, to

campus events. Such events contribute to the vibrant learning community that likely attracts students to particular institutions in the first place.

The social rationale for the present study is its potential benefit to college administrators, professors, and students. College administrators invest significant resources in hosting guest speakers, competitions, and conferences, and the link between well-executed marketing and return on investment (ROI) has long been established. Professors and students, who are often both the generators and audiences of marketing messages, stand to benefit from more relevant and targeted communication on both ends of the marketing spectrum.

Finally, one aspect of the social rationale relates directly to the present study's tailored purpose mentioned above—finding a way to grow the Conference for Undergraduate Research in Communication at RIT. Scholarly research points to various ways in which students benefit from undergraduate research. For instance, undergraduate research prepares students for future scholarly pursuits. Russell, Hancock, and McCullough (2007) found that undergraduate research opportunities increase students' anticipation of pursuing a Ph.D. Caccavo (2009) found that undergraduate research bolsters students' applications to graduate school because entrance committees perceive these students as needing less training and being more capable of producing publishable material in shorter time.

Several studies point to the increase in confidence that students receive from undergraduate research (Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour, 2007; Lopatto, 2006). In one study (Russell, Hancock, & McCullough, 2007), 83 percent of respondents who had participated in research as undergraduate students reported that their confidence in their research skills had increased. The researchers also found that students who participated in the full research culture—

through such activities as attending conferences, submitting papers to journals, and mentoring other students—were the most likely to report positive outcomes from their experience.

Caccavo (2009) states that undergraduate research allows students to apply data in problem solving, hone skills, refine career interests, collaborate with peers, and work closely with faculty. He contends that “training undergraduates to think like scientists . . . should be a fundamental component of undergraduate curricula” and cites the “growing body” of research in his own field, biology, on the effectiveness of college-level, inquiry-based instruction (p. 9).

Review of Related Scholarly Literature

The research questions posed by the present study warrant a broad understanding of media habits and trends, opinion leadership, and academic marketing. These topics provide a framework for designing an effective research instrument and interpreting the data gathered.

Media Habits

An appraisal of media exposure among American adults serves as a backdrop for understanding the media habits of college students and professors. According to one Nielsen study (2009, November 3) of American adults’ daily media exposure, 95 percent of adults are reached by television, 77 percent by broadcast radio, 64 percent by the Web/Internet (excluding email), 35 percent by newspaper, and 27 percent by magazines. Clearly, traditional media remain ubiquitous in spite of the advent of the Internet and its disruptive innovations (e.g., online news and articles, video streaming, and podcasts). However, a look at recent media trends reveals

signs of a general shift away from traditional media to the Internet, with the impact of the Internet varying from medium to medium.

Of the traditional media formats, newspapers have arguably receded the most. In the 25 years between 1983 and 2008, newspaper circulation dropped by over 14 million subscribers, from 62,645,000 to 48,597,000 (Newspaper Association of America, n.d.). There is also evidence of an accelerated decline in newspaper circulation in more recent years. Industry figures show a seven percent drop in circulation of the nation's newspapers from the fall of 2007 to the fall of 2008 (Arango, 2009). Cutbacks due to the recession explain a small portion of the decrease, but migration to the Internet as a source of news information appears to be mostly to blame. From 2005 to 2009, unique readers of online newspapers grew by 30 million (Newspaper Association of America, n.d.).

Recent changes in magazine consumption are less dramatic, making it more difficult to draw forecasts for the industry. Some sources point to a decrease in paper magazine readership, while others claim that readership is holding strong. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2008), 23 percent of American adults claimed to have read a magazine the day before—down 10 percentage points from 33 percent in 1994. Additionally, across 251 American magazines, ad pages decreased by 12 percent in 2008, compared to a one percent drop the previous year (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). It is likely that this decline is tied to the recession, but ad revenues are not expected to rebound anytime soon. The firm Veronis Suhler Stevenson has projected magazine ad revenue decreases of 9.8 percent in 2010, 5.5 percent in 2011, and 0.6 percent in 2012; the firm's estimated five-year, compounded annual

decline of 6.6 percent for the years 2008-2013 places magazines just above newspapers among the lowest performing media (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010).

Magazine Publishers of America (MPA) has a less bleak outlook on magazines. According to the MPA's 2009-10 handbook, more than four out of five American adults read magazines, and magazine readership among adults remains strong in the present decade in spite of the influx of new media options. For instance, the number of magazine readers grew by six percent between 2004 and 2008, from 179,373,000 readers to 189,681,000. The MPA handbook also contains quantitative data on the growth of magazine websites. From 2005 to 2009, the number of magazines with websites increased by 50 percent, from 10,131 to 15,204. While the MPA construes the growth of magazine websites as something good for the industry, there is reason to doubt that the Web will be a lucrative future home for the industry. According to Veronis Suhler Stevenson, digital revenues comprised only two percent of all magazine revenue in 2007, compared with 41 percent for circulation and 58 percent from advertising; by 2012, digital revenues are expected to grow to only seven percent of all magazine revenues (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009).

Like the magazine industry, the television industry has been the subject of mixed reports about the Internet's impact. Nielsen (2008) reports that in the third quarter of 2008, the average American spent approximately 142 hours watching TV per month, an increase of five hours from the same quarter in 2007. This increase in television watching took place *in spite of* a simultaneous increase of 1.5 hours a month in Internet use. (It is worth noting that 31 percent of Internet use takes place in front of a television set.) With the average U.S. household taking in

more than eight hours of TV a day, the 2007-08 television season set a record high for television consumption since Nielsen started measuring it in the 1950s.

On the other hand, a more recent report from Knowledge Networks (2010) shows that more people are watching television programming on the Internet—a convergence of the two media that may foretell a permanent change in television as we know it. According to a Knowledge Networks survey of 1,901 Internet users aged 13-54, the use of the Internet to watch full TV episodes tripled between 2006 and 2009, meaning that nearly a quarter (22 percent) of people in this group stream or download complete television episodes from the Internet. Six percent of respondents said that online television viewing prompted them to reduce or cancel their television service in the past year, or that they expect to reduce or cancel their service in the next year. Additionally, seven percent of respondents said they have engaged in “over the top” viewing, defined as using a TV set to watch Internet video. As one Knowledge Network executive notes, the growing number of television sets with Internet access, coupled with the fact that a third of homes with TV have a bundled television/Internet service package, is most likely accelerating the melding of the two media.

Despite the fact that radio ranks second to television with regard to daily media exposure among American adults (Nielsen, 2009, November 3), some signs point to radio’s inability to adapt to the Internet as well as television. Mindlin (2008) reports that the average number of Americans listening to radio at any given point of the day shrank by 14 percent between 1998 and 2008. One factor in this decline is that today’s teenagers are less interested in radio than teenagers of past generations. A more significant factor is the growing proportion of college graduates in American society: from 1998 to 2008, college graduates age 25 to 54 reduced their

radio listening time by eight times the amount that nongraduates reduced theirs. One probable explanation for this trend is that nongraduates are more likely to work in environments that are conducive to radio listening.

Although pure-play Internet radio (available only through the Internet) has not yet had a negative impact on broadcast radio, other Internet-based technologies are eroding the time people spend listening to broadcast radio (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). According to two Arbitron studies (2008, 2009), the number of respondents who said their use of an iPod/MP3 player resulted in less radio listening rose from 37 percent in 2008 to 42 percent in 2009; by the same token, the number of respondents who said they listened to Internet radio in the previous month rose from 21 percent in 2008 to 27 percent in 2009.

While the traditional media discussed above have suffered significant losses or achieved modest gains, the Internet has experienced dramatic adoption since its introduction in the 1990s. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Trend Data, 2009), Internet use among American adults increased from 46 percent in 2000 to 79 percent in 2009. Owing in part to the Internet's vast array of uses, recent research has focused on questions of how different people use the Internet. The graph below (Figure 2) shows generational differences in Internet activities of online adults.² As the graph makes clear, teenagers and young adults age 18-32 are using the Internet for social media, blogging, and media consumption to a much greater extent than adults age 33 and above.

² The activity categories were selected for relevance to the current discussion. See the original data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Infographics, 2009) for a comprehensive list of Internet activities.

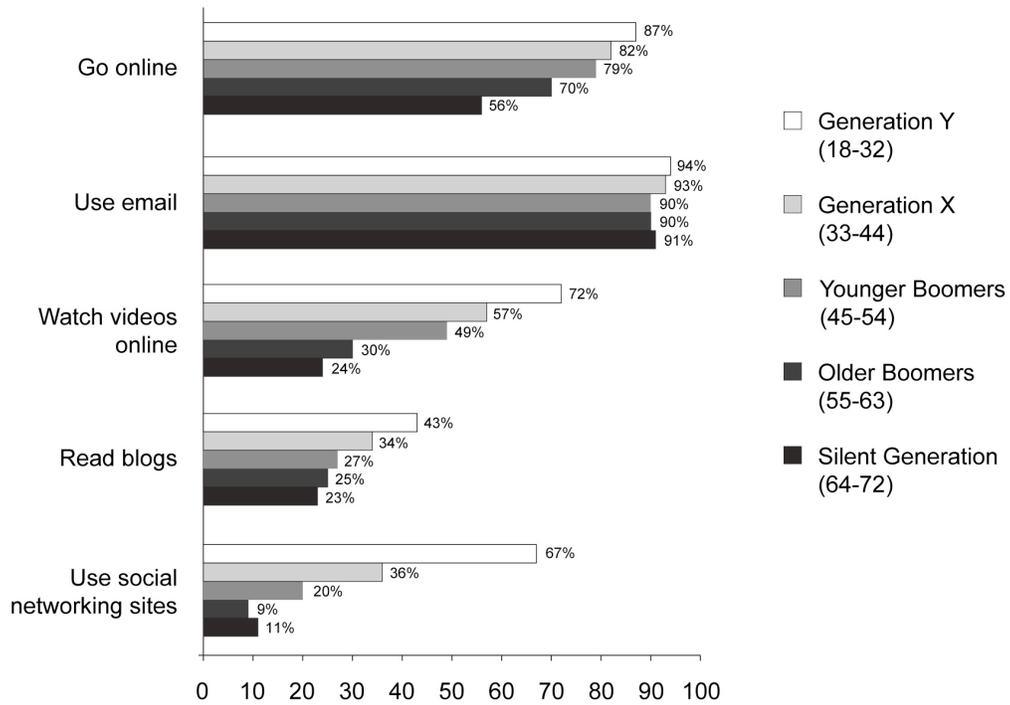


Figure 2: Generational Differences in Online Activities

Chart Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project (Infographics, 2009). Online at <http://pewinternet.org/Infographics/Generational-differences-in-online-activities.aspx>. Source for online adult data is from surveys conducted August 2006, February-March 2007, August-September 2007, October-December 2007, May 2008, August 2008, November 2008, and December 2008.

