

How Do We Communicate?

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Introduction

On many campuses of a wide range of colleges across the globe, students communicate with each other through the use of a variety of different forms of technology. Phones, laptops, even personal tablets all offer different ways for people to talk to each other, and all of these devices have become an integral part of many classes. It is no longer a question if technology should become part of the classroom or the college itself. Now, the question is what different ways can colleges communicate with their students? In this paper, a group of students currently attending St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin set out to answer the question of which communication channels should the college use to share information with current students? To do this, we interviewed a small number of both alumni and current students of St. Norbert and asked them numerous research questions about their personal communication and how St. Norbert can better utilize technology.

Literature Review

This study explores the channels that St. Norbert College uses to communicate with their students. Due to society's technological advancements, research technology and social media platforms are always changing and will most likely never disappear. Communication platforms include Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Facetime or talking on the phone, texting, and email. Technology platforms include computer, phone, and an Apple watch. Studying these platforms can lead to higher productivity in communicating between students and professors, while allowing researchers and individuals to identify the trends in communication and find ways to make it more efficient.

One detail the research addressed was the reliance on technology. Agozzino says, “This study also came to the conclusion that by denying access to Facebook and Twitter would be a major deal-breaker for 18 to 24 year olds seeking employment” (p.182). This emulates the idea that demands for certain social media platforms changes because while Facebook was once very prevalent, in recent years it has slowly become less used by our generation. The study also found how much we live off of our technology.

Our generation has become so reliant on not only social media but the overall need to have constant communication. Dodd and Campbell states, “This generation represents the nation’s first to be born into a society with an accessible Internet system that permeates both business and social spheres of American life. For Generation Y, social media is woven into the very fabric of their life [and lifestyles]”(p. 3). Due to it being so accessible we have become obsessed with the idea of having constant contact with peers near and far. To look at it in another light, Redden and Way state, “teens structured their lives around keeping connected and experienced tension when forced to disconnect” (Redden & Way, 2017, p. 26). This is valid because this generation is so reliant and used to the constant social communication that when it is taken away they are unsure of how to handle. This increases the overall amount of technological communication in our generation, especially as they try new platforms.

When observing the millennial generation as a whole, they are open and willing to try new social activities in a variety of forms. “Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change” it is stated from their research that, “In weighing their own life priorities, Millennials place parenthood and marriage far above career and financial success” this brings a variety of ideas to

light because with previous generations-as this article relates back to- were looking at life in the opposing view compared to millennials. Previous generations had been rushing to the altar to get married at an extremely early age, while millennials are not rushing into marriage because they are actively trying to change the social norm because in generations before them marriages ended in divorce and they want to try and avoid that at all costs.

In addition, Sulleyman says, “Millennials and Generation Z Interact More Through Phones and Apps Than in Real Life, Report Finds” a report conducted by tech company LivePerson claims that majority of youth prefer to communicate digitally rather than face to face, with the percentages in the UK being even higher than in the United States. Tech company LivePerson conducted a survey on 4,013 teens and adults from multiple countries (Sulleyman, 2017). Many teens and younger adults have an overwhelming relationship to their phones, so much so that they could be considered to be an extension of ourselves. Administrations should use this research to make their communication more effective.

Analyzing average screen time can develop efficient systems of administrative communication. Sheldon states, “On average, participants spent 1.38 hours on Facebook per day ($SD = 1.64$), .57 hours on Twitter ($SD = 1.19$), and sent 55 text messages per day ($SD = 75.59$)” (Sheldon, 2018, p. 105). Students in our interviews seemed to have similar responses, with the addition of Snapchat time spent. The overall idea was that college students spend plenty of time on different media outlets.

The research that has been done on the communication channels young adults are using in their school and personal life is so prevalent because generation y- the participants that make

up the study we did are apart of this generation- is the first generation to be born into a society with easily accessible internet that allows for both business and social aspects of their lives (Dodd and Campbell, 2011, p. 3). Their lives are focused around using as well as communicating through technology. The research that our group has conducted has helped the understanding behind these concepts because it allowed us to take a step back from our technology filled lives and become aware of how much we really use those resources and why other researchers believe it happens. As a group, we primarily use our phones and computers. According to our iPhone screen time, we are spending about 4 hours per day on our phones. The apps that we use the most are Snapchat, Instagram, text messaging, and Twitter. Thus, our generation is using the same apps and spending the same amount of time on their devices, if not more.

On the other hand, applications are very useful and a great way to communicate, but an old fashioned phone call is still a very effective way to make contact. This effectiveness can easily be compared to how St. Norbert College communicates with their students, staff, and community. A study done by Sanina, Balashov, Rubtcova, and Satinsky(2017) showed, “The Effectiveness of Communication Channels in Government and Business Communication” that “Telephone calls are universally the most successful communication channel between government and all types business types” (p. 262). Even with major application improvements, a telephone call is still seen as an extremely effective way to broadcast information to an abundance of people.

Research questions

- 1). Why is the difference between the different platforms changing so much?

- 2). What is the main way people are choosing to communicate?
- 3). How have the trends changed?

Methods

Participants

To make our study more representative of St. Norbert's student communication habits, we interviewed students who live on campus, students who commute, and alumni who graduated within the past 10 years. In order to incorporate both genders, we had a 6 to 4 ratio of males to females. As well as being a student, these interviewees were very involved on campus between both academic clubs and social clubs.

