

The background of the cover is a vibrant green with flowing, wavy lines that create a sense of movement and depth. The lines vary in opacity and direction, creating a dynamic and modern aesthetic.

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University Blogs and Organizational Image

By Karen R. Rudolph and Kaye D. Sweetser

Introduction

For the next several years, colleges and universities across the country will be courting a new breed of student—the Millennial Generation. This cohort, comprised of individuals born after 1981, will provide ample numbers of prospects. To attract these young people as students, many colleges and universities have turned to “a rapidly growing trend in higher education”—blogs (Brumfield, 2005, para. 7). Brumfield (2005) reported that university officials are discovering that student blogs offer a look inside college life in a way typical campus Websites cannot.

This study examines recurring frames appearing in student blogs profiled on college and university Websites, and how these entries depict colleges and universities. By applying framing and attribute agenda setting, this study provides insight into the personalized “real” messages institutions of higher education are sending to potential students.

Literature Review

College Recruiting and the Millennial Generation

According to Hossler (2000), there are two guiding principles in recruitment activities: personalization and timing. The Millennials, also called Generation Y, possess a few unique traits that complement these principles. First, they expect personalization such as being able to customize online content (Kruse, 2004). They also expect real-time access (Kruse, 2004), as they live in a world where they can snap pictures with a digital camera and email out to friends in minutes rather than waiting a week for a photomat to develop, as previous generations had.

The Internet can facilitate such personalization and immediacy. A Pew study notes, “While public discussion has raged about whether blogs constitute legitimate journalism or are a reliable source of information, for teens, blogs are much more about the maintenance and extension of personal relationships” (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2005, p. 15).

According to Nancy Prater, the Web content coordinator at Ball State University, social networking through Websites such as Facebook and Xanga is already taking place. Ball State, a leader in using technology to recruit students, began employing student bloggers in September 2005 (July, 2006).

In choosing bloggers, Ball State first asked deans, department chairs, and key professors for recommendations (July, 2006). For compensation, Ball State provided the bloggers with about \$800 each in high-tech gadgets, such as digital cameras and iPods—tools they would in turn use as they blogged. Prater, who oversaw the project, was happy with the return on investment saying recruiting publics are critical of a “too-perfect” picture often presented by recruitment materials and those deciding which school to attend need to understand what life is really like on a campus when searching for the right fit (July, 2006).

Online Public Relations

In general, public relations practitioners have been labeled technology “laggards” (Porter, Sallot, Cameron, & Shamp, 2001) and consistently rated low with regard to fulfilling the potential for dialogue through an organizational Website (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2001; 2003; Esrock & Leichty, 2000). This is further illustrated by the lack of interactivity and slowness to post content in common Web features like online pressrooms (Gonzalez-Herrero & Ruiz de Valbuena, 2006).

With regard to online public relations in higher education, McAllister-Greve (2005) conducted a content analysis of community college Websites and found that while the sites offered online access to information and services to a variety of publics, they could do more to promote dialogic communication. Consistent with other sectors of public relations, interactive features that solicited input and feedback were limited on the sites. Will and Callison (2006) examined college and university Websites and noted that alumni and friends were the most targeted publics of these sites. Of students, prospective students were most targeted, with links to the admissions office and online and downloadable applications for admission. Will and Callison (2006) determined that while efforts were being made to reach students online, there is much room for improvement.

Using a survey and focus groups, Poock and Lefond (2001) observed how college-bound high school students perceived college and university Web pages, looking at content, site architecture, navigation, connection speed, enjoyable experience, target audience, distinctiveness of site, and graphics. They found that sites that went overboard to appeal to prospective students were seen as unprofessional, a label that indicated a lower quality institution.

Framing Theory and Attribute Agenda Setting

Recognizing that the way student bloggers write about their college

experiences is just as important as what they write about, this study is grounded in framing theory and attribute agenda setting. These mass communication theories seek to understand how specific attempts at communication convey meaning to audiences.

Scholars have used a picture frame metaphor to understand the concept of framing. The idea is that a picture frame's size, complexity, and location affect how the picture is perceived (Ghanem, 1997). Subtopics of the object are the issues being studied (Ghanem, 1997). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) proposed that these subtopics within frames can be content analyzed inductively and deductively. Deductive analysis is used to determine the extent that predefined frames occur in the news. The strengths of this approach are that it can be replicated easily, can handle large samples, and can differentiate framing between media (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The drawback to a deductive approach is that frames not defined in advance might be overlooked during the study. According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), using an inductive approach involves having an "open view to attempt to reveal the array of possible frames, beginning with very loosely defined preconceptions of these frames" (p. 94). While this approach is great for detecting all possible frames, it unfortunately is typically labor intensive, based on small samples, and hard to replicate.

Affective attributes consider the public's emotional response to media coverage (Ghanem, 1997). Journalists elicit this response through their use of narratives, most often chronicles and stories, and through news values such as proximity and human interest. Ghanem (1997) suggested that "bringing a story to such a personal level might help the reader identify with the happenings in the story and thus feel more concern for what is going on" (p. 13). In political coverage, affective attributes also include opinions about the candidates (Golan & Wanta, 2001). Golan and Wanta (2001) said cognitive attributes, meanwhile, involve information about newsmakers, whether it's about issues or personal characteristics. According to Ghanem (1997), cognitive attributes attempt to "shed light on whether the media and the audience are thinking about the problem in the same way" (p. 13).

