

Following in the Footprints: Influence of Celebrities to Generate Community College Search

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Community colleges have an impressive number of celebrity students (Giang): Walt Disney (innovator of motion pictures and creator of Mickey Mouse and Disneyland), Ross Perot (businessman and former presidential candidate), James Dean (actor and cultural icon), Clint Eastwood (actor, film maker, composer, and politician), George Lucas (film director), Billy Crystal (actor and film director), Jim Lehrer (journalist), Benjamin Cayetano (Governor of Hawaii), Nolan Archibald (CEO of Black & Decker), John Walsh (TV personality, victims advocate, and hotel developer), Jim Wright (Texas congressman and Speaker of House), Nolan Ryan (CEO of Texas Rangers and former major league baseball pitcher), Tom Hanks (actor and director), and Eileen Collins (NASA astronaut and space shuttle commander). Also, these community college celebrities may have more attention-getting power for high school students and soon-to-be graduates because of their Hollywood box office blockbusters: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Terri Hatcher, Eddie Murphy, and Halle Berry (Kohli). Following in the footprints of celebrities who attended a community college gives the institution ethos and a sense of connectedness, which is more times than not only bestowed to universities. As one research participant explained about a celebrity spokesperson, "It shows prospective students that community colleges are

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 5, No. 1&2
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not always worse than universities; [community colleges] produce successful people too."

Celebrity appeal is not a new advertising strategy for convincing consumers that a brand is worthy of their attention. Celebrities can perpetuate product conversations and engage consumers in a narrative that is desired by consumers because they are an integrated part of the brand's message. A recent study of celebrity endorsements indicated ". . . that sales for some brands increased up to 20 percent" (Crutchfield). Consumers are exposed to over 3,000 advertisements each day through multiple channels (e.g., apps, billboards, magazines, radio, social media, television, and web sites). One hundred and fifty of the 3,000 advertisements reach the subconscious mind with approximately 30 percent reaching consumers' conscious mind (Crutchfield). Featuring celebrities endorsing a brand ". . . dramatically accelerate[s] the potential for your brand to reach the conscious mind of the consumer" (Crutchfield). Community colleges can reap attention using celebrities in advertisements. This study investigates how community colleges can increase its popularity and its attention given by potential college students by featuring celebrities who attended the college in advertisements.

Currently, there are 1,655 community colleges across the United States vying to get the attention of potential college students (U.S. Department of Education). Community colleges offer different benefits to students than four-year institutions. These institutions are respected for their open access and equality, comprehensive program offerings, commitment to teaching, community-based philosophy, and dedication to life-long learning (American Association of Community Colleges). More specifically, aside from the cost-effective tuition offered by community colleges, students can move at their own pace, balance personal and academic needs simultaneously, receive personalized attention from faculty and staff, and earn an associate's degree and then transfer to a four-year institution (Boyington). Although the traditional age of a community college student

is 29, many students who attend this type of educational institution later graduate from four-year institutions. According to a recent study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, ". . . 46 percent of all students who completed a 4-year degree had been enrolled at a 2-year institution at some point in the past. . . ." (Smith).

Traditionally, community colleges have been perceived as academically below four-year institutions. "Teens often consider community colleges to be undesirable and inferior" (Boyington). The president of Pasadena City College in California, who contends this depiction of community colleges, suggests that students view those attending community college as not being good enough for enrollment at a four-year university (Boyington).

Gaining the attention of high school graduates is at the forefront of community college admissions officers for several reasons. One, community colleges continue to feel competition from the for-profit sector. Two, selected programs, such as health care, also offer pressure because of competition. Three, community colleges are perceived as a place of departure rather than arrival. Students tend to feel affinity for the university that they graduated from rather than the institution that started their path to advanced education (Bellafante). Higher competition within education, as well as traditional notions about community colleges' image, are keeping many admissions representatives on the prowl to find ways to garner attention. To propel the search process among high school graduates to college choice or enrollment, celebrities can give these soon-to-be college students the opportunity to "follow in the footprints" of celebrities.