Data from Nielsen (2010) reveals the tremendous increases in time that Internet users are spending on social networking sites. In December 2009, global Internet users spent more than five-and-a-half hours on social networking sites, an increase of over 158 percent from two hours and ten minutes in December of 2007. For Americans specifically, total minutes spent on social networking and blogging sites increased 210 percent year-over-year in the same timeframe, and the average time per person increased 143 percent year-over-year. Another Nielsen report (2009, September 24) shows that American advertisers are paying close attention to these trends. From August 2008 to August 2009, advertising spending on the top social network and blogging sites increased from roughly \$49 million to roughly \$108 million—a 119 percent increase in spite of a recession.

While there is a clear correlation between the overall decline of traditional media and the rise of the Internet, causation remains to be established. One study (Arbitron & Edison Media Research, 2006) is unique in presenting self-reported data on the Internet's effect on traditional media use. Americans age 12 or older said the Internet was responsible for a decline in their use of four traditional media formats. A full 30 percent of respondents said they spent less time with newspapers because of the Internet: likewise with magazines (30 percent), television (33 percent), and radio (19 percent). Despite the inherent weaknesses of self-reported data, subjects of this study were clearly under the impression that the Internet has a displacement effect on traditional forms of media.

Media, Opinion Leadership, and Behavior

An appraisal of media habits and trends leads to more probing questions about the interplay of media, opinion leadership, and behavior. A pioneering study on this topic focused on

voting behavior among residents of Erie County, Ohio, in the 1940 presidential election.

Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) made several discoveries about media influence that challenged conventional wisdom of the time—particularly the hypodermic needle model of communication, which posited media as a potent drug to which audiences were hopelessly vulnerable. First among the researchers' findings was that face-to-face communication had more impact on voters' decisions than the media. More specifically, participants who were undecided at the beginning of the campaign were more influenced by interpersonal communication than radio or print media.

The researchers also learned that patterns of attention to radio, newspaper, and magazine stories about the campaign were highly selective. Those who rated themselves as very interested in the election exposed themselves to much more media coverage than those who were moderately interested or not interested at all. Essentially, propaganda aimed at the masses was consumed primarily by small subsets of the population—people who not only professed a high level of interest in the campaign, but typically had a higher socio-economic status and were early deciders in the election. These individuals would come to be labeled as “opinion leaders” by the researchers, and they played a critical role in personal influence.

From this 1940 study, the two-step flow theory of communication emerged. According to the theory, information flows from the media to opinion leaders (step one), and from opinion leaders to less engaged segments of the population (step two). Opinion leaders maintain a high level of exposure to certain types of media messages, and individuals with less exposure, interest, and knowledge turn to opinion leaders for information and advice.

The researchers proposed several reasons why personal influence was more effective than media in determining voter behavior: 1) *Trust*—Individuals would be more likely to trust opinion leaders than the media, knowing that political propaganda is designed to persuade; 2) *Exchange of ideas*—Individuals would have a better opportunity to have a conversation with an opinion leader, who could neutralize the individual's misgivings on a certain issue; and 3) *Social approval*—It was likely that an individual would be rewarded with social approval if he or she expressed agreement with an opinion leader.

Lazarsfeld executed a second landmark study that led to deeper insights into two-step flow. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) began field work in 1945 on what became known as the Decatur study, after the Illinois town where it was carried out. The focus of the study was the role of female opinion leaders as they influenced their friends and acquaintances in four areas of everyday decision making: marketing, fashion, public affairs, and movies. The researchers observed that women who were “gregarious”—as determined by the number of their friends and social organizations—generally offered more opinion leadership. The researchers also discovered that opinion leaders are recognized by their peers as having above-average knowledge in a particular subject; for this reason, they are sought out for their advice on specific topics but generally are not consulted on a wide range of issues.

Two-step flow takes a focused view of the interplay of media, opinion leadership, and behavior, examining personal influence on a microscopic, person-to-person level. In contrast, diffusion of innovation—a theory introduced by Rogers several decades later—takes a macroscopic view, plotting adoption of new behaviors or products on a bell-shaped curve that describes diffusion within a population.

Rogers (1995) introduced the theory of diffusion of innovation in 1962 after reviewing over 500 studies that illustrated various processes and effects of diffusion. Prominent among them was Ryan and Gross's 1943 study of the adoption of hybrid seed corn in Iowa. The Iowa study shifted attention from "pattern to process" in the adoption of innovation (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p. 128). While S-curves had long shown the *pattern* by which adoptions accumulate within a population, Rogers's bell curve finally showed the *process* by which adoptions diffuse within a population, starting with innovators and making their way through early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and laggards.

According to diffusion of innovation, mass media is the most efficient way to make an audience aware of a new innovation, while the personal influence of opinion leaders is most effective in behavior change, or influencing people to adopt. Two-step flow and diffusion of innovation both posit that the more homophilous the two parties are—i.e., the greater the similarities in social status, education level, and other defining attributes between opinion leaders and their followers—the more influential opinion leaders will be.

One theory that does not concern itself with media or opinion leaders is relevant to the present discussion nonetheless. Granovetter's (1974) theory on the strength of weak ties (SWT) is an important complement to two-step flow and diffusion of innovation because it helps answer the basic question of how information travels through social networks in the absence of media and opinion leaders. The theory emerged from Granovetter's 1970 study of professionals in a Boston suburb who had recently found a new job through a personal contact. The workers that Granovetter studied (all in professional, technical, and managerial positions) were more likely to have heard about the job opportunity through weak ties (27.8 percent) than strong ones (16.7

percent). Tie strength was determined by how often the job changer saw the contact around the time the information about the job opportunity was exchanged. The majority of the workers (55.6 percent) obtained new job information through a contact that was somewhere in between a weak tie and a strong tie.³

Granovetter's case for SWT in job mobility is based on his contention that individuals within a close social network, being exposed mainly to each other, will share overlapping information. Acquaintances are privy to information about job opportunities that an individual has not heard of already. As Granovetter (1983) suggests, a proper understanding of SWT does not overlook strong ties but provides a new understanding of the importance of weak ties. Weak ties serve as conduits of new information, while strong ties exert a strong influence over decision making.

Two-step flow, diffusion of innovation, and strength of weak ties are theories that emerged before the age of the Internet but remain useful to marketers in their quest to understand and leverage word-of-mouth advertising. It is still unclear how the roles of opinion leaders, innovators, and acquaintances change in the context of viral marketing, which can be described as a technologically enhanced form of word-of-mouth. Viral marketing is similar to word-of-mouth in that both methods of advertising depend heavily on the flow of information among consumers. However, viral marketing describes the "epidemic that occurs when a company uses the *network effect of the Internet* to create hyper-growth—not found in traditional business models..." (Knight, 1999, p. 50; italics added). On the Internet, viral messages are dispersed via

³ It is not until his 1983 article on SWT that Granovetter makes clear the correlation between strong ties and contact that happens "often," weak ties and contact that happens "rarely," and middle-ground ties and contact that happens "occasionally." Even then, this correlation must be gathered from context clues. Granovetter writes that "workers were more likely to hear about new jobs through weak ties (27.8 percent) than through strong ones (16.7 percent), with a majority in between (55.6 percent)" (p. 205).

email and social media. Because digital technology compresses time and space, online messages spread more rapidly and more broadly than in the analog world.

Viral marketing is effective for brand awareness because viral campaigns *by definition* exploit extensive webs of online social networks. It is less safe to say that viral marketing is instrumental in getting people to adopt new behaviors or purchase products. Even experts on the matter such as Li and Bernoff (2008) concede that “[t]here’s no proof—yet—that online buzz leads directly to sales in every industry.” The authors argue, however, that industry researchers and academics are finding increasing evidence that “with the right measurements, online word of mouth is a leading indicator of sales” (p. 92).

The data from Nielsen (2010) above establish that Americans are spending more time on social networking sites. Li and Bernoff’s (2008) research asks what it is that Americans are doing on these sites. The researchers coined the term “social technographics” and created the social technographics ladder to describe six types of social media users. In the table below, each category represents a group of consumers that is more active in social media than consumers assigned to lower levels. A consumer need only participate in one of the activities at least once a month to belong to that group. It is possible for individuals to belong to several different groups, with the exception of those in the inactive group, which is mutually exclusive with the five active groups.

SOCIAL TECHNOGRAPHICS LADDER	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Activities</i>
CREATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a blog • Publish your own Web pages • Upload video you created • Upload audio/music you created • Write articles or stories and post them
CRITICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post ratings/reviews of products or services • Comment on someone else’s blog • Contribute to online forums • Contribute to/edit articles in a wiki
COLLECTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use RSS feeds • Add tags to Web pages or photos • “Vote” for websites online
JOINERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain profile on a social networking site • Visit social networking sites
SPECTATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read blogs • Watch video from other users • Listen to podcasts • Read online forums • Read customer ratings/reviews
INACTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None of these activities

Source: Li and Bernoff (2008, p. 43)

With the right survey instrument, it is possible to create a social technographics profile for any demographic group that shows what percentage of group members are creators, critics, collectors, and so on. The social technographics profile can then help marketers pinpoint ways to target their audience in social media.⁴ For instance, if a demographic group over-indexes in the joiners category—as is the case for American young people age 18-27—then sites like Facebook are a prime area to target those individuals.

⁴ The social technographics profiles for two segments of American adults—those age 18-22 and all adults with doctoral level degrees—would have been useful in informing the current research project and its accompanying marketing recommendations. A request was made to Forrester Research for donations of the data, but no donation program for students exists (B. Donovan, personal communication, January 13, 2010). The price of the data would have been \$7,500, well beyond the present research budget.