Akin to the framing concept is attribute agenda setting, also called second-level agenda setting. This second level "examines how media coverage affects both what the public thinks about and how the public thinks about it" (Ghanem, 1997, p.3). In addition, this second level tries to figure out how an agenda of attributes influences public opinion (McCombs & Evatt, 1995). According to McCombs (2004), "attribute is a generic term encompassing the entire range of properties and traits that characterize an object" (p. 70).

Ghanem (1997) described attribute agenda setting as looking at an item under a magnifying lens while first level uses the naked eye. She added: "The

attributes of an object are the set of perspectives or frames that journalists and the public employ to think about each object. How news frames impact the public agenda is the emerging second level of agenda setting” (p. 5). Survey respondents from Iyengar and Simon’s (1993) investigation of media effects that occurred during the Persian Gulf crisis and war illustrate this distinction. The first level of agenda setting is seen when respondents said the crisis was the most important problem facing the nation. Describing the crisis in terms of diplomatic or military options depicts the second level (Reese, 2001).

RQ1: What reoccurring frames appear in entries by student bloggers on admission department Websites?

RQ2: What is the distribution of tone within frames?

RQ3: Are any relationships apparent between the use of tone and attribute frames?

RQ4: What are the characteristics of students that colleges and universities employ as bloggers on admission Websites?

RQ5: What are the characteristics of the institutions that use blogs on admission Websites?

Methodology

This study used quantitative content analysis to examine frames and attributes.

No comprehensive list exists of colleges and universities that use student blogs in their recruitment efforts. Therefore, the sample was created by first determining which institutions use blogs. This was done by visiting the Website of each college or university listed on a master list of institutions accredited by the six biggest regional accrediting organizations.

The list contained a total of 1,906 institutions. Of these, 172 institutions were excluded from the sample for either not offering at least one bachelor’s degree, not being located within the 50 states, or for having closed. Thus, 1,734 school sites were examined for the presence of student blogs used for recruitment purposes. For this study, blogs were operationally defined as frequently updated Web pages with posts centered on one topic arranged in reverse chronological order. A total of 183 institutions were found to have blogs fitting the criteria.

The unit of analysis was the blog post collected from each school's Website. The time frame selected was from a full academic year, in order to fully examine the content of student bloggers during their tenure as university representatives. To preserve the data, each post was downloaded manually, thus capturing the images and text together in one file. Ninety-two institutions were found to have archives of student blogs for the academic year resulting in the collection of 4,792 blog posts. From this, a stratified sample was created. Using a randomized number table, 10 percent or 10 posts (whichever was greater) from each blogger was identified for analysis. If a particular blogger did not post at least 10 times during the sample period, then all of the posts from that student were analyzed. This random sampling method was necessary because of the enormity of individualized frequencies. The stratified sample included 2,471 blog posts.

An inductive approach was taken in analyzing posts in an attempt to reveal all possible frames (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Posts were coded for attributes emphasized in the blog. The original inductive frames to be used were determined by reading through a sample of blog posts. They include: academics, professors, social life, extracurricular activities, residential life, athletics, finances, physical wellness, religion, and community. These frames were adjusted after a pilot test of the code sheet.

Frames were recorded using an instrument based on the method employed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The instrument contained a series of dichotomous-orientated response questions in order to create a frame factor score for each item. Given that these are content-specific inductive frames, this factor frame approach appeared to be the most logical in identifying not only the presence of frames, but also the level of occurrence of that frame for each item. Poock and Lefond's (2001) research on college and university Web pages was used as a starting point to identify the frame attribute questions. The overall frames, therefore, are made up of several individual attributes.

The academics frame emerged when bloggers wrote about coursework, the institution's academic reputation, or academic honesty. The professor frame occurred when the blogger wrote comments about the institution's faculty – descriptions of their personal characteristics and whether bloggers felt they are competent. The social life frame referred to statements depicting life outside of the classroom including extra-curricular activities and entertainment opportunities. The extracurricular activities frame included mentions of school-sponsored activities the blogger was involved with outside of class. The residential life frame included descriptions of living in a dorm room and what the

dining hall was like. The athletics frame showed what role athletics played at an institution including intramural and competitive sports. The finances frame occurred when the blogger wrote about his personal finances and the costs of attending the institution. The physical wellness frame included references to the blogger's personal wellness. The religion frame depicted the religious atmosphere on campus and the community frame presented the blogger's relationship and feelings toward the local community.

After identifying whether these attributes were used, coders determined an overall tone for that frame. Demographic characteristics collected, when possible, included gender, ethnicity, school classification, and hometown (in state or out of state).

Two trained coders (including the author) content analyzed the blog posts. Intercoder reliability was assessed on a random sample of coded items, and determined to be 0.95 using Holsti's formula for measuring the percentage of agreement. Differences were reconciled throughout the coding process.

Results

This study explored the types of frames used in blog posts on admission department Websites. The post was the unit of analysis ($N = 4,792$) and represented 92 institutions and 349 individual bloggers. Ten percent or 10 posts, whichever was greater, from each blogger was randomly selected for analysis ($n = 2,471$).