A 2012 study concluded that millennials were twice as likely than Gen Xers (aged 35-49) to be influenced by celebrities, four times more likely than boomers (aged 50-69), and ten times more likely than silents (aged 70 and older) (Barton, Koslow, and Beauchamp). In addition, celebrities appeal to millennials and bolster relationships, because both talk in the

same language. Millennials see elements of their personalities in the celebrity, which creates a personal connection (Hoffmann). Millennials will support and share a product when they feel a personal connection. The sense of personal connection is key as millennials are bombarded with more advertisements than they can pay attention to overall.

The advertising market for millennials can be oversaturated due to their exposure to all types of media. It is important to reach potential college students in ways that grab their attention and will be perceived as relevant to their lives. In the current research, which addressed how community colleges can gain the attention of prospective students by using the star power of celebrities, all the participants who attended community college were asked if they paid attention to advertisements when searching for community colleges to attend. Eighty-three percent of the participants said they did not recall advertising from community colleges. For the 17 percent of participants who did recall advertising, the community college message did not add to the decision-making process. "I think there isn't too much that separates community colleges, so anything to differentiate the college would be beneficial," declared a male participant. "Community colleges really aren't as popular or noticeable as a university. Advertising can get them noticed," shared a female participant.

Literature Review

Currently, there are approximately 1.8 billion millennials (those born between 1980 and early 2000s) in the world. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, of those 1.8 billion, 25 million are aged 12-17, 31.5 million are aged 18-24, and 42.5 million are aged 25-34 (qtd. in "How Influential Are Celebrities?"). These ages represent the greatest proportion of aspiring college students. Millennials will outpace boomer earnings by 2018 as well as education ("Tiffany Makes Inroads with Millennials as Hepburn

Era Fades”). Millennials are the most educated generation in American history; meaning far more members of this generation are going to college than those of past generations (Patten and Fry).

Millennials are continuing their education after high school, but the question needs to be asked: How do they decide which institution to enroll? The list of influential factors affecting high school graduates' college choice is lengthy because higher education is defined as a "high involvement" purchase (Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells 118). Consumers will go through a series of steps when making a purchase, better defined as the Consumer Decision Making Process (Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells 151). For high involvement purchases, the process is sequenced as follows:

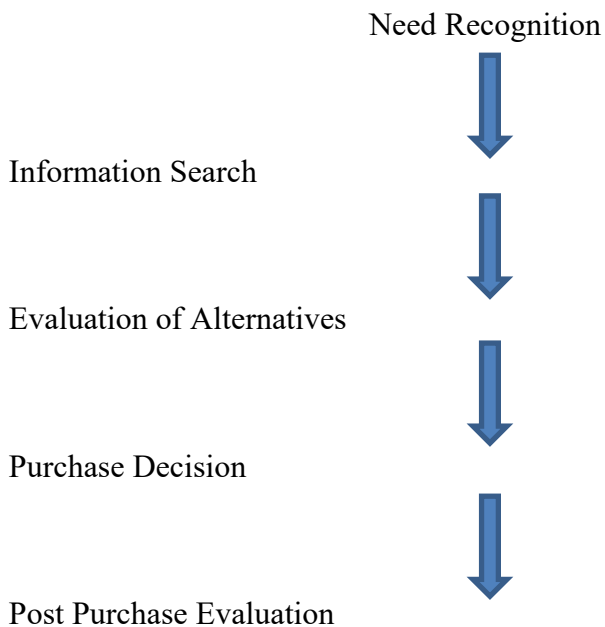


Figure 1: Consumer Decision Making Process

Need recognition is when a consumer identifies a need for a product or a service. The degree of the need varies in terms of importance. Information search is when a consumer seeks out information about products and/or services. Information search for high involvement purchases, such as higher education, is critical, as the risk of making a bad decision has greater monetary repercussions. Evaluation of alternatives is when a consumer compares features of products and/or services within a brand category. Upon conclusion of evaluation, the consumer will reduce the list options to a reasonable number. Purchase decision includes two parts: The first part is when the consumer takes a reasonable number and narrows the purchase to one brand. Once one brand is selected, the consumer decides where he/she will purchase the product and/or service. Post purchase evaluation is the last step in the Consumer Decision Making Process. During this stage, consumers will reconsider and/or justify the recent purchase. High involvement purchases are re-evaluated in deeper depth because of the greater financial investment.