The social technographics ladder may lead us to wonder how the roles of creators and critics in the online world overlap with the roles of opinion leaders in the offline world. However, lacking a body of empirical research on this overlap, we do not yet have answers to several obvious questions. Are online and offline opinion leaders the same people? Do online opinion leaders influence behavior as effectively as offline opinion leaders, or do they just raise brand awareness? These questions are outside the scope of the present study and will appear again below in suggestions for future research.

College Marketing for Student Recruitment

College marketing for student recruitment and academic event marketing on college campuses both ask the question of what students seek in return for their academic investments. Given this common central question, college marketing may yield insights relevant to academic event marketing. Although the present study does not attempt to test college marketing tactics for their effectiveness in academic event marketing, a brief overview of college marketing is pertinent to the marketing recommendations below. The following paragraphs take a brief look at recent trends in college marketing and prominent themes in college viewbooks, which continue to play an important role in student recruitment even in the age of the Internet (Jaschik, 2005).

Results of a 2007 survey conducted by Lipman Hearne and CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) reveal several noteworthy trends in college marketing. First, it appears that college marketing pays off. Institutions that invest “heavily” in marketing (defined as more than 0.5 percent of operating budget, excluding staff benefits and salaries) do a better job attracting quality applicants and increasing enrollment yield than those that do not invest heavily in marketing. Interactive and Web initiatives comprise much of the additional

marketing investment since 2000, when the authors performed a similar study. Many colleges and universities are now investing in emerging technologies to engage with alumni and prospective students. More than two-thirds of the institutions in the study's sample reported using e-communications, virtual tours, and streaming video to attract students. Institutions with mid-level and larger budgets invest in more cutting-edge technologies, like microsites, student blogs, and podcasts. Institutions with smaller budgets are just as likely to use website updates, e-communications, and virtual tours as those with mid-level and large budgets. College marketers' increased attention to Web-based technologies since 2000 suggests they are aware of young people's Internet habits, such as those reported above from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Trend Data, 2009). Even still, the biggest portion of college marketing budgets is still devoted to non Web-based advertising, print publications, and mailings.

Lipman Hearne and CASE found that in addition to increased marketing investment, *targeted* marketing activities yield tangible results. Targeted marketing initiatives correlated not only with improved applicant quality, but with a greater percentage of alumni who donate. Lewison and Hawes (2007) recommend that colleges differentiate their audiences because segmentation enables universities to develop a target marketing approach. The authors contend that university marketers who fail to acknowledge differences among students practice "mass marketing, or perhaps even non-marketing" (p. 16).

Finally, Lipman Hearne and CASE found that investment in internal communications—such as emails, campus events, and an intranet—increased on-campus collaboration, the number of quality applicants, and alumni giving. Internal communications build community, identity,

and pride in an institution, as well as buy-in for the institution’s strategic direction. This goes a long way in branding the institution for external audiences.

Hartley and Morpew (2008) turned to college viewbooks for insight into college marketing messages. A content analysis of 48 viewbooks from colleges and universities across the U.S. yielded six prominent themes, as follows.⁵

PROMINENT COLLEGE VIEWBOOK THEMES	
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Institutional context / campus features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great location • Campus beauty • Campus landmarks • Diversity of the student body • Use of technology
Academics/faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum/Majors • Student/Faculty interaction • Low student/faculty ratio • Chance to study abroad
Co-curricular opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students having fun • Students engaged in non-sports activities (e.g. clubs) • Varsity and intramural sports • Residence life (housing, dining)
Admissions and financial aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions requirements • Presence of financial aid/scholarships • How to visit campus
Value of an education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful alumni • Validation through external rankings or guidebooks • Read online forums • Read customer ratings/reviews
Purpose of higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing students for a job • Formative/developmental

Source: Hartley and Morpew (2008, p. 678)

The researchers describe the widespread use of the six themes to portray an idyllic life for students, communicated through the accentuation, omission, or misrepresentation of aspects of

⁵ Of the 48 institutions in the sample, half were public and half were private.

college life. For example, most viewbooks in the sample devoted their first pages to attractive campus features. Likewise, most depicted a vibrant student body of young, fun-loving, and diverse individuals while omitting references to non-traditional students (commuters) and transfer students. Depictions of study abroad were “more suggestive of tourism than academia” (p. 680), faculty were touted as being always available for students in need, and descriptions of financial aid avoided hard numbers while stressing affordability and the institution’s commitment to working with students to find a financial solution. By and large, the viewbooks underplayed the solitary work that goes into getting a college degree. Only half the viewbooks contained any images of students studying; among those that did, students were most often shown studying in groups.

Hartley and Morpew are careful to present the six themes as descriptive rather than prescriptive. They note the absence of references to societal benefits of formal education, even though such messages are common in statements intended for faculty and board members (Morpew & Hartley, 2006). In the majority of viewbooks in the 2008 study, students were framed as the primary beneficiaries of the growth and enrichment, career development, and earning potential that come with a college education. Hartley and Morpew warn that the emphasis on the individual in college viewbooks may betray a lack of understanding by college marketers of their audience. The researchers cite statistics about the activist nature of young people today. For instance, in 2006, 83 percent of incoming college freshmen had done volunteer work, and 49 percent had participated in a demonstration during the previous year. These students, the researchers argue, may be more enticed by messaging that includes opportunities for student leadership or service learning. Finally, the researchers cite a series of focus groups

conducted by the Education Conservancy that revealed that students dislike “disingenuous” recruiting efforts and “generic” marketing collateral. According to these students, most colleges “sound alike” (Jaschik, 2007).

The relevance of college marketing to academic event marketing can only be intuited; all we know is that both forms of marketing strive to attract students with the promise of a memorable learning experience. But given the dearth of research on academic event marketing, college marketing resources may be a useful proxy. Suggestions for future research on the connections between college marketing and academic event marketing will be discussed in further detail below.

Methods

Because the research questions focus on event marketing on college campuses, an online survey was distributed to RIT professors and students via Clipboard (an online survey system developed by The Wallace Center at RIT). The survey instrument, found in Appendix B, contained three sections.

The first section addressed RQ 1 (What do professors, graduate students, and undergraduates say their media habits are today?) by asking respondents to indicate the amount of time they spent engaged in a variety of media activities both “yesterday” and “the day before yesterday.” These activities included traditional media behaviors (e.g., watching television and listening to the radio) and newer media behaviors (e.g., consuming Web content and sending/receiving text messages).

Because of the dramatic increase that social media has experienced in recent years (Nielsen, 2010), the preferred social media websites of students and professors were of particular interest. The final question in Part 1 probed respondents' use of social networking and social media websites. This question asked respondents to indicate how often they visit each of 13 social networking and media websites, with options ranging from "Never" to "Several times per day." The first draft of the survey instrument contained 18 social networking and media sites pulled from two sources: Alexa's (n.d.) ranking of the top 100 U.S. websites as of December 18, 2009, and a Nielsen report (2009, June 2) on the top 10 social networking and blog sites in the U.S. The two sources contained five overlapping websites. An additional website, delicious.com, was added because of anecdotal evidence of its popularity.

A pre-test group of 10 RIT undergraduates, one RIT professor, and one University of Rochester professor completed the survey draft. Six websites that were consistently rated as "never" visited were removed from the list. Pre-testers were allowed to add up to five additional social networking and media websites. Only one pre-tester came up with an additional site. Because this site was mentioned by no other pre-testers and seemed unlikely to resonate with survey respondents, it was not included in the final survey.

Part 2 of the survey was devoted to RQs 2 through 5. Instead of asking respondents how they would most likely learn and share information about a *hypothetical* event, and what would motivate them to attend the event and mention it to others, the survey required respondents to answer questions about an actual event on campus. The event was defined as a talk or demonstration open to the RIT community. Within the given criteria, respondents were able to identify and answer questions about a broad variety of events. Among the 10 students and two

professors in the pre-test group, everyone was able to remember a talk or demonstration that had taken place on campus (or that was scheduled to take place at a future date at the time of the pre-test survey).

The survey pre-test helped gauge the clarity and appropriateness of questions, as well as the amount of time necessary for survey completion. Transferring the paper pre-test survey to an online format (in Clipboard) required several modifications that rendered the survey more simple and therefore easier to use. The Clipboard survey was designed to branch in as many as seven different places, so the online survey was tested once by each of three RIT professors and a total of 19 times by the author (assuming various personae and answering questions along all possible branching paths) before being released to respondents.

The survey was emailed in the early spring of 2010 to all RIT professors, all graduate students, and all undergraduates majoring in programs within the College of Liberal Arts. Because RIT's faculty and staff listserv is closely guarded, the alphabetical directory of faculty and staff posted publicly on RIT's website (www.rit.edu/its/services/tele/phonebook) served as the source for all professor email addresses. Only faculty whose titles contained the words "department chair," "program chair," or "professor" were included in the survey email, which went to 708 faculty recipients. Sending the survey to students was a less complicated affair. The survey was emailed to all RIT graduate students via listserv from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and to all undergraduates in the College of Liberal Arts via listserv from the Department of Communication. Faculty and graduate students received only one email asking them to take the survey. COLA undergraduates received an initial request and a reminder email 11 days later.

Results and Discussion

The sample included 59 professors, 127 graduate students, and 34 undergraduates. Respondents ranged in age from 18 years to 68, with a mean age of 33 years and a median age of 26. Males comprised 58 percent of the sample. RIT's eight colleges were represented more or less equally, with one exception: the College of Liberal Arts (COLA) was overrepresented by undergraduates due to the fact that only students majoring in COLA programs received the survey.

Assessment of Media Habits

RQ 1 asked what professors, graduate students, and undergraduates say their media habits are today. Part 1 of the survey gathered information on general media habits before homing in on social media use. Even though significant differences emerged among groups for specific media activities, general trends in time expenditures were observable by category. The sample spent the most time with Web-based media, followed by traditional electronic media (e.g., television and radio) and finally print media. Respondents used the scale in Table 1 to indicate their time spent engaged with eight media activities both "yesterday" (survey question 1) and "the day before yesterday" (survey question 2).