Blog activity varied throughout the academic year and appeared to peak during specific months. Figure 1 illustrates blog post activity each month based on educational classification (year in school), and Figures 2 and 3 compares activity based on institution (size and private/public, respectively).

Figure 1: Frequency of Posts By Month and Blogger Classification

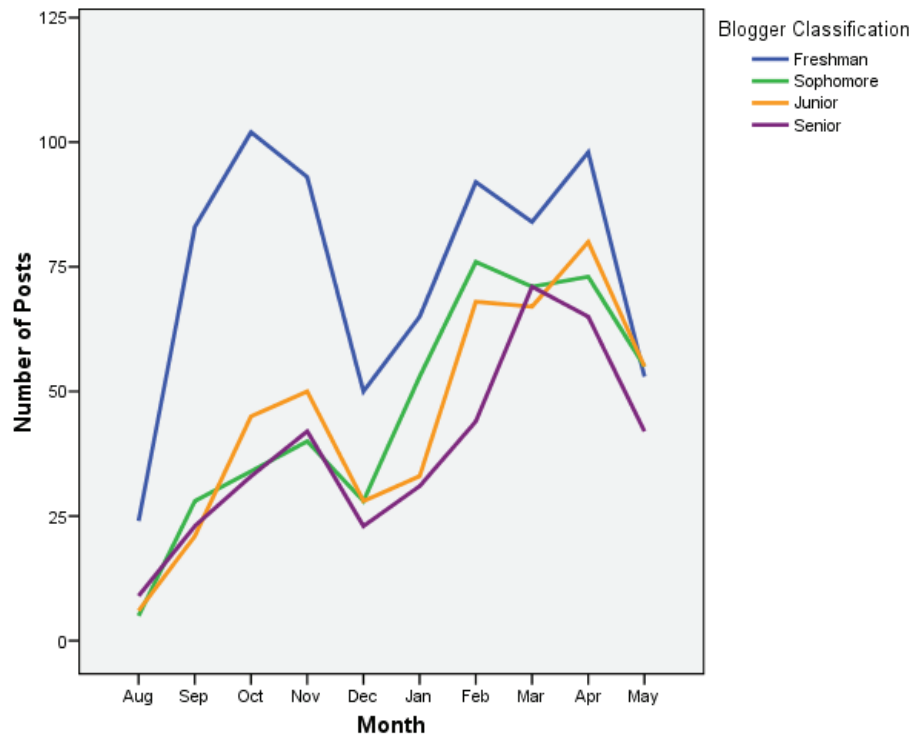


Figure 2: Frequency of Posts By Month and Size of Institution

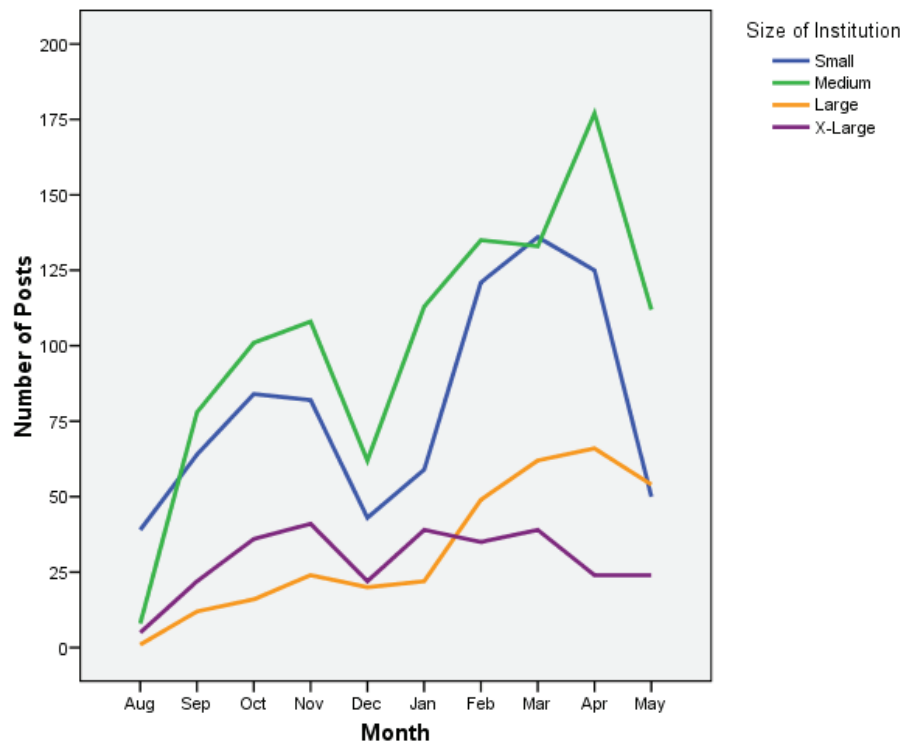
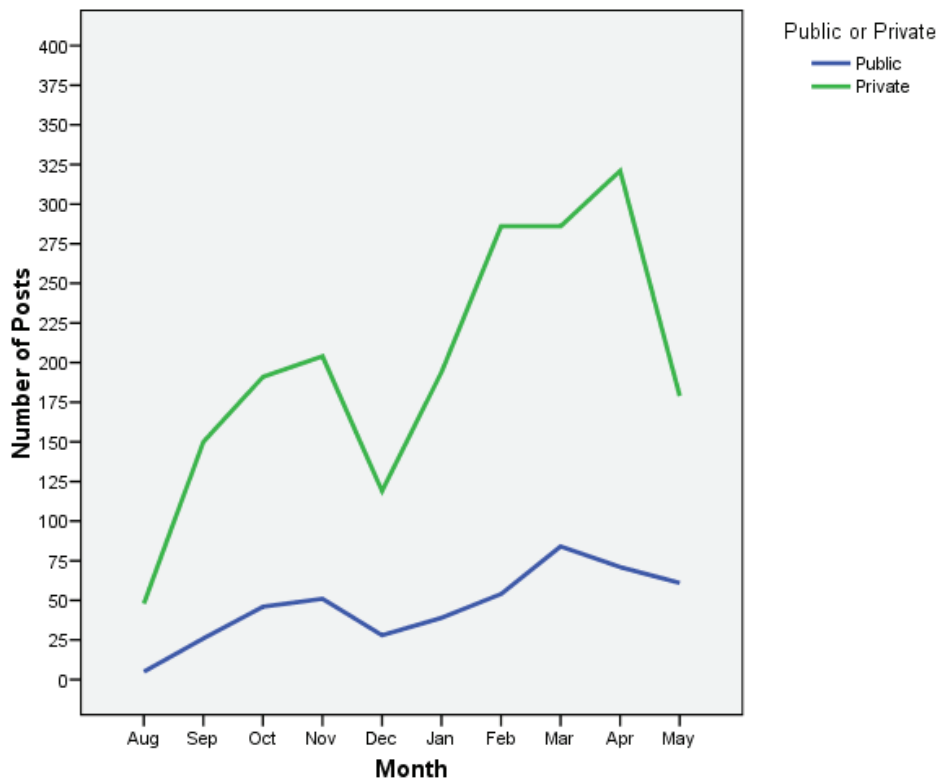