As previously stated, higher education is a high involvement purchase. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average annual price for undergraduate tuition, fees, and board for the 2014-2015 academic year was approximately \$16,188 at public institutions, \$41,970 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$23,372 at private for-profit institutions. Deciding which institution to enroll requires an in-depth information search (see Fig. 1: Consumer Decision Making Process). Influential social factors include: reputation, graduates get good jobs, financial assistance, cost, social activities, campus visit, campus size, graduates accepted to master's program, percentage of students who graduate from institution, proximity to home, college website, ranking in national publications, parents' college choice, first college choice too expensive, early decision and/or early action, aid not offered at first college choice, advice by high school counselor, recruited by athletic department, relatives' college choice, religious affiliation, advice by

teacher, and ability to take online courses (Morse). Social forces can influence behaviors because they provide information, offer a means of comparison, and lend guidance (Wells, Moriarty, and Burnett 134).

Advertising initiatives are another pivotal force driving how students learn about college options. It is reported that only three percent of millennials think advertising is boring (Bruell). They are the first generation to be part of the brand's message, which allows them to be involved. Involvement offers millennials the opportunity to be co-creators of messages and not bystanders. College websites, a form of advertising, enables current students and alumni to share their college experience, while inviting prospective students to chat online.

One brand that consumers are willing to share passionately is where they went to college, as higher education is a brand. "Academe and the corporate world share many characteristics," and prospective customers, just like prospective students, have many choices of brands from which to pick (Lockwood and Hadd). A brand consists of a name, logo, tagline, color palette, architecture/design, and sounds. Community colleges tout brand identity elements to differentiate one college from another. Colleges offer community, culture, and connectedness. A college with a defined brand "transfers" to those looking to attend, those attending, and those who have graduated.

Community colleges have struggled with maintaining a solid brand because community colleges have developed in multiple directions. To date, community colleges have several varying institutional directions, such as comprehensive community college, academically orientated two-year college, community-based learning center, or postsecondary occupational training center (Townsend 316). Community colleges can amplify the brand experience by offering brand ambassadors (i.e., celebrities).

Brand ambassadors put a human face not only on brands and corporations, but on higher education too. The brand ambassadors for

higher education are current celebrity students or celebrity alumni. Millennials relate to celebrity students because the celebrity is relevant to the brand; after all, the celebrity picked this community college among hundreds of others to attend. The celebrity is not simply marketing a product (i.e., community college) but also *use* the product.

Brand ambassadors, or endorsers, represent a brand in a positive way. They embody the corporate identity in appearance, demeanor, values, and ethics; essentially, they are the brand. Brand ambassadors are a hybrid between public relations and human resources. Public relations practitioners develop relationships and human resource representatives educate. An effective brand ambassador is the walking and the talking embodiment of the product he or she represents. Brand ambassadors understand the brand as much as the manufacturing company; they are well versed in the brand history, brand identity, brand differentiation, and brand promise. A brand ambassador illuminates the product with human aspects, as well as the lifestyle that accompanies the product. Endorsers are individuals who are well known to the population because of the publicity associated with their lives.

There are three types of endorsers: expert, celebrity, and lay (Tellis 180). Experts are individuals or organizations that the target population perceives as having specialized knowledge in a field (for example, Bill Gates for Microsoft and the American Medical Association). Celebrities are individuals who are well known to the population because of the publicity associated with their lives. Examples of celebrity endorsers are entertainers, athletes (sports), businessmen and business women, politicians, reporters, consumer advocates, and religious leaders. Lay endorsers are unknown or fictitious individuals or characters. It is important to note that an endorser may be in more than one category. For example, Michael Jordan is an expert for basketball shoes and a celebrity for Hanes underwear. Brand ambassadors, or endorsers, are key to influencing college search, and ultimately, choice, because they "set the

mood [and reason] to bond over a universal human experience" (Hoffmann). Most four-year institutions invest in brand ambassadors because they explain what the institution does, differentiate the institution from others, and keep the brand's message consistent.