Table 1

Scale for Time Spent with Media Activities

Time Spent	0 hours	Less than 1 hour	1 hour to less than 2 hours	2 hours to less than 3 hours	3 hours to less than 4 hours	More than 4 hours
Coded As	1	2	3	4	5	6

Media routines can vary from day to day: in order to achieve a more accurate sense of typical media use, the self-reported data from both days (yesterday and the day before) were combined before mean scores were computed. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no statistically significant differences in the amount of time that professors, graduate students, and undergraduates spent watching television, listening to the radio, or reading a printed magazine. However, significant differences in time expenditures emerged for the remaining five media activities. Table 2 lists mean scores for each group and shows where statistically significant differences appeared between groups, as revealed by a Tukey post-hoc test.

Table 2

Mean Scores for Time Spent with Media Activities Over Two Days

Media Activity	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates	All Respondents
Watching broadcast or cable TV on a television set	5.20	5.05	5.29	5.13
Listening to the radio	4.10	3.78	4.09	3.91
Reading a printed magazine	3.31	2.96	3.15	3.08
Reading a paper newspaper	3.17 ^a	2.57 ^{a,b}	2.21 ^b	2.68
Reading or hanging flyers or posters in campus facilities	2.53	2.42 ^a	2.85 ^a	2.52
Reading and writing email	6.31 ^{a,b}	5.13 ^a	4.94 ^b	5.41
Sending or reading text messages	2.81 ^{a,b}	3.87 ^{a,c}	5.35 ^{b,c}	3.82
Reading, watching, listening to, or creating website content	5.75 ^a	6.83 ^a	6.94	6.56

Note: Identical superscripts indicate a significant difference between groups.

Newspaper reading and the reading or hanging of advertisements in campus facilities were the two non-digital media activities in which groups differed significantly. Professors spent significantly more time reading a paper newspaper ($F = 13.749$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) than both graduate students and undergraduates. This is likely due to the age gap between professors, graduate students, and undergraduate students (respective mean ages of 51, 28, 22) and the tendency for younger people to have lower readership levels when it comes to print newspapers (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). For the category of reading or hanging flyers or posters in campus facilities ($F = 3.122$, $df = 2$, $p = .046$), only graduate students and undergraduates differed significantly, with undergraduates reporting more time spent engaged with this activity. The difference may be due to the large variety of extracurricular activities for undergraduates and the need for students to advertise them. It is also possible that with the majority of undergraduates living on campus, these students spend more time in campus facilities than graduate students.

Most of the differences in media habits occurred within the realm of digital technologies. Professors reported spending significantly more time reading and writing email than graduate students and undergraduates. This point might challenge conventional wisdom that young adults spend the most time with Internet technologies, a notion supported by recent data that suggest Internet users skew young. Ninety-three percent of Americans adults age 18-29 use the Internet, compared to 81 percent of those 30-49, 70 percent of those 50-64, and 38 percent of those 65 and older (Pew Internet and American Life Project, Trend Data, 2009). However, educational attainment tends to level the playing field, with 94 percent of college graduates using the Internet. Moreover, among online adults, the percentage of email users is fairly consistent across

age groups: 94 percent of those 18-32, 93 percent of those 33-44, 90 percent of those 45-63, and 64 percent of those 64-72 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, Infographics, 2009). The research instrument for the present study was an online survey emailed to respondents, so there is no question that 100 percent of the sample were online adults who use email. The extra time that professors reported spending on email may be due to the extra care and attention that email communication requires within a professional academic context.

The difference between professors and students in time spent on email may be further explained by the possibility that graduate students and undergraduates use texting and social media for communication that would have transpired over email in the past. This notion is supported by the survey data. Undergraduates spent the most time texting, followed by graduate students and professors, with significant differences between each group ($F = 25.316$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). Graduate students spent significantly more time than professors creating or consuming website content ($F = 3.367$, $df = 2$, $p = .036$). Undergraduates spent even more time than graduate students with website content, but analysis yielded no significant differences between undergraduates and professors. This is likely due to the small sample size of undergraduates. The use of social media may explain why graduate students and undergraduates reported greater time expenditures than professors on website content. Survey respondents used the scale in Table 3 to indicate how often they visit 13 websites culled from authoritative sources on the highest-ranking social media websites (Alexa, n.d.; Nielsen, 2009, June 2). Professors showed the lowest mean rank in visitation rate for 12 of 13 websites. This disparity corroborates data that suggest considerable generational differences in the use of social media. While 67 percent of online adults between the ages of 18 and 32 use social media, this figure is only 36 percent for those 33-

44, 20 percent for those 45-54, 9 percent for those 55-63, and 11 percent for those 64-72 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, Infographics, 2009).

A Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA was run for each social media website. Only three websites—Blogger, Delicious, and Gaia Online—showed no significant differences among groups in the distribution of answer choices.⁶ However, significant differences emerged for the remaining 10 websites. Table 4 lists the mean rank and median for each group in the sample and shows where statistically significant differences appeared between groups, as revealed by a post-hoc pairwise comparison.

⁶ Blogger, as its name suggests, is a blogging website. It hosts free blogs for users. Delicious allows users to share bookmarked web pages. Gaia Online is an online gaming and social networking site.

Table 3

Scale for Frequency of Visiting Social Media Websites

Frequency of Visits	Never	Less than once per year	Once per year	Several times per year	Several times per month	Several times per week	Several times per day
Coded As	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Table 4

Median Scores for Frequency of Visiting Social Media Websites

Website		Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
Blogger	Mean Rank	—	—	—
	Median	1	1	1
Delicious	Mean Rank	—	—	—
	Median	1	1	1
Deviantart	Mean Rank	95 ^{a,b}	113.85 ^a	121.19 ^b
	Median	1	1	1
Digg	Mean Rank	94.66 ^a	117.88 ^a	110.43
	Median	1	1	1
Facebook	Mean Rank	68.95 ^{a,b}	120.16 ^a	144.29 ^b
	Median	4	6	7
Flickr	Mean Rank	93.64 ^a	116.73 ^a	103.03
	Median	1	1	1
Gaia Online	Mean Rank	—	—	—
	Median	1	1	1

LinkedIn	Mean Rank	102.13	120.55 ^a	84.57 ^a
	Median	1	4	1
LiveJournal	Mean Rank	102.97 ^a	114.07 ^a	104.04
	Median	1	1	1
MySpace	Mean Rank	96.34 ^a	113.21	121.31 ^a
	Median	1	1	1
Photobucket	Mean Rank	97.12 ^{a,b}	114.56 ^a	118.57 ^b
	Median	1	1	1
Twitter	Mean Rank	89.48 ^{a,b}	117.73 ^a	119.97 ^b
	Median	1	1	1
YouTube	Mean Rank	80.58 ^{a,b}	117.43 ^a	133.51 ^b
	Median	5	5	6

Note: Mean rank is not calculated when no significant differences appear between groups.

Note: Identical superscripts indicate a significant difference between groups.

The media-sharing websites showed varying differences among groups. The list included two photo-sharing websites, Flickr and Photobucket. Professors reported a significantly lower visitation rate to Flickr than graduate students ($H = 7.59$, $df = 2$, $p = .023$) and a significantly lower rate to Photobucket than both graduate students and undergraduates ($H = 9.28$, $df = 2$, $p = .01$). Even though students as a whole reported visiting these photo-sharing sites more often than professors, the median for each group still reflected the lowest answer on the scale (one, or “never”), suggesting infrequent use among all three groups.

YouTube was among the most frequently visited websites in the list. Graduate students and undergraduates reported significantly higher visitation rates to YouTube than professors ($H = 20.59$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). The time it takes to watch videos online may contribute to the extra time that students spend online compared to professors, as discussed above.

Deviantart occupies its own category as an online creative community where users post original artwork and interact with each other. Although professors reported a significantly lower visitation rate than graduate students and undergraduates ($H = 13.39$, $df = 2$, $p = .001$), each group’s median score reflected the lowest point on the answer scale, suggesting that Deviantart is not popular with any single group.

For Digg, URLs themselves are the medium for sharing. Digg members post links to Internet content in a forum where other members can vote for the link (or “Digg” it), sending the most popular links to Digg’s main page. Even though Digg icons are often found among the share buttons increasingly common on websites, median scores for visitation rates were low. Professors reported a significantly lower visitation rate to Digg than graduate students ($H = 11.87$, $df = 2$, $p = .003$).

The third category of social media websites is devoted to blogging/micro-blogging and social networking. This category includes LiveJournal, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn. Keeping with the pattern of less social media usage overall, professors reported visiting LiveJournal significantly less often than graduate students ($H = 7.14$, $df = 2$, $p = .028$). Professors also visited Twitter significantly less often than graduate students and undergraduates ($H = 13.88$, $df = 2$, $p = .001$). However, even the most frequent Twitter users, undergraduate students, had a median score of one (or “never”).

Although Facebook and MySpace are often mentioned in tandem as icons of the social media movement, Facebook far outpaced MySpace in visitation rates among the three groups of respondents. For MySpace, undergraduates emerged as the most frequent users, with a significantly higher visitation rate than professors ($H = 7.97$, $df = 2$, $p = .019$). However, undergraduates’ median score still reflected the lowest answer on the scale. In contrast, Facebook was the most frequently visited site in the list. Even the least frequent visitors, professors, showed a median score of four (or “several times per year”). Professors reported visiting Facebook significantly less often than graduate students and undergraduates ($H = 40.92$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). The data on MySpace and Facebook from the present survey agree with a broader trend reported by Nielsen (2009, June 2): from April 2008 to April 2009, total time spent on Facebook increased 700 percent, while total time spent on MySpace decreased 31 percent.

LinkedIn is the only social media website for which professors did not show the lowest mean rank. Graduate students reported the highest rates and differed significantly from undergraduates, who reported the lowest rates ($H = 11.19$, $df = 2$, $p = .004$). Because LinkedIn is

dedicated to professional networking, it may hold more appeal for professors and graduate students than for undergraduates, who have not begun their careers.

The data described above help answer the question of what professors, graduate students, and undergraduates say their media habits are today. Several differences were noted among the three groups with regard to time expenditures in a variety of media activities. In the category of non-digital media, professors spent the most time reading newspapers, while undergraduates spent the most time reading or hanging flyers and posters on campus. Among digital technologies, professors spent the most time on email and the least time engaging website content, and undergraduates spent the most time text messaging.