By interviewing different genders, different ages, students, and alumni, it made a great impact on the outcome of analyzing the communication effectiveness at St. Norbert College. The age diversity depicts how the college's communication system is in relation to how it has been in the past. Thus, the alumni and upperclassmen interviewees helped give us this idea of how technology and communication channels have changed in the past decade.

Procedures

The sampling technique we used in our study was quota sampling. Quota sampling is a sampling method of gathering representative data from a specific subgroup. The reason we decided on using quota sampling was to get a wide variety of interviewees but from a specific group of people. The subgroup we chose was from St. Norbert students that either were currently attending or graduated within the last 10 years. We asked our interviewees a series of both open-ended and closed-ended questions; this was to help us standardize as well as make it easier for us to compare our results.

Among the responses in the survey we found that while our age range was all over the board they were between 18-31 years old who on average had been an active smartphone user for 6 years. The 6 male and 4 female participants were from areas of Northern Wisconsin and were mainly first year and second year students who got involved in social groups or Greek life on campus. While conducting the survey we found out that laptops and phones were the most used devices; computers for both academic and personal use and phones for personal use. The interviewees most used apps were Snapchat, texting, and emailing. While the interviewees were avid communicators, they felt the communication effectiveness from St. Norbert was either not good or moderate. With this, they preferred getting emails from professors over a notification from moodle or alertus. They also believed that if the campus could use a different form of communication they should try texting because this a common and easy form of communication that is being used.

Results & Discussion

From interviewing alumni and current St. Norbert College students, we were able to find a variety of activities they are, or were, involved in, as well as identify the constant change in how people use technology to communicate with each other. For example, we interviewed a 2009 St. Norbert graduate, and he informed us that the main source of communication from the college was through email, but if the students really wanted to know information regarding the college community they would have to go onto the St. Norbert website in order to receive insight pertaining to St. Norbert campus events and public service announcements. The alumni recommended that texting would be a more effective way to get information out to those on campus but due to the time that they were in college texting was not widely used. Moving

forward, after interviewing another alumni, it was discovered that St. Norbert did not start using Google accounts until her sophomore year in school, so in 2013. Compared to students now who use their Google accounts for just about everything, this is just one example of the vast differences in technology that have arisen within the past decade.

For the results of the survey it showed a large correlation between the less amount of years spent in school, the more the person is apt to check social media. Out of the 183 students who took part in this survey it was found that on a daily basis 96.7% check Snapchat, 69.9% check Facebook, 90.2% check Instagram, 51.4% check Twitter, and 84.7% check email. Also, the platforms that the survey showed were most used are, 85.2% said Snapchat, 66.7%, said Instagram, 25.1% said Facebook, 24% said Twitter, and 23.5% said email. A way that St. Norbert could better reach their students would be to use more platforms shown above due to the wide variety of student usage. While the survey shows that a large amount of people predominantly use Snapchat so did our own interviews and research. As stated above in the literature review, the average time the 5 members of our group spent on social media was 4 hours. We were surprised that when going over the survey results we found that this was the average among college students.

As mentioned earlier, the most common communication applications are Snapchat, email, and texting. Through analyzing data that interviewees provided, it was discovered that Snapchat is the most used social media platform, but this differs from ten years ago and even five years ago. Ten years ago, this was the prime of AOL instant messenger, and five years ago Facebook was the thing to do. These were the days where Snapchat was yet to exist, and emailing, texting, and Facebook were the main means of communication. This is another example of how in just

ten short years the top social media platforms change very quickly. With new trends constantly coming out, it is hard to keep up.

As stated in the introduction, our interviews consisted of asking a small number of both alumni and current students of St. Norbert College numerous questions about their personal communication and how St. Norbert can better utilize technology to communicate information to them. We found that much of the communication between students and the school was online, and social media such as Snapchat was used by many. The survey found that students felt St. Norbert's communication abilities were neutral; a mean of 3.84. In addition to our interview and survey results, our literature review results similarly show that there has been an increase in digital communication and a change within what platforms millennials are using (such as Facebook slowly being traded out in favor of newer social media such as Snapchat). We also found that phone calls are still considered by many to be a valid way to communicate with a body or system, such as the St. Norbert College community. Our research findings are important because it highlights the drastically increased presence technology has gained in college campuses, how this escalation is directly tied to the increase in technology in a huge percentage of millennials' daily lives.

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Appendix

Opening: Hello and thank you for agreeing to take part in our study. The goal of this study is to identify what types of communication channels are used most frequently while at St. Norbert College.

Questions

Demographic

- 1). What is your age?
- 2). What is your gender?
- 3). What is your year in school/graduation year?
- 4). What are you involved in?
- 5). Where are you from?

Specific questions pertaining to research

- 1). What technology resources do you use on a daily basis?

Out of all your technology resources which do you use the most?

Out of the following which do you use the most:

Facebook
Twitter
Snapchat
Instagram
Facetime/calling
Texting
Email

Which of the above resources are you most comfortable with?

2). Is the college's communication system effective and why?

When you were in school which of the following was the most beneficial:

Moodle

Emails from professors

Alertus

3). Do you wish some messages and information would be sent in another format?

What formats could be used?

How would you like such messages delivered?

Extra Questions

4). Which technology resources do you use specifically for school work/work?

5). Which technology resources do you use specifically for your personal life?

6). How long have you been an active smartphone users?

Closing: Thank you for answering these questions and helping me conduct my research! I am hoping to find out which communication channels students at SNC use regularly.