Currently, community colleges do not invest large amounts of dollars into the advertising budget, especially if enrollment is up. The mentality is that community colleges do not need to advertise in traditional ways for brand recognition, noting that most people know their local community college exists (Moltz). However, advertising is critical for top-of-mind awareness with key audiences (Moltz). In addition, advertising can combat the perception that community colleges are academically inferior to four-year institutions.

The key to featuring celebrity endorsers in advertisements is relevance. The celebrity must have a connection to the brand ("How Influential are Celebrities?"). Celebrity community college students have the strongest connection possible to the brand; after all, they picked the college. To gauge this effectively, Ace Metrix, a company that measures celebrity ads, uses a tool called Ace Score. Ace Score measures how a commercial performs on voluntary consumer consumption and desired response from the advertiser. Ace Metrix reports that, ". . . those [ads] that out-performed had a strong connection to the endorsed brand . . ." ("How Influential are Celebrities? (updated)").

These examples illustrate the search and the enrollment power for community colleges using pop culture. The intellectual penguins from *Madagascar* featured one penguin in the third movie articulating his future, which included attending community college to later become president of the United States. Community college student Tom Hanks and A-list actress Julia Roberts appeared in *Larry Crowne* featuring an out-of-work middle-aged man returning to community college to hone his skills. Sitcom *Community* takes place on the campus of a community college. The trailer for the sitcom refers to a community college as a ". . . a

place where anyone can begin again" (Osborn). Pop culture is touting community colleges, and so are celebrities.

Acclaimed actor and director Robert Redford headlined the 2014 Middlesex Community College Celebrity Forum. According to the community college's president, "Mr. Redford certainly carries the star power with his Hollywood pedigree. But it's his inspirational leadership in taking on causes that help preserve our natural resources, and his championing of the art of independent filmmaking that have helped define him as an icon of our generation" (MCC Blog Admin). Although forced to teach at Los Angeles Trade Technical College as part of his community service, Kayne West has increased enrollment by 40 percent in the fashion design program. In addition to teaching, West offers personal mentoring for students attending his class (Lasane). If following in the footsteps of community college celebrities does not garner attention, then support from a celebrity likely will. Rapper 50 Cent provides scholarships to students at Queensborough or LaGuardia Community Colleges (Kristof). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has donated \$35 million to community colleges in selected areas in a program called "Completion by Design" (Deprez).

Celebrities enter the Consumer Decision Making Process during the information gathering stage. This is the stage when prospective students are gathering information from various institutions of higher learning. The community college celebrity draws the attention to the institution, making the community college an integral part of the information search. The community college may have been omitted or overlooked if not for the pull-power of the celebrity. Star power is an effective advertising strategy for brands. "Just one endorsement can spell an increase in sales by four percent almost immediately" (Olenski).

Several examples are offered to illustrate the effects of celebrities on sales of products. During the 2017 Super Bowl, Lady Gaga debuted as the new face for Tiffany & Co. as a strategy to gain momentum with young shoppers. Quarter earnings increased to 92 cents a share, which was six

cents higher than analysts projected (Tiffany Makes Inroads with Millennials”). Digestive health boosting yogurt Activia featured Jamie Lee Curtis when the product was introduced. First year sales of \$130 million “. . . surpassed the \$100 million benchmark that qualifies as a new-product success story” (York). Athletic giant Nike entered the game of golf with Tiger Woods. During a ten-year period, the celebrity appeal of Woods generated an additional \$103 million in golf ball sales alone (Chung, Derdenger, and Srinivasan). Sales of products and services is the goal. Before a sale can be made, the product and/or service must generate awareness.

Theoretical Framework

Nielsen released that millennials are “. . . most responsive to messages that use celebrity endorsement or related characters/themes.” In addition, “. . . they do believe and admire celebrities that are social and engage with their fans, so celebrity endorsements presented in a real/authentic way appeal to them.” Given that millennials respond to celebrity endorsers in a positive manner, there are three theories that articulate why endorsers work: 1) Source Credibility Theory; 2) Source Attractiveness Theory; and 3) Meaning Transfer Theory (Tellis 181-183).