Social media may help explain why students spent more time than professors engaged with website content. Professors showed the lowest mean rank for 12 of 13 social media websites. Facebook and YouTube stood out as the most frequently visited social media sites, with LinkedIn trailing at a distant third. The websites in the survey lineup were culled from lists of top-ranking social media sites, so it is somewhat surprising that the majority of sites showed signs of neglect from all three groups. These websites likely have vast audiences beyond (but not excluding) college professors and students.

Media Used for Learning and Sharing Information about Academic Events

RQ 2 asked how professors and students learn about academic events. Part 2 of the survey instrument contained questions designed to answer this question. First, respondents were asked to recall an event on campus, defined as a talk or demonstration open to the RIT community. No time range was set, so individuals were free to choose a presentation that happened in the past or that was scheduled to take place in the future. As a means of ensuring

that respondents answered questions about a single event, they were asked to recall the name of the presenter, the topic of the presentation, and the actual or approximate date of the event.

Respondents were more likely to choose an event they had actually attended or still planned to attend. Professors reported the highest rate of actual or planned attendance, at 84 percent, compared to 79 percent of graduate students and 58 percent of undergraduates.

Respondents indicated how they first learned about the presentation by selecting one option from a range of possible channels that included “Other,” followed by a blank field for explanation. Answers submitted as “Other” were grouped by similarity and coded as their own variables. A chi-square test showed no significant difference in how professors, graduate students, and undergraduates reported first learning about the presentation. Table 5 shows how answers were distributed.

Table 5

How Respondents First Learned about the Presentation

Answer Choices	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
Email from someone I know	17%	6%	4%
Email announcement from an RIT department, employee, or student organizer	60%	54%	50%
Flyer or poster hanging on campus	7%	14%	21%
Someone told me face to face or by telephone	5%	19%	14%
Through a social networking website (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)	2%	1%	4%
Letter or postcard	0%	0%	4%
I used a search engine like Google to learn about the presentation.	0%	0%	0%
I helped organize it.*	5%	1%	0%
Newspaper*	0%	1%	0%
Other website (not a social networking site)*	2%	2%	0%
Other	2%	1%	4%

*These items were not in the original survey but warranted a new category based on similar "Other" answers.

For all three groups, email announcement was the most common first introduction to the presentation, with at least half the members of each group selecting this option. The second most common channel differed from group to group. For professors, it was an “email from someone I know.” (Respondents were expected to use their judgment to decipher the difference between an “email from someone I know” and an “email announcement” from an RIT entity.) For graduate students, the answer option “someone told me face to face or by telephone” was rated second highest. For undergraduates, it was a flyer or poster hanging on campus. Connections can be made between the data on media time expenditures above and the ways that respondents first learned about the presentation. For instance, professors spent the most time with email, so it seems fitting that a full 77 percent of professors first learned about the presentation by email. Undergraduates spent the most time with flyers and posters on campus, and 21 percent of undergraduates first learned about the presentation from a flyer or poster. Given how much more time students spent than professors on website content (including social media), it is surprising that more students did not report a social networking site as the means of introduction to the event. This suggests that academic event marketers are not tapping social media as much as they could be. It is worth noting that no respondents used a search engine to find out about the event. This suggests that academic event marketing belongs in the realm of “push” rather than “pull” marketing strategies.⁷

After revealing how they first learned about the presentation, respondents indicated the first advertisement they saw for the event. The first answer option for this question was “None. I

⁷ Push strategies include methods of advertising such as commercials, direct mail, and banner ads—media that literally push products onto consumers. Pull strategies use lures like informational events and social media to generate curiosity in consumers. In this model, consumers pull products toward themselves and/or into the supply chain.

never saw any advertisements for the presentation.” The respondents who chose this answer branched to another part of the survey. The percentages in Table 6 pertain to respondents who reported seeing at least one advertisement. A chi-square test revealed no significant difference in the type of ad first seen by the three groups. Notably, email announcements and flyers comprised the majority of ads first seen by respondents in all groups.

Table 6

First Advertisement Seen

Answer Choices	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
Email announcement from an RIT department, employee, or student organizer	79%	62%	48%
Flyer or poster hanging on campus	15%	33%	40%
Posting on or from a social networking site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)	2%	1%	4%
Letter or postcard	0%	0%	0%
Website	2%	2%	4%
Magazine	0%	0%	4%
Other	2%	1%	0%

In addition to asking respondents to indicate the format of the first advertisement they saw, it was important to ask them what it was about the ad that won their attention. The majority of respondents—88 percent of professors, 81 percent of graduate students, and 72 percent of undergraduates—answered yes to the question of whether the first ad they saw contributed to their interest in the presentation. Respondents then assessed six different advertisement attributes and indicated their level of importance in gaining and holding the individual's attention. The scale included four options: Not Important (coded in the survey data as 1), Moderately Important (2), Important (3), and Does Not Apply (0). Only answers coded as 1, 2, or 3 were included in statistical analyses. Table 7 lists mean scores for level of importance and shows where statistically significant differences appeared between groups, as revealed by a Tukey post-hoc test.

Table 7

Importance of Advertisement Attributes

Attributes	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
A clear message about what I would learn at the presentation	2.78	2.68	2.83
A high level of professionalism in the design and/or ad copy	2.14 ^a	2.38	2.59 ^a
A thought-provoking message	2.08 ^a	2.35	2.59 ^a
Bold shapes, colors, and/or photographs	1.56 ^a	1.78	2.28 ^a
Strategic placement of the ad (e.g., in my mailbox, my Inbox, a prominent location on campus, in a magazine I read, etc.)	2.52	2.55	2.59
Seeing the same ad more than once	1.93	2.03	2.28

Note: Identical superscripts indicate a significant difference between groups.

For each group, the most important advertisement attribute was a clear message about what would be learned at the presentation. The second most important attribute was strategic placement of the ad. Significant differences emerged only between professors and undergraduates, for the following attributes: a high level of professionalism ($F = 3.48$, $df = 2$, $p = .034$), a thought-provoking message ($F = 3.74$, $df = 2$, $p = .026$), and bold design features ($F = 4.55$, $df = 2$, $p = .013$). These differences suggest that undergraduates pay more attention to attention-grabbing language and imagery, while professors base their level of interest in ads on more subtle factors. Graduate students hover between professors and undergraduates for every attribute except “a clear message,” for which graduate students’ mean rating for importance was lower (but not significantly) than the other two groups.

RQ 3 asked how professors, graduate students, and undergraduates share news about academic events with others. Respondents answered questions about how they told *peers* about the presentation. Students were instructed to define peers as other students, while professors were instructed to define peers as any other RIT employees. A chi-square test revealed no significant differences in the number of professors, graduate students, and undergraduates who told peers about the presentation. Overall, respondents appeared to be a gregarious group: 60 percent of professors, 58 percent of graduate students, and 45 percent of undergraduates reported having spread the word about the presentation to peers. Table 8 shows the methods of communication the three groups used. Respondents were asked to check all applicable options.

Table 8

How Professors and Students Told Peers about the Presentation

Answer Choices	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
Phone call or text message	3%	22%	27%
Told them face to face	66%	86%	80%
Email	54%	23%	13%
Social networking site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)	6%	19%	13%
Posted a flyer in a campus facility	9%	2%	0%
Placed an advertisement in their department mailbox/es	0%	2%	0%
Other	0%	2%	7%

Face-to-face communication was the primary way that respondents in all three groups told peers about the presentation. A chi-square test revealed significant differences among groups for two answer options: email ($X^2 = 12.63$, $df = 2$, $p = .002$) and phone call or text message ($X^2 = 7.14$, $df = 2$, $p = .028$). The figures in Table 8 make clear that professors were more likely than students to use email, and students were more likely than professors to use their phones. These observations run parallel to tendencies described above with regard to media time expenditures: professors spent more time emailing than students, and students spent more time text messaging than professors. It is worth noting the double-digit percentages of students who used social media to tell peers about the presentation—19 percent of graduate students and 13 percent of undergraduates. These figures are higher than the percentages of graduate students (1 percent) and undergraduates (4 percent) who *first learned* about the event through social media. It is possible that electronic messages travel a common route from email announcement, the most common way that students reported first learning about the presentation, to social media websites.

Professors were asked whether they told their students about the presentation, and by what means. Thirty-seven percent of professors reported having shared news about the event with their students. Table 9 shows the methods of communication that professors used (with multiple selections possible). A side-by-side comparison of Tables 8 and 9 makes clear that there is very little difference in the methods that professors used to tell their peers and their students about the presentation.

Table 9

How Professors Told Students about the Presentation

Answer Choices	Percentage
Phone call or text message	0%
Told them face to face	70%
Email	55%
Social networking site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)	5%
Posted a flyer in a campus facility	5%
Placed an advertisement in their department mailbox/es	0%
Other	0%

The discussion above addresses the ways that professors, graduate students, and undergraduates learn about academic events and tell others about such events. For all three groups, email announcement was the most common means of first learning about a presentation, as well as the most common advertisement first seen. The most important predictor of the advertisement's ability to gain and hold an individual's attention was a clear message about what would be learned at the presentation. Of the three groups, undergraduates placed the most emphasis on attention-grabbing features—e.g., bold design and a thought-provoking message.

All groups reported face-to-face communication as the most common method of telling peers about the event (as well as telling students, in the case of professors). Differences emerged among groups for the second-ranking method of sharing the news. For professors, it was email communication, used by 54 percent of professors who told peers and 55 percent of professors who told students. For undergraduates, it was phone communication, used by 27 percent of undergraduates who told peers. Graduate students showed a near tie for email and phone, used by 23 percent and 22 percent (respectively) of those who told peers. Social media was more prominent as a means for students to *spread the word* about a presentation than to *learn about it* in the first place. Overall, the ways that professors and students reported to learn and share information about a presentation reflected their self-reported media habits.