Figure 3: Frequency of Posts By Month and Public/Private Status



Frames and Attributes

With no factors surfacing during a factor analysis, this research grouped attributes into frames in a similar fashion to Taylor et al. (2001) by creating separate summative indices. The indices for each frame, along with means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1. The low alpha scores and lack of emerging frames can be attributed to the study’s investigation of a wide range of topics with very specific categories, which Taylor et al. (2001), who reported alphas as low as 0.11, explains as acceptable. Taylor et al. (2001) said indices “reflect the concatenation of multiple concepts within a single construct rather than the isolation of a singular concept via multiple items, as in a scale.” (p. 274).

The academics frame index consisted of 11 attributes, professor frame index had four, social life frame index had five, extracurricular frame index had 16, residential life frame index had five, athletics frame index included five, finances frame index had seven, physical wellness frame index had six, religion frame index had five, and the community frame index had four attributes.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Frames and Issue Attributes

	M (n = 2,471)	SD	Percentage (n = 2,471)
Frame Indices			
Academics Frame Index (a = .212)	.94	.94	61.5%
Administrative tasks	.05	.21	4.7%
Class	.26	.43	25.5%
Coursework	.37	.48	36.9%
Academic honesty	.00	.02	0.1%
Honor or remedial courses	.03	.16	2.7%
Academic reputation	.01	.07	0.5%
Studying	.14	.34	13.9%
Study abroad	.06	.23	5.6%
Internships	.03	.16	2.7%
Field trips	.01	.09	0.9%
Career services	.01	.09	0.8%
Professor Frame Index (a = .159)	.10	.33	9.4%
Personal characteristics of professor	.05	.21	5.1%
Encounters with professors outside the classroom	.04	.18	3.5%
Professor's competence	.02	.13	1.7%
Recommendations about which professor to take	.00	.02	0.1%
Social Life Frame Index (a = .346)	1.30	.83	84.2%
Life outside the classroom	.83	.37	82.8%
Too much going on to study	.00	.04	0.2%
Entertainment opportunities provided through the institution	.19	.39	18.8%
What he does on the weekends	.28	.45	28.1%
Being bored	.01	.07	0.5%
Extracurricular Frame Index (a = .121)	.29	.56	25.1%
Band	.01	.92	0.8%
Choir	.01	.11	1.3%
Sports	.10	.29	9.6%
Honor societies	.00	.07	0.5%
Theatre	.02	.12	1.5%
Political groups	.00	.02	0.1%
Student publications	.01	.11	1.3%
Student union activities	.01	.09	1.0%
Sororities/fraternities	.06	.24	6.2%
Pep rallies	.00	.06	0.4%
Tailgating	.00	.06	0.4%
Tour Guide	.01	.11	1.4%
Student government	.02	.14	2.2%
Orientation leader	.01	.09	1.0%
Campus TV/radio	.01	.09	0.9%
Academic club	.01	.11	1.3%
Residential Life Frame Index (a = .118)	.14	.39	13.5%
What it's like to live in a dorm	.09	.28	8.6%
Calling the campus "home"	.02	.12	1.7%
Dining hall	.03	.16	2.7%
Parking on campus	.00	.04	0.2%