Source Credibility Theory is based on the premise that “. . . acceptance of the message depends on the qualities of the source. Expertness and trustworthiness are two key qualities” that lead the consumer to accept the message (Tellis 181). Tellis defines expertness as the ability of the source (i.e., celebrity community college students) to make true claims. Consumers are more likely to accept the claim if the endorser is perceived as an expert. The willingness of the source to make true claims is part of trustworthiness.

Source Attractiveness Theory defines acceptance of the message dependent on the attractiveness of the source, which is based on

familiarity, likability, and similarity. Familiarity is the audience's knowledge of the source through exposure; likability is affection for the source's physical appearance and behavior; and similarity is the resemblance between source and receiver.

Meaning Transfer Theory is based on the premise that a celebrity encodes a set of meanings, which, if well used, can be transferred to the endorsed product. Meaning Transfer Theory can result in meaning capture. Meaning capture is when consumers buy the endorsed product with the intention of capturing some of the desirable meanings, which celebrities have imbued in the product. The theory assumes that consumers purchase products not merely for their functional value but also for their cultural and symbolic value.

Conceptual Framework

Hossler and Gallagher's three-stage model of college choice is used in this study. The first phase of the model is called *predisposition*. It “. . . refers to the plans students develop for education or work after they graduate from high school” (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 9). *Search* is the second phase of the college choice model. In the search phase, students will explore various college options and gather information about each college's characteristics. The last phase is *choice*. It is at this stage that a student will narrow down his or her college choices and decide to enroll at a specific institution (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 9). Since this study examines how community colleges can gain the attention of prospective students using the star power of celebrities, *search* is the most applicable phase. It is during the search phase that college-bound and current students pay attention to advertising initiatives from colleges, which will ultimately determine college choice.

Methodology

This qualitative study investigates how celebrity star power garners the attention of prospective students at community colleges. Former community college students were asked and agreed to participate in this study because they were recent high school graduates who were engaged in the college search process. Prior to attending college, these individuals were faced with preconceived notions about higher education. Possible questions that lingered for these students before entering institutions of higher learning were “should I attend college,” “which college should I attend,” and “what is college about?” To answer these questions, they browsed solicited and unsolicited information (e.g., brochures, catalogs, and flyers) from colleges. In addition, they may have paid attention to billboard, television, and social media advertisements. Possibly, they visited colleges that appeared to meet their needs, wants, and interests. Furthermore, they may have used their personal computers to browse school literature (Morse), take virtual tours, or chat with current students at the college.

Former community college students, rather than high school juniors and seniors, were also asked to participate in this study because these students understand which advertisements do and do not garner attention. They are keenly aware that advertising messages must be entertaining and engaging to be effective; relevance and connectedness to their world is critical. Research participants were 67 (33 males and 34 females) former community college students who were enrolled at 21 different community colleges in ten different states, ranging in student population and size. The participants were aged 19-22 with various ethnicities. The research participants were enrolled in upper-level advertising courses at a four-year liberal arts institution in Missouri. The institution enrolls a diverse population, increasing the generalizability of the current research findings. The major reasons given for selecting a community college as opposed to

other institutions of higher education were: 1) A+ program; 2) cheaper than university; 3) closer to home and family; and 4) completion of general education requirements.

The qualitative research method used to understand the proposed research question was focus group interviewing, which was selected for several reasons. Firstly, this method encourages subjects to speak freely, completely, and without criticism about their “. . . behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess” (Berg 111). Secondly, focus group interviewing creates a “synergistic group effect,” which lends to greater ideas, analyses, and discussions about the given topic (Berg 112). Lastly, and most importantly, this method is based upon interaction. “Meaning and answers arising during focus group interviews are socially constructed rather than individually created” (Berg 115). It is imperative to this type of study to use focus group interviewing because, as in focus groups, the process of selecting a college occurs socially. After the focus group, the researcher bracketed the data (Berg 116). Bracketing allows the researcher to hold the phenomenon (i.e., celebrity endorsers on college choice search) up close for inspection.

