

## PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

I chose two documents highlighting social media marketing and influencers, and they play a role in college decision making. Both papers contained valuable information, but the research paper provided deeper insights into how social media marketing is affecting college decision making, versus the essay recognizing the occurrence and general affects. The research paper, "The Influence of Instagram and Social Media Marketing Engagement on Prospective College Students' University Selection," bolsters data to support that online recruiting efforts must be made in order to draw in new students, especially when targeting certain demographics/specialties. The essay, "Colleges Find a Low-Cost Marketing Tool: Social Media Influencers, also reviews how social media is revolutionizing decision making. As a former journalist, I notice that the essay is more informative rather than inquisitive – it points out facts and includes an interview, but it fails to research actual student opinion to develop a conclusion and call to action. The research paper develops further implications that push for industry advancement.

The formats of each article are very different. The essay did not have subheadings or organized background information. It was also written in a much more casual tone than the research paper. The research paper was indeed much longer and included a detailed matrix to organize background, purpose, research, and implications. I believe there are different purposes for each of the types of formats. The essay is a good tool to stay informed on trending higher education topics, but research will always provide an in-depth look to how these trends are truly affecting the industry and what professionals can expect moving forward.

### Research paper

de los Reyes, J. (2023). The Influence of Instagram and Social Media Marketing Engagement on Prospective College Students' University Selection. *SEM Quarterly Journal*, 11(2), 3–17.

### Essay

Elletson, G. (2019, June 12). *Colleges Find a Low-Cost Marketing Tool: Social-Media Influencers*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-find-a-low-cost-marketing-tool-social-media-influencers/>

## PRELIMINARY SURVEY PLAN

I plan to study social media influencer's impact on college decision making. For this research, I plan to collect data from current undergraduate students at The University of Alabama. I chose this specific group to study the most recent social media trends and marketing tactics. Since social media and technology develop rapidly, collecting information from each grade level would expose what apps and content are being consumed across the various ages. Graduate students are not included in this study because continuing education decisions are much more niche depending on program offerings by an institution.

I plan to ask students how social media affected their choice of institution. Questions include, but are not limited to:

- How much time do you spend on social media a day?
- How often do you buy a product or service based on an influencer review?
- Did you follow your institution on social media before committing to UA? If yes:
  - Which social networking sites?
  - Did the content posted help you see yourself as a student on campus?
  - Were you exposed to on-campus opportunities?
  - Did information presented on social media make your onboarding experience easier?
  - How did consistency of posting affect your reliability in the school?
- Did people you follow on social media influence your decision of choosing UA? If yes, how did their experience impact your decision?
- How does seeing other institutions' social media channels influence your opinion of UA?
- How important is it to you to showcase your college experience on social media?
- Do you think an institutions social media page is important?
- How did you hear about this survey?
- What other factors influenced your choice to come to UA?

I plan to use quantitative method by implementing a rating system on a scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree (still working on phrasing for the questions above). I will collect this data by pushing an electronic survey out via email, social media, and word of mouth with use of a QR code. Each dissemination tactic

will have its own tracking URL to determine where the survey is from. This opens the lense of how those on social media perceive its use. I plan to include an interview portion to implement mix methods and gain deeper thoughts of students. I will begin analysis with categorizing students by time spent on social media and if they followed the institution before their first day of school freshman year. Their level of interaction is important to understand how deeply social media impacted their decision to attend UA.