Motivations for Attending Academic Events and Sharing News about Events with Others

RQ 4 asked what motivates professors, graduate students, and undergraduates to attend academic events. Respondents were asked to indicate what factors motivated them to consider attending the presentation they recalled for the survey. The first answer option was “None. I was not motivated to consider attending the presentation.” The respondents who chose this answer

branched to another part of the survey. The figures in Table 10 pertain only to respondents who indicated at least one motivating factor. Respondents were asked to choose all applicable options, and the range of possible motivating factors included “Other,” followed by a blank field for explanation. Answers submitted as “Other” were grouped by similarity and coded as their own variables.

Table 10

Motivating Factors for Consideration of Event Attendance

Motivating Factors	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
I am interested in the presentation topic. [†]	91%	68%	54%
My professor, department chair, or dean said it was mandatory to attend the presentation. [†]	2%	23%	17%
My professor, department chair, or dean suggested the presentation (even though it was not mandatory). [†]	11%	27%	50%
A peer whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation.	19%	19%	17%
The advertisements I saw were compelling.	11%	17%	8%
I helped organize it.*	4%	1%	0%
Extra credit (gave or received). ^{*†}	2%	2%	13%
I am familiar with and/or interested in the presenter.*	6%	3%	8%
It fit my schedule.*	2%	0%	0%
It was a networking opportunity.*	0%	2%	8%
I wanted to support the series.*	4%	0%	0%
I took my students during class time.*	0%	1%	0%
Other	0%	3%	0%

[†]Categories in which significant differences appeared among groups.

*These items were not in the original survey but warranted a new category based on similar "Other" answers.

For all three groups, interest in the presentation topic was the most common motivating factor. A chi-square test was run on each factor, and significant differences emerged between groups in several areas. More professors than graduate students and undergraduates chose topic interest as a motivating factor ($X^2 = 13.8$, $df = 2$, $p = .001$). Graduate students and undergraduates were more likely than professors to indicate as motivating factors the mandate of a professor, department chair, or dean ($X^2 = 11.82$, $df = 2$, $p = .003$) or the suggestion of a professor, department chair, or dean ($X^2 = 13.34$, $df = 2$, $p = .001$). More undergraduates than graduate students were motivated by extra credit ($X^2 = 6.67$, $df = 2$, $p = .036$).

After being asked to indicate all motivating factors for attendance, respondents were asked to select the *most important* motivating factor from the options in the previous question. A chi-square test revealed significant differences among professors, graduate students, and undergraduates ($X^2 = 50.49$, $df = 20$, $p < .001$). Table 11 shows how the three groups answered the question.

Table 11

Most Important Motivating Factor for Consideration of Event Attendance

Motivating Factor	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
I am interested in the presentation topic.	81%	52%	30%
My professor, department chair, or dean said it was mandatory to attend the presentation.	2%	23%	9%
My professor, department chair, or dean suggested the presentation (even though it was not mandatory).	6%	12%	30%
A peer whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation.	0%	4%	9%
The advertisements I saw were compelling.	4%	2%	4%
Extra credit (gave or received).*	0%	2%	4%
I am familiar with and/or interested in the presenter.*	4%	1%	4%
It was a networking opportunity.*	0%	1%	9%
I wanted to support the series.*	2%	0%	0%
Other	2%	2%	0%

*These items were not in the original survey but warranted a new category based on similar "Other" answers.

Several trends observable in Table 10 (general motivating factors) also appear in Table 11 (most important motivating factor). Once again, professors clustered around topic interest, while students' choices were more dispersed, with mandates and suggestions from authority figures factoring more prominently into students' motivations than professors'. Students appeared to be open to suggestion; this is a promising sign, as learning about new things should be among students' top priorities.

Certain data from Tables 10 and 11 speak to the influence of opinion leaders in respondents' motivations to consider attending the presentation. In Table 10, the suggestion of one's professor, department chair, or dean was the second most common motivating factor for graduate students and undergraduates, and it tied for third most common for professors. The suggestion of a trusted peer claimed a nearly equal percentage of each group, for a total average of 18 percent. In Table 11, which measures the most important motivating factor in attendance, students were far less likely to cite a compelling ad than the mandate or suggestion of an authority figure or the suggestion of a trusted peer. This supports two-step flow theory, which suggests that personal influence has a greater impact than media on behavior. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) defined opinion leaders as individuals with expertise in a particular subject (or subjects) whose guidance is actively sought by others. The survey did not probe the level of expertise of referring individuals or the respondents' level of interest in guidance from their referrers, but it stands to reason that the relationships between referrers and respondents reflect the opinion leader/follower dynamic in important ways. At the very least, this is an interesting area for future study.

The survey also probed demotivating factors for attending the presentation. Respondents who indicated they did not attend the presentation (or did not plan to attend, if it was in the future) were asked to choose all applicable options from a list of demotivating factors that included “Other,” followed by a blank field for explanation. Answers submitted as “Other” were grouped by similarity and coded as their own variables. A chi-square test revealed significant differences among the three groups in their reasons for not attending. Table 12 shows demotivating factors for attendance and the percentages of respondents who cited them.

Table 12

Reasons for Not Attending

Demotivating Factors	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
The presentation took place (or takes place) during class time.	0%	13%	46%
I was (or will be) away from campus during the presentation.	30%	16%	8%
My workload was (or is) too large to fit the presentation into my schedule.	20%	44%	23%
I forgot.*	0%	3%	0%
I wasn't interested enough.*	20%	3%	23%
Other scheduling conflict.*	20%	0%	0%
The event took place during my work hours.*	0%	6%	0%
Transportation problem.*	0%	6%	0%
Other*	10%	9%	0%

*These items were not in the original survey but warranted a new category based on similar "Other" answers.

It is important to remember that most of the survey respondents *did attend* (or planned to attend) the presentation they were asked to recall. Attendance rates were 84 percent for professors, 79 percent for graduate students, and 58 percent for undergraduates. Table 12 represents a very small sample of respondents: therefore, only the most general observations can be made, and cautiously. For professors, the most common demotivating factor was a scheduling conflict—either as a result of being off campus or having a more important obligation. For graduate students, the most common demotivating factor was workload. Undergraduates, like professors, were most often demotivated by a scheduling conflict, particularly as a result of the presentation taking place during class time.

RQ 5 asked what motivates professors, graduate students, and undergraduates to tell others about academic events. As noted earlier, survey respondents were a vocal group with regard to telling *peers* about the presentation. Sixty percent of professors, 58 percent of graduate students, and 45 percent of undergraduates reported sharing news about the presentation with peers. Respondents assessed four different statements about motivational factors for telling peers. Level of agreement with each statement was measured by a Likert scale that included five options: Strongly Disagree (coded as 1), Disagree (2), Agree (3), Strongly Agree (4), and Does Not Apply (0). Only answers coded as 1, 2, 3, or 4 were included in statistical analyses. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine significant differences among the three groups for each statement. Table 13 lists mean scores for each group and shows where statistically significant differences appeared between groups, as revealed by a Tukey post-hoc test.

Table 13

Motivating Factors for Telling Peers about the Presentation

Attributes	Professors	Graduate Students	Undergraduates
I like suggesting things to people that I think they'll find interesting.	3.34	3.32	3.00
I was energized by my own enthusiasm for the presentation.	3.06	2.85	2.86
I wanted to attend the event with companions.	2.40 ^a	3.03 ^a	3.00
Someone whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation, and I wanted to pass the news to others.	2.39	2.84	2.33

Note: Identical superscripts indicate a significant difference between groups.

For each group, the appeal of suggesting things that other people might find interesting was the most important motivating factor. This might be summarized as the altruistic factor. A significant difference between groups emerged for only one factor, the desire to attend the event with companions ($F = 5.791$, $df = 2$, $p = .004$). Compared to professors, graduate students placed significantly greater importance on wanting to attend the event with companions—what we might call the social factor. The undergraduate mean for this factor was only three hundredths of a percentage point lower than the graduate student mean. Once again, the undergraduate sample size was likely too small to confirm a significant difference between undergraduates and professors.

Professors used the same Likert scale described above to indicate their motivations for telling their students about the presentation. Table 14 shows the distribution of professors' answers to this question.

Table 14

Motivating Factors for Telling Students about the Presentation

Attributes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
I like suggesting things to people that I think they'll find interesting.	0%	0%	55%	45%	3.45
I was energized by my own enthusiasm for the presentation.	6%	12%	53%	29%	3.06
I wanted to attend the event with companions.	10%	60%	30%	0%	2.20
Someone whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation, and I wanted to pass the news to others.	20%	30%	50%	0%	2.30
The presentation topic was relevant to a course I teach.	5%	11%	47%	37%	3.16

Once again, the altruistic motivation (suggesting things to people that they might find interesting) was the most important motivating factor, with 100 percent of professors agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Topic relevance to a course taught by the professor was the second most important motivating factor, with 84 percent of professors agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

The section above addresses motivating factors for attending academic events and telling others about such events. Professors and graduate students reported interest in a presentation topic to be the most important motivating factor for attendance. For undergraduates, topic interest was equally important to the suggestion of an authority figure. A notable percentage of all three groups reported the suggestion of an authority figure or trusted peer to be an important motivating factor in event attendance, intimating the motivational power of opinion leadership. Students appeared to be especially receptive to suggestions from others, a potentially promising sign of open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity. With regard to motivations for telling peers about the presentation (or peers and students, in the case of professors), all three groups reported the most important factor to be the desire to suggest things to people that they might find interesting. Students placed more importance than professors on the desire to attend the event with companions.

Conclusion

Marketing Implications

The survey findings reported above have important implications for marketing academic events, including RIT's Conference for Undergraduate Research in Communication.⁸

Administrators of CURC and similar events are likely to benefit most from the study's findings on message crafting and communication channels.

With regard to message crafting, the survey results provide instruction on the content and style of effective marketing materials for academic events. For instance, professors and undergraduates placed the greatest importance on the same advertisement attribute—a clear message about what they would learn at the presentation—when asked to rate six ad attributes and each one's role in cultivating interest in an ad. The implication for CURC is that the conference's marketing materials should clearly communicate the learning opportunities the conference offers.