As the focus group moderator, the researcher explained the research project to the participants as well as how the focus groups would operate. Participants were told their responses would be recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis by the researcher. Focus group size was between eight to ten students. The focus groups were conducted in a single session, with duration ranging from 60-90 minutes. To elicit discussion about how celebrity endorsers can garner attention during college search with a relevant message and media, the researcher crafted a series of discussion questions (see below), which is a common practice because focus groups provide a means for assessing intentionally created conversations about research topics (Berg 122). The discussion questions were the following:

Do you pay attention to celebrity endorsers? If so, why?

What media do you use to pay attention to celebrity endorsers?

Do you think a celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson for a community college? Why?

When searching for higher education, describe a celebrity advertisement specific to community colleges that would gain your attention. Explain what the ad would look like and what the message would communicate.

When searching for higher education, what media are the most effective to receive messages from community colleges? Why?

Analysis and Results

The researcher analyzed the recorded discussions and identified concepts the research participants deemed as true. Redundancies in the discussion questions prompted the researcher to identify similarities and make connections. It was apparent that these prospective students experienced a level of uncertainty, which brought about nervous and anxious feelings. This is understandable as college seekers desire information about higher education options because “people approaching a choice among unfamiliar options seek information on how to structure the problem” (Wright and Rip 177). Celebrities offer a credible, connectable framework, which will gain and perpetuate a dialogue desired by college seekers.

Sixty-nine percent of the participants reported that they pay attention to celebrity endorsers. "I pay attention [to celebrities], because they are intriguing and capture my attention. I watch celebrities on TV, in movies, and read in magazines. I pay attention to their lives, and I know who they are," said a female participant. The participants follow celebrities because

the celebrities have interesting lives and lifestyles; bottom line, celebrities are entertaining. A female participant majoring in fashion merchandising shared this: "I always pay attention to celebrities in the entertainment industry to see what they are wearing." A 20-year old male participant stated the allure of celebrities best when he said, "There must be a reason they've made it so far. I try to learn and listen to celebrities as much as possible, especially when considering my career goal, which is film making."

The participants in the study overwhelmingly preferred social media to follow celebrities, because it is the most convenient and easy to use. Social media/websites include: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Twitter. As one male participant said, "I usually follow celebrities on social media, because I always have my phone." A female participant uses Instagram every day because she likes to ". . . scroll through the photos."

"The great thing that we know of social media is that it breeds this social intimacy with the star," contends Jo Piazza, author of *Celebrity Inc.* and the newly released *The Knockoff* (Rosenbaum). Sixty-seven percent of the participants reportedly use social media to follow celebrities. Community colleges can harness the power of their social media sites by showcasing celebrity students. A recent study of 7,000 high school students revealed that 68 percent use social media to research schools (Lytle).

Another preferred medium is Entertainment News television (otherwise referred to as E! News). Thirty-three percent of participants cited this medium. This is consistent with 2014 research by the American Press Institute, which concluded that entertainment news is the only topic followed by a majority of younger people.

Sixty-three percent of participants agreed that a celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson for a community college, with the condition that the celebrity attended the endorsed college. Celebrity relevance to the

brand (i.e., community college education) is critical and influences choice. High school dropout Mark Wahlberg visited T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, to encourage students to stay in school. Wahlberg's message was perceived as influential because he was relevant (Brown). "Community college celebrities get people's attention and help them remember the college every time they see the celebrity endorser," shared a male participant. "I think a celebrity endorser will increase the amount of people who register, considering someone they look up to is acknowledging the academic benefits of the college," declared a female psychology participant. Another female participant said, "People look at celebrities every day, whether they are professional athletes, actors, singers, or politicians. They are all public figures and people are interested in them and what they have to say." The bottom line is that the celebrity has ". . . influential power. Community colleges aren't as popular or noticeable as a university; a celebrity endorser makes you look."

Thirty-seven percent of participants do not think a celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson. The major reason cited was speculation that a celebrity would attend a community college; which is even more reason for community colleges to boast about their celebrity students and garner attention.