Living off campus	.01	.12	1.5%
Athletics Frame Index (a = .475)	.22	.58	15.2%
Attending competitive athletic events	.05	.21	4.9%
Being part of a competitive team	.07	.26	7.4%
How teams are faring	.06	.22	5.5%
Acting as a cheerleader	.02	.14	2.1%
Playing or watching intramural sports	.02	.15	2.3%
Finances Frame Index (a = .140)	.19	.45	16.8%
Costs associated with attending the institution	.01	.12	1.5%
Financial aid package	.01	.09	0.8%
Having a budget	.01	.08	0.7%
Working a job on campus	.07	.26	7.4%
Working a job off campus	.02	.15	2.3%
Working at an unknown location	.03	.17	3.0%
Working a job when not in school	.03	.18	3.4%
Physical Wellness Frame Index (a = .199)	.18	.46	16.0%
Exercising or working out	.03	.17	3.3%
Being stressed or not stressed	.07	.25	6.7%
Taking naps or needing more sleep	.04	.18	3.6%
Being sick	.03	.16	2.9%
Using health services on campus	.00	.06	0.4%
Time management	.02	.13	1.8%
Religion Frame Index (a = .396)	.11	.40	8.9%
Involved with a religious organization	.02	.13	2.0%
Mission trips	.00	.06	0.4%
Attending a religious service off campus	.02	.15	2.3%
Reference to religious values	.05	.21	4.7%
Praying or meditating	.02	.13	2.0%
Community Frame Index (a = .022)	.18	.40	17.1%
Describe the weather where the institution is located	.12	.32	11.7%
Describe the town or city where the institution is located	.03	.16	2.6%
Collaborative efforts between the local community and institution	.02	.14	2.2%
Local news or events	.02	.12	1.5%

Bloggers' Use of Frames

RQ1 asked how student bloggers framed their respective colleges and universities in blogs posted on admission department Websites. The mean score for each of the 10 frames revealed the bloggers' overall use of the frame in admission blogs (see Table 1).

Bloggers wrote a great deal about their social life in posts by discussing what they did outside of class, what they did on the weekends, and entertainment opportunities provided by the institution. The second most common frame was the academics frame where bloggers wrote about their coursework, classes, and studying. The extracurricular frame was the third most common frame. Under this frame, bloggers wrote about being involved with sports and groups such as sororities and fraternities and, to a lesser

degree theatre. From there, the other frames were community frame, finances frame, physical wellness frame, athletics frame, residential life frame, professor frame, and the religion frame. See Table 1 for a full report of frame and attribute occurrence.

Correlations provide additional understanding between the relationships of frames. These tests uncovered that for the most part there were very weak yet statistically significant correlations between frame indices. The highest correlations that occurred were among the nonacademic-oriented items. For example, the social life frame index had a positive weak relationship with the extracurricular frame index ($r = .214, p < .001$) and the athletic frame index ($r = .204, p < .001$). Additionally, the athletic frame index had a weak positive correlation with the extracurricular frame index ($r = .360, p < .001$).

Blogger Use of Tone Within Frames

RQ2 asked about the distribution of tone within frames. A frequency count showed that overall frames were mostly positive. In addition to being the most common frame, the social life frame was also the most positive frame (30.3 percent; $n = 748$) while the residential life frame was the most negative (3.4 percent; $n = 84$). Table 2 shows tone distribution by frames.

To better understand the relationship between tone and frame index, correlations were run. The community frame had the strongest positive correlation with tone, $r(2,471) = .933, p < .001$, followed closely by the professor frame, $r(2,471) = .930, p < .001$. In addition, the athletics frame correlated positively with tone, $r(2,471) = .897, p < .001$, as did the finances frame, $r(2,471) = .888, p < .001$. The religion frame correlated positively with tone, $r(2,471) = .866, p < .001$. The residential life frame correlated positively with tone, $r(2,471) = .826, p < .001$. The physical wellness frame correlated positively with tone, $r(2,471) = .817, p < .001$, as did the extracurricular frame, $r(2,471) = .812, p < .001$, and the social life frame, $r(2,471) = .752, p < .001$. The academics frame also correlated positively with tone, $r(2,471) = .726, p < .001$. It is important to note that while these correlations show association between the frames and tone, they do not necessarily imply causation.

Table 2. Tone Distribution By Frame

Frame	Negative (n = 325)		Neutral (n = 3,171)		Positive (n = 3,422)		Frame Not Mentioned (n = 17,792)	
Academics	64	2.6%	927	37.5%	576	23.3%	904	36.6%
Professor	12	0.5%	20	0.8%	210	8.5%	2229	90.2%
Social Life	20	0.8%	1312	53.1%	748	30.3%	391	15.8%
Extracurricular	3	0.1%	96	3.9%	637	25.8%	1735	70.2%
Residential Life	84	3.4%	73	3.0%	215	8.7%	2099	84.9%
Athletics	5	0.2%	52	2.1%	327	13.2%	2087	84.5%
Finances	30	1.2%	202	8.2%	192	7.8%	2047	82.8%
Physical Wellness	66	2.7%	319	12.9%	63	2.5%	2023	81.9%
Religion	0	0.0%	41	1.7%	197	8.0%	2233	90.4%
Community	41	1.7%	129	5.2%	257	10.4%	2044	82.7%