The survey question about advertisement attributes did not include an item as simple as “a clear message about the *presentation topic*,” but topic clarity is inherent in the highest-ranking answer option, “a clear message about what I would learn at the presentation.” In another part of the survey, professors indicated that interest in the presentation topic was the most important motivating factor in their decision about attendance. For undergraduates, topic interest was one of the two motivating factors that tied for most important. The study's overall findings on the importance of *message clarity* and *topic interest* speak to the role of selective perception in how

⁸ As its name suggests, the conference is only for undergraduates. However, the marketing recommendations that follow are broad enough that marketers with a graduate student audience will find them instructive. These marketers may also take comfort in knowing that graduate students and undergraduates generally have more in common with each other than with professors when it comes to media habits, motivations for attending academic events, and motivations for telling others about academic events.

professors and undergraduates learn about academic events and make decisions about attendance. In other words, it is likely that respondents had a pre-existing interest in the presentation topic before they saw the first advertisement. This would explain why they paid attention to the ad and considered attending the event.

With regard to marketing CURC, it is unlikely that professors and undergraduates have a pre-existing interest in undergraduate research conferences, given that such conferences are still rare. It is more likely that professors and undergraduates have a pre-existing interest in the kinds of benefits that undergraduate research offers (such as those outlined in the project rationale above). A messaging strategy that strives to *match* the conference' offerings to interests that professors and undergraduates already possess may be more successful than a strategy that attempts to *create interest* where none exists. In other words, messages should place more emphasis on what CURC offers (i.e., learning and growth opportunities) than what it is (i.e., its history, geographic reach, etc.).

The survey question about advertisement attributes also revealed that compelling language and imagery are more appealing to undergraduates than professors. Undergraduates placed significantly more importance than professors on what might be described as assertive ad features—a thought-provoking message, professionalism in the design or ad copy, and bold shapes, colors, or photographs. Students' self-reported affinity for thought-provoking messages concurs with Hartley and Morpew's (2008) proposition that students are attracted to authenticity. Despite professors' placement of less importance on assertive ad features, their ratings of these features still hovered in the range of "moderately important." What this means for CURC is that marketing materials should not be timid in their approach, and they should be

polished and professional. This suggestion extends to all forms of CURC's marketing collateral: logo, website, letterhead, email announcements, social media presence, flyers, and posters. It is advisable to work with a professional graphic designer. Well-designed materials with a captivating message will create a stronger first impression of the conference for target audiences.

For professors and undergraduates, "strategic placement of the ad" was the second most important advertisement attribute. The survey question included examples of strategic placement—"in my mailbox, my Inbox, a prominent location on campus, in a magazine I read, etc." The clear implication for CURC is that administrators should carefully consider where to place advertisements. Luckily, the survey findings provide some direction in this area. For one, the data gathered on media habits revealed that professors and undergraduates spent more time on Web-based activities (including email) than most other media activities. This indicates that Web and email are promising arenas for advertising to professors and undergraduates. Other survey data provided further support for this notion. The study probed the most common channels for learning about academic events. Respondents indicated how they first learned about the presentation and the first advertisement they saw for it. Email announcement dominated both answer sets. This implies that CURC administrators should use email announcement as their primary tool for advertising.

The survey data exposed undergraduates as the most active group in social media. It was noted earlier that undergraduates were more likely to use social media to *tell others* about the presentation than to *learn* about the presentation, so it is possible that electronic messages travel a common route from email announcement, the most common way that students reported first learning about the presentation, to social media websites. This implies that CURC administrators

should equip email announcements with links to the conference's social media profiles. The most important link is for Facebook, and it should be included in emails to both professors and undergraduates. Even though professors visited Facebook significantly less often than undergraduates, Facebook was still the second-ranking social media website for professors.

Email announcements about CURC should also include a link to the conference's LinkedIn profile (or its administrator's). This applies especially to emails aimed at professors because they reported visiting LinkedIn significantly more often than undergraduates. If resources permit, CURC should also create a YouTube page and include a YouTube link in email messages. YouTube was the highest ranking social media website for professors, and undergraduates reported a significantly higher visitation rate. CURC's YouTube page could host video interviews with conference participants and eventually a promotional video.

Equipping an email announcement with share links is a simple matter of embedding the links in the body copy, the email signature, or the email footer. One of the advantages of using email to distribute social media links is the potential for those links to generate activity beyond the life of the email. For example, students who learn about CURC by email might follow a link to Facebook (embedded in the email) and decide to "like" the conference. At that point, they can easily visit the conference's page and use the "Share" button to copy CURC posts to their walls or distribute CURC posts to Facebook friends. Some recipients of CURC's email announcements may click through to CURC's website, for which there should also be a link embedded in every email. With this in mind, social media share buttons should appear on the website as well.

The preceding paragraphs emphasize email announcement as the most important starting point for CURC's digital strategy. However, leveraging email announcements assumes

administrators already possess the email addresses of a sizable corps of intended recipients. The primary benefit of social media is that it allows administrators to reach people to whom they do not already have access. In the absence of a robust email list, much can still be accomplished with social media.

The differences in the self-reported survey data from professors and undergraduates justify a two-pronged, targeted-marketing approach for raising awareness of CURC. Ideally, separate messages should be crafted for professors and students because the two groups stand to benefit from the conference in different ways. Both campaigns will benefit from bold and well-designed marketing materials. With regard to communication channels, both campaigns should include email announcements and social media. The undergraduate campaign should extend to the offline world because flyers and posters figured prominently for undergraduates as the second most common method of introduction and first ad seen. Students rated “strategic placement” of the first advertisement they saw as the second most important feature in winning their attention, so flyers and posters should be placed where students (or targeted subsets of students) are most likely to see them. It was also discovered that undergraduates spent a lot of time text messaging. CURC administrators may wish to explore this channel, even though text messaging was not a common method of introduction or first ad seen. In the event that limited resources allow for only one combined marketing campaign for CURC, the messages should include benefits for both students and professors and include the same channels as those recommended for students: email announcement, social media, and flyers and posters.

CURC administrators may pose the question of which audience—professors or undergraduates—warrants a greater investment of marketing efforts. Professors and

undergraduates were both vocal about sharing news of the event with others, so there is no case for focusing on one group over the other based on that group's garrulousness. However, other survey data sheds light on the question of which group is likely to yield a greater return on investment. As discussed earlier, respondents were asked to indicate the most important motivating factor for attending the presentation. Eighty-one percent of professors—the vast majority—reported that interest in the presentation topic was the most important motivating factor. Mandates and suggestions from a department chair or dean comprised only 8 percent of answers. Undergraduates, on the other hand, appeared to be driven by a more diverse set of factors. While 30 percent of undergraduates named interest in the topic as the most important motivating factor, a full 39 percent cited the mandate (nine percent) or suggestion (30 percent) of a professor. Only nine percent cited the suggestion of a trusted peer. These results suggest that professors maintain a considerable degree of power and/or influence over undergraduates, and that professors therefore warrant a greater investment in marketing efforts. When asked to indicate the importance of different motivating factors for telling students about the presentation, professors gave the highest importance to the desire to suggest things that students might find interesting, followed closely by relevance to a course the professors taught. This implies that communication professors should be the primary target for CURC's marketing strategy.

Finally, if resources permit, CURC's marketing strategy should branch into other channels—for instance, advertising in newspapers, magazines, and journals that professors and undergraduates are most likely to read or advertising on radio stations they are most likely to listen to. The survey data suggests that these forms of media are ubiquitous, even if they do not command as much time as Web-based media, text messaging, and watching television. Lastly,

although it was established earlier that no one used Google to learn about the presentation, the conference's website should be optimized for search engines as a best practice.

Limitations and Weaknesses

The study had several limitations and weaknesses. Most importantly, the data collected by the survey was self-reported, rather than based on direct observation. Self-reported data has inherent weaknesses because some respondents have hidden motivations for answering questions in nonobjective ways—e.g., because they want to promote or conceal different habits or personality traits. Unfortunately, the scope of the research questions was too broad to rely on direct observation for this study.

The sample was limited because the number of undergraduate respondents was small. A maximum of 34 undergraduates answered any given question, compared to 59 professors and 127 graduate students. For several survey questions, the data for undergraduates was very similar to the data for graduate students, but a significant difference emerged only between professors and graduate students. This is likely because the undergraduate sample size was too small to confirm a statistically significant difference between undergraduates and professors. Even though the marketing recommendations above are based in part on data collected from undergraduates, it is recommended that academic event marketers who are interested in this study's results rely more heavily on the data for graduate students than undergraduates.

Academic event marketers should note several limitations and weaknesses in the study's potential for guiding marketing strategy. Non-RIT personnel should be mindful that the study incorporated a convenience sample of RIT professors and students, and there is no guarantee that what holds true for RIT also applies at other college campuses. All marketers of academic

events, including CURC, should remember that the study asks about a specific type of event—a talk or demonstration open to the RIT community. Respondents may have answered questions differently if asked about other types of campus events, such as fairs, celebrations, or conferences. Conferences certainly require a higher level of commitment than talks and demonstrations and may tap different motivations and communication channels. Finally, the unpredictability of media habits and social media usage limits the window of time in which marketing recommendations can be drawn from the survey data. For instance, Facebook appears to have had a disruptive effect on MySpace (Nielsen, 2009, June 2) and is itself vulnerable to emerging social media platforms. Like all marketers, academic event marketers must stay current with media trends in order to remain competitive.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research may help to address the weaknesses and limitations of the present study, which poses many opportunities for further investigation. The study should be replicated on other college campuses, preferably with a higher number of undergraduate respondents. With a larger overall sample, it would be possible to rank precisely the predictors of participation in academic events, which marketers of such events may be interested to know. The study would benefit from a qualitative component as well. Interviews with students and professors (perhaps even those with previous involvement in CURC) would shed more light on important motivations and channels of communication surrounding academic events.

Future research could test the marketing recommendations derived from the present study in a real-life scenario. For instance, do flashy advertisements and a robust social media presence actually increase undergraduate participation rates in academic events? Do email announcements

that contain social media links increase awareness of an event and, by the same token, involvement? While the marketing recommendations drawn from this study focus on Web-based media and paper advertisements in campus facilities, future investigation might probe more deeply into the potential for college magazines, newspapers, and radio stations to help promote academic events.

