Chapter 5

Engaging Millennial Students Through Social Media Usage and Its Impact on HBCU Persistence

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will explore the perception millennial college students hold regarding the engagement of social media use and its impact on their college persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The topic of student persistence in postsecondary education continues to be a matter of significant importance. A third or more students leave four-year public colleges and universities at the end of their first year, and about 40% of students who begin college will never earn a degree. Despite all the attention to improving student retention, most institutional persistence rates have remained stagnant.
INTRODUCTION

In today’s society, millennials build and partake in extensive digital social networks. Recent studies in both the U.S. and the U.K. have also found a widespread youthful interest in social media (Ofcom, 2012). In 2007, 30 percent of social network members accessed sites at least once a day (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010); by 2010 this grew to 67 percent. Studies reported that on average, young people stayed in touch with 300 Facebook friends and followed 79 Twitter accounts (Lenhart, et al., 2010). The 2014 Canadian-based Media Smarts survey of 5,000 students found a proliferation of mobile devices devoted almost entirely to social networking (Steeves, 2014). Acknowledging this increase in time spent “socializing,” Sherry Turkle (2012) wondered whether as Facebook friends grow, real friends diminish. New media, Turkle argued, constructs a space in which the young are alone together (Turkle, 2012). Turkle’s interviewees reported that when social situations are really problematic or troubling, they turn to family members, not friends (Turkle, 2012).

According to Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010), 79% of adults say that they use the Internet and nearly half (47%), or 59% of Internet users, say that use a least one social networking site. This is nearly double the number of users found in a Pew study conducted in 2008 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010). In addition to the number of users increasing dramatically, Pew’s research also found that the population of users of social media has gotten older. More than half of all adult social networking site users are over the age of 35 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010).

Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) study provided insight into the popularity among the sites. The dominant platform was Facebook, with more than 90% of people surveyed. Next, 29% of individuals surveyed stated LinkedIn was second dominant platform, followed 18% for Twitter. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) also found that there is variance in the way that people use various social media: 52% of Facebook users and 33% of Twitter users engage with the platform daily; while only 7% and 6% of LinkedIn users do the same (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010).

In a separate study, the Pew report found that Millennials, will lead society into “a new world of personal disclosure and information sharing using new media” (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010). In this study, researchers interviewed 895 technology stakeholders and critics. Nearly 70% of the respondents agreed that by 2020, Generation Y, also known as Millennials, will continue to be “ambient broadcasters who disclose a great deal of personal information in order to stay connected and take advantage of social, economic and political opportunities. However, 29% of those surveyed posited that as the population group ages, they will grow out of their desire to use social networks, multiplayer online games and
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