Relationship Between Attribute Frames and Tone

The relationship between frame attributes and tone was examined in order to answer RQ3. Chi square tests were run separately on each frame attribute to determine how the frame's tone changed when attributes were present. Results show the percentage present within each attribute. Each attribute reached statistical significance. For example, posts that mentioned the blogger's life outside the classroom were more likely to be neutral (63.9 percent; n = 1,306) than positive (35.2 percent; n = 719) or negative (0.9 percent; n = 19), $X^2(3) = 2,220.116, p < .001$. Posts that discussed class were almost equally likely to be neutral (48 percent; n = 303) as they were positive (47.7 percent; n = 301), but less likely to be negative (4.3 percent; n = 27), $X^2(3) = 562.54, p < .001$. Posts that included mentions of attributes from the extracurricular frame were especially likely to be positive. For example, posts about the blogger being involved with student government were more likely to be positive (87 percent; n = 47) than neutral (11.1 percent; n = 6) or negative (1.9 percent; n = 1), $X^2(3) = 140.161, p < .001$. On the contrary, posts about parking on campus were overwhelmingly negative (83.3 percent; n = 5) rather than positive (16.7 percent; n = 1) or neutral (0 percent; n = 0), $X^2(3) = 118.782, p < .001$. Posts about costs associated with the institution were also alarmingly negative (69.4 percent; n = 25) instead of neutral (11.1 percent; n = 4) or even positive (19.4 percent; n = 7), $X^2(3) = 1437.87, p < .001$.

Overall, there was a relationship between the frames and tone and it appeared that bloggers were more likely to frame their institutions positively or neutrally rather than negatively.

Blogger Characteristics

RQ4 asked about the characteristics of students that colleges and

universities employed as bloggers on admission Websites. More than half the bloggers were female (61.2 percent; $n = 1,513$) and 37.6 percent were male ($n = 930$); gender for a fraction of bloggers could not be determined (1.1 percent; $n = 28$). White students were in the majority (68.8 percent; $n = 1,700$), followed distantly by African Americans (9.3 percent; $n = 230$), Asians (5.2 percent; $n = 129$), and Hispanics (0.7 percent; $n = 18$). Figure 1 shows the frequency of posts by gender and that both males and females tended to post most often during the middle of each semester.

All classifications of students were represented, but the majority of bloggers were freshmen (30.3 percent; $n = 748$), followed by sophomores (19.2 percent; $n = 475$), juniors (18.8 percent; $n = 464$), and seniors (15.5 percent; $n = 3384$). Only 117 of the entries (4.7 percent) were written by bloggers identified as transfer students. Regardless of classification, bloggers followed a similar pattern of posts peaking during the midterm months of the semesters before dropping off in the final months, December and May.

An ANOVA was used to assess the relationship between use of frames and blogger classification. Eight of the 10 frame indices reached statistical significance when compared with the blogger's classification. Freshmen bloggers used five frames more than their upperclassmen peers: social life (five attributes), $F(4) = 8.90$, $p < .001$; residential life (five attributes), $F(4) = 19.210$, $p < .001$; physical wellness (six attributes), $F(4) = 5.799$, $p < .001$; religion (five attributes), $F(4) = 10.792$, $p < .001$; and community (four attributes), $F(4) = 5.431$, $p < .001$.

Juniors were more likely than freshmen, sophomores, and seniors to use the academics frame, which included 11 attributes, $F(4) = 4.30$, $p < .05$. Sophomores, meanwhile, were more likely than freshmen, juniors, and seniors to use the extracurricular frames, which included 16 attributes, $F(4) = 3.807$, $p < .05$. Seniors mostly used the athletics frame, with five attributes, $F(4) = 3.560$, $p < .05$.

Geographically, the bloggers mostly came from out of state (41.3 percent; $n = 1,020$) and in state (31.1 percent; $n = 769$) but also included internationals (3.8 percent; $n = 94$) and students of missionary parents (0.2 percent; $n = 6$). The relationship between frames and two blogger characteristics, gender and hometown, were also examined in an attempt to uncover deeper connections between the variables. Three frames reached statistical significance when compared with the blogger's gender. Posts that included talk of the blogger's social life were slightly more likely to be written by female students (87.1 percent; $n = 1,318$) rather than males (80.1 percent; $n = 745$), $X^2(2) = 32.918$, $p < .001$. Male bloggers were more likely to write posts that included the athletics frame (18 percent; $n = 167$) than females bloggers were (13.7 percent; $n = 207$), $X^2(2) = 9.592$, $p = .008$. Finally, posts that included the physical wellness frame were more likely

be written by a female blogger (17.7 percent; $n = 268$) rather than a male blogger (13.1 percent; $n = 122$), $X^2(2) = 9.65$, $p = .008$.

Institution Characteristics

RQ5 asked about the types of institutions that operated admission blogs for recruitment purposes. The 92 colleges and universities were classified based on standards used by U.S. News & World Report for its “America’s Best Colleges” rankings. The majority of schools were classified as medium (39.13 percent; $n = 36$) and small (36.95 percent; $n = 34$). Large schools accounted for 16.3 percent ($n = 15$) of the institutions, while extra large schools comprised 7.6 percent ($n = 7$) of the total schools. Figure 3 shows the frequency of posts by the size of the institution. All institutions had similar dips and rises in post frequency up until April when medium institutions saw a rise in the number of posts while other institutions declined.