The last two research questions asked the participants to create a community college ad that would gain their attention and the most effective media to communicate the message. "Traveling back in time" is the resounding theme in the participants' responses. Sixty-seven percent of the participants think the connection between a community college education and the celebrity's success would increase search to enrollment. A male participant said,

"I think it would be cool to see an ad with the celebrity making his/her college decision. The TV commercial would show the celebrity weighing out the pros and cons of community college versus a big university. The ad would show why the celeb chose

the community college. Making the decision between which college to go to is hard. It would be nice to see someone well known going through the same tough decision."

Featuring an advertisement with the "traveling back in time" theme ". . . shows the celebrity being a part of the community college rather than just telling about it," declared a participant. A female participant offered this specific YouTube ad, "The advertisement should be a humorous video. The celebrity could be cramming for a final exam or accidentally sleeping through an 8 a.m. class. Show the celebrity going through typical college struggles, but make it a little silly because we all have been there!"

Social media and television were cited as the most effective media for receiving recruitment messages. Potential college students desire information and the need to be entertained during the college search. Social media was cited as effective because we are always connected. A female participant shared this about the "connectedness" factor, "You can share links to the community college's website on your timeline for your friends to see, connect to other students that attend the college, and learn more about the college on their profile." The article, "Six Reasons Your Community College Needs a Social Media Strategy and Not Just a Facebook Page," explains the robustness of one social media platform, Instagram: 53 percent of young adults ages 18-29 now use Instagram, making it very significant for student recruitment (Miller). Television was selected as a medium because of its ability to showcase unforgettable images. Television earns almost 23 hours of viewing each week among those aged 18-24 (Hinkley).

Discussion

Attracting the positive attention of prospective students is at the forefront of community college admissions and recruitment officers due to

perceived community college image and multiple brand directions. In addition, attention to community college advertising goes unnoticed because of lack of advertising and/or a unique brand message. Attention to community college, as well as ethos and sense of connectedness, can be enhanced using star power. Star power equates to success in which the latter was propelled by a community college education.

Star power is often a strategy touted by universities. For example, the University of Michigan has a section on its website devoted to notable alumni. Community colleges can boast the same, thus challenging the notion that these institutions are less than four-year universities. Showcasing celebrity students and alumni needs to be included in the college's advertising creative executions and budget. Simply being in one's neighborhood does not open a dialogue with prospective students; prospective students need a reason to believe and to relate. Potential college students desire and demand relevance and connectedness to brands they chose to incorporate into their life. By far, college choice is one of the most prevalent brands because of its ability to grow and mature one's mind and sense of being.

To date, community colleges have relied on affordability to attract students to point of enrollment. According to U.S. News, money is the number one reason to choose a community college rather than a four-year institution; community colleges are cost-effective (Mitchell). The participants in this study echoed the same, stating that community colleges are cheaper than a four-year institution.

The greatest limiting factor in this study was understanding the influence of pop culture on community college search and enrollment; only one study could be found, which featured celebrities as a recruitment tool. In 2002, Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio ran a campaign including television, radio, and billboard featuring Alan Ruck of the television program, *Spin City* and the 1986 blockbuster hit *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, recording artist Gerald Levert, and 1996 Olympic gold

medalist Dominique Moceanu. The celebrities are relevant to the community college because they have local ties to the community and the roles they have played. For example, Ruck, who plays the mayor's chief of staff on *Spin City*, promoted the community college's business and hospitality management program while Levert touted courses in creative fields, such as music, studio recording, theater, and graphics (Mortland).

Showcasing celebrity students and alumni in college advertising will garner attention to the extent of spurring college search. Messages that focus on the celebrity "traveling back in time" and how the community college was pivotal to his or her success offers information and entertainment, which are both equally desired by potential college students. "I'm interested in my community. Knowing that a celebrity attended the community college in my neighborhood would get my attention," expressed one participant. Media needs to be tailored using a mix of traditional and social approaches. Celebrity alumni chose their alma mater from hundreds of higher education options. The celebrity is not simply marketing a product, they have *used* the product. The implications of these research findings are critical to community college enrollment. Community colleges can tout their celebrity alumni, which garners attention from prospective students to the extent of following in their footprints.

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