The survey data suggested that undergraduates are influenced by professors in their decisions about academic events. A future study could test the effect of professors' suggestions on a group of students with shared interest in a topic. Would students who heard the professors' suggestions be more likely to participate in the event? If so, how much more likely? Questions like these point to a broader conversation about opinion leadership. In an earlier discussion about the work of Li and Bernoff (2008), several questions were posed. For instance, are Li and Bernoff's online "creators" and "critics" the Web-based equivalent of opinion leaders from more traditional, face-to-face contexts? Do online opinion leaders influence behavior as effectively as offline opinion leaders, or is their influence restricted to, say, brand awareness? Do traits of real-world opinion leaders carry over to the online world? Bringing the focus back to college campuses, it would be interesting to poll professors and students in order to compose their social technographics profiles, which could then be used to bolster academic event marketing strategy.

Finally, future research should test the relationship between college marketing for student recruitment and academic event marketing. At this point, it is only possible to speculate about the usefulness of college marketing as a proxy for academic event marketing, but it stands to reason that motivations for choosing colleges also apply to academic events. On a microscopic level, a single academic event might reflect an entire college experience, with students making

decisions about attendance based on accessibility, prestige, and opportunities for learning, growth, and networking. Future studies should investigate whether Lipman Hearne and Case's (2007) recommendations for college marketing also yield results for academic event marketing. It would also be interesting to ask if messages that work in college marketing are equally effective for academic event marketing. The review of related literature only touched upon college marketing messages. Hartley and Morpew (2008) describe the messages conveyed in college viewbooks, but the authors ultimately recommend turning away from the tradition of viewbook messaging.

The present study examined the communication channels that professors, graduate students, and undergraduates use to learn about academic events and to tell others about such events. The study also probed the motivations of professors and students to attend academic events and suggest them to others. The study findings shed light on these questions. Email announcement emerged as the most common way that members of the three groups learn about academic events, and face-to-face communication was the most common means of sharing news about events with others. Interest in the subject matter was the most important motivating factor in decisions about attendance, and the desire to suggest things that others might find interesting was the most important motivating factor in telling others. In spite of these broad similarities, significant differences emerged among the groups. Overall, students showed more diversity in the channels of communication they used for learning and sharing information about academic events, as well as their motivations for attending events and mentioning them to others. The study's most valuable findings are implications for successful message crafting and distribution. It is hoped that marketers of academic events on college campuses, especially RIT's Conference

for Undergraduate Research in Communication, will find the study instructive in guiding marketing strategy.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument Request Emails

Survey Email #1

From: Julie Johnson
Date: [early spring, 2010]
To: [professors; graduate students; COLA undergraduates]
Subject: Research Study: Event Marketing on Campus

Dear RIT Student or Professor,

I am a graduate student in the communication and media technologies program at RIT. My master's thesis attempts to answer questions that few scholars have asked before about event marketing on college campuses. Below is a link to a survey about how RIT community members learn and share information about special events on campus. As an RIT student or professor, your expertise in this subject will help broaden our understanding of how people like you learn about such events.

The survey has three sections and should only take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The questions are close-ended, and all information gathered is confidential. Participation is voluntary, and you can exit the survey anytime without penalty. There are no risks involved in participation.

If you are an RIT student or professor who is responsible for advertising academic events, the results of this survey may be of benefit to you. Please contact me by any of the means below to request survey results when they become available.

If you have questions about the survey, please direct them to me or to Heather Foti, Associate Director of the Human Subjects Research Office, at hmfsrcs@rit.edu or 475-7673.

Thank you in advance for contributing your time to this research project, which stands to benefit RIT and other college communities.

<https://clipboard.rit.edu/take.cfm?sid=92AB20C3>

Sincerely,

Julie Johnson
M.S. Candidate 2010 (Communication and Media Technologies)
Rochester Institute of Technology
(585) 473-8913
jaj6788@rit.edu

Survey Email #2

From: Julie Johnson
Date: April 20, 2010
To: [COLA undergraduates]
Subject: Research Study Reminder: Event Marketing on Campus

Dear RIT Student or Professor,

Last week, I sent you a link to a survey about how RIT students and professors receive and disseminate information about special events on campus. I am writing to ask that you please take the survey if you haven't done so already. Completion time for this anonymous survey is 10-15 minutes, and your participation is highly valued.

You may access the survey at <https://clipboard.rit.edu/take.cfm?sid=92AB20C3>.

My sincere thanks to those of you who have already participated.

Kind regards,

Julie Johnson
M.S. Candidate 2010 (Communication and Media Technologies)
Rochester Institute of Technology
(585) 473-8913
jaj6788@rit.edu

posters in campus facilities						
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3) Which of the following social networking and social media websites do you visit, and how often?

WEBSITE	HOW OFTEN						
	Never	Less than once per year	Once per year	Several times per year	Several times per month	Several times per week	Several times per day
Blogger	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delicious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deviantart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digg	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flickr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gaia Online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LiveJournal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MySpace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photobucket	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part 2: Questions about an Academic Event

From time to time, people visit RIT to offer a lecture or perform a demonstration. Think back to the last time you learned about someone who was visiting to give a talk or demonstration that was open to the RIT community. Then answer the following questions as accurately as possible.

Please Note: The word **peer** is used in several questions below. If you are a student, please interpret **peers** to mean other students. If you are a professor, please interpret **peers** to mean any other RIT employees.

4) What was the presentation?

Name of presenter _____

Topic of talk or demonstration _____

Date of event (exact or estimated) _____

5) Please indicate how you **first** learned about the presentation. Choose only one option.

- Email from someone I know
- Email announcement from an RIT department, employee, or student organizer
- Flyer or poster hanging on campus
- Someone told me face to face or by telephone
- Through a social networking website (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)
- Letter or postcard
- I used a search engine like Google to learn about the presentation
- Other _____

6) What was the **first** advertisement you saw for the presentation?

- None. I never saw any advertisements for the presentation. [If checked, branch to question 9.]
- Email announcement from an RIT department, employee, or student organizer
- Flyer or poster hanging on campus
- Posting on or from a social networking site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)
- Letter or postcard
- Website
- Other (Explain) _____

7) Did the first event advertisement you saw help contribute to your interest in the presentation?

- Yes
- No [If checked, branch to question 9.]

8) Please rate the advertisement attributes according to their level of importance in gaining and holding your attention. For attributes that do not apply to the advertisement you saw, choose “Does Not Apply.”

	Not Important	Moderately Important	Important	Does Not Apply
A clear message about what I would learn at the presentation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A high level of professionalism in the design and/or ad copy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A thought-provoking message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bold shapes, colors, and/or photographs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategic placement of the ad (e.g., in my mailbox, my Inbox, a prominent location on campus, in a magazine I read, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeing the same ad more than once	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9) What factors motivated you to consider attending the presentation? Check all that apply.

- None. I was not motivated to consider attending the presentation.
- I am interested in the presentation topic.
- My professor, department chair, or dean said it was mandatory to attend the presentation.
- My professor, department chair, or dean suggested the presentation (even though it was not mandatory).
- A peer whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation.
- The advertisements I saw were compelling.
- Other: _____

10) Of the motivating factors you checked in the previous question, which was the most important? [If you checked only one option above, check the same option again.]

- None. I was not motivated to consider attending the presentation.
- I am interested in the presentation topic.
- My professor, department chair, or dean said it was mandatory to attend the presentation.
- My professor, department chair, or dean suggested the presentation (even though it was not mandatory).
- A peer whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation.

- The advertisements I saw were compelling.
- Other: _____

11) Did you share news of the event with any of your peers?

- Yes
- No [If checked, branch to question 14.]

12) We would like to know what motivated you to share news about the presentation with your peers. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. For statements that do not apply, choose "Does Not Apply."

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply
I like suggesting things to people that I think they'll find interesting.	<input type="radio"/>				
I was energized by my own enthusiasm for the presentation.	<input type="radio"/>				
I wanted to attend the event with companions.	<input type="radio"/>				
Someone whose opinion I trust told me about the presentation, and I wanted to pass the news to others.	<input type="radio"/>				

13) How did you share information about the presentation with your peers? Please check all that apply.

- Phone call or text message
- Told them face to face
- Email
- Social networking site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)
- Posted a flyer in a campus facility
- Placed an advertisement in their department mailbox/es
- Other: _____

14) Did you attend the presentation? If the presentation is in the future, do you plan to attend it?

- Yes [If checked, branch to question 16.]
- No

15) If you did not attend the presentation, or if the presentation is in the future and you do not plan to attend it, what is your reason for not attending?

- The presentation took place (or takes place) during class time.
- I was (or will be) away from campus during the presentation.
- My workload was (or is) too large to fit the presentation into my schedule.
- Other: _____

16) Are you a faculty member, graduate student, or undergraduate student?

- Faculty member
- Graduate student [If checked, branch to question 20.]
- Undergraduate student [If checked, branch to question 20.]

17) Before the presentation took place, did you share news of it with any of your students?

- Yes
- No [If checked, branch to question 20.]

18) We would like to know what motivated you to tell your students about the presentation. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. For statements that do not apply, choose "Does Not Apply."

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply
I like suggesting things to people that I think they'll find interesting.	<input type="radio"/>				
I was energized by my own enthusiasm for the presentation.	<input type="radio"/>				
I wanted to attend the event with companions.	<input type="radio"/>				
Someone whose opinion I trust told me about the event, and I wanted to pass the news to others.	<input type="radio"/>				
The presentation topic was relevant to a course I teach.	<input type="radio"/>				

19) How did you share information about the presentation with your students? Please check all that apply.

- Phone call or text message
- Told them face to face
- Email
- Social networking site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)
- Posted a flyer in a campus facility
- Placed an advertisement in their department mailbox/es
- Other: _____

Part 3: General Information

Finally, the last set of questions asks about several personal characteristics. Your responses will be used for statistical purposes only.

20) What RIT college are you most closely affiliated with?

- College of Applied Science and Technology
- E. Philip Saunders College of Business
- B. Thomas Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences
- Kate Gleason College of Engineering
- College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
- College of Liberal Arts
- College of Science
- National Technical Institute for the Deaf
- University Studies

21) What age did you turn on your last birthday? _____

22) Which sex are you?

- Male
- Female

Thank you once again for participating in this survey. If you would like a summary of the results when they become available, please e-mail Julie Johnson at jaj6788@rit.edu.