Of the 92 colleges and universities, 75 were private institutions (81.52 percent) while 17 were public (18.47 percent). Forty-six percent of the institutions were religiously affiliated ($n = 43$) while 53.26 percent were not ($n = 49$). Both public and private schools showed similar patterns in post frequency during the academic year, as seen in Figure 4. At private institutions, however, the frequency of posts increased slightly after March before declining at the end of the semester. For public institutions, March signaled the high point in frequencies before a decline in April and May toward the end of the semester.

The relationship between frames and the institution characteristics, size, and public/private status were also examined in an attempt to uncover deeper connections between the variables. Four frames reached statistical significance when compared to the size of the institution. Overall the institutions mentioned the social life frame between 77.4 percent and 88.5 percent of the time in posts. The medium institutions presented this frame most often (88.5 percent; $n = 912$) while the large institutions mentioned it the least (77.4 percent; $n = 253$) within the size of institution variable, $X^2(3) = 31.08$, $p < .001$. Posts that discussed extracurricular activities were more likely to be written by bloggers at medium-sized institutions (29.5 percent; $n = 304$) than from small (22.5 percent; $n = 186$), large (20.8 percent; $n = 68$), or extra large (21.3 percent; $n = 61$) institutions, $X^2(3) = 18.981$, $p < .001$.

The religious frame was mentioned in posts between 2.1 percent and 12.5 percent of the time. The medium and small institutions revealed this frame most often (12.5 percent; $n = 129$ and 9.3 percent; $n = 77$, respectively) while the extra large and large institutions presented this frame least often (2.1 percent; $n = 6$ and 2.4 percent; $n = 8$, respectively), $X^2(3) = 49.966$, $p < .001$. Similarly, posts that mentioned the community frame were more likely to be

written by bloggers at a medium- (20.8 percent; n = 214) or small-sized (16.3 percent; n = 134) institution rather than a large (13.1 percent; n = 43) or extra large (10.8 percent; n = 31) institution, $X^2(3) = 21.825$, $p < .001$.

The religion frame achieved the greatest statistical significance when examining the relationship between frames and the institution's public/private status. Posts that mentioned the religion frame were more likely to be written by bloggers at a private institution (10.3 percent; n = 207) than a public institution (2.8 percent; n = 13), $X^2(1) = 26.466$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to add to the knowledge of framing theory in discipline by uncovering how student bloggers depicted their colleges and universities through the use of frames. Of special interest were the specific attributes and tone used by bloggers to describe these institutions, effectively becoming agents of the university's public relations and recruitment efforts. In doing so, this research provides data about the types of institutions taking advantage of blogs on their Websites and the types of students chosen to chronicle their lives through admission blogs. Such data create the foundation for future framing research involving all types of recruitment materials. In addition, it generated suggestions and implications for university public relations and marketing professionals.

Blogger Use of Frames

The current analysis suggests that student blogs have the potential to showcase the college experience at an institution. Unlike traditional Web pages or view books, which do a decent job of highlighting an institution's academic prestige and programs, state-of-the-art buildings, and extracurricular offerings, student blogs offer prospective students a chance to "test drive" an institution. This potential is seen by the abundant use of the social life and academics frames by student bloggers when posting entries. The use of these frames is in line with the Pew Internet and American Life Project study that found that 37 percent of bloggers classify the main topic of their blog as personal experiences (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006).

Administrators should note that academics and extracurricular frames ranked as the second and third frames in frequency. By writing about these topics, bloggers created opportunities to dispense the institution's message, although this message did not always come out exactly as the institution might like. This was the case when Jason, at ERAU-Daytona Beach, wrote: "I like all of my classes except economics because I mean bottom line, it's

not very interesting.”

Unlike conventional public relations materials such as press releases or fact sheets, blog content was not always rosy for the institution. Such posts added credibility that bloggers had free reign over what they posted and were not being censored. Nevertheless, by at least opening themselves to the opportunity, institutions create the possibility of gleaning more natural sounding student approval.

The figures indicate a noticeable increase in the frequency of posts around the midterm of each semester. Specifically, across all blogs October and November garnered the most posts in the fall semester (237 and 255, respectively) and March and April amassed the most in the spring semester (370 and 392, respectively). Despite the increase in posting, however, bloggers maintained a consist use of the various frames. This boost in posts might have several explanations—bloggers may become more interested in blogging or more familiar with the computer software or perhaps administrators pushed for the increase. Regardless of the reason, this increase had good timing. October and November are critical months to reach prospective students who begin visiting campuses and choosing which institutions they will apply to. March and April are important as prospective students continue to narrow their choices based on where they gained acceptance.

Blogger Use of Tone Within Frames

The way bloggers said what they posted is how they garner their power, appeal, and authenticity. Meaning, there can and most likely will be statements posted that make public relations practitioners and administrators cringe. The good news, however, is that blog posts were overwhelmingly positive toward the institution.

Only three frames—social life, academics, and physical wellness—garnered more neutral mentions than positive tone. Posts sometimes included a lot of ramblings about weekend activities and the student blogger being ill or not wanting to get out of bed for an 8 a.m. class before something beneficial to the institution would emerge on the blog.

But if administrators can overlook an insignificant post, they might later stumble upon a valuable entry like the one a Hamline University student wrote: “As I was sitting there, it struck me how lucky we are at Hamline to have faculty and staff that are committed to providing the students with a diverse, well-rounded educational experience. It makes me so happy to be here!!”

And this positive post by Nicole at Lewis and Clark College: “I will be graduating in a week and a half with a handful of loans, but I know that every

dollar I will have to pay in the future is well worth it for the education and experiences that I have received.”

At 3.4 percent, the residential life frame was the most negative frame. While this represented only 84 posts, it was a blow to institutions, many of which spend a lot of money trying to keep students happily residing on campus. These negative posts touched on all aspects of residential life but targeted parking on campus (83.3 percent; n = 5) and dining halls (28.4 percent; n = 19) the most.

Complaints covered the standard array of lack of parking on campus, unhealthy cafeteria food, and a laundry list of gripes about the residence halls. Just as a student blogger naturally glowing about a how great the college is, these personal complaints from bloggers could possibly impact a prospective student’s view of the university. If institutions can handle the not-so-flattering parts of blog posts, the positive public relations from such content could possibly outweigh the negative. Ultimately, if institutions decide to have student blogs as part of their recruitment strategy, they must be confident in the product they are selling, have a tough skin, and employ student bloggers who can fairly accentuate the good with the bad.

Implications for Practitioners

Overall, public relations practitioners missed opportunities with student blogs. It was apparent that many institutions had simply slapped a blog up on their admission Website with only the thought that having one was better than not having one. Much more is involved in running a successful admission blog than just the logistics of getting it on the Web. Institutions must carefully select bloggers who will represent the student body and, ultimately, the institution’s brand. Practitioners should also stay involved with the project (albeit ethically, adhering to established guidelines such as those from the Word of Mouth Marketing Association), actively guiding bloggers so that their posts can meet established goals, namely to provide prospective students with the clearest picture of life at the institution. Finally, practitioners should use the blogs as a resource to gauge the campus climate.

Student bloggers should remain acutely aware of the purpose of recruitment blogs. In this study, less than 20 percent of bloggers (n = 463) acknowledged the specific audience they were blogging for—prospective students. This was alarming and showed why many posts failed to reach their potential. For example, Shari from Robert Morris College in Illinois used most of her blogs to write about her 15-year-old daughter’s trips around the world. The institution, and prospective students, would benefit more from the posts if Shari spent more space writing about her experience of returning to school later in life. An active, continuous review of blogs by public relations

practitioners and training on the institution's topical expectations of the blogs can assist keeping the blogs on track without playing too heavy of a hand in directing the blogs or acting unethically.

Papacharissi (2004) discovered that bloggers were not usually focused on feedback or what their audiences had to say about the blogs. This is why practitioners should guide bloggers when needed. That does not mean tell them what to write. Instead, it means remind them who their audience is, suggest topics to write about, and encourage quick and helpful responses to comments. Practitioners should also impose limits on the number of posts per week. While not justified quantitatively, it seems likely that these blogs lose their effectiveness when bloggers post more than once or twice a week. Bloggers simply ran out of insightful things to write and resorted to ramblings that give a play-by-play account of the blogger's day. These sprawling posts often lost sight of the purpose of recruitment blogs.

Practitioners can also use blogs for environmental scanning of current student opinions. For example, Lauren, from Ball State University, was unhappy about a studio not staying open 24 hours:

“I've been working on a group project for two weeks for a studio which isn't due until midnight on Monday but oh yes, my group finished early! We finished plotting our last board around 4:15 AM (though due to an annoying new policy which causes our plotting room to no longer be available 24/7 we couldn't pick up the last two until this morning because the room locked at 4 AM).”

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers insight into the way student bloggers frame their institutions, there are some limitations. First and foremost, this study was exploratory. The frames created and used for this study were based on previous studies but relied on inductive attributes. Future studies can adjust the frames and attributes so that they might have a better chance to factor analyze—and perhaps focus on a single topic more in line with previous journalism studies.

Future studies should analyze comments left on admission blogs in an attempt to understand the two-way communication between student bloggers and their audience. In addition, future research should take into account some variables not included in the current study, namely the use of curse words in posts and the impact of poor grammar, spelling, and writing. Josh from Rutgers University, for example, introduced himself on his blog as a “sofomore.” These items should be considered because they can have an impact on how prospective students view an institution.

Finally, this study did not attempt to note the influence of framing on the targeted audience, prospective students and their parents. Future researchers should conduct surveys of prospective students and parents to determine their perspective on admission blogs. This type of research could help clarify the types of students who make the best bloggers as well as the topics in most demand. Ball State University has begun this process on their campus with intercept interviews during campus tours and of incoming freshmen during summer orientation. Future researchers should continue this type of evaluation to determine the impact recruitment blogs have on their intended audience.

Conclusion

Nancy Prater, the Ball State University official who oversaw her institution's blog project, remarked that putting blogs on the institution's Website gives administrators "a little bit more control" and a chance "to tell your own story in the way you might like better" than if public relations merely relied on self-run student blogs already on the Internet. By carefully selecting the students who will represent the institution and giving them proper guidance on the purpose of the blog, recruitment blogs do give colleges and universities control over telling the institution's story as compared to non-institution blogs. Even so, the control is limited if the public relations tactic is handled ethically. It is nothing like the complete control practitioners have over other university public relations materials. This study showed, however, that bloggers are portraying their institutions in an overwhelmingly positive way and using frames that benefit the institution. It also pointed toward the untapped potential of recruitment blogs. These findings show that students can be trusted by intuitions to tell the college or university story.

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